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Illustrated by Justine Novak
The Bill Casey Award

The Bill Casey Memorial Fund annually awards $100.00 to the author of the best article, story, or poem appearing in each volume of San Jose Studies. Friends and relatives of Bill Casey, a faculty member at San Jose State University from 1962 to 1966, established the fund at his death to encourage creative writing and scholarship. The recipient of each award is selected by the Committee of Trustees of San Jose Studies.

The Bill Casey Award in Letters for 1984

has been presented to


The Committee of Trustees also awarded a one-year subscription to San Jose Studies to the author of the best work (exclusive of the Bill Casey award) published in the categories of (1) poetry, (2) fiction, and (3) articles. The 1984 recipients of these awards are:

Poetry
James Sutherland-Smith — "The Spectre of the Rose"
"The Age of Reason"
"Clouds Blown Away"
"Vienna Night,"
Spring, 1984.

Fiction

Essay
James M. Freeman — "Knowledge, Compassion and Involvement,"
Spring, 1984.
FICTION
The previous evening, while she watched an old movie on public television, Michael had reread the chapter in the beekeeping manual on honey extraction. Right after sundown they'd carried in the boxes of filled honeycomb and stacked them inside the garage. These square wooden boxes were called “supers,” probably, Michael had remarked, because of their position above the brood chambers to which the queen bee was confined.

Over the past year, Michael had entertained every faculty gathering with his latest discoveries in what he called the “arcane lore and discourse” of beekeeping. Nevertheless, he hadn’t questioned the manual’s use of the word “harvest” for a practice that seemed closer to burglary. All they’d done was to remove the hive cover and replace it with a board that had been sprayed with a special chemical. While they waited the few minutes it took for the fumes to frighten the bees into abandoning their store of honey, Michael had remarked, “You’d think they’d have caught on at some point in their evolution, but they appear to be creatures of memory, not of learning.”

Now it was Saturday morning. Michael had carried the honey supers into the kitchen while she washed the jars they’d collected. When he was through, he stood and watched her with his hands pressed hard against his lower back. “For a substance that’s a conventional symbol for sweetness and easy living,” he said, “honey is surprisingly heavy.” He grunted and pushed his elbows further behind, leaning his upper body backwards into his hands, then let his arms drop. He picked up a clean jar from the draining rack and turned it back and forth on his fingertips. The flawed glass sparkled in the early autumn sunshine that was already streaming in through the window above the sink. “Better wash as many of these as you’ve got,” Michael said. “Fifty, a hundred, there’s no telling how many we’ll need.”

Thousands of bees, millions of flights, of blossoms. Ten honeycomb frames in a super, thousands of cells in a single frame. Numbers of jars had come to Michael’s mind in sets of fifty. All this was exactly like
something else. But what? The kitchen full of steam, crowded in with the stacked supers, the rented extractor on its platform, the table and countertops cluttered with pans, colanders, sieves, the electric decapping knife. A deployment of receptacles, waiting. Hot water and something sharp to cut with. Were they a part of it? Was this like childbirth? Surgery? “Honey is a naturally clean, germ-free substance,” Michael had quoted earlier from the manual. “There is therefore no need to sterilize the containers.” Surgery was certainly wrong.

The jars were dusty from sitting in open cartons in the cellar. At first, the dishwasher had seemed the obvious, most efficient method of cleaning them, but there was concern among the beekeepers they’d talked with about the use of strong soaps which were said to affect the delicate flavor of honey. In any case it was unlikely that the dishwasher would have removed the hardened excretions of the many insects that had become trapped inside the jars. Their dried-out corpses moved back and forth among the waves of soapsuds. They seemed to be floating playfully, brought back to life by the miracle of warmth and moisture.

She was using the old baby-bottle brush, and when she lifted the scrubbed jars out of the rinse water the clean glass squeaked against the palms of her rubber gloves. She’d watched the worker bees cleaning cells. They climbed inside until their bodies almost disappeared. Was that what she was reminded of then, from seeing her hands push inside each jar, working the bristles against the glass until it was perfectly clean, then moving on to the next? She’d had to pull off the glove finally, and use her fingernails to scrape away the droppings or whatever substance it was that had squeezed from the body of a starving, panicked insect as it tried to find footing on a wall made of glass.

There was a sudden sharp hum outside the window screen. “The bees have smelled the honey,” Michael said, and reached past her shoulder to push the window shut. He closed the door to the outside and released the lock that sent its heavy bolt shooting into place. “We’ll go in and out through the house,” he said. “I’ll close the dining-room door too, in case they find some other way in.”

She drained the sink and gathered up the soaked labels. Mustard, olives, marmalade from Edinburgh, wild strawberry jam from Provence. Some essential truth about their family could probably be uncovered, or invented, Michael would say, from objects as ordinary as these. They were the residue of a particular way of life, of their travels, the travels of their children, their friends, their preference lately for small, consumable gifts. The jars of seasonings were smaller now that the children were gone, now that Michael was eating less salt, sugar, spices, vinegar. The heart specialist had recited the list, speaking faster at each item, deliberately imitating the cadence of the old jump-rope rhyme. “Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper,” the rope would turn faster and faster until the jumper tripped. Time seemed to have done just that since Michael’s
attack, piling up on itself more and more, fulfilling the prophesy of a childhood game.

One of Michael’s younger colleagues had written a best-selling book analyzing the contents of residential trash cans, including labels like these. To the dismay of the older faculty, the university had granted him tenure and promotion at an unprecedented speed, in spite of the notoriety. Or because of it, it was impossible to tell. Why then should it be so hard to remember something as ordinary as what this time, this day, this experience was like, when the image felt so near?

“Here goes!” Michael had unplugged the decapping knife and was drawing the heated blade across a frame of honeycomb. The knife sliced under the seals, uncovering a filigree of perfect hexagons, each swelling with clear gold liquid drawn by the heat and the release. The air was filled with the compelling scent of warm honey and scorched beeswax. At the window there was a sudden frenzy of humming and brushing against the screen beyond the glass.

“Here goes again, every step the first.” Michael had lowered two unsealed frames into the extractor. He turned the handle slowly at first, then more and more rapidly. With the cover off, they were able to watch the whirling rack and frames until there was nothing to see except the illusion of a gray cylinder. “Centrifugal force,” Michael said above the rattle. He pronounced the syllables in a peculiar rhythm, thrown off by the steady, repetitive motion of his arm and of the machine.

After what seemed like a very long time, although it had probably only been a few minutes, a few clear threads flew out to the sides of the tank. That was all, a glistening here and there, almost invisible, less substantial than filaments of cotton candy, after so long, so many turns of the handle. There was no way of knowing how many, but Michael had already changed hands two or three times, as each arm grew tired.

“Although honey may be extracted during the night without interference from the curious bees, it will flow more readily in the heat of the day,” Michael had read aloud from the manual the night before. The kitchen was heating up rapidly, flooded now with sunshine, the air sealed inside the tightly shut doors and windows. There was barely enough room to move about the kitchen, and nothing to be done except to wait. She filled the sink once more with hot water and wiped the table where honey had dripped from the blade of the decapping knife.

“Come and look,” Michael said, letting go of the handle. The whirling slowed down rapidly, and the frames became visible once more. The inner wall of the tank was coated with a gloss, and like fresh varnish spread too thick, the honey was slowly gathering into horizontal rows of gold drops. Michael lifted one of the frames from the rack. All the cells were empty on one side. “Spun too fast there,” he said, and pointed with his free thumb at a corner where the wax had torn away, revealing the astonishing depth and perfect geometry of the intact cells. He handled
the sticky frames lightly, using only the tips of his fingers to turn them over while he examined both sides before lowering them back into the extractor.

"Want to do this for a while?" he said, and pulled the kitchen stool next to the extractor. "Better sit down. It's harder work than it seems."

She wiped the handle, then dropped the sponge in the sink. Michael was staring blankly into the distance beyond the window and moving his hands slowly through the warm soapy water. The bees had stopped flying into the screen and were walking on it. A few were patrolling the edges and seemed to be tasting the air with their tongues along each joint in the wood.

The movie she'd been watching the evening before was "The African Queen." Michael had looked up from the manual occasionally to watch the screen for a few minutes. "That could be a metaphor for marriage," he said at one point. The movie had reached the scene where Humphrey Bogart is in the water pulling the African Queen through dense, almost impassable marsh grass. When he comes back on board, leeches are clinging to his body. He doesn't know this at first, not until he sees that Katharine Hepburn is staring at him, too horrified to speak, and pointing to the opening in his shirt where a large glossy leech is pressed tightly against his chest. He moves his shirt aside and finds another, then more and more on his chest, his back, on his calves under his pantlegs.

For the first time in the movie, Humphrey Bogart is visibly afraid. He is afraid of the leeches, but earlier, when German soldiers are shooting at him from a cliff high above the river, and later, when he and Katharine Hepburn are about to be hanged, he seems unafraid. Only these soft, silent leeches are able to make him shudder helplessly and wrap his arms around himself. His chin and mouth quiver like an old man's. What is he afraid of? Not of death. Something else. Something more horrible than death. In the next scene, Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn are both in the water, both pulling the boat, both, presumably, covered with leeches, although the movie doesn't show this.

Were the leeches a part of the metaphor, and was that what she'd been trying all morning to remember? Bees and leeches, small creatures in large numbers, a single menacing body with millions of independent parts, each part quick to enter, to suck, to sting. Humphrey Bogart had trembled and hugged himself under those slow, silent, minute invasions. But under the threat of German bullets with their speed, their noise and explosions, he'd remained calmly self-controlled and with almost no chance of escape, had steered the African Queen down the river and out of danger.

That fullness, that too much of something was part of what she was trying to remember.

From turning the handle in such small circles, her arm had quickly grown tired and sore. She stretched to ease the muscles in her shoulders
and felt a tightness on her skin. She touched the back of her hand with her tongue and tasted soap, salt and the sweetness of honey. A fine mist had been escaping, unnoticed, thrown off by the rapid spinning. That had been the purpose of the cover and not, as they had assumed, to keep out impurities. "It doesn't say anything in here about the cover," Michael said, thumbing impatiently through the manual. The pages were sticking together, and the newspapers they'd spread that morning over the floor had started to tear and rumple from sticking to their shoes and to the linoleum.

Before putting the cover on, they looked once more inside the extractor. A clear, round pool of honey had collected at the base of the tank. Michael threw down the manual and clasped his hands triumphantly above his head.

Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn give up, finally, and lie down, expecting to die together on the African Queen. But while they are asleep rain comes, raises the water level, and frees their boat. Now the view shifts upwards to reveal that the lake, their destination, is just ahead and on it the German ship they have come to destroy.

They have escaped dying from heat, suffocation, exhaustion, but they face mortal danger several times again during the last few minutes of the movie. The African Queen founders in a storm and they are nearly drowned but are rescued by the German ship, taken prisoner, and condemned to death by hanging. Just before they are hanged, the ship's captain unwillingly agrees to marry them. Meanwhile, pieces of the African Queen have floated toward the ship, unseen by the crew who are assembled to watch the hanging. Among the debris is a piece of the hull of the African Queen with one of the homemade torpedoes still in place. The captain performs the marriage in a rapid, indifferent monotone and immediately gives the command, "Proceed with the execution," as if the words were a part of the ceremony. At that moment there is a loud explosion, and Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn jump overboard together.

This past year, their first year of beekeeping, had demanded a compulsiveness similar to the voyage of the African Queen. And this day of extracting the honey, like those last desperate hours before the arrival at the lake, held a similar risk of madness from heat and confinement, from sticking like leeches to everything. Just as Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn had become indifferent to the leeches, she and Michael stopped washing their hands.

Eventually the extractor handle refused to turn. The level of the pool of honey had reached the base of the rack and stopped it from spinning. Michael knelt and placed a jar on the floor at the base of the extractor. "This valve is called a 'honey gate'," he said. "Isn't it wonderful? It's poetry, really." He lifted the valve, then stood up, backed away slightly, and stood with one knee raised, like the first movement of a dance step.
The valve opening was wide and round, and the honey swelled slowly through it, a glistening golden ball that slowly lengthened and descended. When the tip reached the base of the jar the flow widened into a flat ribbon that swayed sedately back and forth. Its surface carried creamy yellow fragments of wax from broken comb. A bee's wing floated past, its pattern of dark veins perfectly legible against the gold.

"We'll have to filter that stuff out," Michael said. He had knelt down again, his eyes fixed on the ribbon of honey moving behind the glass. "But right now all I want to do is watch."

The year before, they'd spent the last two months of Michael's sabbatical in Mexico City. They checked into an expensive hotel and started immediately to look for more permanent housing. At the end of the third day of exhausting, futile search they were examining a modest apartment that had been added onto the flat roof of a square, buff-colored four-story building. The apartment had two plain rooms, a bedroom and a living-room with a dim alcove where shelves of mismatched dishes, some battered pots, and a spirit stove were meant to serve as a kitchen. The apartment had no running water, and the bathroom was two floors down. The single feature that held any attraction was a bare, enclosed sun-deck which had been part of the flat roof. The place was devoid of the charm they'd hoped to find, but it did offer an end to their homeless wandering.

The landlady was a plump, unsmiling woman who spoke no English and nodded blankly at their Spanish. When she understood that they were interested in renting the apartment, her eyelids drooped sullenly. She muttered, almost under her breath, a stream of rapid and angry, sounding words that they couldn't follow except for the last two, "mi esposo." Then she turned abruptly and went inside, leaving them standing on the sun-deck.

Beyond the rough wooden fence that surrounded the sun-deck the lights of the city glowed through the balmy, gathering darkness. From the narrow streets and courtyards directly below rose the clear voices of children calling plaintively, as if they were lost. The voices and their calls sounded exactly like their children had, in long games of hide-and-seek that had lasted into the dark of summer evenings. Above the sun-deck, the round, open sky was soft pink and lavender, deepening slowly into gray.

"There seems to be a problem," Michael said, "and maybe it's just as well." They had turned their backs on the poignant scene to look again at the apartment, this time from the outside. The structure was even uglier, more makeshift and precarious-looking than the rest of the building, its stained plaster walls cracked and poorly aligned. But spilling from the edges of the low roof was a thick mass of flowering bougainvillea that had not been visible from the inside. Its lush green and red were still vibrant,
even under the dying light. Michael stepped over to the fence and looked down. "That vine climbs all the way up to here from the ground," he said.

The landlady was coming back up the stairs that led into the apartment. She was scolding someone in a loud, coarse tone of voice that was at the same time oddly sweet and musical. Near the top of the stairs she fell suddenly silent, and they could hear the creaking of the bare wooden steps and the brushing of her thick body against the wall of the cramped stairwell. A moment later she appeared in the door that opened onto the deck followed by a tall, strikingly handsome man. He was wearing a starched white shirt that he had evidently just changed into, and his face, neck and hands were deep brown next to the white cloth. His hair and mustache were black and streaked slightly with silver.

The landlady stood facing them, with her back to her husband. Her round face was flushed and defiant, and she was breathing heavily from the climb. She fanned her full bosom with one hand and said, "Mi esposo," with a quick backward tilt of her head. The husband stepped briskly around her and shook hands with Michael. The landlady watched, as if supervising the two men, her own hands now clutched tightly against the bulge beneath her soiled apron.

The landlord stepped back and smiled shyly, showing even white teeth. "Before you stay," he said, hesitating, "I must show you. Please." The instant he started to speak, the landlady turned abruptly, went inside and down the stairs. The landlord extended his arm, bending forward slightly from the waist, and led the way to the farthest corner of the fence where he opened a wide gate they hadn't noticed was there. Like the rest of the fence, it was crudely made, with a latch and hinges made of loops of rusted wire.

Beyond the gate was an expanse of flat, open roof. To the left, where the roof was closed off on one side by the apartment wall, stood several square wooden boxes. They'd been painted the same mottled pale brown as the building, and were lined up precisely in a single row very close to the edge.

"Beehives!" Michael's voice cracked boyishly. "You keep bees!"

"You are right. They are bees." The landlord turned and faced them, smiling, but with his hands held out, palms forward. They stopped, and he went on the last few steps alone. When he reached the row of hives, he turned again to face them, resting his right hand flat on top of the hive next to him. He lowered his eyes for a moment, as if to compose himself before beginning a formal lecture.

"Bees are inside now for night," he said, and gently patted the top of the hive. "In Spanish, abejas. Bees." He drew the word out between his perfect teeth, holding his mouth in a grin that made his dark eyes glow.

The two men had turned then and looked at her. The Mexican's black eyebrows lifted slightly. After a silence he said anxiously, "You have no
objection, Senora?” He pronounced the word, “objection,” and a few seconds passed before she understood. “They will not molest you,” he said, mistaking her hesitation, “They are much too busy always. Busy bees.” They all laughed suddenly, as if the homely expression had uncovered a secret code that they’d shared all along without realizing it. From the ease with which he’d spoken the words, drawing the sound out again on the tip of his tongue, it was clear that he’d used the expression before, hundreds of times perhaps, with prospective tenants like themselves, for exactly the same purpose and with exactly the same effect.

Michael approached the hives cautiously and pointed down at the edge of the roof. “An outside stairway,” he said, “that’s good.” The landlord looked where Michael had pointed and shook his head. “In case of fire,” Michael explained. “Fire,” the landlord repeated, laughing suddenly. He placed his hands and forearms on opposite sides of the hive, as if to embrace and protect it. “Fire makes bees very afraid.” He held one hand to his mouth, the fingertips pulled together against his full lips. “They eat honey, very much honey.” They all laughed at his pantomime of frightened bees, and this time their laughter was more genuine.

They’d moved into the apartment the following day and that night lay together without touching, their bodies parallel in the strange bed. In unfamiliar places, at moments like these, they seemed not to recognize each other, as though back home, among familiar objects and routines, they had gradually become strangers without noticing it. Now the most ordinary sounds, their own voices, even their silence, seemed alien.

Somewhere beneath them their handsome landlord, the beekeeper, would be asleep at this hour, breathing peacefully beside his round, plain wife. “My father kept bees,” Michael said suddenly into the darkness. “I just remembered. I don’t know how I could have forgotten something like that when I have so few memories of him. He always wore a hat with a wide brim and something, a kind of veil.” He was gesturing in the dark with his hand, and the bed shook and creaked slightly from the motion. “I can still picture the way that outfit transformed him.” He paused. “You couldn’t see his face.” He paused again. “I wonder if this man wears protective clothing?”

Behind a veil the landlord’s dark eyes, his mustache, his even white teeth would be clearly discernible, even more striking perhaps, although at his age, in this country, the teeth were undoubtedly false.

Michael had moved close to her then, as if the memory of his father had made him suddenly at ease and comfortable on the thin, narrow mattress, made him recognize her and want to touch her.

The next morning she woke at dawn, lit the spirit-stove, and prepared a cup of instant coffee from the bottle of extract and the canned sweet milk they had bought the day before. She carried the cup out onto the sun-
deck and looked down. The street was empty and still in shadow. She
heard a soft murmur and turned around. The rising sun had reached a
corner of the apartment roof and where the dense bronze light shone
through them, the blossoms of the bougainvilla glowed orange and
magenta, like clusters of tiny lanterns made of tissue paper. The sound
she'd heard was the humming of bees already at work, crawling and
flying among the flowers wherever the sun's rays had reached them.

Later that morning, Michael had carried the crude wooden table and
chairs out to the sun-deck, and from then on they'd eaten breakfast
outdoors every day. They bought honey from the landlady. She'd
charged them twice what they would have paid at the corner market, they
discovered later. But it had been worth the extra cost, for they had quickly
began to look upon the bees as their own. They spread honey lavishly on
the bland Mexican rolls and stirred their tea with honey-coated spoons.
Each day the bees were drawn to the sticky mouth of the jar on their table,
so that they had to be careful not to pick one up accidentally on food or on
a cup. From past experience, they knew that this small daily risk would
remain much more vivid in memory than the parks, churches, museums
or even the archeological sites that Michael had specifically come to
study.

They sat on after breakfast every morning and watched the bees while
mapping out the day's sight-seeing. At moments like these, a peculiar
torpor overcame her. There was so much to do, so many exotic choices, so
much leisure and freedom. Yet there never seemed to be time or energy
enough even for the most ordinary tasks like taking a bath, shopping,
speaking. She envied the bees their perfect familiarity, their single-
mindedness.

Michael had planned to sunbathe in the afternoons, but the heat and
glare on the sun-deck proved far too intense. They lowered the shades
before leaving the apartment for each morning's excursion, and
remained indoors through the afternoon until the cooler hour. On most
days she washed a few pieces of their clothing before lying down to read
or sleep. Michael had strung their travel clothesline on the open roof, and
when she hung out the laundry she often saw bees fly by, just above her
head. The weight of the pollen they were carrying pulled their legs down,
and sometimes she could even see the full pockets billowing out with the
rich shades of orange, red, and purple, like the wide silk pantaloons of
harem women.

One day near the end of their stay she had gone out later than usual to
take in the laundry. She was in her bare feet, and wearing only a thin
cotton slip, but the sunset was spectacular, pink and gold, and she'd been
watching it for several minutes before she noticed the landlord. He was
standing still, only a few feet away, with his back to her and to the brilliant
Western sky, facing the row of beehives. His shirt collar was a luminous
white against the dark column of his neck. Above his shoulder, threads of
cigarette smoke curled slowly upwards on the calm, luminous air.

The bees were returning for the night. Their moving wings and the delicate brown plush of their bodies caught the last rays of sunlight so that they glowed brightly as they approached. But the instant they flew into the shadow of the apartment wall they seemed to disappear, except for the small thump and ticking when they landed. She could hear them, even from where she was standing, as if the bees were too heavy with pollen or too exhausted from the day to control their landing and were letting themselves fall before the hive entrance at the last moment.

She raised her bare arms to unpin the laundry. The soles of her feet brushed noisily against the gritty surface of the roof, but the landlord seemed not to hear. He remained perfectly still.

On the flight home, Michael had announced that he was thinking of taking an early retirement. "For one thing," he said, "it would give us more time to travel out of season when there's a better choice of places to stay." Later, when their plane was starting its final descent, he said, "I've been thinking about taking up beekeeping, starting with one or two hives and expanding later, if all goes well. It could become a profitable business, a tax write-off if nothing else, although we won't need it if I retire. I'll call the accountant and some beekeeping supply sources first thing tomorrow."

After a long silence, he said, "I've been thinking about my father. I know he had arthritis even as a young man. He'd injured his knees in a fall. Playing basketball, if I'm not mistaken. Maybe that's why I've had so little interest in sports. Exercise of the intellect doesn't count, I suppose." He laughed self-consciously. "I realize now that raising bees had something to do with the belief, mistaken I think, that bee venom relieves the pain from arthritis." He tilted his head back exactly as the Mexican landlady had done, to show he'd been talking about his father with their landlord, the beekeeper. "I suppose the pain is so constant and so great that for relief a man would submit to just about anything, including bee-sting. I remember seeing my father moving slowly among the hives. He always moved slowly, like an old man. I thought he was an old man, but when he died he had just turned thirty, young enough to be my son."

She'd listened with the special patience that always descended upon her on their trips homeward. Soon, after this final total disconnectedness from the earth itself, the core and shell of her being would reabsorb each other, as though part of her had been waiting for the part that had been moving, not so much in alien surroundings as in another's familiarity. In the last moments of perfect intimacy and idleness of their airplane seats, Michael had described his plans to retire and become a beekeeper, like his father. But unlike his father, Michael would in a few years really be an old man.

The sun was touching the horizon when the plane began the last stage of its descent. The low angle of gold sunlight on the approaching
landscape brought the sudden, vivid image to her mind of pale cigarette smoke curling upwards. She saw again, beyond the firm angle of the landlord’s shoulder, the final return of the bees to their hive, their bodies glowing with captured light, abruptly extinguished by the shadow of the apartment wall. The landlord too would become an old man. His slender, erect body would shrink and stoop. His hair would turn completely white. His round wife would grow rounder, would die first probably from sullenness, from a lack of grace. It takes a certain grace to stay alive. Michael’s arthritic young father had moved like an old man among his beehives, was moving there still in the memory of his son, his son-father.

Michael had researched thoroughly the subject of beekeeping and set up three hives at the end of the garden, without speaking again of his father or of the Mexican landlord. But her mind had preserved a vision of both men, as if she had witnessed with her own eyes, not only the Mexican’s contemplative presence among the bees, but the young father’s as well. Through a conscious imitation of them, she’d learned to remain calm when a foam of bees spilled out of a newly-opened hive. In spite of the veil and the protective coveralls, it was only by concentrating hard on the inner vision of the two men that she was able to hold back the stirrings of panic and the temptation to run wildly in those first few seconds, when the bees took to the air and to the bright sky that must have appeared so suddenly and inexplicably above their colony and disrupted their work.

Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn had learned to walk through the leech-infested water, Michael had achieved a similar almost majestic ability to ignore the thousands of determined presences that electrified the air with their blind need and possessiveness. But with each interruption of a hive, she experienced something like an unsealing and awakening of all the incidents and feelings, even the most minute and seemingly insignificant, of her own lifetime, of all the human and natural history that had come before and would follow. Each cell of her body, each memory, thought, dream seemed to be set loose to vibrate, to occupy space as a visible, audible, constantly shifting constellation.

By late afternoon, most of the honey had been spun out of the frames. On the table and counter and in every corner of the floor, the sieves and colanders had been propped up to allow the honey to filter through slowly, drawn down by its astonishing density through layer upon layer of broken wax and insect body parts.

The air in the kitchen was stifling and cloying, not only with the taste and smell of honey, but with the tactile sensation of its weight and stickiness. The filled honey jars stood in the sunlight at one end of the counter. Through the glass that she’d scrubbed hours earlier to this perfect clarity, the honey radiated its own particular heat and illumination as pure, concentrated energy.
Michael pulled his damp shirt away from his chest. "I'm going out for a breath of air," he said. She stayed, partly to make sure the jars didn't overflow, but mostly because she suspected that going outdoors, then coming inside again, could only intensify the day's low-grade depression, the suspicion that ultimately there was no escape from the stickiness and the smothering heat.

Michael was going out through the house, and the moment she heard the distant sound of the front door closing behind him, she knew what it was that she'd been remembering so vividly all day without being able to arrive at a conscious recognition. The crowding, the heat, the compulsion and repetition, the sensations of process without beginning or end: these were the conditions of life and work inside a beehive. It was also like being on the African Queen with the air dense and hard to breathe, the tall impassable grasses closing in. The leeches in the water were like the bees outside the window with their hunger for the warm, flowing food, for honey, for blood. Had the bees at the window screen also recognized something, as she had, without being able to remember what it was that they wanted to reach, that was eluding them so closely? What had it felt like, that intense desire, those minute, fierce probings at the screen?

She heard a shout, a door slapping shut, like a gunshot through the silent house, running footsteps. Michael pushed through the dining-room door and into the kitchen, his hand pressed against his right temple. "The ammonia, quick! I've been stung!" She fumbled through the cupboard under the sink, but the bottle wasn't in its usual place. She found a large cooking onion, and chopped it in half. Michael seized one piece and rubbed the raw surface on the side of his face. Tears sprung immediately to his eyes and streamed down his cheeks. He gave an embarrassed, frightened laugh, as if he'd been observed really crying. "One of them flew straight at me as soon as I stepped off the porch," he said. "I don't know why, or why just that one."

He lowered himself onto the kitchen stool, tilted his head to one side, and lifted the piece of onion which he'd held tight against his temple as he sat down. She searched for the stinger, holding the sharp paring knife ready to scrape it out, as they'd learned to do, to keep the venom from spreading. But there was no stinger, only three pink swellings in a row and nearby, at the hairline, a small dab of honey.

Michael wiped his cheeks and forehead with the kitchen towel, then held the damp cloth tight against his face for a few seconds. "It was after the honey," he said, his breath shallow and trembling through the cloth. His face, when he uncovered it, was like a frightened old man's, like Humphrey Bogart's, with the same watery eyes, the same gray, loose chin. "We can finish this later," he said, shaking out the towel. He folded it squarely in half before hanging it up. "There isn't much left to be done. We can do it in the morning. I'm going to put some ice on this and lie
down for a while."

She fixed a meal of soup, bread, cheese, and apples, and carried it on a tray to the living-room. Michael had fallen asleep on the sofa, and he woke up refreshed and cheerful. He stood up to examine himself in the mirror above the mantel. Although his eye was now partly shut, it gave his face a rakish expression, and the smoothness of the swelling made him look younger. "I'll get the wine," he said, still smiling at his reflection. He went to the dining-room and came back carrying two of their good crystal goblets. He was holding them casually, upside-down, with his fingers laced around the stems. He poured the plain red wine into them, and complimented her lavishly on the meal. They went to bed early, leaving the plates and soup dishes in the sink.

After their love-making, Michael fell immediately into a deep sleep which was interrupted once after the first slow breaths, when his head moved violently from side to side on the pillow, as if he were saying "no" emphatically. After the long, tedious day, she felt very ready for sleep. But when she closed her eyes she saw images moving against the dark, of honey dripping steadily, the whirling centrifuge, the swelling pattern of cut honey cells.

She slept and dreamed it was the following morning. She entered the kitchen and found bees crawling inside the extractor, on the half-filled jars, the sieves and colanders. Above her head, more bees were coming in. They were lowering themselves slowly backwards, so that their pointed abdomens appeared first through the small round holes in the ceiling. Then they dropped into flight inside the room. There were holes all over the ceiling, and several narrow cracks in the corners of the walls. The holes were precisely the size of honey cells, and she wondered how she could have failed to notice them before.

Now everything was outdoors. The extractor, the jars and utensils, all still crawling with bees, lay scattered in bright sunshine on picnic tables and benches. Small children played and ran among the tables, dressed in light summer clothing in pastel yellow, green, pink, the colors and the creamy texture of ice cream and flower petals. Only the children's soft round arms and legs were bare, but the pale delicate fabric made them seem entirely naked. The young parents were standing nearby, chatting and laughing among themselves and glancing only occasionally, and indifferently, in the direction of their children. Although the bees seemed completely preoccupied with the honey, she wanted to warn the parents, to plead with them to take their children away, but she was mute and invisible to them.

The effort to speak woke her. It was only a few minutes past midnight. She got out of bed and went to the kitchen. The honey had stopped draining, halted in mid-flow by the coolness of the night air. Everything was as she'd left it except that in the glare of artificial light each object looked as if it had been moved and then put back in almost, but not quite
exactly, the same place. She examined the walls and ceiling for holes or cracks or other openings, and found none.

In the morning she was awakened by a violent shaking. Michael had gone outside for the Sunday paper and was climbing back into bed. The side of his face was still swollen bright pink, raw-looking and scarred with the imprint of the folds of cloth, where it had been resting against the pillow. She described the dream and while he listened he touched both of his temples lightly with his fingertips to measure the difference. "It's not surprising," he said when she had finished, "that you would dream about the bees, an anxiety dream especially."

She went to the kitchen. In the daylight, everything was exactly as she'd left it. She made coffee and brought it to the bedroom where Michael was sitting up, reading the paper. Since the children had left, and even before, she usually lingered in bed on Sunday mornings to read through most of the thick Sunday paper while Michael prepared an elaborate brunch. But this morning her eyes were refusing to stay in focus on the page. Each time Michael moved and shook the bed, she lost her place and the print began to crawl in front of her eyes like a layer of worker bees moving across a frame of honeycomb. She saw the kitchen, the work that was waiting to be done, her hands doing it. She got up, pulled on the clothes she'd worn the day before, went to the kitchen, and plugged in the decapping knife.

By noon, she had unsealed and extracted the few remaining frames. She gathered up the newspapers and crushed them into a large ball which she pushed into the living-room fireplace. The paper immediately began to unfold, and she closed and fastened the glass fire doors to keep it from falling into the room. She washed the extractor and utensils, then filled a pail with hot water and mopped the floor.

Michael came in, taking long, careful steps across the damp linoleum. He looked at the containers on the table where the last of the honey was filtering through. "You've been busy," he said, and reached around to enclose her in his arms. The mop handle was still in her hands, between them. He looked at the stack of clean utensils in the dish-draining rack. "Next year we'll let the bees clean those up for us. We'll just put them outside on the picnic table." He opened his arms and released her. "I'll fix us something nice to eat," he said, "but first there's something I want to show you."

She followed him to the living-room. Inside the fireplace, behind the glass, dozens of bees were crawling over and inside the wrinkled newspaper. "They came down the chimney," Michael said.
DURING the twentieth century, the rise of new technologies has been accompanied by some disturbing effects on the human psyche. One of the recurrent views in twentieth century poetry and art is that machines such as the airplane bomber have often produced a split consciousness—the mind divided between the impersonal detachment offered by modern technology and an intense, painful awareness of human suffering. Airplanes have also helped produce human automata—fighters as efficient and detached as the machines they used. This mechanized consciousness prompted by the machinery of war has sometimes led pilots to perceive catastrophic destruction as a banal, romanticized, or even showy spectacle.

Perhaps one of the most telling historic testaments to the distancing effects of modern war machines was revealed in a written interview with Col. Paul W. Tibbets, Jr., the commander of the Enola Gay, the B-29 aircraft that dropped the world's first atomic bomb over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Enola Gay was the name of Tibbets' mother, and there is something of the proud son and well-trained soldier and technologist in Tibbets' account of his mission, an account marked by its detached telling of a technical job well-executed. The comments were made in an interview several years later for the Columbia University Oral History Office:

As far as I was concerned it was a perfect operation. We got out of there without any trouble. We heard the blast and felt it; it rocked us exactly as they said it would.¹

From the beginning after the blast, Tibbets' major task was avoiding the shock wave that hit the flyers with "a real wallop." Tibbets' account says
nothing about killing, but instead reports the technical maneuvers that kept his mind occupied:

When we got hit by the shock wave, I rolled right into another bank, a little bit easier this time and came right on around, because with all this going on, I wanted to get a look at it.

Tibbets’ vision of the city is telling. Rather than seeing destruction of life, he describes a chilling view of growth: “There was a mushroom growing up, and we watched it blossom.” But his actual view is literally obscured, leaving no details in view:

And, of course, we had seen the city when we came in, and there was nothing to see when we came back. It was covered by this boiling, black-looking mess.

After avoiding another potential threat, a huge radiation cloud, the men flew back for some sleep. Describing the reactions of the airplane mechanics after the bomb was dropped, Tibbets tells of the men’s wide-eyed admiration, the wonderment and awe they felt, a wonderment that, today, seems disturbing. Tibbets’ narrative has the nonjudgmental innocence of Huck Finn reporting a Missouri mishap. His story about the men telling their exploits has the ring of nineteenth-century American Southwestern humor:

The guys who were working on the airplanes weren’t impressed until the information was public... “Gee, is it true?” Then, of course, everybody got to feeling real proud of the part he got to play in it. I imagine some pretty wild tales flew around; the stories got pretty big.

Tibbets’ account concludes with a series of denials and justifications as though he is defensively answering his critics. His sentences become terse and tense, removed from any meandering self-condemnation. One wonders if there was another level of thought by the private man:

I felt nothing about it. I was told—as a military person—to do something. I recognized, as somebody said a long time ago, war is hell. I don’t know how many people were killed... But let’s face it, if you’re going to fight a war, you fight it to win and use any method you can. It wasn’t my decision to make morally, one way or the other. I did what I was told. I can assure you that I can sleep just as peacefully at night as anybody.
The smiling, handsome face of Col. Tibbets photographed after the Hiroshima raid is a face untroubled and smiling. The interviews, conducted some years later under a grant from the American Heritage Society for inclusion in The History of Flight (1962), effectively deny us any subsequent reflections the Colonel may have had, any revisions of his neutrality. The case is closed, the end to a neat and efficient execution of a military bombing.

But there were signs that, beneath the surface, at least one of the flyers involved in the Hiroshima bombing would later be troubled by his role. Claude Robert Eatherly, a spotter for the Enola Gay who guided the plane to its target, was reported to have been suffering from mental illness at the time of his death in 1978. Photographer Richard Avedon’s portrait of Eatherly reproduced in Nothing Personal is a telling commentary. The photograph presents Eatherly with his hand covering his forehead, his lips closed tightly, and his eyes squeezed in pain.

The supremely lethal effects of many modern machines such as the airplane were hardly perceived in the early decades of the twentieth century. Rather, there was a pervasive sense of pride and excitement as a new group of aviators proved they could transcend previous limits of time and space. The flyer, in fact, became the world’s new hero.

Air exhibitions and meets of the period drew large crowds, and the dominant view was one of soaring achievement. Advertising posters dramatically reflected the feeling of euphoria as the airplane quickly became a central icon heralding a new age. One illustration is a poster for an air meet held at Nice in 1910. The poster portrays a pilot, flowers in outstretched hand, hovering over a strip of coastal France. The serpentine line of the coast and bird’s-eye view of the pilot and landscape below lend an air of Belle Époque elegance to the scene. The emphasis is on a heady transcendence of the earth.

In other posters of the period, planes fly over Roman ruins and Gothic cathedrals, emblems of tradition and past aesthetic and technological achievement. When an artist depicted French pilot Leon Morane flying at 951 feet and circling the Rouen Cathedral, the airplane is seen as a capstone in the history of creative invention. In his new flying machine, Morane witnesses a breathtaking view of the city below, made luminous and softened by the lavenders and oranges of the setting sun.

A more energized pictorial view of the airplane was presented in the paintings of French artist Robert Delaunay, a man whose work reflected the great buoyancy and the feel of momentum generated by the rush of technical innovations sweeping across Europe and America in the early years of the twentieth century.

Delaunay’s painting Homage to Blériot (1913–14) pays tribute to the much-heralded first air crossing of the English Channel by Frenchman Louis Blériot in 1909. Capturing the swelled pride and sense of exhilaration that greeted this event, Delaunay’s painting is circled with
MEETING D'AVIATION

NICE

abstracted airplane images, including red propeller blades on the left and a flying red box-kite glider at the top. To the right is the image of the Eiffel Tower, the nineteenth-century emblem of engineering expertise and one of Delaunay's favorite painting subjects. Linking the images are the artist's characteristic color discs—bright banded circles of sunny greens and oranges that express elation and excitement while also suggesting rotating wheels, radial engines, and the whirling blades of the propeller.

Delaunay's admiration for aviation was seen also in his painting Sun, Tower, Airplane (1913) which joined three pictorial emblems of engineering achievement: the Eiffel Tower, the Great Wheel (a popular nineteenth-century amusement park ride), and, soaring high above, the red box-kite biplane—a proud image of modernity.

For other avant-garde observers of the period, the excitement of the airplane stemmed from the sensation of speed it provided and the new visual perspectives now available. Italian Futurist artist Gino Severini in his drawing Flying Over Reims (1915) captured the strange new view of the earth as seen from an airplane. The landscape in Severini's drawing becomes a Cubist montage of overlapping, angular, tilted images of the trees and buildings below.

French poet Guillaume Apollinaire was similarly fascinated by the expanded sensory and spatial possibilities presented by airplane flying. For Apollinaire, who had eagerly enlisted as an artilleryman during the First World War, the progress of technology far outweighed the destructiveness of war.

Apollinaire's singular perception of the machine and aviation is seen in his poem "Guerre":

Then don't weep for the horrors of war
Before the war we had only the surface
Of the earth and the seas
After it we'll have the depths
Subterranean and aerial space

Apollinaire's vision is one in which electrical communication wires and aerial space take the fighters far from the combat zone into a more industrialized and yet mystical post-war world:

After, after

Industry Agriculture Metal
Fire Crystal Speed
Voice Gaze Touch separately
And together in the touch of things from far away
And farther still
From the beyond of this earth.
Central to Apollinaire’s view is a new aesthetic offered by technology—the dual possibilities of observation and direct contact, surveillance and touch. The airplane in both poetry and art would continue to evoke this peculiar tension between an amoral, aesthetic transcendence and being in touch with the earth below. As airplanes began to play an increasing role in wartime combat, the tension or gap increased to the point where aviation could become a painful source of psychic dislocation.

These dilemmas and dangers posed by the military airplane appeared early in its history. In 1908 the Wright Brothers sold their new flyer, later dubbed Signal Corps I, to the United States army. Soon, strategists and flyers began working on developing the three wartime functions of the airplane: surveillance, bombing and fighting.

Aside from the spectacular actions of the few war aces, the most important function of the military airplane during the First World War was reconnaissance, the aerial observation of enemy activities and position. At the beginning of the war, airplane manufacturers concentrated on developing slow, steady aircraft that would permit photography. The military pilot was cast in the role of spotter, removed from fighting and destruction in the trenches below, god-like in his omniscience.

When used as a bomber, the airplane presented its own set of ironies and paradoxes. The earliest reports of airplanes flying over battlefields were tinged with a circus air as though the flyers were distancing themselves from knowledge of the potentially dangerous capabilities of the new machines. An aviation exhibition troop called the Moisant International Aviators were performing in Mexico, putting on an air show for the Mexican army during the revolution of 1911. Flying over the hostilities, the aviators engaged in a mock bombing by dropping oranges on the soldiers below, who jokingly fired back with blank cartridges.

Air bombing, of course, primarily had its macabre side. In 1911 airplanes were first used in actual combat as Italian army officers made history’s first bombing runs by dropping grenades on a Turkish encampment in Libya during a colonial war. In his bombing mission, Captain Carlo Montu flew a Taube monoplane, an airplane so stable that the pilot could let go of the controls to hand-drop grenades. Here, perhaps for the first time, was an important feature of modern technology: the disparity between the equilibrium of the airplane and the disruption which was caused on the ground.

The first bombadiers were in a unique position: in hand-dropping grenades, darts, and even bricks on the enemy below, they were literally in touch with their role as destroyers, even though in those early years they were largely ineffectual in doing any significant damage. But as airplane technology developed during the course of the First World War, the bombadier would grow more distant from direct knowledge of his
own combatant's role.

Writing about his night-bombing missions during World War I, Cy Caldwell, a Canadian member of the Royal Flying Corps, described the sense of psychic separation he felt as a flyer:

The bombsights were simply a little wire arrangement and the observer was supposed to peer through these wires. As his pilot flew him up to the target, when the two wires, top and bottom, came into line, he was supposed to pull the chain and away went the bombs. Oh, there was no doubt about it, they all hit the ground . . . But what they hit we never knew.5

Through the aid of impersonal technologies, Caldwell could well remain ignorant of the human destruction he had caused.

One of the important roles of twentieth-century writers and artists has been to help bridge the psychic distance created by new technologies and to confront directly the devastating effects of modern machines. For artists such as Picasso and German Expressionist Otto Dix, the airplane offered no seductive transcendent vision. Instead, they forcefully presented their horror and disgust at the destruction made possible by modern technologies.

In his series of etchings and aquatints titled Der Krieg or War, Dix dramatized the fearsome properties of an airplane during a bombing run. "The Bombing of Lens" (1924) evokes the horror and momentary insanity on the faces of fleeing civilians, a look of madness also seen in Dix's paintings of trench warfare and wartime catastrophe. The airplane is the central villain as it nose-dives over a street made endless through narrowed vanishing-point perspective. Dix himself was in the army from 1914–17, and ended the war in an asylum. The faces on his figures have the wide-eyed nightmare terror of works by artists Edvard Munch or James Ensor. What is new is the presence of the demonic, avenging airplane which has been substituted for the inner demons of the earlier Expressionists.

The most celebrated example of art which decries the mayhem caused by distant military aircraft is Picasso's massive painting Guernica (1937). The work depicts the aftermath of a wanton attack on Spanish civilians by German bombers in service of the Spanish Fascists. Picasso, who was a loyalist during the Spanish Civil War, protested the destruction of the Basque city. The huge (11' x 26') painting was created for the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris World's Fair. It is a blunt, expressionistic cry of anger and shock, seen in the abstracted, open-mouthed faces of victims shrieking with their heads tilted back and arms outstretched. There is an ordered, angular tension in the hard geometries of Picasso's black, white, and grey images. The stolid Minotaur, a creature suggesting the darkness of fascist violence and brutality, faces away from the image of a
lightbulb—a stylized eye which becomes an unblinking witness to the monstrous uses of war technology.

During the Second World War, the machinery of death was sometimes denounced less with expressionist fury that with a sense of bewilderment, irony, and loss. American poet Randall Jarrell in his poem “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” written in 1945 considered what it was like for a person to be symbiotically connected to a new product of war technology. The gunner in a B-17 or B-24 bomber sat in a ball turret, a plexiglass sphere accompanied by two .50 caliber machine guns. To track a fighter attacking his bomber from below, the gunner, as Jarrell wrote in his notes accompanying the poem, was forced to revolve with the turret: “hunched upside down in his little sphere, he looked like the foetus in the womb.” Crouched in this position, the gunner became a target for enemy explosive shells.

The horror and sadness of Jarrell’s poem is its demonstration of the paradoxes of war machines. Plexiglass bubbles were developed for the first time during World War II to provide protection and visibility. The gun turrets in the poem become problematic mothers which provide protection yet render their charges painfully vulnerable. They are terrible maternal machines which give birth yet threaten death:

From my mother’s sleep I fell into the State
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from the earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.6

During the 1960’s, the years of America’s intensified involvement in the Vietnam War, poetry and art confronted the role of the United States in causing suffering and developing deadly military machines. Military neutrality, the “I was just following orders” stance of Col. Tibbets, was no longer viewed as a tenable argument. In a world that had experienced the Nuremberg Trials, there was an insistence on accountability.

The military airplane became a focal point for Pop Artists such as James Rosenquist and Roy Lichtenstein, as well as for artists Nancy Spero and later Audrey Flack during the 1970’s, all of whom presented critical views of America’s new military machines and the attitudes of pilots.

Rosenquist in his massive painting F-111 (1965) stood back with cool detachment, allowing a surreal juxtaposition of opposing images to provide an indictment of America’s newest fighter-bomber introduced in 1965. Through four billboard-sized panels totalling 86 feet in length, Rosenquist created ironic contrasts between banal domestic products of American technology and the country’s thoroughly destructive inventions. The vision is of America’s innocence and culpability. In one panel, a smiling young girl sitting under the conical plastic bubble of a hair
James Rosenquist. F-111. 1965. Oil on canvas. 72\frac{3}{4}'' x 84''. Photo courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. Private collection.
dryer—an echo of the ball turret’s bubble—appears next to the image of an umbrella hovering over a large cloud created by a bomb explosion. In another view, the slick lines and metallic surface of the F-111 is partially obscured by a bland flower pattern created by a wallpaper roller. The painted image of a pointed airplane nose cone is juxtaposed with the seemingly mundane rendering of spaghetti, providing a grim reminder of human intestines and the deadly disemboweling machine.

As in Guernica, Rosenquist also links an image of brute force with one of light, though his detachment as an artist is far different from Picasso’s impassioned involvement. The body of the F-111 rests near three electric light bulbs, one of which is broken in two. The cracked bulb with its egg-like form here becomes an a version of innocence as well as watchfulness—an ovum shattered by the impact of the war machine.

Paintings by two women artists highlight very different approaches to the dilemmas and dangers posed by the airplane. Sharing Rosenquist’s detachment, artist Audrey Flack goes even further in portraying America’s fascination with war games and imperviousness to the dangers of its machines. Spitfire (1973) is a glinting view of children’s toy airplane model kits that tend to trivialize deadly machines. With seeming detachment, the artist uses an airbrush to create an impersonal but vivid view of Curtiss Fighterbomber and plastic Spitfire models. The painting’s metallic blues, shiny bottles of model paint, and strand of metal...
beads all contribute to indictment of military consumerism. The glitter and reflected light betray Flack's actual involvement—her biting, ironic view of the way merchandisers turn aerial bombing into a game far removed from the cruel realities of actual combat.

While Audrey Flack presents a precise, photorealist version of military aircraft, New York artist Nancy Spero plunges in with a highly personal, violent, and satirical version of airplane warfare. Spero's savage anger is directed at the airplane's mechanical oppression. Her small gouache paintings on the subject of war were created between 1966 and 1977 and are simultaneously delicate and raw, fierce and yet strangely ethereal. The artist's fury is particularly apparent in her paintings which reveal her feelings of revulsion towards tactical and nuclear weapons of war. The military helicopters in Spero's paintings are ravenous destroyers, uncompromising death machines. The artist's fast, spontaneous brushwork and delicate washes belie her hard-edged denunciation of war technologies.

While other artists have looked at the distancing effects of the airplane, Spero infuses her work with the visceral feel of aircraft—the sometimes horrendous, unwanted feeling of intimacy created between victim and

machine. Her paintings are titled with popular military rhetoric: *Search and Destroy*, *God Is On Our Side*, *G.L.O.R.Y.*, *Superpacification*. The titles are used ironically and are a stinging reminder of how military slogans try to mask the way machines invade the privacy and sanctity of human life. The helicopter in Spero's *Search and Destroy* (1967) jabs at a human victim trying to crawl away on the ground. On its impersonal search-and-destroy mission, the helicopter becomes a mechanical tormentor menacing the man whose effort to escape is surely futile. With a few deft and economical brushstrokes, Spero's painting evokes all the pain and suffering of the war.

*Superpacification* is the military euphemism Spero uses to title another view of the helicopter, this time transformed into a serpent—an androgynous mechanical monster that has the look of both avenging male and cruel mother-figure. As the helicopter hovers, a series of nude human figures cling to lines beneath the plane's belly. The victims hang limply like dependent children to the mother machine in a diabolical attachment brought on by war.

Artists and writers have indicated not only the century's cruel war technologies and acts of war, but also the way military pilots may tend to ward off knowledge of the destruction they cause. Often there is a striking perception of the way the machine itself, the impersonal machine of high technology, has altered the consciousness of its users. The dispassionate airplane has created dispassionate killers, apparently shielded from their own destructiveness.

Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein in the 1960's lampooned the psychic distancing engendered by popular culture and new machines. In his painting *Whaam!* (1963), Lichtenstein painted two enlarged cartoon panels of a flyer hitting a target. The work "Whaam!" is surrounded by splashy color, reducing a deadly hit to a two-dimensional neutral splat. The written words of the pilot reveal the way pop culture glamorizes

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

technology, turning a bombing mission into a smooth-running, efficient spectacle.

"I pressed the fire control . . .
and ahead of me rockets
blazed through the sky."

Another chilling view of the amoral possibilities offered by the airplane is seen in Lichtenstein’s O. K. Hot Shot (1963). The lurid yellow word “VOOMP!” again reduces destruction to its flattened and debased comic equivalent, while the enlarged maniacal face and words of the pilot turn deadly killing into macho melodrama:

"Okay, Hot-Shot, Okay!
I’m Pouring"

While Lichtenstein’s paintings provide a brash and witty view of the airplane’s potential for deadening consciousness, Denise Levertov, in her poems describing her visit to North Vietnam during the 1960’s, presents a much quieter and more intimate analysis of the airplane and its ability to create distance. “From a Plane” which opens her volume The Freeing of the Dust pays tribute to the possibilities for aesthetic order offered by the airplane. Levertov’s aerial view of the terrain is at once painterly, sensual, tactile, and removed:

Green water of lagoons,
brown waters of a great river
sunning its muscles along intelligent
rectangular swathes of
other brown, other green,
alluvial silvers.7

The poet perceives also the airplane’s ability to cloak harshness, to offer a softened perspective that covers the war’s ripped-apart terrain:

Always air
looked down through, gives
a reclamation of order, re-
visioning solace: the great body
not torn apart, though raked and raked
by our claws—

The opening contemplative consideration of air observation gives way to a more troubled reflection in Levertov’s “The Pilots.” Lichtenstein’s paintings had clearly highlighted the mechanical actions of efficient
pilots and the way comics have turned war into romantic adventure. Levertov’s poem “The Pilots,” which describes her visit to captured American POW pilots, is a more cautious investigation of the flyers’ mentality, yet the implications remain the same: the flyers are likely to have become immune to awareness of their targets. The numbing aspects of war have been well-documented before, yet here Levertov goes further by examining the moral ambiguities of bombing missions:

Because they were prisoners,
because they were polite and friendly . . .
because they said Yes, they knew
   the names of the bombs they dropped
but didn’t say whether they understood what these bombs
   are designed to do
to human flesh . . .
   . . . I hope
they were truly ignorant,
as unawakened,
as they seemed

With her hostility gone and defenses down, Levertov struggles, embarrassingly, to be charitable and offers awkward excuses for the pilots such as their being victims of Middle-American values and poor freshman English classes. Her voice is condescending and the self-righteousness deadens the poems. Ultimately, “The Pilots” becomes as much Levertov’s struggle with herself as with the pilots, and the poem ends as an investigation of her own naivété:

for if they did understand precisely
what they were doing, and did it anyway, and would do it again,
then I must learn to distrust
my own preference for trusting people.

In other anti-war poems that consider the aesthetic and ethical issues surrounding air warfare, the struggle also becomes one of breaking through the objective, transcendent view offered by airplanes themselves. The airplane offers possibilities for aesthetic contemplation and moral distance, yet the poet and painter are often engaged in a personal struggle to break through and see the ground below, to once again be in touch with the realities of a ravaged landscape.

Galway Kinnell’s poem “Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond” offers, at first, a distanced view of wartime bombing in Vietnam. The poem opens with the careful observation, precise language and spare images of both Oriental art and haiku:
The old watch: their thick eyes puff and foreclose by the moon. The young, heads trailed by beginnings of necks, shiver in the guarantee they shall be bodies.

In the frog pond
The vapor trail of a SAC bomber creeps,

I hear its drone, drifting, high up in immaculate ozone.

The images Kinnell presents suggest indirection and distance. We see vapor trail but no bomber, hear sound but see no machine. All is a far-off, refracted view, as remote and in some sense as ordered and peaceful as the “immaculate ozone” and the view seen from the overhead airplane. But the poet’s objectivity is short-lived. In the second section of the poem and the parts that follow, the true rancor is revealed as Kinnell moves toward clear sarcasm, bitterness, and brutal images that bludgeon us with anger as the poet forces himself to confront the smell and feel of war:

And I hear,
coming over the hills, America singing,
her varied carols I hear:
crack of deputies’ rifles practicing their aim on stray dogs at night,
sput of cattleprod,
TV groaning at the smells of the human body,
curses of the soldier as he poisons, burns, grinds and stabs the rice of the world . . .

Kinnell’s “Vapor Trail” is, in the end, angrily prophetic and castigating, full of surreal images and biblical cadences. The distanced poet and the remote bomber are brought down to touch the realities of the ruined flesh:

And by rice paddies in Asia bones wearing a few shadows walk down a dirt road, smashed bloodsuckers on their heel, knowing the flesh a man throws down in the sunshine dogs shall eat and the flesh that is upthrown in the air shall be seized by birds
Among the poems probing the problematic nature of the airplane and flyer, James Dickey's "The Firebombing" is one of the best. The poem penetrates the imperviousness of a bombardier's psyche and becomes a bombing run which dives into and splinters complacency. Dickey's chief concern is, again, the way airplanes have helped produce a split consciousness. The flyer's mind is divided by the psychic distance offered by modern technology and an acute awareness of human pain and the disorder produced by machines.

Dickey, who was himself a bombardier in Japan during World War II, has written a poem about his flying experience which represents a careful and intense effort to empathize with war's victims and identify with the bomb-dropping enemy as well. The poet tries to come to terms with the technology of war, the machines that allow impersonal killings of victims far below.

At the poem's opening, the focus is on the technological, on the bombardier who is closely associated with mechanical apparatus. A glass bubble encases him as a prisoner and yet also separates and protects him from a recognition of the damage he is inflicting. The poem starts electrically, again making use of a light:

Snap, a bulb is tricked on in the cockpit.

And some technical-minded stranger with my hands
Is sitting in a glass treasure-hole of blue light
Having potential fire under the undeodorized arms
Of his wings, on thin bomb-shackles,
The"tear-drop-shaped" 300-gallon drop-tanks
Filled with napalm and gasoline.9

The poet is dreaming, and in this "dark dream" he is conducting an "anti-morale" raid on the people below. At first, he objectifies the scene as did the early reconnaissance pilots of the First World War. He identifies with the bombardier who sits making a survey of the territory. In his description, Dickey leaves spaces between words that slow down reading perception, lend intensity to the images, and stand, perhaps, for psychic distance, distance from responsibility for the pain that will be inflicted:

Enemy rivers and trees
Sliding off me like snakeskin,
Strips of vapor spooled from the wingtips
Going invisible passing over on
Over bridges roads from nightwalkers
Sunday night in the enemy's country absolute
Calm the moon's face coming slowly
About
Though the bombardier could easily be lulled by the calm stability below, the protective distance of the invisible plane and even the aesthetic streamlining of the "tear-drop shaped" drop tanks, he insists on confronting his own detachment. What follows is a mixture of bitter recognition and an angry determination to be rid of the aesthetic view that allows for distance:

    when those on earth
Die, there is not even sound
One is cool and enthralled in the cockpit,
Turned blue by the power of beauty,
In a pale treasure-hole of soft light
Deep in aesthetic contemplation,
Seeing the ponds catch fire


Useless

Firing small arms
Speckles from the river
Bank one ninety-millimeter
Misses far down wrong petals gone

It is this detachment,
The honored aesthetic evil,
The greatest sense of power of one's life
That must be shed in bars, or by whatever
Means . . .

A cool distance is not for Dickey. Instead, he enforces involvement and perception through his recording, with uncanny precision, the "speckles from the river," the minute particulars of war. His reportorial eye forces us to view quotidian details ("All leashes of dogs/Break under the first bomb").

Dickey also insists on irony and self-criticism, as when he chides himself: "Holding onto another man's walls, My hat should crawl on my head/In streetcars, thinking of it, The fat on my body should pale." His self-prodding and interiorized rage is seen when he contrasts his own current comfortable life in the suburbs with the wrecked lives of war victims. He is unflinching as he mocks his life of Campbell's Soup consumerism and complacency:

    Where the lawn mower rests on its laurels
Where the diet exists
For my own good where I try to drop
Twenty years, eating figs in the pantry
Blinded by each and all
Of the eye-catching cans...

The force of Dickey's poem lies in the writer's indictment of fire bombing as well as his indictment of his own detachment. The anger is directed at the enemy self that is guilty of complicity:

But in this half-paid-for pantry

I still have charge—secret charge—
Of the fire developed to cling
To everything...

During the twentieth century, as both writers and artists have helped us recognize, we live in an era in which we have invented machines such as the airplane which provide us with the possibility of detachment as well as direct, lethal intervention in human life. Through the airplane, we have widened the possibilities for observation and perception. Yet, paradoxically, we have also developed the means to deaden all perception on a massive scale. Poets and artists have confronted us with these paradoxes, and their images of mechanical coolness and horror leave us to ponder our responsibility—our "secret charge."
Notes

"EACH Other" is a masterpiece of banality and parody. Language, character, context are ordinary. Situation and theme are parodic. The two intersecting modes create a radical view of sibling incest, one that criticizes both traditional coupling and the new power relations set up by brother and sister. Fred and Freda, echoing the Martha Quest who struggled against "the tyranny of the family," consciously try to avoid a replication of the family structure they grew up in. Subversion and two of the most interesting questions about subversion, what it costs and how it is tied to the patterns it claims to overthrow, are at issue in the story.

The very plainly written, very short (just ten pages) story bears its thematic burden well. Its irony is so cool, so understated it almost denies the aptness of the word parody. The plot is simple. The ordinary opening line, "I suppose your brother's coming again?" is spoken by a young husband as he watches his wife through a mirror. He leaves for work, the brother arrives, brother and sister make love, talk, then separate until the next morning. Like so many other Lessing opening lines, this one becomes charged and complicated only in retrospect. The flat, matter-of-fact narration diffuses the explosive material into banality. The word incest is never used.

"Each Other" has a significant relationship with other stories in the collection in which it appears. A Man and Two Women (1963) lacks a single reappearing protagonist but its stories grow in meaning by juxtaposition and interrelation. "Each Other," the one that breaks an ancient taboo, seems wittily placed in the thirteenth spot. The nineteenth and last story,

*This paper has been revised since its original presentation at a Northeast Modern Language Association meeting, March 30, 1984.
perhaps echoically called “To Room Nineteen,” has, I think, a special relationship to the thirteenth story. Susan Rawlings’ “balanced and sensible family” seems, for example, to suit a marriage apparently “grounded in intelligence.” She has had four children, the first child is male, the sex most couples want their first child to be, the second, female, to balance the male, then boy-girl twins of whom only the girl, Molly, has a name. Surely we are permitted to imagine an M-name for Molly’s twin brother by analogy with Fred and Freda in “Each Other.” Is it an accident that the mother of these two boy-girl sets takes a room in Fred’s Hotel?

Fuller attention to the relationship between “Each Other” and its companion stories belongs to another occasion. I wish instead to consider, not exhaustively but provocatively, the relationship between “Each Other” and Thomas Mann’s “The Blood of the Walsungs” (1905), for “Each Other” often seems to comment on Mann’s story of sibling incest.

Mann calls his twins Siegmund and Sieglinde and parodically sets them against their Wagnerian counterparts in Die Walküre, deliberately creating “an imitation of an imitation of transmitted myths.” Like the Rawlings twins, Mann’s are the youngest in a “balanced” brood of four. Wagner’s twins are a reduction from their mythic originals as Mann’s are a reduction from Wagner’s. Parody builds on parody. “Each Other” inverts and parallels “The Blood of the Walsungs” at many points. Mann de-mythologizes; Lessing strips her sibling incest tale even more thoroughly. It stands before us naked, shorn of myth, yet evoking the tensions and the anxieties historically associated with incest even while it parodies these responses.

“Each Other” appears to applaud incestuous love as superior to exogamous love, contradicting what Lévi-Strauss calls the exchange basis of marriage: “the prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others.” Lessing’s message becomes double-edged as the reader discovers that in preferring her brother to her husband, Freda has exchanged one authority for another. Sibling incest, commonly thought of as a consensual act occurring between equals and taking place within the same generation, does not necessarily threaten the family structure. This is one explanation of why it has never excited the same horror as parent-child incest (today defined as child abuse) where the power relation is always unequal and the family structure always threatened. Sibling incest has even been acceptable in some cultures—in Egypt, Peru and Hawaii, for example—and not just in royal families. However, recent research concludes that most sibling incest in our culture involves an older brother who uses his gender and his age to initiate an incestuous relationship with a younger sister. The presumed peership between sister and brother must therefore be questioned. Lessing emphasizes the presumption by effectively making her Fred and
Freda twins, then undercuts it by making the brother hold the power, for Fred, not Freda, defines the terms of the relationship.

The names Fred and Freda suggest the slight differentiation sexual division confers on the human body. Everything about Fred and Freda suggests twinship, that extreme of sibling identity—their names (the feminized Fred is intensified by the spelling Freda instead of the more usual Frieda), their physical similarity; both are equally tall, slender, white bodied, black haired, black eyed. Fred kisses "the perfected copies" of his own eyes. After lovemaking, the sister stands by the brother, "as tall as he." The aim of their lovemaking is to annihilate separateness: "to burn out and up and away into a flame of identity," to "become one person." "Are we one person then?" Freda asks, knowing the answer but wanting to hear Fred say it again. The desire to become one is common to all couples. In Fred and Freda desire and reality clash less as they are genetically close to begin with.

More startling than their incestuous love is the decision of the two to pull apart just before orgasm, "to see how far they both could go." Thus, though the siblings defy the taboo against incest, they technically uphold it by avoiding orgasm. This avoidance simultaneously sustains and mocks societal norms. It sustains them by not permitting incestuous sex to go all the way; it mocks them by doing everything but. Furthermore, in an era which places an extraordinary value on orgasm, the couple's refusal of orgasm is parodic and subversive. We'll show you, their behavior seems to say, that sexual pleasure is as much related to restraint as to letting go. In The Golden Notebook the inability to achieve orgasm is a sign of profound spiritual aridity. Ella, one of Anna Wulf's other selves in that novel, perfectly formulates the sexual orthodoxy of our time when she says, "Integrity is the orgasm." Those who uphold an older orthodoxy would find withdrawal subversive because it prevents conception. Freda herself assumes that if she has a child, Charlie will be its father, not Fred. Thus, she seems bound in part to societal norms. Yet not achieving orgasm is superior to achieving orgasm as Freda presumably does with Charlie or Fred presumably does with Alice. This turnabout of contemporary values questions the new orthodoxy Ella so firmly upholds. The brinksman-and brinkswomanship game Fred and Freda play offends both procreative and orgasmic ideals. Every view of their sexual behavior reflects on both old and new shibboleths. Thus, their incest can be described as only the beginning turn of their screw.

Lessing's social context is wonderfully banal. Charlie is a civil servant type, clerkly, white collar, who must leave home for his desk in the city. Fred, as "an electrician ... not tied to desk or office," is free to visit Freda in between other calls without exciting the neighbors' suspicions. The room, that staple of Lessing's fiction, is barely particularized. It has a bed, a mirror, "suburban sunlight," "new green curtains," "too-large, too-new furniture," "the young husband's hairbrushes." It is neither a royal house
for Electra and Orestes nor the overrich bourgeois casing for the “costly and crumbling trifles” collected by Herr Ahrenhold. Mann’s dense detailed social and historical context is totally lacking in Lessing’s story. Fred has a blue shirt to match his blue collar status (but only the stocky, shorter Charlie has blue eyes). Freda changes from a short nightshirt into a frilly white negligee for her brother. So Lessing’s bare detail speaks, but always toward demythologizing and parody. Mann’s parodic intent works in reverse; the wealth and artifice of his twins negate the skins and huts of their originals. Preciosity replaces myth and passion.

Lessing’s eliminations go very far indeed. There are no parents. There is no prior history. Charlie, the husband, and Alice, the brother’s absent girlfriend, represent the outer world of normality, of acceptable mores. The attitude of Fred and Freda toward their parents can be inferred from their delight in deceiving the husband and the girlfriend. That delight is malicious, though for Freda laced with anxiety. It correlates with the contempt and arrogance Mann’s Siegmund and Sieglinde visit upon their father and Sieglinde’s betrothed. Charlie notes the “sheer brutality of Freda’s slow, considering, contemptuous smile.” He has the awareness his counterpart in the Mann story, Von Beckerath, does not have.

A servant in violet breeches opens Mann’s story. He rings a gong whose “brazen din, savage and primitive, out of all proportion to its purport” sounds its “cannibalistic summons” in startling counterpoint to the civilized surface of the household. Although the act of incest which closes the story would seem to deserve words like “savage and primitive,” these words do not in fact suit the Ahrenhold twins with “their spoilt indolent faces.” Perhaps their act is indeed “out of all proportion to its purport.” Certainly their narcissism sounds strongly through Mann’s rich, powerful and obvious imagery. Sieglinde wears a dress on which two embroidered peacocks face each other much as she and her brother face each other and as they face their mythic counterparts onstage at the performance of Die Walküre. Lessing’s twins, in their far simpler but characteristic suburban lower middle class environment, have gone much further than Mann’s twins. Their act lacks a ritual dimension; it does not occur once, but repeatedly and regularly.

Fred and Freda share with Siegmund and Sieglinde slenderness, tallness, black hair, black eyes, white skin. The Ahrenhold twins always go “hand in hand” for all the world to see. Fred and Freda’s hands and eyes entwine in private. Those eyes reinforce the opening mirror through which the husband watches his wife. Both couples share intimate nicknames. Siegmund is Gigi to Sieglinde; Fred and Freda are Olive Oyl and Popeye. The words “each other” sound and re-sound in both stories.

Both brothers effectively give away their sisters. This central fact prevents me from reading “Each Other” as an attack on patriarchal marriage. True, Fred can do everything and Siegmund very little to
prevent his sister's marriage. Still, Siegmund makes no effort to speak out about the unsuitability of Von Beckerath as a husband for Sieglinde. Instead, he chooses to be privately perverse. When pressed by Sieglinde about the effect of their incest on Von Beckerath, Siegmund is typically flippant: "He ought to be grateful to us. His existence will be a little less trivial, from now on." Siegmund echoes his own father who had earlier in the story preached against ennui. The dangers of ennui seem more forbidding than the breaking of the incest taboo, the need to épater le bourgeois more urgent than passion.

The overrefined Ahrenhold twins accomplish their sexual union on their ritual last night alone, a night from which the sister's betrothed has been deliberately and publicly excluded. In possessing Sieglinde before her husband does, Siegmund claims seigneurial rights over her. Thus from yet another point of view, passion is less at issue than possession. Incest has even less dread for Fred and Freda whose morning rendezvous repeats earlier transgressions. In fact, Fred has engineered Freda's marriage in order to provide a cover for their meetings. In both stories the sister is subject to the brother. That subjection seems to me the sub-text of Lessing's story. Freda's subjection is more complicated because as the central consciousness in her story she has the dominant fictional role. This is a critical change from Mann's story in which Siegmund is the central consciousness and Sieglinde the subordinate reflecting consciousness. Sieglinde is triply obedient and recessive—to father, to brother, and to story focus.

Lessing's parody works against conventional sex and marriage; it also works against its opposite. Freda articulates the key irony in the story: "Perhaps if you and I didn't have Charlie and Alice for coming, we wouldn't be able to do it our way." The brother and sister hold "each other's amorous hands, for fear that what they were might be cheapened by her husband, his girl." Somehow Fred and Freda's love requires a set of conventional shadow lovers. If Fred and Freda were extramarital lovers, Lessing might comment openly, as she has elsewhere, on how often such affairs keep a marriage intact. Through her incestuous twins, she is commenting ironically on the function of outside lovers, for when Fred and Freda are in bed, Charlie and Alice are with them.

The seeming sufficiency and equality of incest against exogamous heterosexual coupling is threatened by a number of things. The husband's unease has led him to enlist the landlady as a spy; he is suspicious and this marriage of only one month is described as "on the verge of disaster." The perfection of sibling incest is also severely undercut when we learn that Freda has married Charlie because Fred asked her to: "I didn't want to, you said I should." Freda raises again her clearly often raised plea that brother and sister live together. "There isn't any law against it, is there?" she says, inevitably and ironically evoking for the reader the ancient taboo that has indeed been inscribed in law.
"You're crazy," Fred says. His use of "crazy" comes after his overreaction to "normal" as Freda has used it. "Crazy," "normal" and "against the law" speak to guilt and unease. Though brother and sister have the perfect cover for living together, as Freda points out, Fred insists they go on as they are.

Fred determines the framework of his relationship with Freda. He has encouraged, even insisted on, Freda's marriage. He wants her to have a husband while he can continue to have a "girl" rather than a wife. He is "affectionate and possessive," like a real husband. He also uses "the young husband's hairbrushes, as if he lived here." Furthermore, the world of the story subjects Freda to the bedroom. Her men leave for or arrive from and return to the working world. Unlike most of the other women protagonists in *A Man and Two Women*, she remains fixed in her bedroom.

The superiority of incestuous over heterosexual exogamous love is, therefore, more apparent than real. The undercurrents of anxiety connected with the words "normal" and "crazy" reveal that Fred is more openly disturbed by incest than Freda is. By binding his sister, having a "girl" instead of a wife, and fixing the scene of infidelity and incest in his sister's bedroom, Fred keeps himself freer and more in control and thereby reduces his own anxiety.

Because Fred refuses to live with Freda, the two are forced into the banality of secrecy and subterfuge associated with adultery. A life together would have a different kind of secrecy and subterfuge, but it would presumably not involve unfaithfulness and it would be a clearer antithesis to conventional marital ideals. It would comment on the institution of marriage very differently.

Freda shows her anxiety in a more hidden way. Her obsessive cleanliness echoes Siegmund's in "The Blood of the Walsungs." It makes her husband think of words like "unhealthy," "not clean, dirty." Charlie remembers Freda's "obsessive care of her flesh, hair, nails, and the long hours spent in the bath. Yes, dirty, his rising aversion insisted." Near the end of the story, before the siblings part, we are told, "At last they kissed, brother and sister kisses, gentle and warm." These permissible nonerotic kisses conclude and counterpoint the language of guilt and uncleanness that all three members of the triangle have felt and used.

Thus though Lessing strips her story of myth and magic, she chooses not to eliminate the ethos of taboo from her story. The unease and the guilt show us that the breaking of the incest taboo exacts its toll. Even more important, the substitution of the twin brother for the husband does not lead to equality.

In the larger context of Lessing's thought, twinning is a striking form of repetition. It insists on the intimacy of opposites, male and female, brother and sister, routine and sublime sex. Male and female function as accomplices in complex and questionable sexual games. In the Martha
Quest novels repetition is the human inability to break out of inherited familiar and environmental patterns. It is fatality. Incest between twins seems the perfect ironic extreme of repetition, the perfect narcissism, the perfect sublimity, the perfect imprisonment, but only perfect, according to "Each Other," if enacted with acceptable reflections of the self in "her husband, his girl."

Fred and Freda will reenact their morning ritual indefinitely unless Charlie becomes more like Hunding than he is and slays Fred-Siegmund. The story's essential dynamic may finally be more existential than mythic or psychological. It suggests an eternity of mornings in a fixed and limited location. In her anatomy of sexual power politics Lessing finds nothing sacred as she mocks contemporary obsessions with sexuality, orgasm, togetherness, men in the world, women in bed. Fred and Freda are as imprisoned as Freda and Charlie or Alice and Fred. If Hannah Arendt pointed out for our times the banality of evil, perhaps Lessing points out for us in "Each Other" the banality of sibling incest.

Lessing's skeptical, ironic undercurrents have disappeared entirely in recent depictions of sibling incest. In the 1982 Hungarian film, "Forbidden Relations," for example, a half-sister and brother make love before they know their kinship. Once they know, they are horrified but unable to resist a relationship that probably would not have started had the two been brought up as sister and brother. The state finally permits the couple to live together with their two children. By its very conception, this plot reduces the power of the incest taboo. A more recent novel turns sibling incest into "dark comedy." The sister muses: "I'll bet the neighbors see me as an old maid and you as a sapless bachelor. Little do they know that there's more heat in this house than in all the other houses of the townland put together." This sister has what Freda wanted—life with her brother in an unsuspecting community. The idyll gets dark and complicated when the sister becomes pregnant by her brother. Though the idyll is undercut, this work, like the Hungarian film, gives sibling incest a permissive edge.

Lessing goes as far as she can go to discard the trappings of taboo and yet keep all the ironic interconnections between taboo and rebellion. The new order defines itself in terms of the old order. Though royal houses are diminished to a clerk and an electrician and splendid raiment to a nightshirt, Lessing's witty demolitions of myth have a remarkable power. Their parodic tensions survive even banality to acquire a certain ritual character. The Freda so fixed in her bedroom becomes fixed in our minds as a figure permanently divided between brother and husband, deluded by her dream of equality in love.
Notes

1 I want to note the relationship and hope others will examine the nineteen stories as a group. Margaret Atack has made an excellent beginning in “Towards a Narrative Analysis of a A Man and Two Women,” in Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives, ed. Jenny Taylor (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 135–163.


3 Gail Finney, “Self-Reflexive Siblings: Incest as Narcissism in Tieck, Wagner and Thomas Mann,” German Quarterly, 56 (March 1983), p. 252. I was spurred on to think about “Each Other” by Roz Spafford’s question to me at a 1980 MLA panel at which I gave a paper entitled “From Anna/Saul to Martha/Mark: Mixed Doubles in Doris Lessing.” Beverly Schlack-Randles referred me back to Mann’s story, Lalla Gorlin to Gail Finney’s earlier version of her article which I saw in manuscript form and shared with Elizabeth Abel. Elizabeth Abel’s 1982 MLA paper, “The Sister’s Choice: Antigone, Incest and Fiction by Women,” significantly adds to discourse about sibling incest in general and “Each Other” in particular. Her emphasis is on the sister’s refusal “to enter the system of exchange.”


5 Levi-Strauss, p. 9.

A Cost-Benefit Study of the Arts-in-Corrections Program

Lawrence G. Brewster

Housed in the “lock-up” units of North Block and Max. B at San Quentin, Charles Turner sought diversion “doing anything other than staring out the cell window hoping to catch a glimpse of passing seagulls.” Finding relief in “reading books of all sorts including the Bible,” he then became frustrated because “there was no way of sharing what I was learning with the outside world.” Then he became inspired by the drawings of an inmate two cells down the block. The only chance he had to see those drawings was in passing as he was escorted to the showers or to the exercise yard. Picking up a few pointers from the other inmates, Turner began, using only colored pencils. His tutor would pass him envelopes upon which he had illustrated various techniques. Eventually he obtained a watercolor set.

Pleased with the results of his early studies, and determined to learn, Turner decided to work at painting four hours a day, even after gaining yard privileges. In order to obtain supplies, he had to sell his work, which he “hated doing” because his drawings meant more to him than “a few packs of smokes.” Looking back, Turner feels the struggle was worthwhile because nothing can replace the sense of pride and accomplishment his art gives him.

Although he was motivated to seek instruction and pay for art supplies on his own, not until Turner entered the Arts-in-Corrections program did his artistic talents flourish and did his work gain recognition outside of prison. He recently won honors in a statewide art competition sponsored by the California Arts Council, and his work was displayed in the State capital building this past summer.

Thousands of inmate artists like Turner are active in prison arts programs throughout the country. In the past fifteen years, the fine arts
Lanz Machado, Bone Sculpture.

have been promoted behind bars as millions of dollars are invested in hundreds of new programs. Inmates have responded with enthusiasm to the chance to express themselves in the studio. Some have come to pass the time, others to learn a new hobby. Still others have turned to the easel, the written word, music or the kiln with visions of "making it" on their own as artists on the outside. "I know the going is tough out there," says Vern McKee, an inmate artist who has already made several thousands of dollars in prison through his music and paintings. "But I want to own my own studio and support myself with my art."

Despite the enthusiasm of both inmates and arts-program officials, a combination of inflation, public conservatism, prison overcrowding, and skepticism on the part of some prison administrators may succeed in curtailing the growth of such programs even before they have time to prove themselves.

A decade ago, "arts in prison" usually implied no more than a commercial art instructor, visiting a prison and bringing paint and blank canvas. Inmates who were interested in creative expression beyond the level of arts-and-crafts had to find ways to ferret out extra supplies and work on their own, long into the night in their cells. Inmate art shows were rare; sales of their work even rarer.

"A lot of arts programs were masked in an unfocused veil," says Bill Cleveland, Director of the Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) program. "There
wasn’t any clarity as to how or why they were there. Now, we are starting to focus on individual disciplines.” Cleveland goes on to say:

Our role as providers of arts programs in California prisons has been to mold that inevitable impulse to create with the fine arts a model of quality, inspiration and discipline. Our goal has been to improve the prison experience by providing participants an opportunity to effect their own environment and begin changing their attitudes about themselves and others.

Of course, it would be naive of us to believe that the creation of one or two pieces of art is going to markedly alter one’s value system over night. But it has been our experience that over time each step forward in the personal struggle for mastery and completion in the artistic process is a small down payment in the process towards a new and solid sense of respect for oneself and one’s fellows.²

Whatever the qualitative benefits of programs like AIC, the reality of a cost-conscious age is that the public, legislators, and prison officials want to know the quantitative benefits. The question most often asked of arts programs across the country is: what dollar value is returned for dollars spent? One answer is found in this cost-benefit study of the AIC program—one of the nation’s first experiments in providing fine arts instruction to inmates.³

Although the AIC program is established in twelve State prison facilities, we limit our research to four Northern California prisons: California Medical Facility at Vacaville, San Quentin, Deuel Vocational Institution, and the Correctional Training Facility at Soledad. These four institutions provide a representative sample of the institutions involved in AIC. They represent different levels of institutions in the CDC system; a full complement of AIC program offerings; three institutions, with Artist/Facilitators and one without; and varying degrees of involvement with community art organizations.⁴

Program Description

The Arts-in-Corrections program was established by the legislature in July of 1980. The program is based on the successful pilot Prison Arts Project begun in 1977 at California Medical Facility at Vacaville. Individual and group instruction is offered in the arts and fine craft disciplines. (See Table 1.)
Kathlene McDonald, *Self Portrait, W16528.*
Table 1.
Program Function

Specific Program objectives are:
—To provide instruction and guidance to inmates in the visual, literary, performing and media and fine craft disciplines;
—To provide through professional success models in the arts an opportunity for inmates to learn, experience, and be rewarded for individual responsibility and self-discipline;
—To provide a constructive leisure time activity as a means of releasing energy not dissipated in work, relieve tensions created by confinement, spur the passage of time, and promote the physical and mental health of inmates;
—To reduce institutional tension among inmates and between inmates and staff;
—To provide public service to local communities through art projects and concerts;
—To increase participant’s constructive self-sufficiency and heighten self-esteem.

Benefits

The primary benefits for the four institutions are summarized in Table 2. Each is discussed below.

Benefits to Inmates

Benefits to inmates can be classified as “individual benefits” or “social benefits.” In the latter society as a whole stands to gain. The direct benefits to inmates are many.

Constructive Use of Leisure Time

One of the most important functions served by the AIC program is recreational. Recreational activities release energies not dissipated in work, relieve tensions created by confinement, spur the passage of time, and promote the physical and mental health of inmates. Recreational activities are also associated with an aspect of outside life not usually considered by the offender—leisure time. Yet, it has been suggested that the failure to use leisure time in a constructive way may have contributed to criminal behavior in the first place.

Although we are unable to place monetary value on the “constructive” use of leisure time per se, we may assign a dollar figure to art instruction (calculated on an hourly basis) received by inmates. In 1982, the Program offered 7,028 hours of instruction in the institutions evaluated. A total of 1924 classes were held, with an average class size of 8.5. The total value of this individual benefit was $113,886.
Improved Self-Confidence and Self-Discipline

There is no precise way to quantify these benefits. However, through the observations of this evaluator and questionnaires distributed to the staff, artists, and inmates associated with the Program, we found a demonstrated willingness of inmates to complete projects on their own. For many, their involvement in Program art projects represented the first time they could remember following a task through to completion.

Many of the correctional officers interviewed as well as inmates both in and out of the Program agreed that inmates committed to the arts program are often leaders within the institution. They are "disciplined men to whom others will turn to for advice and counsel."

The assumption is not only that higher self-confidence and self-discipline are important individual benefits, but that they produce also social and potentially taxpayer benefits. The individual gain is obvious. The social and taxpayer benefits are the result of a decrease in the recidivism rate among inmates. Although there are certainly not sufficient data available to confirm either a cause-effect relationship, or even a correlation between the Program and its effect on recidivism, there are documented cases of inmates who have managed to use the skills and, more important, the self-confidence learned through the Program, to remain free of the institution. We recognize, however, that we may be looking at a self-selected group of inmates who would have succeeded on the outside without the arts program.

Economic Rewards

The program does not expect to produce artists. In fact special effort is made to speak realistically about the art world so that inmates will not have any illusions about easy success. Even so, inmates have managed to earn a total of $2250 through art competition and art shows sponsored by the AIC and Hobby Craft Programs in 1982. We cannot know the total amount earned through the private sale of their art, but we do know that several thousands of dollars have been made by inmates in the Program.

Quality Work Positions

In the four institutions reviewed, 131 inmates worked for the AIC program during 1982 (for a total of 3440 hours). The inmates worked as either instructors, clerks, clerk porters, or art apprentices.

Since the implementation of the "Work Time Credit Law" (SB 2954) January 1, 1983, this function of the program has become an even more important benefit to inmates. This law requires that institutions provide work to all inmates who qualify for and choose to become a part of the Work Time Credit program. The problem is that institutions are not able
to find meaningful jobs for every inmate opting to take advantage of this law (currently inmates are selecting this option at a ratio of 3 to 1) In the face of this new demand for quality jobs, the AIC program hopes to provide even more work for qualified inmates in the future.

Reduced Tension in the Institution.

The benefit of reduced tension in institutions can be classified as "individual," or "social" and "taxpayer" benefits, where social and taxpayer benefits include savings in administrative and disciplinary actions, damage to facilities, reduced stress on the staff, and social and political costs associated with prison riots and lockdowns.⁷

Tension among inmates and between inmates and staff is always a problem in institutions. It is particularly a problem, however, for institutions faced with the severe overcrowding of California prisons. The projected male prison population, for example, will nearly double by 1988. During the next 17 months alone, 10,000 additional inmates will have to be accommodated within the state's prison system. Under these conditions it is more critical than ever for institutions to offer programs which allow inmates' pent-up energies to be released constructively.

The best evidence to indicate that the AIC program does improve the attitude and behavior of inmates is the reduced number of disciplinary reports among those participating in the program. Table 3 shows that at CMF and CTF, the two institutions for which data are available, 35.9% of the AIC inmates at CMF and 65.7% at CTF were involved in fewer disciplinary actions while participating in the program.⁸ If we exclude those inmates who received no disciplinaries while at the institution, the relationship between involvement in the program and decline in disciplinaries becomes even more dramatic: 75% of the AIC inmates at CMF and 80.6% at CTF demonstrate a better attitude and behavior as reflected in fewer disciplinaries.⁹

It is estimated that 5 to 40 hours are spent writing, investigating, hearing, reviewing and administering disciplinary actions—with an average of 8 hours per disciplinary. If we take the average number of hours spent on disciplinary actions and an average hourly rate of $17.00 for the correctional officers involved and multiply by the average rate of decrease in disciplinary actions at the four institutions (51%) of the 1,116 for AIC inmates, the total savings is $77,406.¹⁰

Other evidence of improved attitude among AIC inmates is the comments of staff, inmates and artists. When the inmates were asked, for example, "do you like working with others in the art program?" nearly 90% responded "Yes, very much." During interviews, inmates in particular, but the staff and artists also, agreed that during program activities inmates of all races were able to work together in a cooperative and friendly manner. Their concern, during program activities at least,
seemed to be art and little more. As one inmate put it: "I've never seen the men work so intensely and be so little concerned with what someone was doing or saying around them."

It is important to note as well that some staff seem interested in the inmates' art work. They ask questions and occasionally will offer suggestions concerning the techniques and style of their work, ask to see their finished products, and in some cases commission a piece. Also, at San Quentin, CMF, and CTF, the Artist/Facilitators are now, or soon will be, offering art history and appreciation classes to staff.

Finally, there have been no cases of an inmate using art equipment/materials for any purposes other than to do their art. There was one case at CMF in which an inmate attempted to "sneak" materials back to his cell. This inmate was quickly asked to leave the program by the Artist/Facilitator. There have been no incidents of violence or major disruptions during classes or in the program work areas. When an inmate does "get out of line" with improper language or off-color jokes, for example (particularly with female instructors), the instructor or another inmate merely asks the inmate to cease the unacceptable behavior.

A reason given for the better than "normal" behavior is, as one inmate put it, "because the program is too valuable to us to take a chance on stealing materials or otherwise screwing up in class or in the work areas." Another inmate said that "those who are not interested in their art either drop out of the program fairly early or are pushed out by the Artist/Facilitator."

Cost Avoidance

We include under this benefit all work completed by AIC participants (the professional art instructors as well as the inmate artists) that the institution had planned to pay to an outside contractor. For example, CMF had planned to commission a stained glass window and door for their entrance. Instead, a few of the AIC inmate artists, with the help of their stained glass instructor, completed the project. Similar beautification projects that would have been given to outside contractors in the other institutions were instead awarded to AIC participants.

In other words, these projects should not be confused with those included in the institutional enrichment section. Cost avoidance refers to only those projects requested by the administration and that would have otherwise cost the institution money. The institutional enrichment projects were requested of the administration by the inmates and would not have been otherwise commissioned.

Because the program did not charge the institution for labor, this can be considered a "taxpayer" benefit. A total number of 3,000 hours were spent working on similar projects at the four institutions reviewed. The
total taxpayer benefit, including salvaged CDC equipment and supplies, was $16,000.12

Institutional Enrichment

Institutional enrichment provides “individual” benefits to the inmate artists involved in the projects, as well as the general inmate population and staff who enjoy the finished products. The murals and stained glass projects at the four institutions, for example, help to make the institution more aesthetically pleasing for family visitors, inmates, and staff. It also provides some diversion for the general inmate population who are able to watch and interact with the artists while they work.

A conservative estimate of the total number of hours spent on projects at CMF, San Quentin, DVI, and CTF, including murals, stained glass projects (different from the one commissioned by the staff at CMF), and paintings for staff offices, in 1982 was 1800. This has resulted in an estimated value of $9,000.13

Community Service

“Individual”, “social” and “taxpayer” benefits result from community projects sponsored by the Arts-in-Corrections program. Individual benefits accrue to inmates who are able to practice their art, while at the same time interacting with community groups through a constructive activity. Community projects not only provide inmates with a sense of accomplishment and pride, but also offer a much needed break from the institutional environment.

The social and taxpayer benefits are derived from the donated labor, materials, and art talent. Public buildings and walls are enhanced by murals, paintings, and stained glass windows/doors. There also have been public readings of inmate poetry and concerts for the benefit of community groups. Finally, several anthologies of inmate prose and poetry have been published.

The various community projects, concerts, and published works allow inmates to pay something back to society in a unique and creative form. But perhaps the most important by-product of this activity is that it is the first step in integrating inmates into the society to which they must eventually return. Inmates at CMF, CTF, and San Quentin contributed $3,000 to their local communities in 1982.14

Costs

The discussion of benefits above was organized by type of beneficiary—e.g., inmates, staff, taxpayers. The program, however, is organized by components: art instruction, community service, service to
the institution, media, research, and administration. Accurate cost estimates can be made only by program components. However, the components yield more than one type of benefit as Table 4 illustrates. We estimate personnel costs of the program components based on their reporting of time allocations for the four institutions. Therefore, if an individual reported spending a certain percentage of his time providing instruction to inmates, the same percentage of his salary (including fringe benefits) is assigned to this component's costs. Administrative and research costs are prorated among the other four components as are direct (non-labor) costs. Thus annual costs are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Annual Costs—1982</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total personnel costs</td>
<td>$143,530.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total direct costs (e.g., supplies, equipment and travel)</td>
<td>19,260.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are distributed among the major activities as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Annual Costs—1982</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art instruction (including the administrative costs of hiring, orientation and supervision of artists)</td>
<td>$144,147.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>1,573.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to institutions</td>
<td>5,270.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media (including a documentary, newsletter and art shows/competitions)</td>
<td>11,800.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus the total annual program cost to provide the level of activity undertaken in 1982 in the four institutions evaluated was $162,790.

Apart from administrative costs that are included in the administration component (these, along with research costs, are prorated among the other components), we assume the costs for the use of volunteers and donated materials to be zero. Many cost-benefit analyses invoke opportunity cost reasoning to impute the worth of volunteers in their next best alternative use; however, here it is sufficient to note that AIC volunteers have shown through their revealed preferences that their private benefits from the volunteer work are greater than their perceptions of their opportunity costs. Otherwise, they would not be undertaking this activity. From the social point of view as well, volunteers are costless in that they have chosen the AIC program rather than some other program. Neither CDC nor the public can deploy them to their next most productive function. Naturally, any benefits resulting from the use of volunteers have been considered above together with benefits accruing from regular program personnel.
Benefit-Cost Comparisons

Despite the overlap between program components and benefits, the quantifiable benefits may be divided among the program components to allow comparison to quantifiable benefits with costs. It is the qualitative benefits that cannot be allocated precisely.

Table 5 shows the benefits by type produced by each program component to which dollar values can be assigned. The art instruction to inmates component cost $144,147 in 1982 yielded total social benefits of $200,522 composed of taxpayer benefits of $77,406 and individual benefits of $123,116. In addition to these measurable benefits, the benefits produced by this component include improved self-confidence and self-esteem among inmates, escape from the boredom and ennui of prison life, and less stress for staff.

The community service component cost $1,573, yielding measurable social benefits of $3,000, composed of $3,000 in taxpayer benefits. Qualitative benefits produced by this component include a possible first step of integration into the community, improved self-confidence and self-esteem, and improved community-institution relations.

The service to institution component cost $5,270, yielding measurable social and taxpayer benefits of $25,000. Qualitative benefits include improved inmate-staff relations, aesthetic enhancement of the institution for both inmates and staff, and increased self-esteem and self-confidence among the inmate-artists.

The media component produced no quantifiable benefits at a cost of $11,800. Qualitative benefits include a possible increased willingness of community organizations to contribute financial assistance and/or volunteer help and materials to the program, and a possible increase in positive citizen attitudes toward inmates and correctional institutions.

Overall, we see that the program in the four institutions reviewed produced $228,522 in measurable social benefits composed of $105,406 in taxpayer benefits and $123,116 in individual benefits compared with a cost in 1982 of $162,790.

Conclusions

When the unquantifiable (qualitative) benefits that result from program operations are considered along with the quantifiable benefits, especially those attributable to “art instruction” and “service to the institution,” it is our judgment that the program is cost-beneficial. On an institutional level, we find support for this conclusion from many of the staff and administrators. In interviews it was suggested that the AIC Program provides instruction and activities to a portion of the inmate population that otherwise are not reached through traditional vocational, education, or recreation programs.
All illustrations are printed with the permission of Bill Cleveland.

1 Biographical notes from a statement prepared by Charles Edward Turner, Vacaville.


4 Programmatic information for this analysis was obtained from published materials, Arts-in-Corrections and the California Department of Corrections’ records, questionnaires completed by staff, artists and inmates, and persons from the William James Association, the Arts-in-Corrections Program and the California Department of Corrections. Several on-site interviews, and inspections were conducted and used as a major source of information for evaluating the environmental conditions and impact of the program within the institutions. All data and calculations are based on a single year-1982.

5 It is possible that double counting of benefits may occur between direct benefits to inmates and a reduction of tension within the institution. However, we are considering the former as a benefit of increased skills, self-confidence, and self-discipline; whereas, the latter is considered more an environmental benefit.

6 The figure, $113,886, is determined by multiplying the number of classes by the average attendance for a total instructor-inmate contact hour of 17,521. We then multiply this figure by $6.50/hr.—a low hourly rate compared with art instruction in the private sector.

7 Although we cannot establish a cause-effect relationship, we know that in some cases a better relationship is formed between staff and AIC inmates based on interviews and statements volunteered by staff and inmates. Any reduction in stress is important because of the costs associated with stress related illnesses and resignations. For example, the turnover rate at CDC is 24%, or twice the state average.

8 A sample of 34 inmates of CMF and 38 inmates at CTF were drawn from a list of all AIC inmates using a random numbers table.

9 We cannot establish a cause-effect relationship; we only assume that a relationship between the AIC Program and fewer disciplinary actions exists. Disciplinary actions are classified as administrative or serious by CDC. We have combined these two categories because: (1) we are primarily interested in the program’s effect on an inmate’s general attitude/behavior and not so much on the specific behavior; and, (2) a 1982 study concluded: (a) there is considerable evidence of non-uniformity in the determination of whether a disciplinary is administrative or serious and (b) there is evidence of considerable misunderstanding of the kinds of infractions to which specific rules pertain. See, Ronald York, Kevin Hanks and Robert Dickover, “A Study of Classification of Disciplinaries,” Research Unit, CDC, May 28, 1982.

10 We arrive at the 51 percent figure for the four institutions by taking an average of the 36 percent and 66 percent at CMF and CTF respectively. This is a conservative estimate in the overall decline of disciplinaries at the four institutions when we consider that the inmate population at CTF, DVI, and San Quentin are very similar, compared with CMF, and yet the decline in disciplinaries at CTF was 66 percent compared with 36 percent at CMF.

11 We do not treat the labor as an opportunity cost because: (1) AIC inmates are not allowed to sell their work and (2) the inmates receive the same level of
instruction and experience (perhaps more) working on these projects as they would in class.

12 A conservative value of $5.00/hr is used to calculate labor benefits.

13 A conservative value of $5.00/hr is used to calculate labor benefits, including the labor of professional artists overseeing the projects. Although we do not include the number of hours spent preparing for and performing concerts in the institutions, such work nevertheless should be considered a form of institutional enrichment.

14 Additional community projects planned for in 1982 and to be executed in 1983 will amount to a total $20,300. Because they will not be completed until 1983 we do not include them in our calculations.

15 We are taking only the percentage of time estimated to be spent on program activities/administration in the four institutions reviewed. So, for example, the director's salary and expenses are calculated based on the percentage of his total time spent on these four institutions. The same is true for the William James Association personnel and so forth.

16 We include only estimated number of hours spent by professional artists and artist/facilitators. The costs for materials/supplies have already been deducted from the specified benefits.

17 Ibid.
Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Benefits to Inmates</th>
<th>$113,886</th>
<th>Qualitative Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Constructive use of leisure time</td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn art skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Improved self-confidence and self-discipline</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Escape from the boredom and ennui of prison life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aesthetic and economic rewards</td>
<td>$2,250</td>
<td>Skills learned in art classes may be applied to work once released, e.g., ability to conceptualize, to conceive of, design and implement an idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Integration into the community</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Prerequisite for success in outside world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Quality work positions</td>
<td>$6,980</td>
<td>Positive role models for other inmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Development of leadership skills to be used in and out of institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide an income to help to support themselves and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expose inmates, many for the first time, to the beauty and joy of fine art as well as a cultural heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Begin the process of acceptance into society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive reinforcement for doing positive-constructive rather than negative-destructive acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide meaningful work for inmates who qualify under the “Work Time Credit Law”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Promote a sense of responsibility among inmates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 3
IMPACT OF AIC PROGRAM ON DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS-1982

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Of Program</th>
<th>CMF</th>
<th>CTF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Disciplinary Action</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Change in Disciplinary Action</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Disciplinary Action</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease In Disciplinary Action*</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.5%</td>
<td>99.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Decrease in disciplinary action is defined here as having no disciplinary actions while participating in the program. Source: Inmate files at California Medical Facility and California Training Facility.

**TABLE 4**

**IMPACT OF PROGRAM COMPONENTS ON BENEFITS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Components</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Art Instruction    | Artistic skills and thought processes learned/developed  
                        Escape from boredom and ennui of prison life  
                        Improved self-confidence and self-esteem  
                        Increased appreciation of aesthetic and cultural values |
| Community Service  | Opportunity for inmates to repay society, however small the contribution  
                        Improved community-institution relations (although this has not been proved)  
                        Opportunity for inmates to apply their newly acquired artistic skills  
                        Improved self-confidence and self-esteem (although this has not been proved)  
                        Escape from boredom and ennui of prison life |
| Service to Institution | Improved inmate-staff relations  
                        Opportunity for inmates to repay society, however little the contribution  
                        Opportunity for inmates to apply their newly acquired artistic skills  
                        Improved self-confidence and self-esteem (although this has not been proved)  
                        Escape from boredom and ennui of prison life |
| Media              | Attract additional financial assistance  
                        Educate the public concerning the program and the work inmates are capable of producing (although this has not been proved)  
                        Video and film experience for inmates |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Annual Cost</th>
<th>Quantifiable Benefits</th>
<th>Taxpayer Benefits</th>
<th>Individual Benefits</th>
<th>Total Social Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Instruction</td>
<td>$144,147</td>
<td>Constructive use of leisure time —</td>
<td>$113,886</td>
<td>$113,886</td>
<td>$113,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Rewards (art shows/competition) —</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>2,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality work positions —</td>
<td>6,980</td>
<td>6,980</td>
<td>6,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer disciplinary actions —</td>
<td>$77,406</td>
<td>77,406</td>
<td>77,406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>$77,406</td>
<td>$123,116</td>
<td>$200,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>$1,573</td>
<td>Art produced for community —</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Institution</td>
<td>$5,270</td>
<td>Cost avoidance —</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional enrichment —</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>9,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
<td>$25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>$11,800</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$162,790</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$228,522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some Founding Mothers of Connecticut

MEN dominate our histories of early New England. Women did not vote, hold office, fight, serve as deacons or ministers; they rarely paid taxes, owned little property, seldom wrote or spoke to posterity. A few we do know, such as Ann Hutchinson or Ann Bradford, but they are extraordinary rather than typical. Since the society was patrilinear, genealogists commonly follow only the men, the women appearing merely as wives and above all mothers, seldom as people in their own right. The records which we rely on sometimes preserve only the wife's first name, occasionally even no name at all. Nevertheless from many points of view the contribution of women equalled that of men, and the sources, notably the records of the probate courts, do permit a description of the obscure as well as the famous. This brief sketch opens with a few examples of the immigrants and then generalizes about their lives in the new world.

Ann Stanes' husband emigrated to Milford from England about 1642 to join his master, Edmund Tapp, leaving Ann at home. We do not read much about this servant class in New England, supposedly settled by families, but the area attracted quite a few poor Englishmen seeking their fortunes. The only unusual feature of this case was Stanes' marital status. He presumably intended to send for Ann, although she had reached her forties and no children survived. Unhappily Stanes, in helping build Tapp's house, "broake ye rim of his body," becoming useless to Tapp. However Ann's brother, William Lewis, had become a prominent resident of Hartford, some fifty miles north. There Stanes made his way, and there he died two years later, having cost his brother-in-law £24 local money (£10 or £12 sterling), primarily in £15 worth of food and £7 in clothing "from top to toe."

Lewis visited England in 1649, found his sister impoverished, bought clothes for her (£5) and paid her way to Hartford (£9). Ann spent the rest of her life in Farmington, just west of Hartford, dying in 1675. Her will left property to several friends with the residue to her nephew, Lieutenant and later Captain William Lewis, but her brother submitted a bill which
exceeded her little estate of £27. Aside from that old debt she evidently possessed enough for subsistence, including an adequate bed, iron cooking utensils, a cow, and a Bible. She signed with a mark but may well have written the will, which refers to her nephew as follows: "I ... do mack him my holl and soull axsackitary."

We knew rather less about Hannah Potter Beecher. She was born about 1583 of unknown parentage and married one Potter, probably surnamed John or William to judge by their two sons. He then died, presumably after William's birth in 1608. She presently married John Beecher, by whom she had another son, Isaac. Hannah, her husband, and their three boys emigrated to New Haven where Beecher died almost at once, in 1638.

Hannah did not remarry, an unusual choice in a society where men outnumbered women two to one, and they needed one another. She was of course over fifty, but two circumstances made her financially independent: her two surviving sons could contribute to her support (John had died) and above all she was acting as a midwife, a career woman. At her death in 1659 she left an estate of £57, sufficient for a single person with some other income. This property included a house and lot, enough consumer goods to make her comfortable, much more clothing than necessary, and a very nice feather bed with all that went with it. Her sons all married and gave her, and the colony, ten grandchildren.

Hannah's daughter-in-law Elizabeth, the wife of John Potter, also had become a founding mother. Her early life remains uncertain. Probably she had married one Wood in 1630, producing a daughter named Elizabeth. This suggests a birth-date for Elizabeth I between 1605 and 1610. She then married John Potter who as we have seen immigrated to New Haven with his mother Hannah, and by him had two sons and a daughter, all of whom produced Connecticut families. Potter died in 1643 and Elizabeth married, as we suppose for the third time, Edward Parker, probably soon after his arrival in 1644. They had four children all of whom eventually married. Parker left a decent property at his death in 1662, for he was a carpenter as well as a small farmer. Elizabeth Wood (?) Potter Parker by that time was over fifty and had ceased to bear children ten years earlier, but she married once again, to Robert Rose, a prosperous Branford farmer with a large family of his own. Rose died soon thereafter but Elizabeth survived until 1677. Her will shows that she had kept their house, now left to her youngest son John Parker. The personal estate nearly duplicated that of Hannah's, including a cow, a shoat, £15 worth of clothing and a comfortable £30 in household goods. She had given seven children to the pioneer village.

Not all of the young immigrant women founded families so successfully. Avis Armstrong of Hartford died in 1660 unmarried with only £16 worth of personal property. We know nothing more about her
except what we infer from the court's granting of her estate to Nathaniel Ruscoe "in his own behalf." Clearly she had no relatives in the area. Ruscoe at this point was a man of over fifty with a young son but no daughter to help his wife. The income from his carpenter's trade, a farm, and a share in a boat would enable him to hire a servant in lieu of a daughter. Avis, then, was surely a servant girl who died just a bit too young.\(^5\)

A few illustrations prove only that such individuals existed. We would like an exact description of the whole female population: their age, life expectancy, children, property, circumstances, welfare, values. We cannot obtain any of this even with weeks of research, but a few generalizations do emerge from the scattered, male-dominated records.

The first generation of immigrants consisted principally of young men and women in a ratio of two to one. New Haven colony in particular was a business venture involving entrepreneurs with risk capital who brought servants such as Stanes to develop iron manufacturing and help to establish a permanent settlement. Other towns also had a significant economic component. The hazards of the voyage and uncertainties of the new life tended to discourage older people unless a profound religious impulse sustained them. The women too were young, over half under thirty, and almost all of British birth. The median age of marriage in Connecticut was only twenty, seven years less than that in England.\(^6\)

This early age reflected both the shortage of women and the favorable prospects of the new world. To be sure, the expected wealth failed to appear, yet the colonists raised, caught, or shot plenty of food, including meat, and escaped the diseases that afflicted the settlers farther south. They might not possess luxuries, these young wives, but they fed and clothed themselves well as their longevity demonstrated. Most of them survived childbirth and lived for another thirty years, fully equaling the men, and indeed one out of four married two or three times. During these years they typically passed through a series of changes in circumstances and estates paralleling though not duplicating that of the men.

Until marriage the young girls lived at home or with a relative or neighbor who needed household help. Servants on contract were rare in early Connecticut by comparison with the Chesapeake colonies, and in their place families who lacked a daughter or could afford a maid drew on the local pool, especially the poorer girls. These received room and board and a small sum of money, less than the boys because they produced no direct income. This difference appeared when the colony levied a "poll" tax, a species of basic income tax on productive labor. It fell on men whose work in the fields and shops earned money or its equivalent, such as food, but those who did not produce such a surplus were exempt: boys under sixteen, old men, those receiving charity, certain others such as soldiers on duty and ministers—and women. The young girls certainly
contributed greatly, even essentially to the family. They earned little cash income but their services freed their brothers and fathers for work in the fields or shops and they helped their mothers supply the family with a variety of articles which otherwise were traded for.

The social position of unmarried women, of whatever age, reflected their parents' status rather than their own accomplishment. Economically they lived, as we said, comfortably given the standards of the time. They did own property as Avis Armstrong's inventory reveals. So also Blaynch Hunt of Wethersfield, who died in 1644, left £44 in personal belongings including more than enough clothing, a good feather bed, some silver articles, and debts owing to her. The fact that she left much of this to two young "cousins," both girls, and refers to Governor Thomas Wells, then forty-six, as an uncle suggests that she was young. This sort of property, especially clothing, money, and articles of adornment such as jewelry, truly belonged to women and remained so even after their marriage.

In addition to their own private possessions the daughters received shares of the family wealth. What that meant obviously depended upon the total amount to be distributed and the number of recipients. In the 1640s and 1650s the average bride's father would be a man of fifty who owned personal property worth well over £200, half that figure in real estate. As a rule, four children would reach marriageable age. The median total of roughly £350 would be divided by five because the eldest son obtained a double share. Each of the other children could expect £70 worth unless the mother remained alive to claim her thirds. The exact sum, of course, varied with circumstances but most girls could count on receiving a part of the family estate upon marriage, often with more to follow, almost equal to that of their husbands. This property would include household goods while the men contributed articles of production for their income—the land, tools, and livestock. Obviously this varied according to parental means. Probate inventories reveal some young couples possessed of barely enough for survival. Thus when the wife of Thomas Lamson died in 1650 leaving two children of five and seven, the court evaluated her property "as she had before she married him" at only £36, including a house and lot, a cow, and some household articles. Lamson remarried twice, eventually leaving a small farm encumbered by debts. Her son, surely handicapped by all this, never married and died at 42 with a modest farm. The daughter, Azuba, did marry but not until age 27. Her son Joshua Wells carried on his grandmother's married name by calling a son Lamson.

Azuba's early death was, as we have seen, unusual. Most girls who survived the childhood diseases and were strong enough for housework lived as long as their husbands. The early years would be very difficult, with small children to tire rather than help their mothers who labored without servants. Indeed one out of ten young parents lived below a subsistence level, judging from the record of their consumer goods.
However they had enough to eat and relatives or neighbors would alleviate real hardship, especially during these early years when people usually formed closely knit communities. On the other hand, one in ten could afford to hire some help and the rest did not have to worry about survival, a fact which would not ease the long days of a young housewife and mother.

Ruth Bouton of Fairfield represents the women who lived decently but died before they could enjoy any real comfort. We do not know who her parents were, but she was probably in her early twenties when she died in 1666 a year after her husband Richard. He left only £72 worth of property including a dozen acres or so, two cows, a mare and colt, and four sheep. Ruth and he were either renting a house or living with his brother, Serjeant John, who survived long enough to become a frequent deputy to the legislature. Fortunately Richard could earn money as a cooper, which would have supported his family, especially since they had only a young daughter. Their £23 worth of consumer goods barely sufficed. Ruth's estate lacked the cooper's equipment but included the same land and livestock and twice as much in household articles and clothing, enough to have attracted a husband had she survived. More fortunate was Mary Odell, daughter of John. She was born in 1605 and at twenty-five married Benjamin Turney, five years her senior. By him she had eight children, some born in England, the others after they emigrated to Concord in 1639. They soon moved to Fairfield where in 1649 Turney died leaving an estate of £157, enough for a standard of living safely above subsistence, since he had the tools both of a carpenter and a farmer. Mary presently married Joseph Middlebrook, another immigrant to Concord who had accompanied the Turneys to Fairfield. He had lost his wife (probably a second one) not long after Turney's death so the two families combined, he contributing a son, Joseph. Mary bore Middlebrook a daughter who survived her, for she died in 1660 at age 55. These last years were probably good ones for Mary, since the two sets of children would be old enough to help, and Joseph owned more property than Turney. Middlebrook married yet again and died in 1686 leaving an estate of £580 and a sizable farm.

The difference between the standards of living of Ruth and Mary owed much to their age at death. The common sequence of events forced a mother to struggle during the first fifteen years of marriage because children were economic if not also psychological and physiological liabilities. If a woman survived, her work lightened especially if she had older daughters, and her standard of living improved. Fortunately four out of five mothers did survive to enjoy some comfort and even a little free time. Judging their condition from their husbands' estates, three out of four women of middle age enjoyed an income safely above subsistence, especially among those dying before 1670.
Jane Moulthrop of New Haven represents these mature women reasonably well—a bit older than most, but we rarely find the inventories of both husband and wife and we must use what luck provides. We do not know her parentage. She and Matthew presumably married in 1635, the year before the birth of a son. Two daughters followed, but she bore no more children and died in 1672 in her late fifties. Her husband died four years earlier. The son had married and Matthew had replaced him with a servant. The Moultrhops owned a good farm, his estate being valued at £327. The son took half of the farm after Matthew’s death but Jane retained most of the rest, which was well supplied with livestock; she also had £41 worth of household goods.

Similar is the case of Rosamund Lindon (or Lindall) whom we meet as the wife of Henry Lindon, giving birth to a child, Mary, in 1646. They may well have lost one or two babies earlier since Lindon became a deacon in 1659, suggesting a birth date before 1614. He also served as deputy to the legislature and a judge before his death in 1661. Rosamund therefore probably had been born between 1615 and 1620. Lindon owned a share in the local ironworks and a small farm, in addition to which his inventory listed a fair sum of money due to him, perhaps arising from the offices. The household goods totalled £83, sufficient for a decent standard of living. This had been achieved without sons, for the couple had six daughters, the eldest of whom would have relieved Rosamund of some of her hard work.

Rosamund, who was around forty when her husband died, remained a widow for three years and then married Nathaniel Richardson of Norwalk. He had immigrated in 1632 and had no children, nor did he equal Lindon’s prestige, but he owned more property including a sizable farm. Rosamund died in 1683, two years after her second husband, without his land but retaining some of the livestock and £44 in consumer goods, which made her a relatively well-to-do elderly-lady.

Here we encounter some technical problems. We do not know how accurately these two women represented their age group, for far more elderly widows died than the probate court reveals, nor can we judge

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what property they needed for independence. Men of a comparable position, elderly and “retired” in the sense that they no longer retained income-producing property, left larger estates than the women, especially at the top end of the scale of wealth. In each case only ten percent owned less than the requisite for a decent standard of living. Most widows lacked the men’s ability to earn supplementary cash (exceptions do occur), but on the other hand their husbands sometimes assured them of a sufficiency by arrangements with the children or other relatives, for example guaranteeing them a room in the homestead with firewood and some food, items which the estate inventories would not reveal but which wills often contain in some detail. Also, probate judges applied principles of equity in their behalf. We cannot be sure, but most likely widows had the same standard of living as did the widowers.

Given this uncertainty, the best procedure is to look at what records we have, beginning with the situation of the poorest women, those who left less than £80 worth of property. We have met Ann Stanes, Hannah Beecher, and Elizabeth Parker Rose. The latter two clearly did not need any help whereas the first depended on her brother. The husband of Joyce Ward of Wethersfield (d. 1641) apparently died in England leaving her responsible for three children at home and perhaps a son who was in England. Of these, a son and a daughter had married and settled down near her and another child whom she had apprenticed. Therefore none remained dependent on her and she was clearly living adequately, though with little property. Elizabeth Bayse of Hartford (d. 1673) had been left quite well off including ten or twelve acres, a house and a barn by her husband John (d. 1671). Illness prevented her from fully benefitting from these possessions and her three married daughters had taken over. She still had £61 in personal wealth and so was well cared for. Elizabeth Denslow retained only £38 worth of her husband’s good estate though she died just two years after he. Apparently she had turned over most of the estate to her two daughters and their children, one of whom had been living with grandma.

These examples must suffice. One of the relatively poor widows remained fully self-sufficient, four were decently treated by their families, and one supported herself. There are four others like them in the early records; all had children, and two were originally quite comfortable. The most interesting represents the whole. Mary Willcox of Hartford (d. 1669) inherited £130 as her share of her husband’s estate in 1651, including the “ould howse” next to the new one and a maid servant, called an “apprentice.” Her son John was to provide firewood and £4 per year. She also had two married daughters. By the time of her death she was about seventy and feeble; the probate court had instructed John to pay an extra £2 per year since “on account of weakness she cannot occupy the Old House, Orchards, etc.” Six pounds in country pay would not fully support her but with her other property surely sufficed,
especially since the two daughters could help.\textsuperscript{20}

This account has stressed the ordinary women, even those at the bottom of Connecticut's society. That seems proper, for they have received little notice from historians because of their obscurity or from genealogists if they failed to produce a son who reached fatherhood. But we should now remember that many graced the top. One in five wives shared their husbands' prominent status if they lived long enough; and the colony's leaders owed more than a mere existence to mothers even if their very names remain hidden. The wife of Governor Andrew Leete we know only as Mary though she became the mother of an equally prominent Andrew. One of the earliest ministers, Adam Blakeman of Stratford (1598–1665) married simply "Jane," yet she gave birth to another minister among other children and for several years after his death managed successfully the 160-acre farm and the family.\textsuperscript{21}

Connecticut's immigrant women and their daughters, on the whole, fared well. The lives of most people during the seventeenth century consisted of hard work, poverty, and early death. The early migration from Europe to the New World did not automatically lessen the burden of work, alleviate poverty, or lengthen the life span; it seldom did so in the West Indies or in the Chesapeake. In the northern colonies the labor may have remained about the same: perhaps a little less for the poor immigrant, somewhat more for members of the upper class. Life expectancy however clearly increased due above all to a healthier environment and better food.\textsuperscript{22} The escape from poverty occurred primarily because of the almost unlimited natural resources not only for food but for shelter and warmth. In addition the ethics of the people ensured adequate care for the unfortunate by the church, the town, or individuals. To all this we can add freedom from higher authority, at least external to their own institutions, enabling them to create a new society.

None of this guaranteed a good life for all, as the careers of Ann Stanes and Avis Armstrong testify. Most of the people worked very hard and the women had to bear, nurse, and raise many children. A majority experienced deprivations; few enjoyed comfort or, in Lois Carr's inspired word, the amenities. Over the years they have received little credit, the men overmuch, and it is high time that the founding mothers shared equally.
Notes

1 Her will of 1670 refers to herself as “stricken in years,” which suggests that she had been middle-aged when her husband left. Her brother must have been born by 1594. The will and other information are printed in Charles William Manwaring, comp., A Digest of the Early Connecticut Probate Records, 3 vols. (1904–1906), I, 235–237.


3 New Haven district probate records, I, 80–81. The Connecticut State Library in Hartford contains almost all of the colony’s probate records on microfilm.

4 Ibid., 108, 176; Jacobus, New Haven, VI, 1519. The fact that she bore a child as late as 1652 supports a date of birth not much, if any, before 1610.

5 Manwaring, I, 93, 228–229. Ruscoe’s house in 1673 consisted not only of the usual basic hall and parlor with their chambers but also a kitchen, a buttery, and a “new room.”

6 The evidence for this and following statements comes from research reported in my Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut (Princeton, 1985).

7 Hartford district probate records, II, 437. Since she lacked real estate she must have lived with some family and helped out.

8 During the first decades of the colony’s settlement land was plentiful, therefore cheap, while livestock were scarce and expensive, so that personal exceeded real wealth. Later in the century the relationship was reversed.

9 Jacobus, New Haven, IV, 720 and V, 1079 provides flesh and blood for the probate skeleton. We do not know Mrs. Lamson’s name unless she called her daughter Azuba after herself, a common practice. Lamson probably was her second husband.

10 Donald Lines Jacobus, History and Genealogy of Old Fairfield (3 vols., Fairfield, 1930–1931), I, 95–96; Fairfield district probate records, II, 1, 16. The daughter did not marry until age 33, indicative of poverty. Ruth’s additional personal wealth suggests that the appraisers of Richard’s estate had omitted not only her clothing but some of the household furnishings, perhaps those she had brought to the marriage.

11 Jacobus, Fairfield, 618–619; Fairfield district probate records, I, 13.

12 Jacobus, Fairfield, 409.

13 Source: all colony inventories. No court records survive for the towns in New London for these years. The probate courts recorded most of the deaths of adult males and show no wealth-bias. The table is based on a combination of consumer goods, acres of land, and total personal
wealth. The decline among the well-off group reflects the failure of the first generation to discover an equivalent for the Chesapeake's tobacco. The proportion did not return to the pre-1660 level until the eighteenth century.

One daughter survived and presumably had received part of the estate when she married in 1663. Jacobus, New Haven, VI, 1234; New Haven district probate records, I, 143, 156.

If the marriage had occurred in the colonies during the first years Lindon might have been thirty or more at his marriage and achieved high office at a relatively young age, while Rosamond might have been in her late teens and so born as late as 1627. But in England the probabilities are as stated in the text.


Fairfield district probate records, II, 74.

Connecticut experienced no epidemic during the first fifty years and no serious one until Queen Anne's War. This resulted partly from the general absence of diseases characteristic of the southern colonies and the comparative isolation of the settlers, living as they did in scattered villages rather than in cities, with no mass immigration to bring microbes. “Better food” means an improvement both in quantity and quality, additional meat being especially important.
Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion: Revising an Interpretive Tradition

Laura Ellen Haigwood

O THOON, the central character of William Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion, is often viewed as a victim of the more powerful men around her. In this essay I would like to challenge this view on two points: its accuracy vis-à-vis the text itself and its underlying assumptions. I will give particular attention to the readings of Harold Bloom, David V. Erdman and Alicia Ostriker because they are especially representative of trends in the interpretation of Visions. I will then offer a different view of Oothoon, supported by a discussion of some important details of the plot and of Oothoon's own rhetoric. My interpretation is informed by feminist theory and criticism, but this essay also offers a critique of the tendency in feminism to—at times—over-emphasize the victimization of women and neglect their power. In my interpretation of Visions, I will argue that guilt is inextricably linked to power and that Oothoon has more of both than other critics have remarked.

For the reader who may be unfamiliar with Blake's work in general or Visions in particular, let me begin by briefly describing what kind of text it is, where it fits in Blake's oeuvre and what it is about. As the illustrations to this essay show, it is (in W.J.T. Mitchell's terms) a "composite" text, a marriage of poetry and visual art. The sixth of Blake's books in illuminated printing, Visions was first printed in 1793, following Songs of Innocence (1789) and preceding Songs of Experience (1794). Visions also comes between The Book of Thel (1789) and America, a Prophecy (1793), sharing themes and images with both. In Thel, sexuality and mortality are offered to, but refused by, the character who gives her name to the book. America, a Prophecy offers a spiritual history of the American Revolution.

The "plot" of Visions is as follows: A woman named Oothoon who
loves a man named Theotormon is wandering in Leutha's vale. She meets a flower who invites her to pluck it, which she does. A sexual encounter between Oothoon and a man named Bromion follows, the precise nature of which is ambiguous: specifically, critics do not agree on whether it is a rape, a sexual act initiated by Bromion to which Oothoon consents, or one which she initiates herself. For a feminist reading, however, this question is obviously central, and it will be a major focus of this essay. Theotormon responds to the sexual encounter by binding Oothoon and Bromion back to back in his cave, Plate i (Figure 1). For the remainder (which is also the bulk) of the poem Bromion speaks relatively little, although what he does say (and this is true of all three characters) provides clues to his nature and meaning, both as character in a narrative and as symbolic figure in an allegory. Bromion presents himself as an imperialist and slave-master, imaginatively limited by his materialist world view. Oothoon, who has the most and the longest speeches in the poem, argues her essential innocence and purity, inveighs against jealousy, and pleads with Theotormon to look at her. And Theotormon utters a series of tormented questions and aphorisms, obliquely scolding both her language and her love. The poem ends without significant change in the relationship among the three characters: Bromion has fallen silent, Oothoon is still pleading with Theotormon, and Theotormon is still resisting her pleas.

As this synopsis suggests, Visions is concerned with both the sexual theme of Thel and the political theme of America. And, as Nelson Hilton's work suggests, it is possible, and even probable, that Blake's contemporary observations of the relationship between the feminist author Mary Wollstonecraft and the misogynist artist Henry Fuseli rendered his understanding of the connection of sexual oppression to other forms of political injustice more acute. Certainly, the book may be read as a political or spiritual allegory as well, although neither allegory necessarily excludes the feminist interpretation I will offer here.

Although it is difficult to argue that Visions is a feminist poem, it is an important text for feminist criticism to engage because it is a good place to confront the implicitly sexist biases of certain ways of reading. Specifically, I contend that the interpretations offered by David Erdman and Harold Bloom may be inaccurate and that their inaccuracies may arise from unexamined assumptions about gender. Because Bloom's commentary, in particular, has become part of the standard scholarly edition of Blake's complete works, it seems especially important to articulate a dissenting interpretation in order both to facilitate a clearer understanding of this particular text and to deconstruct the sexist biases themselves.

I would like to start by re-examining some widely held assumptions about Visions, particularly those concerning Oothoon's rhetoric of free love (and the precise relationship of Blake's text to that rhetoric) and
those concerning the nature of the sexual encounter between Bromion and Oothoon. These two rather different areas of assumption are crucially related in terms of where and how they locate and distribute power, and whom they recognize as "powerful"—specifically, how much power they acknowledge in Oothoon. First, I challenge the assumption that Oothoon speaks "for" Blake as a direct spokesperson for his personal views on free love and sexuality; on the contrary, I think the text presents her speeches with considerable dramatic irony. Second, I interpret Oothoon's sexual encounter with Bromion neither as an instance of free love in action nor as a rape, but rather as an act expressive of her already fallen consciousness—a re-enactment of her sexual oppression, with which she is complicit.

The first of the assumptions I wish to contest, that Oothoon speaks "for" Blake, is most clearly articulated by Harold Bloom, whose general description of *Visions* is "this hymn to free love" (*Blake's Poetry and Prose*, p. 900). But later in his commentary Bloom refers to Enitharmon's song in *The Four Zoas* as a "hymn of triumphant female will," despite the fact that it contains very significant echoes of Oothoon's speeches. Both the song of Enitharmon and those portions of *Visions* which most suggest a hymn to free love convey a celebration of nature and sexuality which is indeed more like a hymn of the female will triumphant than an unambiguously liberatory invitation to sexual experience. By giving them essentially the same language, Blake's oeuvre associates them in ways which an interpretation of either character must take into account.

For a feminist reading, in particular, it is important to bear in mind that sexual liberation, in itself, is not invariably liberating to women, either psychologically or socially. On the contrary, to liberate women sexually without liberating them politically and economically as well is at best insufficient and at worst, as feminists from the Owenites to Shulamith Firestone have observed, to deepen their oppression.

With this in mind, let us continue our analysis of Bloom's interpretation by focusing on his understanding of the central conflict of *Visions*:

[Bromion's] sadistic pride in the rape is tempered both by a bad conscience, and by a revulsion from the sexual awakening he has brought about in his victim. Theotormon's simpler conflict is between the torments of jealousy and continued love.... Ooothoon's reaction is the most subtle and complex of the three.... Ooothoon begins by seeming to accept the morality of her ravisher and her lover, but the acceptance is belied by the psychic actuality of her reaction to her new state. She cannot weep because she is not moved to do so, though she attempts to simulate despair. But the writhing of her limbs indicates instead that her sexual desire has been aroused, and that it only remains for Theotormon truly to fulfill her. His
failure prompts the substitute gratification (for both of them) of her masochistic and momentary submission to a Promethean punishment. . . . From that nadir on, Oothoon moves forward into the full rhetorical power of her new freedom. (Blake’s Poetry and Prose, p. 901)

Bloom purports to be recording what the text shows. But what he most accurately records here is the assumption that rape facilitates “sexual awakening” in its “victims.” It is now common knowledge that rape and other forms of sexual abuse generally have exactly the opposite effect, and it is regrettable that this particular version of one of the most notoriously oppressive and consistently discredited myths about female sexuality should have been retained in the “newly revised edition” of the commentary to Blake’s works. But more to the point is the question of the usefulness and accuracy of Bloom’s remarks as an interpretation of the text: How does the poem bear out, or fail to bear out, Bloom’s hypothesis? Is the purely sexual resolution he proposes here—that “it only remains for Theotormon truly to fulfill her”—really appropriate to the conflicts revealed in the speeches of the three main characters?

I disagree with Bloom that the encounter between Bromion and Oothoon is a rape, for reasons I will give below, although I do agree that Theotormon has power. But the nature of that power, in my view, is much more political and psychological than sexual. In other words, it may be that Theotormon “fails” to give Oothoon sex, but Oothoon does not ask for sex. Rather, she asks for recognition: she asks him to look at her. Moreover, the sexual offer she does make to Theotormon is not the gift of her own sexual favors but those of other women, and her over-riding motive seems to be to engage his eye. Though significantly different in some respects, David Erdman’s view of Oothoon shares certain assumptions with Bloom’s. On the title page of Visions, Plate ii (Figure 2), we see a fleeing female figure running across the waves, looking back over her shoulder. Erdman interprets this figure as Oothoon and suggests that here the text invites us “to help her maintain the faith whereby she still walks on the waves, despite the menaces of Bromion and Theotormon under the aegis of the selfish father-god Urizen” (Illuminated Blake, p. 127). Like Bloom’s suggestion that Oothoon’s problem is sexual frustration and that if Theotormon were to satisfy her the poem’s central conflict would be happily resolved, Erdman’s vision of Oothoon as a damsel in distress is disarming chivalrous but also, I would suggest, slightly condescending, bearing with it the implication that women intrinsically require champions, and inevitably suggesting that they are weaker, in mind and spirit and not merely in body, than men.

But even feminist critics can, I think, unintentionally disempower Oothoon in their efforts to rescue her from male reader’s misperceptions. In response to Northrop Frye’s courtly and trivializing charac-
Figure 2.
terization of the sexual encounter between Oothoon and Bromion as an “extra-marital amour,” Alicia Ostriker concurs emphatically with Bloom in calling it a “rape.” One of the things I most appreciate about Ostriker’s reading of Visions, particularly in her essay “Desire Gratified and Ungratified: William Blake and Sexuality,” is her sensitivity to the moral seriousness of the encounter. But to call it “rape” is, I think, inaccurate, again implying that Oothoon has no real will of her own toward it. As I intend to show, Oothoon is not a rape victim but an active and aggressive participant in her experience.

The interpretations I have referred to vary in significant ways: Bloom sees Oothoon as sexually frustrated, the victim of Theotormon’s fallen consciousness and resultant prudery or impotence; Erdman sees her as a tragically ignored emblem of the spiritually (and politically) good, desirable and liberatory, victimized by the political fear and apathy of the man she loves; Ostriker sees her primarily as a rape victim, the object of male violence toward women. But what these very different interpretations have in common is their emphasis on Oothoon’s victimization, her relative helplessness. In all three readings, the men around her are assumed to have all the guilt—and power.

I think it would be worthwhile to digress here briefly in order to explore the implications of this pervasive view of women as victims, particularly for feminist criticism and the theory that underlies it. While it is important to acknowledge, analyze and deconstruct the undeniable social and political victimization of women, it seems equally important to acknowledge, where appropriate, their guilt, willful complicity and responsibility. No one doubts the essential innocence of an unambiguous victim, but total innocence implies total powerlessness; ironically, and perhaps paradoxically, guilt is power. Most important, guilt implies the power to do otherwise, which in turn suggests the hope of eventually exercising that power to make a positive difference, both for oneself and for others. Though a blow to the ego ideal—or the projected ego ideal, perhaps, in the case of literary interpretation—occasional emphasis on women’s guilt and their power to comply in turn tends to highlight their power, and their responsibility, not to comply. And the recognition and acceptance of such a power offers its own, invaluable, liberatory gestalt.

So let us now examine the development of plot and character in Visions starting from the assumption that Oothoon may be, to some degree, guilty. Is there adequate evidence to support such a view? I believe there is. At the very beginning of the poem, Oothoon plucks the flower, saying “I pluck thee from thy bed/Sweet flower and put thee here to glow between my breasts/And thus I turn my face to where my whole soul seeks” (Plate 1, 11. 11–13). But when she goes to where her whole soul seeks, she ends up on Bromion’s bed which, as it turns out, is not a very soulful place. Bloom’s interpretation tends to sever her act from its consequences: “To hide in Leutha’s vale is to evade sexual reality, and to
pluck Leutha's flower and rise up from her vale is to attempt to give oneself to that reality. The 'terrible thunders' of the roaring Bromion intervene, to ruin the voluntary aspect of that attempt" (Blake's Poetry and Prose, p. 901, emphasis added). Again, while I agree with Bloom about the nature of Leutha's vale, clearing Oothoon from blame also means robbing Oothoon of power. It seems to me more plausible to interpret Bromion's "terrible thunders" as an unforeseen consequence of Oothoon's choice, but one for which she is nonetheless responsible. We know that she is "the soft soul of America" (Plate 1, 1.3) but, significantly and characteristically, Bromion describes her and addresses her in purely physical terms: "Thy soft American plains are mine and Mine thy north and south" (Plate 1, 1.3). He breaks her into parts, none of which suggests or contains her soul. The landscape or body is what he stamps, presumably because it is all he sees. As her subsequent speeches indicate, she seems to learn from him how to see herself or—more precisely—finds in his stamping a further confirmation of her earliest instruction.

As she confides in her brief autobiography, she has been told certain things about herself, adding up to the message that she is merely a biological and sensual creature:

They told me that the night & day were all that I could see;
They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.
And they inclos' d my infinite brain into a narrow circle,
And sunk my heart into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning
Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.
(Pl. 2, 11. 30–4)

Oothoon attempts to resist but ultimately complies with this vision of herself, as I hope to show in an analysis of some of her later speeches. She does not escape from the materialist perspective (emblematized by Bromion) which has "stampt" and shaped her; even her rhetoric of opposition is at times grounded in the same point of view, and shares some of the same oppressive assumptions—most significantly, the assumption that woman exists to serve and reflect man, specifically at the sexual level.

Early in the poem, Bromion describes slavery in the following terms: "They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge:/Their daughters worship terrors and obey the violent" (pl. 1, 11. 22–3). Considered in his character as a slavemaster, Bromion may be assumed to have strong ideological reasons for reporting the attitudes and behavior of slaves in this way, accurately or not. However, as it happens, this does accurately describe Oothoon's attitude and behavior through the rest of the poem. That is, she does say that she wants to "reflect" or worship the tormented and tormenting character she refers to as "my Theotormon,"
who flourishes his scourge at her in Plate 6 (Figure 3). And the significance of worship and obedience is that they can be withheld. In his commentary to the Trianon Press facsimile, Geoffrey Keynes interprets this illumination as Theotormon flagellating himself; however, I think it looks much more as if his scourge is recoiling from or about to hit Oothoon, who is shrinking and weeping as if in anticipation or response.

What ensues from Oothoon’s plucking of the flower, then, is the drama of woman’s sexuality in a fallen context, in which desire, complicity and victimization are intricately and problematically related. The argument (Plate iii) is Oothoon’s version of what happened to her (“I loved Theotormon...”). The narrative voice fills in some significant details. Oothoon is discovered in Leutha’s vale, wandering in “woe,” seeking flowers to comfort her, and we are forced to recall that “woe” is Milton’s characterization of postlapsarian human life in the opening lines of Paradise Lost.4 Further, as Bloom notes and as S. Foster Damon has also suggested, plucking Leutha’s flower may be emblematic of a sexual act. From the beginning, then, perhaps Oothoon errs in seeking sexual comforts for spiritual ills. And the ineffectiveness of her argument with Theotormon may arise from the same cause: she tries to offer him sexual solace for his spiritual torments.

Now, by placing such emphasis on the failure of sexual satisfaction alone to provide spiritual fulfillment, am I suggesting a dualism between spirituality and sexuality? I would not say that Blake posits a duality between the sexual and the spiritual, but neither does he posit them as identical and interchangeable. Sex may be a metaphor for spiritual union, without being the same thing as spiritual union, and this is the crux of my argument about Oothoon. Both the irony of her own speeches and their ironic conjunction with the illustrations tend to emphasize that body and soul, though equally valuable and mutually necessary, are not conflatable.

Thus, the back-to-back bondage of Bromion and Oothoon (Plate i, Figure 1) may be a parody of sexual intercourse from a materialist perspective: a joining of bodies but not of eyes, visions, spirits. This picture does not portray a punishment for sex, itself. Rather, it is specifically named the fate of an “adulterate pair” (Plate 2, 1. 5). And this term is provided by the narrator, not a character, a fact which tends to suggest special authority, at least within the fiction of the narrative itself. In other words, if Oothoon and the other speakers seem at times conspicuously unreliable as narrators, perhaps we may read the authorial voice as indeed slightly more authoritative, offering clues to a basic plot against which we may compare the versions of the characters in order to discover their distinctive perspectives and limitations.

In the light of this authorial characterization of Oothoon and Bromion as “adulterate,” it is useful to remember that “adultery” is not merely a
And in place of deadly in the jaws of the hungry man, where his parch these words are written. Take up, O Man, and sweet shall be thy taste & sweet thy infant joys return.

Integrity, frankness, hatred, hop, nothing, futility, the delight, the taste of pleasure, honest, honest, open, seeking. The memory goes of morning light, open to raging black.

The taught their molecular, jaded workers, child of night & sleep. When then undone, not then dissemble all the secret goes. Life was, that not opaque when all the mystery was disclosed.

They cannot thus forth a modest virgin known to dissemble. With note found under the night pillow to catch virgin joy, and blend it with the name of whose, & sell it in the night. In silence, even without a whisper, and in secret, soul.

In perfect arrogance and, help vaster, light the shady acres. Once were the acres lighted by the gods of honest women.

And does no theologian such thus hypocrite savagery? Was knowing, ardent, secret, truthful, cautious, trembling hypocrisy. Then is Cithaeron, a where indeed, and all the virgin joy.

Of life are honesty, and Theocritus is a seek night's dream. And Cithaeron is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.

But Cithaeron is not so, a virgin filled with virgin fancies.

Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears. If in the morning sun find it, there my gaze are fixed.

Figure 3.
synonym for "sex." Rather, it is a term for sex in a particular context—sex between people who presumably have other sexual commitments of exclusivity and trust that are implicitly or explicitly violated by the "adulterous" relationship. Such a context inevitably suggests, at least, duplicity and "division." Thus it is clear (or, if it is not immediately clear to our own experience and observation, Plate i certainly makes it clear) that the self-dividing torments of adultery may differ from the joys of genuinely free love. Thus, what we see here are both—and simultaneously—the spiritual consequences of sex in a fallen context and a tragic sexual transgression offered as a metaphor for spiritual confusion and lapse. Of course, Ooothoon's lapse or error also fulfills the potential of experience (refused by Thel) to test and to temper one's vision. It is a "fall" which prepares the reader (and, presumably, prepared the author) for the prophetic visions of America. But it is not—and this is my central disagreement with Erdman and Bloom—a privileged state in itself.

In discussing sexual transgression in Visions, I particularly want to emphasize how active Oothoon is. The sexual aggressiveness implied by her act is what makes it difficult for me to concur with Bloom and Ostriker that what occurs between Oothoon and Bromion is a rape. It becomes a kind of "rape," perhaps, after the fact, when he interprets it rapefully and she does not effectively protest. (By "interpreting it rapefully," I mean when he assumes possession, assumes that sexual possession implies total possession.) But the events of the poem originate in Ooothoon's own plucking of the flower and subsequent "impetuous" flight.

The sexually willful aspects of Ooothoon are further emphasized by textual and visual allusions to Leutha in Visions, particularly the rainbow of the title page which, though often interpreted as an unambiguous symbol of hope and other good things, may also be, as Aaron Fogel notes, "an ironic allusion both to Noah's rainbow [a veil over wrath] and to Newton's prisms," evoking and emphasizing the limitations of single or material vision, or the veil of the "Delusive Goddess, Nature." It certainly suggests, at least, that the "fallen, fallen light" of experience and the limited material vision of Newton may be assumed to have an important presence in the poem.

Having shown that Ooothoon's associations with "female will" and lust, as well as desire, are established early in the text and render her more complex and ambiguous, less pure, Promethean and positive than other readers have considered her to be, I would like to turn now to an analysis of some aspects of her speeches. To borrow Lois Chaber's keen observations on Moll Flanders, I would like to suggest that Ooothoon's rhetorical aggression becomes at once a justified defiance of the unjust system of sexual discourse and intercourse in which she embarks upon her experience and an embodiment, verging on parody, of the most alienating features of that system—specifically, prostitution (or white slavery) and the
objectification of women.

One significant feature of Oothoon's rhetoric is her particular way of asking questions, frequently based on an either/or construction: "Is it this or this?" rather than "what is it?" Because they are questions, they seem like authentic gestures toward dialogue: structurally, a question would seem to "want" a response. But the either/or construction slams shut the door of dialogue at the same time that it seems to open it: that is, the possible responses are limited in such a way that if the answer doesn't fit the asker's pre-inscribed categories, the person addressed can only be mute. Certainly this muteness is the traditional relationship of women to the discourse of patriarchal culture, which excludes much of their experience—most notably, their erotic (as opposed to merely reproductive) and intellectual or spiritual experience, the aspects of her own experience which Oothoon seems most anxious to articulate and vindicate.

But her vindication is finally undercut by the fact that she has adopted the same aggressive, totalizing style of language she has heard from Bromion. She doesn't really ask Theotormon what he thinks and feels; she tells him, "enslaving" his experience to her own "system." This can be seen particularly clearly in another pseudo-question based on a does/then construction:

And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty!
This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite.
Then is Oothoon a whore indeed! and all the virgin joys
Of life are harlots: and Theotormon is a sick mans dream
And Oothoon is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.
(Pl. 6, 11. 16-19)

I don't think that the text necessarily invites the reader to share Oothoon's point of view at this point, nor to assume that everything she says or speculates about Theotormon is true. When Bromion says to her, as quoted above, "Thy soft American plains are mine," etc. his total appropriation of the other is not unlike Oothoon's appropriation here of Theotormon's imagination and desires. In this respect, perhaps Oothoon inflicts something of the same verbal rape on Theotormon that Bromion has inflicted upon her. In other words, I think that the voice Blake gives to Oothoon in certain passages, such as this one, is far from liberating.

In Plate iv of the Trianon Press facsimile, Plate 4 (Figure 4), the shape that appears to envelop Oothoon is painted the same green as the surrounding ocean, suggesting a wave rebounding from the rock whose rigid countours are echoed in Theotormon's posture. This illumination is the visual analogue of her rhetoric, a sort of chained flying, circular and repetitive, the oral and aural equivalent of "the same dull round."

Just as Oothoon's rhetoric has, at times, an undeniably oppressive and
Were shadows of discontent, and in what houses dwell the wretched,
Drunk with hope forgotten, and shut up from cold despair.

Tell me where dwell the thoughts forgotten till thou call them forth,
Tell me where dwell the eyes of old, or where the ancient loves.
And when will they return again to the night of oblivion past?

How might breathe voices & spaces for remote and hasting
Comforts into a present, so canquand a night of pain.

When quest thin thou, to what remote land is thy flight?
If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction
Will thou bring consolers on thy wings and hairs and honey and balm;
Or poison from the desert winds, from the eyes of the envious.

Then Brahmian said, and shook the cavern with his lamentation

 Thou hastest that the ancient trees, seen by thine eyes have fruit;
 But longest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth
 In grottoes senses unknown, trees, beast upon birds unknown.
 Unknown, not whispering spread in the infinite microscope,
 In places yet unseen by the voyager, and unseen worlds
 Over another kind of seas, and in atmospheres unknown.

 Ah! are there other names, beside the name of sword and fire?
 And are there other corners, beside the corner of poverty?
 And are there other joys, beside the joys of riches and ease?
 And is there not one law for both the lion and the ox?
 And is there not eternal fire, and eternal chains?
 To bind the phantoms of existence from eternal life.

Then Oothoon waited silent all the day, and all the night.

Figure 4.
aggressive quality, her “free love” seems to me to be less free in itself and less potentially liberating, for herself and for her beloved, than it has seemed to other readers. She offers to bind her desires to Theotormon’s, implicitly demanding that he bind his desires to her. Of course, she is not asking that he catch boys for her as she offers to catch girls for him, but she does ask that he accept her gifts and her worshipful “reflection,” subtly insisting that he continue in the role of a tormenting god who can only be invoked by lamentation and placated by female sacrifices.

Alicia Ostriker and David Aers have pointed out that Oothoon’s language contains and perpetrates many patriarchal assumptions and sexist fantasies. And they tend to agree that these assumptions and fantasies come directly and uncritically from Blake himself. Without giving Blake credit for an unduly high feminist consciousness, I nonetheless interpret Oothoon’s speeches somewhat differently, as instances of dramatic irony, the portrayal of a consciousness insufficiently distanced from the oppressive system it is ostensibly criticizing. And, again, I am strongly persuaded by Nelson Hilton’s work that Blake was familiar enough with both contemporary feminist theory and the personal life of one of its major proponents, Mary Wollstonecraft, to conceive and execute a subtle critique of feminism’s internal contradictions and inconsistencies.

The most obvious and poignant inconsistency of Oothoon’s rhetoric is that rather than freeing herself effectively from Bromion’s domination, she continues asking for more domination from Theotormon; instead of rising toward the freedom which she professes to desire, she descends further into “reflection.” By offering to procure girls for Theotormon, Oothoon protests against her slavery in terms which ultimately intensify it, protesting her enslavement to the sensual, physical and biological by asking for more freedom to be sensual, physical and biological, and to extend the slavery imposed by that limited view of woman to other women. The passage in which Oothoon articulates her sexual offer to Theotormon significantly echoes the passage where she talks about her own ready and undiscriminating responsiveness to beauty:

Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears
If in the morning sun I find it: There my eyes are fix’d
In happy copulation; if in the evening mild, wearied with work;
Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this free born joy.
(Plate 6, 11. 22–23; Plate 7, 11. 1–2)

This is a charming passage, suggesting a naive or innocent conflation of the spiritual with the sensual. However, I see a sudden ironic debasement of the sexual metaphor in her second use of “copulation”: 

90
But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,
And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold;
I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon:
(Plate 7, 11. 23–6)

Even more revealing of the psychology of women under male domination, the difference between these two passages seems to suggest that she is willing to give up her own capacity for happy spiritual “copulation” with Beauty—that is, her capacity for autonomous, unmediated spiritual and intellectual pleasure—to become the voyeur of Theotormon’s carnal “bliss,” “obliterating” and “erasing” herself from “life” in unselfconscious compliance with her early indoctrination.

My intention here has been to show how Oothoon sets the action of the poem in motion and uses what power she has to criticize but also to maintain an oppressive political and spiritual order. In addition, as I suggested in my remarks about the shared assumptions which underlie Bloom’s, Frye’s and Ostriker’s very different readings of Visions, I have wanted to show how a feminist criticism which reads feminine characters primarily as victims may unintentionally echo and reinforce assumptions which support the very oppression it opposes. My more general political motive for making such a point is to find new ways of empowering women readers by contributing to the refinement and clarification of our “visions” of ourselves and of the internal and external sources of oppression.

In order to make my point briefly I have neglected the more positive aspects of Oothoon. It is clear, I think, that Oothoon has a “vision” which in many ways transcends her sense experience. But I have been concerned here with how effectively and consistently she is able to articulate, maintain and persuade others to share that vision. The image of Oothoon chained within the wave of her own rhetoric is indeed complemented by images of her in flight and walking on the water, openly defying the laws of a “Nature” that has frequently been invoked to justify political and economic injustices toward women. Oothoon’s double vision, emphasized rather pointedly by the two pairs of eyes in her name, is a fundamental theme of the poem. Visions does not invite the reader simply to decide whether Oothoon is “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong”; rather, it offers an opportunity for analysis of the very complicated ways in which she may be right but perhaps in the wrong way, seeing both with and through the eye or, to re-phrase this idea in terms of the poem’s motto, speaking alternately and inconsistently from the perspective of the eye and the apprehension of the heart. Relinquishing the long-cherished image of Oothoon as pure, innocent victim in favor of a more complex, well-intentioned but perhaps profoundly erring Oothoon will, I think, enable readers of Blake to
achieve a more accurate and inclusive interpretation of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* as well as a clearer understanding of the oppressive system of discourse and intercourse that enslaves all three of the poem’s voices.

Notes

1 I would like to thank David V. Erdman for generously lending me the photographic reproductions of Copy J from which this and subsequent illustrations were made; I very much appreciate his kindness. Permission to reproduce the plates has been granted by the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. I refer the interested reader to Professor Erdman’s *The Illuminated Blake* for a full reproduction of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*.

2 As Hilton’s fascinating and provocative essay is still unpublished, it may not be widely known. In the manuscript I have read he offers detailed research into the relationship between Blake and Wollstonecraft.
and a new interpretation of *Visions*, both of which have greatly influenced my reading of the poem.

3 The “female will” is an important element in Blake’s symbolic system. In brief and general terms, it is both the will of the female to entrap the male in emotional and sexual bonds (usually depicted as narrow and limiting, and in conflict with a broader and more heroic destiny) and the will or desire of the male himself toward the female which makes him susceptible to her. These are the lines from Enitharmon’s song in *The Four Zoas* which echo Oothoon’s:

> Arise you little glancing wings & sing your infant joy
> Arise & drink your bliss
>
> For every thing that lives is holy …

(Blake’s *Poetry and Prose*, p. 317, 11. 78-80)

It is beyond the scope of this essay to pursue the parallels between Oothoon and Enitharmon in detail, although to do so would be both interesting and fruitful. And, of course, “For everything that lives is holy” is also the concluding line of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Blake’s *Poetry and Prose*, p. 45). Now, it is true that just as the same gesture, or the same form (Mitchell, Warner) need not mean exactly the same thing in every context, neither should we assume that the same words mean precisely the same thing in the mouths of different speakers. Yet we must, I think, consider the other occasions on which Blake gives the same lines to another speaker as part of the larger context in which a given speech is uttered. If we do, we may perhaps see in Blake’s oeuvre an evolution of certain words and phrases, a gradual debasement of the phrase “everything that lives is holy,” mimicking the process by which metaphors die, or by which words of originally liberatory “power” and resonance are seized upon by self-serving demagogues. If so, then we must recognize that Oothoon’s speech in *Visions* comes between the * Marriage and Zoas* and may represent a stage in that debasement.

4 “Of Man’s First Disobedience, and the Fruit/Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste/Brought Death into the World, and all our woe …” (Book 1, 11. 1-3).

5 In “Blake’s Use of Gesture,” Janet Warner notes:

In the final plate of *Visions* … the female form in this pose, Oothoon hovering in the sky above the Daughters of Albion, is a sad and ironic echo of the hovering bearded form menacing her on the title page, whose wings, rather than arms, are outstretched. What seems to be suggested is that Oothoon’s failure to become one with Theotormon has made her an image of the very forces she was trying to overcome. (p. 183)

I am persuaded by Warner’s reading in this instance, consistent as it is with the general tone of unselfconscious failure and irony in Oothoon’s rhetoric.


POETRY
Proposal

for a new public building to be built
on the site of the burned down city hall

It should be a barn built of weathered boards
to give shelter to whatever wild things
might deign to live among us. Raccoons,
owls, snakes, bats, anything
having from four to a hundred legs;
those that fly in the sun or live
in burrows—or in deep dung;
at home in decay that is damp and warm,
and spontaneous, like us.
And whatever rots, and moves in a rotten house;

fungi—toads and stagnant water,
apartments in dead trees.
Every allurement to coax the wild into town,
such as a wooden statue of St. Francis,
with holes in his head, and arms, and robe,
to harbor birds and wildlife.

Here snakes shall be exalted, and ants
have their cities; sparrows revered as eagles.
Rats? There are worse things than rats.
It would be worse if one day
we should have to compare ourselves
with ourselves—and so go mad.
The Shore of Life

Here it is again, the little park, with its ornate bandstand. Trees, the trimmed pines hoarding cones. Green grass and the dull monument with bronze plaque—something ... Camera-America—and something as desolate as a murky shore...

And the shore, glass-strewn, scum-thrown, salted by the tremendous Pacific. Sea-slime oozing between the toes, feeling a lot like life.

And the morning born in the level cannon of the sun.

Stoical

It is best to relinquish the garden where in the mud the toad flicks its tongue at flies and stars and ants line their way to Spain—and the mouse hides in the agave.

Let raptorial boys with folded wings swoop from the wall to raid green apples, while the owl molts a feather.

Give up full bottles and sunrises roses and wine lips: all throw-aways, all to take French leave of; save the one wretched thing you half created and wholly loved.
A Warm Front

We had seen it before,
the coldness

that comes with a warm front,
surprises us,
that sudden twist of heart,
our own minds turning on us

like a caged thing, pounding
for escape, in the ripening

of a September sun,
when our lives
had never been so good,
we had never been loved as much

the end springs a tiger's leap.

Separation gaps open,
so wide,
we had never seen it so wide—

winter crashing into fall,
once more
for the first time.
Green

I recall the first signs,
green caps on the dying snow
no bigger than a quarter smile;

Afterwards there was nothing else.
The same with us.
Everything came down to green,
even love. My senses

measured, recorded its growth
with a need that frightened me.

I never stopped to think
it wasn’t all good.
I never considered

when mistrust swelled like a bulb,
when the first sharp crown
of jealousy stuck out,

it was something else.
Our landscape was imperiled.

And when the counting began,
feelings weighed and priced,
how much, how much,
my worth against another woman’s
how much, how much,

when an old wife’s bargaining
sounded up like crickets,
love became an irrelevancy,
root dead, though
we didn’t know it.

Now, there is nothing but green,
shades and shades of it
in laughable abundance.
The Heat, The Forest

As if a forest
slyly happened while we talked

the heat was everywhere, thick,
a place of no color and no name,
without a forest's branch-to-branch delineation.

So there was conversation,
the nearly wordless kind,

the same old weather,
the unbearable climate

we didn't create,
the region of money and jobs,

it was the atmosphere
and our words for it
coming to the same thing,

a matter of surfaces,
the landscape of impenetrables
we were lost in;

it was the two of us
all winter long

and talk of books and publishers,
of taxes and courts,

it was the thickness
of the ice, now this heat

one could also call—
what? a forest?
Equal Possibilities

I like the level just below freezing,
ice not holding too hard,
its dual promise,
to thicken or break

wide open like a lake or pond
we stare at wondering,
shall we, shall we not?

I like the budded garden,
mouths, not tight lipped,
but puckered, ready as fruit
in near ripeness, to reveal

a sweet warmth
that can turn our heads,
or a sudden spot of brown,

equal possibilities: the breath
that precedes a kiss, a curse.
Visible Warmth

Spring, and the days yellow, visible warmth, hedged and vined

for permanence, like a fence
I could climb.
If I wanted to.

This is no place for the solitary,
the uneven take-over,
a golden deepening, here, not there,
an inexplicable
linking, someone to someone.
It flashes like a gold ring
I speed toward
in an outdated carousel,
enameled horses circling
the same childhood route
as if caught
by an obsolete light.

Why won't they stop?
Surely, this is a horrible mistake.

I look for another like me.

Hands wave,
faces bob in pairs,
burn in my head like tiny suns,
burn with the cold of winter.

I look for the fence
which was never there,
and the horses ....
The Tuba and Madame Mao: A Tale of the Cultural Revolution

Text: Brian Holmes

Illustrations: Justin Novak
The verse is based on a small bit of historical fact. Chiang Ching, former actress and wife to Chairman Mao, once attended a concert at which she was offended by the sound of a tuba. In response, she caused tuba playing to be suppressed in China. This act was one of the initial strokes of the Cultural Revolution. Later, Chiang Ching and the other members of the Gang of Four were brought to trial for various crimes, some even more heinous than this. She alone attempted to defend her actions, claiming that they were founded on the Thought of Mao. Upon conviction, she was sentenced to death, and her name was respelled Jiang Qing. She is still alive today, unrepentant and unexecuted, but few dare pronounce her name in public. The Chinese have learned not to entrust the reins of power to former movie stars. Although tuba playing is no longer a crime, there are still many Chinese who refer to the tuba as a banned instrument.

Once the dreaded Gang of Four Ruled in China; furthermore, Chiang Ching, the Chairman's wife, Supervised artistic life.
Poems, painting, books, and plays
Failed without her word of praise:
Only Chiang Ching could impart
What was trash and what was Art.

At the Concert Hall one day
Madame Mao was caused dismay
By a Tuba player, whose
Low notes spoiled her concert snooze.

Madame Mao was heard to moan
At the Tuba’s awesome tone.
Chiang Ching, the Chairman’s wife,
Far preferred the flute or fife.
In the Tuba she could sense Strains of Western Decadence. Tuba playing was, she found, Fundamentally unsound.

So she rose with this command: “Let the tuba now be banned! Members of the Working Class! Spurn the lowest of the Brass!”

Show this base and bourgeois Horn Revolutionary Scorn!” Then, at Madame Mao’s behest, Tuba playing was supressed.
By command of Madame Mao,
Tuba players all were sent
To the province of Kweichow
For their re-enlightenment.

They performed, in training camps,
Socially redeeming chores,
Turning Tubas in lamps,
Flower pots, and cuspidors.

So for years, from West to East,
Chinese Tuba playing ceased.
When the Gang of Four was purged, Tuba players re-emerged. Unimpeded by Chiang Ching, China learned from Deng Xiao-ping: "Tuba playing is, in fact, Not an anti-social act!

Let the Tuba take its place As our Revolution's Bass! Let the largest, lowest Brass Long inspire the Working Class!"
Sweet dreams, Madame Mao
You are out of power now.
No one in the Gang of Four
Rules in China any more.

Free from your oppressive hand,
Tubas toot throughout the Land.
Tuba players, unafraid,
Bring Chiang Ching their serenade.
Notes On Contributors

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