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SAN JOSE STUDIES
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ARTICLES
Robert Wexelblatt
Professors at Play .................................................. 3

John Ditsky
The Devil Quotes Scripture: Biblical Misattribution and
The Winter of Our Discontent ..................................... 19

Robin Riley Fast
Nature and Creative Power: Pat Mora and Patricia Hampl ........ 29

Fred D. White
Poetic Responses to Einstein ........................................ 41

C. David Pauza
Disease Progression in AIDS ........................................ 53

FICTION
Pierce Butler
Sheaser ................................................................. 66

Lucinda H. Coffman
Waldeane Goes to The Big Apple .................................. 77

Richard Flanagan
So She Danced . . . Dreams in Motion ............................ 86

F. A. Hart
After the Flood .................................................. 93

POETRY
John McGrail, two poems ........................................... 101

J. R. Solonche, three poems ......................................... 103

Lois Bunse, three poems ............................................. 108

ART
Rob Haacke, urban cartoons ....................................... 64
The Bill Casey Award

The Bill Casey Memorial Fund annually awards $100 to the author of the best article, story, or poem appearing in each volume of San José 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 José Studies.

The Bill Casey Award in Letters for 1988

has been presented jointly to


and to

Robert D. Clark, "Wrath and Rapture in the Cult of Athletics," Fall, 1988.

The Committee also awards a one-year subscription to San José 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) prose. The recipients of these awards for 1988 are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Hank Lazer</td>
<td>Spring, 1988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professors at Play

Robert Wexelblatt

1. Pretext, Text, Context

Professors profess professing. Professing is the pretext, established by an institutional and traditional context. Colleges and universities have professors of this and that field of inquiry. They are supposed to profess their special subjects. From the first day of class the professor stands at the front of the room and professes. He or she may also lounge, sit, walk about, even place chairs in a circle and invite everybody to introduce themselves by their nicknames—no matter. Regardless of posture or personality, the professor still strikes the contextual pose and sounds the expected note. The students remember it not only from the previous May but also from a number of Septembers, all the way back to when professors were simply called teachers. This is my name and office number. These are my office hours. Here is the syllabus. These are the required texts for the course. Answer when I call the roll. And now, as to our goals...

To profess literally means to own up to something—guilt, innocence, the Apostles' Creed. The word professor is now a title only vestigially recalling a transitive verb, like, say, sergeant. And just as there are several grades of sergeants in our army so, in our institutions of higher education, there are varieties of professors: assistants, associates, fulls, and emeriti. Undergraduates do not, as a rule, understand this hierarchy. Undergraduates understand the pretext and text, not the context, and rank is part of the context. Professors are keenly aware of context, but, fortunately, not while they are actually professing. Indeed, most professors concentrate on the text and forget about both the pretext (professing) and the context (institutional rank, the agricultural surplus that makes their work possible, civilization). To put it another way, when talking to students professors generally do their duty and become caught up in secondary signs, neglecting the primary ones.

Students never miss primary signs, though. For example, in the act of lecturing, a professor of biology will think more about how to convey the
intricacies of how RNA transmits genetic messages than about whether he or she is conveying wonder at 9 a.m. Nor is this professor likely to speculate on whether the students are in the hall jumping through a hoop in the hope of becoming wealthy medical specialists in another decade. After all, professors don't like to think of themselves as obstacles or even as physical objects. Still, there are crucial and regular moments when both pretext and context not only impinge upon but fill up the professorial consciousness. For instance, there is the regular reading of student evaluations, which seldom have to do with texts but have much to say about the manner of the professor's professing—that is, about the pretext. And there are the sessions devoted to what is called curriculum development. Here a professor may well become aware that to profess one text is to give it institutional value while denying equivalent worth to some other. In the syllabus, text reveals context, if anyone is looking.

Even to me this is a funny way to talk about teaching, but at least it gets one thinking. To think about professing is, in the above terms, to think about three things, though not necessarily all of them at once. Of course, thinking makes the transparent opaque. That is the trouble, especially with theoretical cogitation. Yogi Berra once yelled over to an officious Casey Stengel that he couldn't think and hit at the same time. Personally, I have no very clear idea of what I am actually doing in a classroom while I am doing it. It never seems to me quite to follow my game-plan. Moreover, the sheer irony of professing often overwhelms me and my plan. It is a practical irony, resting on the discontinuities among my uncertainty about the pretext (how and why I am "professing"), the text itself (will drawing a cartoon on the blackboard help these sleepyheads to comprehend Part One of Notes from Underground?), and the intermittent absurdity of the context (I am the professor here? I have authority? I am merely part of a bizarre medieval system for sorting out the young?). I have noticed that I make a lot of jokes about being a professor while I am in the act of professing. I have observed that these jokes both intrigue and disconcert my students.

All the same, even as I mock the context, it continues to govern the text; in short, I am aware that my mockery of professing is a form of professing—on some days, the only form. Example? Let's say my text for the day is Rousseau's and I ask the students a series of questions: Why do I get to stand up here and move around and doodle on the blackboard, while you have to sit down and keep still? Why is philosophy called a "discipline"? Why not a bondage too? What do you suppose is the socio-economic purpose of my grading you every couple of weeks? If I am the professor here, why am I asking all the questions?
2. Two Kinds of Professorial Discourse

In our system there are two general categories of professorial discourse, both determined by context: the lecture (in a big room with a lot of students) and the discussion-section (in a smaller room with not so many students). In dramatic terms, I would say the lecture is tragic, while the discussion-section is comic. Indeed, in the ironic and reflexive mode mentioned above, I have more than once used lectures and discussions to explain the contrast between tragedy and comedy and have done so with my tongue only semi-in-my-cheek. In tragedies, as in lectures, we are confronted whether we like it or not with exalted loneliness, an individual drenched in dignity, vehemently preoccupied with abstract principles or ideas, eliciting pity, terror, and boredom from an audience sitting in something like the atmosphere of a religious service in a church-like amphitheater, all seats facing the stage on which this tragic actor declaims while the fatal disease of professing runs its course for more or less 50 minutes. A genuine discussion-section, on the other hand, resembles comedy in being horizontal rather than vertical, extroverted rather than introverted, informal rather than formal, interrogatory rather than declarative, accommodating rather than rigid, social rather than solitary, commonplace rather than exalted, and generally happier in mood if not in its ending. There is more ethos than pathos in a class discussion; with lectures it is usually the other way around.

It is not to be wondered at that some professors prefer one of these modes of discourse over the other. But calling them "ways of teaching" rather obscures their nature as discourse; that is, as ways of professing. The difficulty with speaking about teaching theoretically is that it makes no sense to consider teaching without learning, though professors do so all the time. Professors think nothing of speaking about "teaching freshmen" or "teaching Hamlet" or "teaching political science." It is as if one should speak of feeding without giving any consideration to eating. You cannot feed somebody if they don't eat; no more can you teach anyone if they fail to learn. Of course it is absurd to speak of teaching Hamlet or political science, as neither is capable of learning. The same may be said for any number of freshmen. Therefore, it is perhaps safer just to say that lectures and discussion-sections involve professors in different kinds of discourse, rather than in kinds of teaching. One can exert oneself ingeniously and mightily in either context, just as one can employ the most savory recipes in cooking, but there is no guarantee anyone will learn or eat. They may lack the aptitude or the appetite.

Professors are seldom judged by how much, let alone how well, their students learn. This is in itself a tacit acknowledgement that they may have little power over learning and therefore over teaching as well. Professors can be, and are, judged on their discourse. Nevertheless, this is
rather odd, as if one should deny that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. A great lecturer is an Oedipus, an Othello; a great section leader is a Socrates. To me, one of the overlooked aspects of the Socratic irony is that a man whose method was intrinsically comic should have had a fate that was so much more tragic than that of even the finest of university lecturers. Even in the Apology, Socrates is cracking jokes. Plato loved him for his discourse, not for his having failed to teach a sufficient number of his judges. Socrates' pedagogical lesson is exactly the same as his ethical one: the end cannot justify the means.

3. Teachers, Learners, and Søren Kierkegaard

In his Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Kierkegaard (who was never outwardly a professor but inwardly was many things) writes most beautifully about teaching. I take his book out and look at what he wrote now and then as a good Christian might a memento mori. His is an eccentric statement—especially in its vocabulary—and yet at the same time I think it embodies both a general caution and a general inspiration. As I doubt Kierkegaard's remarks are widely known, I will cite the passage at length and then turn it over a bit.

The communication of results is an unnatural form of intercourse between man and man, in so far as every man is a spiritual being, for whom the truth consists in nothing else than the self-activity of personal appropriation, which the communication of a result tends to prevent. Let a teacher in relation to the essential truth (for otherwise a direct relationship between teacher and pupil is quite in order) have, as we say, much inwardness of feeling, and be willing to publish his doctrines day in and day out; if he assumes the existence of a direct relationship between the learner and himself, his inwardness is not inwardness, but a direct outpouring of feeling; the respect for the learner which recognizes that he is himself the inwardness of truth, is precisely the teacher's inwardness. Let a learner be enthusiastic, and publish his teacher's praises abroad in the strongest expressions, thus, as we say, giving evidence of his inwardness; this inwardness is not inwardness, but an immediate devotedness; the devout and silent accord, in which the learner by himself assimilates what he has learned, keeping the teacher at a distance because he turns his attention within himself, this is precisely inwardness.

This long passage has only three sentences. The topic of the first is how
not to profess. Delivering facts and conclusions (Caesar divided Gaul into three parts; Hamlet is smarter than Horatio) is not a natural way for humans to talk to one another; that is, if you lecture people on subways and sermonize at dinner parties you will appear stilted and pompous. Kierkegaard implies that people communicate results—give orders, deliver facts—only when addressing people as less than fully human, less than ends-in-themselves, less than "spiritual beings." Moreover, he feels the only really useable and essential truths are subjective ones. Objective truths—i.e., "results"—certainly exist ($2 \times 2 = 4$), but these are not essential because they lack spiritual appeal and personal force for learners with enough soul in them to become first-rather than third-persons. Not only is the fact-filled lecture an unnatural form of discourse for Kierkegaard, he even believes it interferes with learning subjective, essential truths. In the transaction that is teaching, Kierkegaard emphasizes learning over professing. For him, a truth is learned when somebody "appropriates" it, makes it his or her own. He goes even further than this, specifying that the student is unlikely to make a "result" his or her own. Kierkegaard also treats subjective, essential learning in another way, suggesting that the truth itself is better understood as the process of appropriation than as a text. In other words, the learner's truth is the process of making a truth his or her own; it is not just a note in a notebook; it is not a text but a devouring of a text.

The topic of the second sentence is a contrast: the good professor versus the good teacher. The good professor differs from the good teacher not in mastery of material, depth of personal feeling for it, eloquence, erudition, willingness to profess long and hard, or the quality of the appropriated truths he or she possesses. No, the difference lies in the relationship of each to the learner. Incidentally, Kierkegaard's use of the word "learner" here is good; he understands that students can study and not learn, exactly as professors can profess and not teach. Anyway, the good professor fails to teach successfully because he lacks what Kierkegaard calls the "inwardness" of the good teacher. The error lies in "assuming . . . a direct relationship" with the learner. This direct relationship is a kind of arrogant possessiveness, an eagerness to see the class as a sort of collective extension of one's own professing. Such an assumption can lead to very fine lectures and superb student evaluations, no doubt—one can appear absorbing, transporting, fascinating, entertaining, truly passionate in one's performances, and intimately concerned for one's students. The professor engages in "a direct outpouring of feeling." Students often enjoy such discourses, and why not? They like rock concerts as well.

But the good teacher, who is never a force-feeder, understands that the proper relation between teacher and learner is indirect. Only in this indirect relationship is there space for respect, as a good parent will
always leave some room between himself and his child and not smother her, particularly with his love of being her parent. For Kierkegaard, no learning of essential, subjective truth can occur in the absence of this respectful distance in which the learner can learn, can "appropriate." An unappropriated truth is either not learned or is not essential. Notice that, in his parenthesis, Kierkegaard says that if the truth in question is *not* essential (a set of historical dates, say, or the chemical symbols of the inert gases), then a direct relationship between teacher and learner is just fine. No space is needed then; the student requires no room to carry out the difficult act of appropriation.

The topic of the third and last sentence is real learning. Here Kierkegaard focuses, like learning itself, not on the professor but on the learner. The teacher has not taught and the cook has not fed until the learner and eater have digested the lesson and the meal inwardly and for themselves. Kierkegaard understands that a student’s devotion to his teacher is not learning, that discipleship is merely a form of puppy-love and does not necessarily reflect well on either the devotee or the object of devotion. As he has already stated, genuine learning requires a distance between learner and teacher. In this space there is still room for a kind of devotion, but a devotion accorded the lesson itself which can be appropriated—accepted, nodded at—only if the learner digests it on his own. Kierkegaard calls this process of digestion the true "inwardness," implying that to be a mere disciple, let alone a teacher’s pet, is outwardness, a confused sort of devotion for the messenger which ignores assimilation of the message.

I like Kierkegaard’s sentences not so much because they seem to me true. Perhaps they are not true; maybe they do not even add up to an accurate account of good teaching or successful learning; perhaps they are bad descriptive psychology. “The communication of results,” after all, is what the discourses of professing mostly are. I confess I do not like the Teutonic pompousness of these statements, though I am hardly inclined to hold this against them; nor do I care for the theological undertone of the phrase “the essential truth.” No, as I indicated earlier, I admire Kierkegaard’s statement as a cautionary and an inspiration; that is, it reminds me of what to avoid and what to strive for where professing is concerned.

While at work or play in a classroom, one should avoid the mere retailing of finales, never treat students as pseudopods of one’s own brain. One should avoid also: the encouragement of misplaced love; the presumption that students cannot understand the text (the lesson) but can understand the pretext (the professor professing); the annihilation of decent intervals. Conversely, one should always try to recall that, despite its collective appearance, the class is only a legal fiction and that the aim of a good cook is to provide an edible, nourishing, and digestible meal, one
that people will actually eat, not just a display of his or her culinary virtuosity. Learning is more interesting than note-taking, just as eating is more exciting than reviewing a menu. Appropriation by a student may not be under the control of the teacher, but the teacher, as Kierkegaard says, can do much to encourage or prevent this activity. Serve, then clear out.

4. Eros and Professing

I remember the hectic romanticism of my sixth-grade classroom. No Provençal court or Viennese café could outstrip the intensity or baroque complication of the purely experimental and inconsequential flirtations among us incipiently pubescent youngsters. Not one of us understood what was gripping us; nor did our teacher. Mrs. W. was in her final year of service before retiring, a touch senile already, much given to dozing off while we did math problems. She finished out her career, I am convinced, innocent of the most essential fact about her classes, about the green and palpitating souls of her eleven year-olds.

This eroticism had nothing to do with the classroom as a place of formal education, though much with it as a social locus, site of drama, emotional and hormonal hothouse.

It was not until I became a college student that I first noticed something erotic about teaching itself. This observation was both inadvertent and unwelcome, something I wished to put aside, like a desultory and displeasing metaphor. From my point of view as a student, it was preferable to think of the classroom as a rather abstract place, not so much an ivory tower as a cubicle immune to the very ideas being discussed. Ideas were to be taken seriously but not, so to speak, incarnated. Indeed, incarnation seemed to me to undercut an idea’s seriousness. Therefore, I was suitably shocked by the rumors of certain professors pursuing students. I was alarmed when a rather unstable underclasswoman broke down during an especially animated discussion of sexuality and hair in Hedda Gabler, confessing to us all that her stepfather had raped her while shouting to her about her lovely tresses. But these were accidents, and the more serious notion of a formally erotic element built into the transaction of teaching and learning—a, so to speak, impersonal and structural eroticism—was not an idea I wished to entertain. As a student, after all, my eye was on the text and not the pretext or the context. If I noticed that a certain professor seemed unusually insinuating in his or her pedagogy, I dismissed it as stylistic eccentricity.

When I first began teaching, I naturally became more conscious of the faintly erotic element in what I was doing. The idea was still disturbing to me and I promptly repressed my awareness, as if to acknowledge it would in itself be unethical. Like many new instructors, I began teaching by delivering the sort of discourses one puts forward in graduate
seminars. Graduate school is all text and no pretext, rather like a military training that consists wholly of battle history and advanced strategy without the least mention of combat. One professed the text. The pretext was talked about fuzzily, one presumed, in schools of education.

Of course, as a 23-year-old instructor I was flattered when a young woman barely three years my junior developed a crush on me—or I would have been, had I allowed myself to acknowledge the crush at the time. To me the issue was inadmissible. The issue was abstract and could thus be easily disposed of by a clear moral principle. Mine went something like this: A teacher is in a power-relationship with his students. Moreover, his attitude is, in some crucial respects, like that of a psychiatrist toward his patients; in both cases what Freud called a transference can occur. In any event, though, it would be both unconscionable and fatal to succumb to any such temptation—an abuse of power, a confusion of affections, a defeat for the process of learning itself. I feel much the same way now, albeit absolute principles and quick judgments get a bit dented on the way to middle age. Human realities are always more complex than principles; life always squirts out from under the cookie-cutter of theory. There are many good and lasting marriages between teachers and their former students. Abelard and Heloise might have had just such a marriage.

Nevertheless, the whole issue of meaningful emotional attachments, let alone actual sexual relations, is tangential to the enduring question of the structural eroticism of professing. Now that I have been a professor for a good many years (so many that now my pupils are less than half my age), I can think more clearly about the matter, without so impenetrable a veil of moral rigidity, albeit I remain uncomfortable with the topic.

The first plain declaration of the erotic element in teaching I ever heard was the most extreme. I heard it while I was a graduate student in the 60s. The declaration was not intended by the man who declared it to be a revelation of the erotic in professing at all, but rather a political statement. As the then-radical professor who enunciated this idea also chanced to be a poet, he spoke in violent metaphors. The making of metaphors is a notoriously risky business: signifiers float free of intent. The speech identified traditional university teaching with rape. The old are ravishing the young. The Establishment is violating innocence. War-mongering authority is forcing itself on the tenderly pacific children of nature. There was a sort of rancid Rousseauism in the declaration, as I recall; it was pretty trendy, but, withal, a heady rhetorical display.

As I said, it was the 60s. The metaphor stuck with me longer than the politics, though. "To profess is to rape." This suggested that all of the gratification belonged to the professor and, of course, I had noted that this was all too often the truth in a lecture hall. It implied that students were by
nature passive, resistant, and essentially powerless objects, putty in unclean professorial hands. The torrent of words, definitions, and tests constituted rapine. The metaphor was not original. I remembered Eugene Ionesco's second play, the one-act drama *The Lesson*, a work of the early 50s, which I have since offered with irony to students of my own. But, derivative or not, the speech was meant to be an assault on the whole educational context: the Vietnam War, Capitalism, Western civilization, the College Board, the Trustees. But to me it was a revelation of the pretext, the nasty secret of professing. It rapidly crossed my mind that the self-righteous professor propounding these appealing ideas was perhaps a bit of a mind-rapist himself, but such a suspicion was unseasonable.

The 60s wore out and I dismissed the metaphor as one of the excesses of the time. About five years later, though, I was talking with a colleague late one afternoon about some students we shared. Of one unusually talented female my male colleague said excitedly, "I want to rape her mind!" He fairly shouted it, I recall, exultantly. He did not intend anything immoral by it, I am sure; he simply meant he wanted her to learn all he could teach her—at once. Nevertheless, I was startled that he wound up with the same metaphor. His face was not contorted into a sexual or political leer, but he certainly meant what he said.

Feminism has raised our consciousness of this troubling aspect of the educational context, and feminists are, I think, attracted to the same violent metaphor. In many areas of feminist discourse, rape is inevitably the ruling metaphor. The conventional division between male and female principles (power, domination, impatient talk and rationality versus nurture, accommodation, patient and affective silence, etc.) suggests that simply the situation of male teacher and female student is, because of our patriarchal culture and traditional pedagogy, fraught with sexual risk, quite apart from the moral motives of the parties. The extremism of the language ought to serve as a reminder of the genuine risks, of course, but also it should be a goad to professorial irony. Irony about the very situation of male-professor and female-student can be a saving grace, a reliever of the festering tensions through their airing, a simultaneous acknowledgement and rejection. I do not believe there are many ironic rapists. The appeal of the forbidden is lessened by plucking the apple and telling a joke about it. The appeal, though, is undeniable, even for those of high principle. I know one man, for example, a more than averagely decent one, who, after the dissolution of his marriage, stayed for two weeks with a former student. It was ambiguously at her invitation or his suggestion. There are, of course, students who wish to collect teachers. When he told me about this episode months later, he was a little shame-faced, but he concluded by smiling and confiding in a disturbingly entre­neous tone: "I had to do it. Just once. You know?"
Rape is too extreme a term to describe the tamer penetrations of professing by eros. But, as the more commonplace forms of the erotic in pedagogy are less stunning, so they are also less obvious—precisely because they are so commonplace. Consider, for example, how much of professing is a form of courtship. The professor is polite; for his or her intentions are "honorable." The professor attempts to win the students' affections by means of gifts (a paper extension or interesting anecdotes, say), inviting them to pleasant and flattering events (a coffee-hour, a concert, a movie). The courtship may well take more directly pedagogical shapes: a complaisant manner in the classroom, the use of first names, showing excessive regard for jejune interpretations, making an ingratiating selection of texts, a subtle running-down of competitors—other disciplines, other professors.

Then consider how three months' worth of professing might resemble an affair. Here the professor gives to his or her pedagogy a spicy hint of the illicit, a tantalizing lawlessness. The door is smilingly shut before class so they won't hear; discussion of shockingly intimate matters is conducted behind the backs of parents and authorities. An atmosphere of boundless enchantment and group-bound secrecy is fostered in "our class," which meets as if for a tryst. The relationship between professor and students is exclusive, enlivened by private references and in-jokes; it has its own history. The professor disrobes and invites the class to drop its inhibitions as well. This is close to professing as seduction, a more general strategy of erotic manipulation. Here the professor approaches his shyly uninterested students as Don Giovanni does Zerlina. His baritone's sophistication, wit, and effervescence are deployed to make him or her irresistible. Not to worry, though; he is only winning the innocent over to the cause of knowledge. He is a professor; the "seducer" is merely a mask and, should the therapy succeed, he will not abandon his Zerlinas, at least not before the end of the semester.

Having said all this, only one embarrassing question remains. Is there a professorial equivalent of the orgasm? Of course. It is the moment of revelation, of "seeing it," of anagnoresis. In the best classes, as in the finest Greek tragedies, this is the apex of the emotional rollercoaster, the moment for the sake of which theaters and classrooms are built. When it occurs to everybody at the same time, the pleasure and the discharge of energy are considerable. Erotically speaking, the professor aims, not at masturbation, but at intercourse. Pedagogically speaking, however, the good professor will extricate him or herself in time, dropping all such impositions and sublimating the erotic into something more Platonic, into Kierkegaard's "devout and silent accord" which distances the professor in order that the student may "turn his attention within himself." It's not always easy to do. The distance opened by playful irony helps.
Commenting on student writing is a mode of professing. As discourse, these remarks tend to resemble either the lecture or the discussion. Professors who favor the lecture will generally limit themselves to recording a grade and a set of summary remarks, often quite curt ones, sometimes a virtual lecturette. For example: “Your analysis of Kleist’s use of social contract theory takes insufficient account of Rousseau’s work, which he would certainly have known; however, the paper is well organized and generally well written. Do please watch out for commas-plies and memorize the difference between its and it’s! B+.”

Professors who are most at home with the discussion-format will “corre­ere” papers more conversationally; that is, they will treat the student’s essay as though it were spoken and will scribble little Socratic questions, ripostes, and bravos in margins and between lines as if these too could be heard. For example: “What did the British want out of the Opium War?” “But Epictetus did care passionately about duty, didn’t he?” “Good insight!” This type of grader finds it hard to read anything without a pen in hand; this is the inveterate grader. Usually these assiduous professors will also offer a summary statement which, unlike their students, they will esteem more important than the grade.

There is, in fact, an endemic misunderstanding between professors and students about paper-grading. Students seldom read a professor’s comments as they were intended, if indeed they bother to read them at all. It is a reflection of this misunderstanding that a professor will define constructive criticism as a careful effort to indicate what students have done wrong, while students seem to define it simply as praise. Few professors and fewer students inquire into the connection between this ritual and actual learning. Looking back over my own experience, I can recall few instances where I learned much of anything from a professor’s commentary or grade; and, though I may have learned much from the process of writing the paper itself, the process was essentially one-way. A memorable exception will be exemplary because it was so uncommonly instructive. I learned a lasting lesson and learned it efficiently, too: through only one humiliating sentence.

I had written a long paper on Huxley and Waugh, about 30 tortuous pages of closely worked comparison and contrast, composed in a crabbed style that bordered on the Teutonic. The professor didn’t bother telling me anything at all about Huxley or Waugh. However, above the grade on page 30 he wrote the following: “Although your prose occasionally reflects too exactly the (also occasionally) finicky mind and its tendencies (toward the parenthetical) this is nonetheless an excellent (because perceptive) essay.” In a contradictory and incomprehensible gesture of kindness, he then added: “You write well. A.” Normally, of course, I
would have concentrated on this glowing postscript. In this case, though, the grade and the praise seemed to me mere afterthoughts. The sentence which had so playfully and accurately parodied my ludicrous undergraduate prose, on the other hand, caught me like a tuna on a gaff. I have remembered it for 20 years, and I still monitor myself for the parenthetical. Never since have I striven to write a sentence that would resemble one of Kant’s. My face is still red, so to speak, as if I had been teased by a playful uncle.

A couple of my successful classes were actually desperate recourses to play. They were cases of improvisation, faute de mieux, certainly not examples of innovative pedagogical planning. But then premeditation is cold water thrown on the spirit of play, even in a lecture hall. In both cases I found myself at 60 thousand feet with no oil pressure.

The first emergency arose because of The Importance of Being Earnest. It was my own fault. The problem was not that I had assigned Wilde’s perfectly insignificant comedy, but that I had scheduled a lecture on it. Not until the day before, when I sat down to compose my notes, did I realize how I had set myself up. How do you lecture on such a play without sounding like an idiot or attempting an unequal battle of wits? I tried out various approaches: telling Wilde’s life story; explaining the nature of high comedy, verbal wit, Walter Pater, l’art pour l’art aestheticism, Wilde’s views on superficiality, dramaturgy, and dance . . . all leaden, all missing the point. The hour grew late. As I tried out each angle I began to hear Wilde’s contemptuous laughter, and it was infectious. Finally I laughed too. I laughed as Wilde. It was then that the ludicrous but irresistible idea took hold of me. I did not lecture the next day on Wilde but as Wilde. In a sense, we impersonated each other. He had to wear my clothing, but I got to use his ideas. He was much more amusing, witty, paradoxical, and insightful about his play than I could have been. Moreover, he generously commented on other readings in the course—offering a sharp appraisal of Ibsen, for instance, and of Aristophanes—and amplified the general theories I had been developing of tragedy and comedy.

Apropos: there is a story about Charlie Chaplin. It seems he was entertaining guests at a Hollywood party by performing impersonations of various celebrities. People shouted out their requests. Harry Lauter? Woodrow Wilson? Nothing to it. A man called out the name of Enrico Caruso. At once Chaplin sang a Puccini aria and did so with stunning beauty. Afterwards a young woman approached him. “Mr. Chaplin,” she said, “I’d no idea you had such a magnificent voice.” “I don’t,” he replied. “I was just imitating Caruso.”

The second class was slightly different, requiring a different sort of discourse. The students—a group of first-semester freshmen—had read Joyce’s story “Araby” during their second week as college students. We
were to spend a discussion-section on it. I might have lectured but could not face doing so. I anticipated their sullen, rather frightened passivity. They were not yet sufficiently confident with themselves or each other, let alone James Joyce, to respond well even to simple Socratic questioning. At best I could expect the usual answer Socrates elicited: “Yes, certainly.” I did not know what to do and left it to the inspiration of the moment.

I entered on the hour and looked at the class. “Today,” I said to them, “I want you to pretend I am James Joyce. You can speak to me about what you thought of my story ‘Araby.’ You may ask me questions about it. If you like, you can accuse me of things or ask questions about my life—it’s all fair game.”

It was risky. The students might have remained as tight-mouthed as they had been the week before. But it worked. They all had questions—good ones too, far-ranging and thoughtful. The class resembled a presidential press conference. “How old is the narrator?” “Why did you put so much stuff about religion into your story?” “Was Dublin really so drab when you were a kid?” “Why does the boy live with his aunt and uncle?” “What’s The Abbot about?” “How come you ended the story at night?” I had a livelier time being interviewed as non-professor Joyce than I could have had as Professor W., the one who gives the grades.

A certain professor of physics found himself more than a little disappointed with the students in his introductory course. They were doing poorly on examinations, appeared bewildered in class, were unresponsive to his leading questions. He might have become resentful, vindictive, or indifferent. Many professors do.

One late October afternoon the students arrived to find the desks in their physics class rearranged. In place of the customary three straight rows was one great circle with a single desk set squarely in the middle. On this desk, propped upright, stood a copy of their heavy physics textbook. Their professor, lounging by the window, silently invited them to be seated.

Once the perplexed pupils were installed, the professor walked to the desk at the center of the room. “This is your textbook. Possibly some of you may recognize it,” he said. There were a few snickers. He continued, “For the next 50 minutes you can say whatever you like to this book. If it’s up to it, the book may reply.”

The students giggled openly now. The incongruous spirit of play provokes laughter—nervous or delighted. They giggled and then fell silent; however, this was a patient professor of physics. Eventually a young woman raised her hand uncertainly. The professor nodded to her dismissively—no need for a raised hand—and pointed at the book. The student lowered her eyes and looked with genuine resentment at the fat,
double-columned text. "I hate you," she said evenly and not without courage. "Yeah, so do I," echoed from another point on the circle. "Me too."

"Why do you hate me?" asked the professor, speaking for the book.

"Why?" asked the brave woman who had first spoken. "Why do you think?"

"Well, maybe it's because you don't understand me," suggested the physics book.

After that, the remarkable class was off and running.

Pimps and Whores. That's what he privately called it—like Chutes and Ladders. Officially, the game had a more respectable title: "Early Capitalism."

My friend, a professor of social science, felt that his department's series of lectures on the manorial system, feudalism, mercantilism, capitalism, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the creation of the urban proletariat was a bit dry. In his opinion, the students couldn't grasp the workings of economic forces and laws in history and remained ignorant of how these same forces and laws affected human beings, affected themselves. So much of professing seems to be either expressing cynicism in a context of false idealism or idealism in a context of low-down cynicism. Pimps and Whores. It is difficult to decide whether my friend was doing the one or the other with his little didactic game.

The students played for two hours: about 30 of them in one room. The professor showed up with a bundle of Monopoly money and 30 three-by-five cards. The cards were marked with roles and, true to history, were handed out arbitrarily: lord, merchant, freeman, craftsman, landless peasant. There were, of course, mostly landless peasants. The cash was allotted commensurately: lords and merchants had most of it, freeman and guild-members a bit, detached peasants zip.

The object of the game was simple. Whoever wound up with the most money at the end of the two hours was the winner. Whoever had nothing lost big.

Pimps and whores and chutes and ladders. Before long some were selling and some being sold; some went up the ladder, others down the chute. Unions were formed and dissolved; agreements made and betrayed; strikes declared and broken; revolution threatened and repressed. Bondage was re-invented and chosen over starvation. Wages went down and up and down again. Supply rose to meet demand; demand was cut to lower prices. Marginal utility came into play, particularly in the ferocious labor market. Bad money drove out good.

My friend the professor did not play. He observed calmly, as a professor should, while chaos threatened and greed flourished and desperation bloomed. He assured me that in his next class he would not have to say much either; the students would explain economics to him.
Version One:
The explanation of poetry by examination of its sources is not the method of all contemporary criticism by any means; but it is a method which responds to the desire of a good many readers that poetry should be explained to them in terms of something else: the chief part of the letters I receive from persons unknown to me, concerning my own poems, consists of requests for a kind of explanation that I cannot possibly give.

Version Two:
For a number of years now, I have been accustomed to receiving urgent epistles from persons wholly unknown to myself in which requests are made for information on the "background" of certain of my own poems. Now this bespeaks a widespread desire on the part of people that poetry should be explicable in terms other than its own. Criticism that presumes to regard origins as explanations is not the whole story of the recent study of literature, but it is one which surely makes many people reprehensibly happy.

One of these passages is by T. S. Eliot and the other isn't.

I was a first-year instructor of first-year composition. My students were submitting to this required course with the kind of condescending resignation the Chinese probably turned on the Mongols. In common with most college freshmen, they were quite certain they knew all about writing by now. I had no particular wish to deny this. On the contrary, I said that if they knew all about basic writing, we could move right along to more abstruse, subtle, and intriguing matters. I decided that we'd look into the refinements of style and promptly gave them such texts as a speech from a Marlowe play, a passage from a Waugh novel, a hunk of the Talmud, and Orwell's "Politics and the English Language." No change. They offered little in our discussions, sitting before me with a sort of languid haughtiness. After all, I had failed to criticize their papers with what they deemed sufficient constructiveness. Besides, I was only a graduate student. Their unearned arrogance ended by annoying me and so I decided on a playful little challenge.

It was a simple idea and might easily have backfired. I took bits of good writing from a variety of sources, quickly composed inferior parodies, mimeographed the lot and gave it to the students, telling them what I had done. Their job was merely to tell good from bad, authentic from ersatz. No tricks.

At our next meeting, we took a formal vote on each pairing. To my surprise, in every case a majority chose the phoney over the genuine. In short, the result was both better and worse than I had hoped for.
The class, chastened, began working to better effect, while I, marginally more earnest, a wee bit more respected, a touch less playful, pondered my future in this last pair of texts, the better of which is by Howard Nemerov:

**Version One:**

The Absent-Minded Professor

This silly figure, the stalest of jokes
That ever we made from scholastic folks,
Has vanished forever from the public's mind;
And now, on any Fall day, you can find
His sharper successor, hard at work still,
As dead orange leaves bump his window-sill.
For the puttering pedants of earlier days
He grieves not a whit, and it would amaze
Him (no doubt) to suffer intrusion
From those evil old men who preached confusion.

**Version Two:**

Absent-Minded Professor

This lonely figure of not much fun
Strayed out of folklore fifteen years ago
Forever. Now on an autumn afternoon,
While the leaves drift past the office window,
His bright replacement, present-minded stays
At the desk correcting papers, nor ever grieves
For the silly scholar of the bad old days,
Who'd burn the papers and correct the leaves.
PART of the richly allusive texture of Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) is its large store of biblical references, specifically those to the Passion narrative. Since Ethan Allen Hawley quite explicitly portrays himself as a Christ figure throughout the early pages of the novel, when we are so often being reminded that the day is Good Friday, these references are difficult to overlook; and it is evidently Hawley's and Steinbeck's strategy that we notice them and deal with them. Less attended to is the process by which Hawley in his fallen state comes to see himself as a Judas figure insofar as his dealings with Danny and his betrayal of Marullo are concerned. Instrumental in this process is the character of Margie Young-Hunt, whose witchlike powers enable her to predict a course of action to which Hawley, once he accepts it as his fate, will yield, with resultant economic success. In the novel's opening chapter, there is a key exchange between Hawley and Young-Hunt, which is echoed later on and which I believe has especial significance—while also proving to be a rare instance of an error in literary allusion in Steinbeck's writing.

Margie is standing in the store where Ethan works, making another effort to seduce him. As "her fingers moused in her hair" and with her
SAUL BELLOW
In this book John Steinbeck returns to the high standards of "The Grapes of Wrath" and to the social themes that made his early work so impressive, and so powerful. Critics who said of him that he had seen his best days had better tie on their napkins and prepare to eat crow.

EDWARD WEEKS
Steinbeck turns East. This story of a charming inbred New Englander trying to regain the family fortune is told with ingenuity and pathos. The women in it are particularly appealing. One of his best.

LEWIS GANNETT
The finest thing Steinbeck has written since "The Grapes of Wrath."

A mustache with "satanic tips." From the back of the dust jacket for The Winter of Our Discontent. Used courtesy of The Steinbeck Research Center, San Jose State University.
arms "raised . . . over her head"—which would both express interest in Ethan and also draw attention to her breasts—she teasingly begs Ethan to "teach" her:

Ethan said, "And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from Him and put His own raiment on Him and led Him away to crucify Him. And as they came out they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha—that is to say, a place of a skull—"

"Oh, for God's sake!"
"Yes—yes—that is correct. . . ."
"Do you know what a son of a bitch you are?"
"Yes, O Daughter of Jerusalem." (p. 22)

Ethan's bemused play upon "for God's sake" and his puzzling reference to Margie as "Daughter of Jerusalem" have an immediate effect in the novel: Margie promises to "read one hell of a fortune" for Ethan; and the plot is off and running, Margie's "hell" proving no wrongful choice of words.

Later on—much later on—there is another encounter between Margie and Ethan in which she reminds him of their earlier conversation in the store. Ethan's "fortune . . . is coming true," she avers; and since the setting is the same, we are welcome to compare the two exchanges. Margie reminds Ethan that he had called her "Daughter of Jerusalem" back in the "spring right near Easter." "That was Good Friday," Ethan notes. Margie replies, "You do remember. Well, I found it. It's Matthew, and it's pretty wonderful and—scary." "Yes," Ethan concurs (p. 203). There is no further explanation for the conversation's turning to the prophecy mentioned above, but clearly Ethan has succeeded in making a literary—specifically, a biblical—sleuth out of Margie, and just as clearly the same effect is intended for us, his readers.

Ethan's citation of the story of the drafting of Simon of Cyrene to help carry the Cross is word-for-word exact; he is quoting Matthew 27:31–33 (KJV), and the only variation from the standard text is that Ethan's recitation capitalizes the pronouns referring to Jesus. In Matthew's pithy Passion account, these verses come between the crowning with thorns (Ethan, elsewhere, also refers to this) and the crucifixion itself, something Ethan says (at the second encounter) his Aunt Deborah used to inflict on him once each year (p. 203). Margie even interrupts him precisely as one verse ends and before the narrative goes on to describe Jesus' being given vinegar mingled with gall. There is only one problem: to the best of my knowledge, there is no reference to a "Daughter of Jerusalem" in Matthew at all, and thus no explanation of what Margie

21
finds to be so “wonderful and—scary.”

Tetsumaro Hayashi seems to suggest that the reference may be to Mary Magdalene, and that is a sensible suggestion given Margie’s proclivities. However, no biblical allusion to Mary Magdalene as “Daughter of Jerusalem” seems to exist, and the phrase itself is nowhere to be found in Matthew. Indeed, the whole tradition of identifying Mary Magdalene as a fallen woman enamored of Jesus (peaking in the musical Jesus Christ Superstar) seems to have been carpentered for its instructive effect; only Luke (8:2) refers to her before the crucifixion, as a woman from whom Jesus had exorcized “seven devils,” and the specific nature of her bedevilment is sheer guesswork. She is described as on hand for the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter morning, perhaps in the company of the other Marys. On the other hand, the account of the anointing of Jesus’ head and feet with precious ointment and the use of the woman’s hair to dry the anointed parts seem deliberate if sentimental attempts to borrow an event from the life of Mary of Bethany to add color to that of Mary Magdalene. (As their names imply, they are undoubtedly different Marys; there was little point in stressing the latter’s origins in Magdala, in Galilee, if not to differentiate her from Mary of Bethany, in Judea, who hardly seems to be the redeemed whore type—even of the Sweet Thursday variety.)

What hath Steinbeck wrought? One clue to the puzzle might be found in Robert DeMott’s noting that Steinbeck was particularly fond of the King James Version of the Bible, and that he especially liked the Book of Matthew. He might well have gone around thinking that all the good things could be found in Matthew. But “Daughters of Jerusalem” are to be found, I believe, only in Luke, specifically Luke 23:28. Just after Luke’s version of the Simon of Cyrene event (23:26) and again just before the crucifixion itself, this encounter occurs:

27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.
28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.
29 For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the paps which never gave suck.
30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.
31 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

One need hardly point out how such a passage—even if not from
Matthew—would have appealed to John Steinbeck, with its identification of the Cross with a “green tree” and its desperate suggestion that generations to come might well wish to find some cave in Nature to hide in—one of the writer’s most consistent themes. That Jesus on his way to his execution might not have been quite capable of such an articulate response is hardly the point; Steinbeck is not concerned with exegetical possibilities of textual inserts, but with the biblical text as a given. In a novel whose protagonist resembles the author himself as nowhere else but in East of Eden—where the narrator may or may not be the protagonist—the identification of the irreligious speaker with a religious myth is certainly crucial (pun accidental). At any rate, the meaning of this text seems clear enough: If things are bad right now, just imagine how much worse they will get later on.

That being so, it is also unlikely—I might observe in passing—that Steinbeck means Ethan to be implying any reference to such an Old Testament antecedent as Zechariah 9:9:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

This passage, which Handel rather famously set to music in the Messiah, has been taken to prophesy Jesus’ Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem; its meaning is thus diametrically opposed to the spirit of Ethan’s remarks. One is left with a pair of New Testament citations, one stated in the novel and the other one present by implication; and the relevance of these texts to the plot of The Winter of Our Discontent depends upon the assumption that the novel as printed contains a significant error.

There is no way of explaining the textual error—the misattribution—as anything other than Steinbeck’s own. Margie had no reason to tell Ethan she had found his text in other than its real source, nor can we believe that having done her research, she would have made such a mistake in the first place. Had Ethan thought her wrong, he would have pedantically corrected her. There is no advantage to be gained in deliberately fooling the reader, one concludes—though that has been the case until now. I think Steinbeck made an error of attribution out of an obsessive need to connect two different biblical accounts of the Passion and that his doing so suggests an even darker purpose behind The Winter of Our Discontent than has been surmised previously.

The error of changing Luke for Matthew pivots on the Simon of Cyrene account. Just before this incident in Matthew, Pilate releases Barabbas on the demand of the people, with Jesus being condemned to death thereby:
25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

I mean that Steinbeck leaped to error out of a desire to link the Daughters of Jerusalem in Luke with the self-cursing of the populace in Matthew. His mistake would make even greater sense—seem more excusable, or likely—if Steinbeck had been using an edition of the synoptic gospel texts which printed them in parallel columns. Whether or not this use may be established, Steinbeck evidently thought in terms of parallel texts and created a seamless biblical narrative on which to draw. That is to say, Steinbeck connected Matthew and Luke, consciously or not, in order to put together the heedless call for judgment on themselves by the people of Jerusalem with the slightly later prophecy that Jerusalem would be punished for its misdeeds in a way “wonderful and—scary.”

Note that Margie does not take this wonder and fright terribly personally. She is hardly being singled out by Ethan’s quotation but is merely one of a crowd of latter-day citizens of a newer Jerusalem. For John Steinbeck wrote his novel, remember, as an instructional tale for his fellow Americans. In doing so, he neither exculpated himself nor deprived his tale of any hope; Winter is as much written for Steinbeck’s two children as East of Eden was. If one son falls, his sibling can still triumph over evil—though things have become a bit more desperate and a bit of help from a parent might well be required. Ethan Allen Hawley seems terribly aware of his role as exemplary outcast—though he becomes, at least temporarily, a typical sellout.

“Daughters” as employed in the original text also refers inclusively to the citizens of Jerusalem in general—though the passage in Luke seems especially feminine in its imagery—which further strengthens the connection between Matthew and Luke being argued here. Yet is hardly matters whether Steinbeck knew this, any more than it matters whether, if he knew the Zechariah passage, he was also aware that the “and” which implies that two animals were to be borrowed is fairly certainly an error; his Ethan confines himself to employing biblical texts as, well, gospel. But if Steinbeck knew the Zechariah citation, which is positioned just a few KJV pages ahead of Matthew, he might just as well have been familiar with these verses from Zephaniah 3, again just a few more pages ahead of Zechariah:

14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

15 The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.
Taken together, these passages from Zechariah and Zephaniah form a bridge between Messianic prophecy and the notion of a restored Kingdom which has renounced iniquity and reaffirmed its covenant with its God. In the event that such a connection was in Steinbeck’s mind as well, it augurs just such an ending as Winter in fact possesses: a resumption of hopeful commitment to the future premised on the timshel possibility of moral victory set forth in East of Eden.

The Gospel-writers seemed determined to get into their narratives a prophecy of 70 A.D., the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Romans. Steinbeck is hardly concerned with the biblical Jews, but he is stridently admonitory about the situation of the Americans of the 1950s. As 1960 dawns, he warns them that they risk destruction and Diaspora if they crucify the moral Everyman that Ethan soon ceases to be. Ethan does indeed sell out and become at least for a time a member of the amoral majority (as his son in effect reminds him, the excuse that “Everybody does it” can be used to establish a perverse sort of community). In the year 1960—which Ethan and Steinbeck quite accurately pinpoint as a critical one in America’s history—Ethan’s biblical misattribution provides evidence of how Steinbeck, in his irreligious, nonbelieving, but ultimately wholly spiritual way, was expressing a notion simultaneously saddening and inspiriting: that, though America thoroughly deserved the punishment its actions might well bring upon itself, there was no inherent curse by which young Americans were already inescapably doomed. Though refusing to abandon hope, Steinbeck saw his nation—as he put it later in America and Americans (1966)—as poised on a “verge of moral and hence nervous collapse.” By the time of his death, nonetheless, a good many Ellens—the activist generation of the 1960s—had proved themselves worth living for.

The Winter of Our Discontent is finally a novel about mirrors. In it, Ethan Allen Hawley uses a double narrational voice to bring about a sort of objectivity in his own moral vision of himself. Through him, America itself confronts the reality of what it had become in 1960—a false image with a portrait of corruption hidden away in the attic. Ethan sees something of the true nature of this corruption when he walks in on his son, who has just won the “I Love America” Contest, in his room:

He was standing in front of his mirror, holding a hand-glass so he could see his profile. With some dark stuff, maybe Mary’s mascara, he had painted on a narrow black mustache, had darkened his brows and raised the outer ends to satanic tips. He was smiling a world-wise, cynical charm into the mirror when I entered. And he was wearing my blue polka-dot bow tie. He did not seem embarrassed at being caught.

“Rehearsing for a turn,” he said and put the hand-mirror down. (p. 293)
What Ethan Allen Hawley sees in front of him is himself as the devil: his son wearing his own bow tie and a “satanic”-looking mustache getting ready to charm—and fool—the world. Ethan still has not quite realized that children are not necessarily condemned to repeat their parents’ mistakes: that, with help, the sins of the parents do not have to be visited upon them. He sees what he takes to be the clone of his own moral degeneration. The devils, or at least one of them, that Jesus drove out of Mary Magdalene have come to take up residence in Ethan’s genetic code—as a result, that is, of Ethan’s “Jesus” image from the early sections of the novel having changed into the conscious “Judas” of the later portion.

As to this identification of Ethan with Judas instead of Jesus, that equation enters the novel upon Ethan’s double betrayal of Danny and Marullo. Ethan’s high degree of consciousness concerning biblical allusions and parallels having long since been established, the reader has little difficulty in guessing just how Ethan must be interpreting a dream he has late in the novel—specifically, on the morning of July Fourth. Ethan prepares us for the recital of his dream narrative by connecting the self with the nation’s interests:

When Pharaoh had a dream he called in the experts and they told him how it was and would be in the kingdom, and that was right because he was the kingdom. When some of us have a dream, we take it to an expert and he tells us how it is in the country of ourselves. I had a dream that didn’t need an expert. Like most modern people, I don’t believe in prophecy or magic and then spend half my time practicing it. (p. 278)

The dream that Ethan recites involves his being summoned by his friend Danny, who at the time of the dream has been missing for some time, because Danny wants to have certain matters tidied up before taking a journey somewhere “by aircraft.” (p. 278) As Ethan shakes Danny’s hand, oddly swollen,

He put something in my hand, something small and heavy and cool, about the size of a key but not a key—a shape, a metal thing that felt sharp-edged and polished. I don’t know what it was because I didn’t look at it, I only felt it. I leaned near and kissed him on the mouth and with my lips felt his dry lips all chapped and rough. I awakened then, shaken and cold.... (p. 279)

Ethan’s having assured us that he needed no expert to help him understand his dream, it is thus appropriate that he does not supply an inter-
pretation for the reader.

But that Ethan perceives the Judasness of his betrayals is patent enough. And that he generalizes from this association is also quite clear. One page later, we find him lining his wallet with 30 one-hundred-dollar bills, purportedly the price of the store where he has so long worked for Marullo, who is now—thanks to Ethan—about to be deported. Almost at once there follows a famous paragraph that suggests that Ethan’s thoughts on this July Fourth have broadened to include the nation he identifies with:

It must be that there are years unlike other years, as different in climate and direction and mood as one day can be from another day. This year of 1960 was a year of change, a year when secret fears came into the open, when discontent stops being dormant and changes gradually to anger. It wasn’t only in me or in New Baytown. Presidential nominations would be coming up soon and in the air the discontent was changing to anger and with the excitement anger brings. And it wasn’t only the nation; the whole world stirred with restlessness and uneasiness as discontent moved to anger and anger tried to find an outlet in action, any action so long as it was violent—Africa, Cuba, South America, Europe, Asia, the Near East, all restless as horses at the barrier. (pp. 280–81)

Before the chapter is over, Danny’s body has been found, and since “something” had gotten at his face—facelessness being a theme that occurs often enough in Steinbeck—his friend and betrayer has to supply the Chief of Police with identifying marks, among which is a wound in Danny’s side. (pp. 286–87) Can the reader doubt that Ethan knows that he has exchanged the role of ironic Christ for that of a fairly genuine Judas? And what else, may we assume, drives Ethan to his “Place” in the novel’s final chapter, suicide on his mind? What I would stress here, however, is that in the larger terms the novel proposes the Jesus become Judas is America.

As I have pointed out elsewhere,6 at this phase of his career Steinbeck was clearly trying to deal with the “devil” of his own ego, and seemingly winning the struggle. And again, note how the very PR photo that adorns the back of the dust jacket of Winter shows the author wearing a “satanic” mustache, his expression ironically throwing doubt upon the image of a “world-wise, cynical charm” expressed by that same face. In The Winter of Our Discontent, this pair of devils—Ethan Allen Hawley and John Steinbeck—quote Scripture to their own purposes.7 The mistaken attribution which Steinbeck, Ethan, and Margie let slip into the published novel is part of the evidence for our critical recognition that Stein-
beck saw America as having been guilty of the *hubris* that dares a fall to come. And that, having done so, he also had the humility to refuse to except himself from a share of the blame, even as he recognized the need to shoulder the moral burden of choosing—and living for—a better way.

**Notes**

1 New York: Viking, 1961. All further references to this edition will be inserted parenthetically within the text.


4 Curiously enough, on completing a first draft of this article I found that more than a decade ago, I had spotted the textual misattribution in *Winter and mistakenly explained it as a failure on Margie's part to fully understand Ethan's allusion.* See John Ditsky, “*The Winter of Our Discontent: Steinbeck's Testament on Naturalism,*” *Research Studies,* 44, 1 (March 1976), p. 46.


7 This article was written with the advice and expertise of biblical scholars Professors Norman G. McKendrick, S. J., and Barbara Butler of the University of Detroit, and William E. Oyler; and it incorporates ideas and suggestions contributed by students in my 1987 John Steinbeck Seminar at the University of Windsor—especially Jocelyn Roberts, Randy Horvath, and Catherine Creede.
Nature and Creative Power: Pat Mora and Patricia Hampl

Robin Riley Fast

The historical identification of woman and nature has often implied a necessary contradiction between woman and culture, and the belief that intellectual and poetic creativity are outside woman’s “nature.” However, contemporary women poets are finding in nature, imagined as female, a source of poetic power. This essay considers poetry by Pat Mora (Chants, 1984) and Patricia Hampl (Resort and Other Poems, 1983) in which nature, “a well-known face in the poet’s immediate community,” inspires and empowers the female poet.

That nature, which she characterizes as mother and sister, can foster female creativity is affirmed by Susan Griffin: by recognizing their multifaceted relationship with nature and realizing the continuities and potential reciprocities between themselves and nature, women can break free of silence, speak in their own voices, and give voice to nature itself. Similarly, Suzanne Juhasz sees as sources of poetic power contemporary women poets’ revisions of images that link women and nature. And Estella Lauter finds nature “respiritualized” in recent women’s poetry; “that is, it is understood as co-equal with the human self, with layers as mysterious as our own.” (178-79)

Pat Mora’s and Patricia Hampl’s work demonstrates the validity of these insights for women poets’ creative processes. Each poet’s recognition of nature as female and mother affirms her identity and gives her her voice; nature as mother assumes the role of muse. 2 Significantly, this
characterization is based upon unconventional descriptions of nature—the desert, in Mora's poetry, and the wild rose, in Hampl's—which implicitly undermine traditional images and expectations of women and empower the poets. For both, in these poems, the relationship to nature is essential to personal and poetic survival: nature allows them to speak. The deep resonance of female nature's power for the woman poet is suggested by the fact that it moves poets of such different origins: Hampl, a Minnesotan of Czech and Irish background, and Mora, a Chicana from El Paso, Texas.

Two common characteristics of Chicana poetry meet in Mora's work. The first, identified by Marcela Trujillo Gaitan, is the tendency to seek refuge in images of the indigenous mother, one of whose forms is the Indian mother earth. The other characteristic, emphasized by Miriam Bornstein, is the concern with redefinition, not only of women's lives and roles, but also of “the loving cosmic woman image of Mother Earth as it appears in traditional Chicano poetry.” (41) Mora seeks refuge by the act of redefinition itself: she affirms traditional Indian and Chicana women's connections to the desert, and redefines the desert as a fiercely independent woman; both actions validate her own existence as a Chicana poet and empower her to create. Her interest in redefinition is also evident in her depictions of strong women who contradict traditional Chicano notions of feminine propriety and who are clearly inspired by nature, specifically by the mother desert.

Mora establishes the importance of the desert, her primary image of nature, when she dedicates the first five poems in *Chants* to it. The desert is characterized as both muse and mother, a double identity which underlies her other depictions of it and of women and places the whole book in a female landscape. For Mora, the desert's two identities, muse and mother, seem inseparable. As mother, the desert provides nourishment and pleasure; she frightens and heals; she teaches endurance and survival. As muse, the desert functions similarly and in addition provides continuity, through links to a female past and to artistic traditions specifically characterized as women's traditions. In “Bribe,” (7) the poet hears the voices of ancient Indian women chanting as they bury an offering in the desert:

Guide my hands, Mother,
to weave singing birds
flowers rocking in the wind, to trap
them on my cloth with a web of thin threads

Secretly, she makes her own offering, of “a ballpoint pen / and lined yellowing paper.” Then she too “ask[s] the Land to smile on me, to croon / softly, to help me catch her music with words.”
Another aspect of the desert's identity, introduced in the second poem, is also relevant to her roles as mother and muse:

She screams at the spring sky,
dances with her skirts high,

. . . . . . . .

Her unveiled lust fascinates the sun. ("Unrefined," 8)

Here Mora replaces the image of a warm, embracing mother earth with another image of the female, free, wild, and erotically powerful. Her depictions of desert and of woman encompass multiple possibilities, as another early poem, "Mi Madre," demonstrates; all of them empower her poetry. Further, the characterization in "Unrefined" links the desert to some of the women in Mora's other poems, implying that they are the desert's daughters, even when she is not explicitly mentioned.

Beyond the first five poems, the desert continues to be a major element, as a source of magical power and female strength, in poems like "Leyenda" and "Arboles de Maiz," "Bruja: Witch," "Curandera," and "For Georgia O'Keefe." Further, the desert is the literal or emotional setting of love, miracles, nostalgia, and many of the varied experiences Mora depicts. Significantly, Mora's desert is not antagonistic to life, is not a wasteland, does not conform to the literary images readers schooled in the male-dominated Western tradition most commonly associate with the word "desert." 3

The desert is a source of life and power for many of Mora's old and solitary women, who live in harmony and reciprocity with it. This is most clearly the case in "Curandera." The curandera (healer) and her house "have aged together to the rhythm of the desert"; the old woman listens to those who come to be treated, and, like the poet in "Bribe," "she listens / to the desert, always, to the desert." (26) Rubbing "cool morning sand into her hands, into her arms," she seems to affirm her consanguinity with this mother-muse. In return, the desert provides her with food, with the ingredients of her cures, and with the spirit that makes her prayers efficacious. In another poem, the desert frees the "Bruja: Witch" and empowers her to protect other women. Presenting the bruja as a protector, Mora implicitly questions the traditional distinction between practitioners of good magic (curanderos) and those of bad magic (brujos).

Another example of how women can be empowered by the desert to heal is depicted in "Abuelita Magic." The crying of a new mother and her baby awakens the grandmother (the abuelita), a "gray-haired shaman," who
finds a dried red chile,
slowly shakes the wrinkled pod
so the seeds rattle
ts. ss, ts. ss.

and “cures her two children . . . with sleep.” (33) The abuelita’s music,
echoed by repetition within the poem, is reminiscent of the secret
rhythms and chants of the mother desert, evoked in poems like “Bribe,”
“Mi Madre,” and “Curandera.”

That such female connections to the desert are sources of hope and
promise for Mora is evident in three poems about women dancing. The
first is “Unrefined,” where the woman is the lusty, unladylike desert. The
second, “Sola,” is spoken by a woman who has left behind her old dream
of being chosen and led by a “tall-dark-handsome” partner:

At forty I dream of gliding
alone
on ice, to music no one else has heard
arms free (44)

This new dream represents another break with traditional Chicano
images of what is womanly. The third, “Bailando,” is addressed to an
elderly aunt, whom she remembers dancing first as a girl, then as a young
woman, and now

waltzing on your ninetieth birthday,
more beautiful than the orchid
pinned on your shoulder,
tottering now when you walk
but saying to me, “Estoy bailando,”
and laughing. (51)

It is the wild, unladylike desert and the graceful spinster aunt together
that enable Mora to dream of women dancing, free and alone, exercising
creative power. These three poems seem to create a particularly Chicana
composite image: Indian and Spanish elements combined, in English.
Mora draws sustenance from this multifaceted female inheritance, which
includes her inherited relationship with nature.

That relationship seems to have been lost in her poems on cultural con­
flict that most directly concern language. “Illegal Alien” describes a
Chicana’s sense of inadequacy in responding to her maid, who should be
her sister “because we are both women, / both married, both warmed by
Mexican blood.” (40) The speaker, a poet, has no difficulty speaking to the
maid, Socorro. But Socorro needs something else, not “cool words” but
"soothing hands," succor, which the poet cannot give her. In "Elena," too, language is the problem. Elena begins, "My Spanish isn’t enough": her children speak English. (50) "Legal Alien," the last poem in the book, locates the conflict within one person, as well as between her two cultures. "Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural," she is fluent in two languages and two worlds but not entirely accepted by either, and thus ill at ease in both, and in herself (52). Again, her language does not serve her.

It is highly significant that the desert, mother and muse, is missing from these last three, indoor poems. For while the desert enters the homes of the abuelitas, and the curandera, it is far from the poet’s kitchen, the bathroom where Elena hides to practice speaking English, or the paneled office where the "Legal Alien" drafts memos. Mora’s poems imply that keeping a connection with the desert—mother, muse, image, and source of continuity with the past and of new growth for present and future—is necessary to her women’s successfully bridging the contradictions they face, and thus being able to speak—in Spanish, in English, in poetry—with vitality and integrity. Perhaps the bleakness of the last poem is intended to make us to go back to the first ones and to re-discover the strength the desert gives.4

For Patricia Hampl, too, nature, characterized as female in unconventional terms, is essential to emotional survival and to poetry. "Resort" recounts a summer spent alone at a resort on the North Shore of Lake Superior, recovering from the breakup of a love affair. Associated with the pain of loss are other problems: her attachment to the past, her self-absorption, and the temptation to romanticize nature. She resolves these difficulties and recovers, by concentrating on the natural world around her, by learning to see it anew, and by learning from it, particularly from the changes she observes in the wild rose. Recognizing those changes as analogous to changes in herself, identifying with the natural process, she grows and frees herself from emotional paralysis.

Re-vision—seeing first nature and then herself, anew—is the most important part of the recovery process. She describes her problem in terms of seeing: "I stared too long at myself" (62); the solution is described in similar terms: "Seeing is believing, / I hope to see. Just that. Just the rose" (42); and again, "I must see the rose, / then say so, then go home." (62) Seeing rightly, clearly, she implies, can be a source of faith, even of salvation.

She identifies the rose as her teacher, its lessons, as those of "unfolding"; her "job" is to "Admire the rose; forgive my own unrefined face in the wind." (58) This last piece of advice to herself suggests the parallel between rose and poet; in fact, Hampl comes to identify the rose with her own life and possibilities: a little later she urges herself, "The whole rose, the whole life. Keep looking." (63) Although roses have symbolized female sexuality, beauty, fragility, thorniness, and so on, for
centuries, Hampl's vision is a new one, which frees her to recover and to go on with her life. This rose becomes symbolic of a different kind of woman, and so allows the poet to break free of the role of the woman pining away for a lost love, to recover her voice and her creative identity. The rose thus becomes a figure for the muse.

At the start of the poem, the rose is a "pink fact," vulnerable to passing trucks and crashing waves, "girlish," like the flounce of a new dress. (41) However, this characterization is "lifted from memory" (42); that is, not only is it second hand, and thus in a sense unreal, but it is also a highly conventional rose, symbol of a conventional idea of woman. In the second section, Hampl uses the rose to indulge her self-absorbed cultivation of misery: "We want misery to be richer. / We ransack the rose of this moment." (45) She is not yet seeing the rose itself directly, or examining herself, but using the rose to perpetuate the emotional moment in which she is trapped. In the third section she acknowledges her conventional romanticism: "'My love is like a red, red rose'—this is what lovers should say." (50–51) But she also acknowledges despair: "It's a real moment, real as the rose." (52) Thus she both deepens the meaning of the rose, bringing it closer to the reality of her life, and challenges it: to help her, to free her, the rose will have to give her some way out of despair. And it does, when it becomes "unlikely" (56)—unlike the conventionally expected rose.

As Hampl contemplates the rose and the shore, summer passes, and she gradually accepts the necessary mutability of the rose and of her life. Acceptance of the analogy between natural and personal change brings with it assurance and renewed creative power. The rose becomes the answer to her last question to herself: "And what do you know?" (77) In the ninth and final section of the poem, September arrives, and with it, a transformed rose:

The rose was summer, the girlish flutter of pink brazen pollen underneath it all, or I'd thought it was the dead tongue of my first love, something romantic and vague slipping into sad green, past blossom.
But it is September, first frost, and the rose is a vegetable, practical as a widow, the stuff of tea and a jam you buy in a health food store. Rose hips are more rose than the rose, more pink, the jolly late apples of all that lyricism.
The frank body of the flower unfolds its heart which is pelvic, most beautiful bone, perfect gesture. (78)

Here is a different kind of woman from the fragile girl, the fluttering rose
of early summer—now she is sturdy, practical, jolly, and frank, “more rose than rose.” Hampl has sought the “something adult” that happens after the blossom (72); she has named it “usefulness.” (73) Finding it in the rose hip, she also finds its possibility in herself, and thus recovers, too, connection, voice, and rapture.

Now go ahead, harvest the rosy buttons, all their lives packed into the shiny pouches. Inside their pulp is orange as the season, the fire that resides in every ripe, ready thing. Inside is the food, something useful.

What you were waiting for, what you kept touching, what you meant to say, meant to confide, what your mother bears as her Celtic grudge, what the summer released, what each letter in the box has as its further address, what the rose reveals, not rose, but rapture. (79)

The shiny pouches packed with food, the warmth, the rapture, all suggest that one name for this adult rose might be “mother.”

With the rose, two other natural images, wave and light, help develop the theme of language and poetry, confirming the importance of nature to this poet’s voice. We first see the waves pounding the wild rose and then hear them in the rhythmically repeated questions that assail the poet: “Why have I come here, why?” (41, 42) Hampl asserts “I will be well when a wave is just water” (46); she has identified not only the rose, but the “brevity” of a wave, as her subject. (47) Although the waves are associated with uncontained joy (54), they are also identified with tears, sobs, and the “dangerous privacy” from which the poet must escape to “the extended hand of dry land where / all the flowers are, the rose’s faded fist of pink.” (59) As a symbol of pure emotion, pure energy, the wave can be a vehicle of change. However, it also signifies an obsessive changelessness, conveyed in Hampl’s evocations of its powerful rhythm; in this sense the wave represents a trap like the poet’s self-absorbed grief, from which she must free herself. While the rose changes and enables the poet to change, the wave does not.

As she recovers, the rhythm of the waves, which punctuates the first half of the poem, gradually subsides, and light supersedes waves as an object of contemplation. By mid-poem, light grabs the eye’s attention and draws the despairing soul into “the flower market / of late July, the bazaar where we buy and sell beyond sadness.” (61) Her observations of light, as of the rose, map the gradual changes in Hampl’s perceptions of the world and herself. Light makes the lake a watercolor in midsummer (50); by August, “color thickens” as “light spreads itself / on the folded water.”
By the end of the poem, where the waves do not appear, the ascendancy of light is complete.

The deluxe loneliness of September is here, slinking furs of fog, an ensemble punctuated by sapphires, those few days more rash than the meridian of July, color-fast and glassy with light. A whole month supported by the inherited gold of summer, the glamorous bright season. (78)

For Hampl as for Mora, the natural world is vital to the development and continuity of the poet’s voice. The speaker early identifies herself as a writer; that she is a writer in trouble becomes evident as we realize that her poem is structured on the conflicts of contrary voices: all but the last section of the poem consists of poetic meditations, usually on the natural setting and the poet’s place in it, followed by prose dialogues, sometimes-aggressive self-interviews, which may subvert the poetic endeavor, even while forcing the poet to greater clarity.

Are you looking for a different life?

consisting of?

That’s a life plan?

You want to make something? Something grand?

You think that’s bravery—looking at a flower and calling it a person, calling it the ragged past? (66–67)

Hampl’s speech is thus split, as she alternates between meditative receptivity and doubt. Only at the end does the voice of poetry, richly suggestive and assured, sound alone, the poet having answered the questions and moved beyond the doubts that so relentlessly pursued her. Rose and light restore her integrity and her art to her. The waves voice her questions, and her grief. But while she is figuratively immersed in them, her voice, “like any wave . . . repeats and crashes, / reduced to sound, meaningless spray of short syllables.” (61) As she says later, though “I’ll cry every time . . . that doesn’t make it art.” (66) She must bring her emotion under control, give it a shape, to make poetry of it. In the fourth section of the poem, Hampl gives us a lovely image of how rose, wave, and light together might produce the vision that will make poetry possible.
I want to say intimate things to everybody.

A leaf must become strange, the rose unlikely,
and each wave is pronounced distinctly
like a foreign name, over and over—all this
so that one new sentence will emerge
out of the formal light of language,
the morning sun fresh on the nicked silver of a wave. (56–57)

Interestingly, this desire is voiced is just after Hampl, moved to pride and gratitude for her mother’s care with language, has characterized such care as “This cottage industry,” the “humble handwork” of “lacemakers.” (56) In other words, Hampl, like Mora, describes linguistic integrity and creativity in terms of women’s work. However, for Hampl it is not exclusively so: she recalls how her father, a grower of roses, also insisted on “the true word.” (70)

Again, though, Hampl concentrates on the rose as an image of art and a source of poetic inspiration, an image that combines change, rapture, and formal clarity. Thus, the rose teaches “the lessons of unfolding . . . The relation of the rose to long sentences.” (58) In contrast to the meaningless stammering of the waves, the rose teaches articulateness, complexity, the kind of language necessary for the poet to be true to her perceptions, to the changes she observes and participates in. Later this lesson is made more explicit: “The rose happens by degrees, but the seed is a bundle of firm assumptions. Form unfurls. Construction is an unclenched fist.” (72)

Finally, we have the rose hip, firm and compact, definite in form, the product of “all that lyricism” and the promise of more, a mother-like female image of nature—adult, warm, and nurturing—that makes poetry possible for a woman poet.

Through her process of re-vision, the poet has recovered her resilience, confirming her ability to change while maintaining her integrity and her identity as a poet. The rose has become an unconventional image of vital womanhood. Significantly, Hampl leaves the resort in September; instead of anticipating the spring return of the fragile young rose girls, she draws strength and hope from an image of mature womanhood, a “practical,” nurturing “widow.” As a result, she can transcend her doubts and heal the split within herself, so that in the final section of the poem she speaks in one voice, to affirm rapture.

Both Mora and Hampl find in their natural surroundings sources of integrity and strength, and a power that inspires them to poetic speech. Most importantly, they find these things in aspects of nature which they characterize as female, but in which they discover and celebrate qualities that contradict both conventional descriptions of desert and rose and traditional poetic images of female beauty, of motherhood, and of the
muse. Dispensing with the conventional delicate, virginal blossom and fertile, maternal landscape, ripe for exploitation, they concentrate on nature stripped to her essentials: in the desert, the sand, the sun, the plants hardy enough to grow there; at the shore, the rose’s heart, “which is pelvic, most beautiful bone.” (78)

They take inspiration from nature imagined as an older woman alone and, in Mora’s case, from the examples of old women living harmoniously with nature. Their poetry is empowered by mothers; their muses are present, “not Other, but Familiar” and natural. Hampl re-sees the wild rose as a mother-like, mature woman; in coming to that vision she recognizes her kinship with the mature rose and reaffirms the bond of similarity that ties her to her own mother. Mora identifies the desert explicitly as mother, recognizing similarities between the mother desert’s endurance and her own poetic survival, and mirroring the desert’s dance in her own.7

Notes

1 This, in part, is Mary Carruthers’ description of the female muse of some contemporary women poets. (“The Revision of the Muse,” p. 295–96). For discussion of the woman-nature association and its implications, see works by Susan Griffin, Carolyn Merchant, and Sherry B. Ortner.


2 Mary DeShazer discusses women writers’ maternal muses and affirms that “the female poet/female muse relationship closely parallels [the] mother-daughter bond.” (38) But while she analyzes the (male) Romantic tendency to find a muse in “Mother Nature,” she does not consider women poets for whom nature is muse. (Unlike the male poets whom DeShazer discusses, neither Mora nor Hampl imagines this muse as other, or endeavors to appropriate or tame her.)

3 That women of all three major cultures in the American Southwest have not seen the desert as a wasteland is confirmed by Janice Monk and Vera Norwood. Norwood’s discussion of Mary Austin in “Heroines of Nature” is particularly illuminating on this point.

4 Another Chicana poet whose work reflects similar concerns is Lucha Corpi. Her four “Marina” poems redefine the Virgin of Guadalupe and Malinche-Marina, on whom, respectively, traditional Mexican reverence for and revulsion against women have focused, by linking both figures to the earth. Further light is shed on Mora’s concern with female identity and self-expression by Rachel Phillips’ observation that Malinche-Marina, who translated between the Indians
and their Spanish conquerors, "lived by language." (98) This comment suggests the special resonance that the acquisition of linguistic power, of voice, can have for a Chicana poet like Mora, and the importance of affirming and protecting the power of female voices.

That the rose is both self and muse seems contradictory only in the context of traditional (largely masculine) ways of imagining the muse as other. Adrienne Rich suggests that for women, and for men like Walt Whitman, the muse may in fact be the poet's own soul. (pp. 228–30) Hamp!s rose is similarly suggestive.

After completing this essay, I had the opportunity to read Tey Diana Rebolledo's "Tradition and Mythology: Signatures of Landscape in Chicana Literature," which treats Mora's poetry in terms of contemporary Chicanas' concerns with integrating human beings and nature. Future discussions of Chicana literature will be enriched by Rebolledo's essay and by the book in which it appears (Janice Monk and Vera Norwood, eds. The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

Works Cited


Few poets, ignoring the stereotype that science lies outside the sphere of poetry have incorporated Einsteinean motifs into their work, thereby revealing a fascinating correspondence between the abstract, seemingly non-experiential new physics (Einsteinean cosmology being archetypal) and the sensuous concreteness of human life. Their poetry is able to transform scientific knowledge into expressive utterances that have both personal and universal meaning.

"Consciousness," states Owen Barfield in Saving the Appearances, "is correlative to phenomenon." (65) This statement calls to mind Wordsworth's famous proclamation, in the preface to the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads, that the poet rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. . . . The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when those things shall be familiar to us.

Even though Wordsworth never ceased to think of "poet" and "scientist" as inhabitants of two different worlds, he nevertheless perceived a vital relationship between them: "If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid in the transfiguration."

In our own day, F. S. C. Northrop spells out this Wordsworthian chall-
lenge more specifically, emphasizing the extreme difficulty of the task (without loss of Wordsworthian idealism). Northrop explains:

Never has the poet faced a more difficult task. Not only is the gulf between the aesthetic and the theoretic components of reality greater than it has been before, due to the extreme abstractness of contemporary scientific and philosophical theory, but also the number of people in high places whose emotions are still epistemically attached to outmoded conceptions of the theoretic component is probably greater today than at any time since the beginning of the seventeenth century. . . . The creative artist of the younger generation who possesses the sensibility and the skill to refer concepts by intuition unambiguously to immediately apprehendable aesthetic materials, thereby becoming expert in poetry in and for itself, and who has the intellectual capacity to master the scientific philosophy . . . can by joining the aesthetic and the theoretic through epistemic correlation, command the poetry and perhaps . . . even the culture of the future.

(Logic of the Sciences and Humanities, pp. 186, 189)

The fusion between writing poetry and doing science that Northrop envisions is crucial for producing what we are coming to regard as "essential knowledge." Poetry as a means of knowing the world and ourselves is no mere handmaiden to, but is truly a counterpart of, science. Poetry fulfills, in language, the very quest that set scientific inquiry into motion in the first place: it both demonstrates and celebrates the nature of our role in the cosmic scheme of things.

The poems I wish to examine not only acknowledge the importance of Albert Einstein to the modern age—to be sure, a sufficient motive in itself for poetry—but they also participate in the great epistemological dilemma which the discoveries of Einstein and his associates (particularly the quantum physicists) have brought into focus—a dilemma with which Einstein struggled during the latter half of his life. "Participate" is a key word here: I want it to mean not just "involvement with an issue"; not just "to respond in order to clarify," but to invest mathematical abstractions with sensuous form, thereby contributing to the fullest understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny.

As many "humanists" probably already know, the "fullest understanding" of, say, the behavior of subatomic particles cannot be approached independently of a major and absolute limitation, namely, the very act of observation. P. W. Bridgman ("The Nature of Physical Knowledge," p. 22) explains that "the object of knowledge is not to be separated from the instrument of knowledge." Whatever we conclude about the behavior
of electrons or mesons or alpha particles, we conclude in view of the essentially subjective quality of empirical observation. We humanize the cosmos by our very efforts to explain it. The numinous cosmos is utterly beyond us.

The poet—and there is no reason to assume that poet and physicist must be different persons—is as much responsible for understanding the principles of relativity and quantum mechanics as the scientist—a task which may seem prohibitive to many persons with a traditional literary education. The illusion of science as soulless and mechanistic is the result of the rigorous empiricism that had to replace pre-established authority in order for science to acquire its modern validity.

And yet we find at the heart of scientific exploration, just as we find at the heart of artistic exploration, intuition—which Descartes considered to be the fundamental operation of the mind, to which even deduction must be subordinate. "Intuitive illumination," writes Boris Kusnetsov, "creates the poetry of science and makes it related to music, in which, in the words of Leibnitz, the soul calculates, itself not yet knowing." ("Einstein, Science and Culture," p. 179) This intuitive illumination is what the poet too will experience as he or she struggles to bring about those transfigurations to which Wordsworth and Northrop refer.

The Einstein-related poems I have encountered appear to assert one of three ideas:

1) Involvement with abstract, intellectual concepts causes a severing from the material, sensuous world.
2) The universe operates either by blind chance or by divine fiat.
3) Reality is relative to point of view.

It is to these poems that I now wish to turn.

II.

One of the longest poems in which Albert Einstein is the subject is "Einstein" (1929) by Archibald MacLeish. The poem, more than 200 lines long, is filled with a profound sense of humanity's isolation from the earth, that being evidently a necessary sacrifice for one who wishes to penetrate cosmic secrets. The images of desolation and sensory deprivation are brought to surreal intensity. MacLeish's Einstein is a kind of dismembered brain, privy to cosmic truths which, while preserving "A certain secrecy" and seeming "to keep/Something inviolate if only that/His father was an ape," ultimately results in an irreversible disintegration of the physical world around him.

The denial of physical reality, of sensuous life, that Einstein here represents for MacLeish, is expressed in a tone close to despairing:
His hands
And face go naked and alone converse
With what encloses him, as rough and smooth
And sound and silence and the intervals
Of rippling ether and the swarming motes
Clouding a privy: move to them and make
Shadows that mirror them within his skull
In perpendiculants and curves and planes
And bodiless significances blurred
As figures undersea and images
Patterned from eddies of the air.
Which are
Perhaps not shadows but the thing itself
And may be understood.

Ultimately these cosmic obsessions must be paid for dearly. Einstein, attempting to re-enter the world of sensation, is rejected:

Outstretched on the earth
He plunges both his arms into the swirl
Of what surrounds him but the yielding grass
Excludes his fingertips and the soft soil
Will not endure confusion with his hands
Nor will the air receive him nor the light
Dissolve their difference but recoiling turn
Back from his touch.

And likewise, Einstein cannot fit sensory objects into his cosmic scheme:

In autumn the black branches dripping rain
Bruise his uncovered bones and in the spring
His swollen tips are gorged with aching blood
That bursts the laurel.
   But although they seize
His sense he has no name for them, no word
To give them meaning and no utterance
For what they say.

The world of sensation, the tactile and image-filled world, is lost to Einstein and hence to the mind in pursuing answers to metaphysical questions. Abstraction, intellection, is Death.

Like a foam
His flesh is withered and his shriveling
And ashy bones are scattered on the dark.
For all its somber power, the poem, I cannot help feeling, rests upon a basic falsehood—that the mind which strives to grapple with cosmic laws must perforce be a mind untuned to—or thinking itself superior to—physical stimuli. Now, I cannot be certain whether MacLeish invoked the person of Einstein to represent Einstein himself or to serve as a prop for all theoretical physicists. Either way, Einstein has been dealt a bad hand. The great physicist, despite his disdain for material possessions and sensation for its own sake, never lost touch with the sensorial world. He might well have retorted to MacLeish that death lay not in passing over the sensuous trappings of Lotus Land, but in being blind and deaf to the heavens.

That Einstein was very much a part of the world is evident from his nonscientific writings. “Without the sense of kinship with men of like mind,” he writes in “The World as I See It” (1931), “without the occupation with the objective world, the eternally unattainable in the field of art and scientific endeavors, life would have seemed to me empty.” (Ideas and Opinions, p. 20)

But the most dramatic illustration of Einstein’s being at home in the world is his “thought-experiments”—those imaginative and delightful metaphors he created in order to elucidate perplexing aspects of relativity theory: riding on a beam of light, for example to help explain the relativity of time and motion; being accelerated upward through space in an enclosed elevator to help explain the equivalence of gravity and acceleration. These examples, with their glint of Lewis Carroll-like fantasy, are poems in their own right. Howard Moss, in a recent poem, captures this magical element in Einstein very nicely indeed:

A shaman full of secrets, who could touch
Physics with a wand and body forth
The universe’s baby wrapped in stars . . .

(“Einstein’s Bathrobe”)

Likewise, in a much earlier poem (1921)—the earliest Einstein-related poem I have come across—William Carlos Williams associates the harbinger of new scientific knowledge with fecundity rather than sterility:

Einstein, tall as a violet
in the lattice-arbor corner
is tall as
a blossomy peartree . . .

(“St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils”)

45
"How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity," writes Williams, "affecting our very conception of the heavens about us . . . without incorporating its essential fact—the relativity of measurements—into our own category of activity: the poem? Do we think we stand outside the universe?" ("The Poem as a Field of Action") Williams, like Northrop, is attempting to bridge the gap between the abstract scientific and the sensory artistic.

Let us now turn to a different attempt by a poet to establish a connection between the physical and the theoretical, in light of Einsteinean principles. Kelly Cherry, in "A Bird's-Eye View of Einstein" (Relativity: A Point of View), is not, first of all, aiming for a one-to-one correspondence between the two realms; instead she has absorbed the reality of a relativistic universe into a trinity of mythlike recollections, each of which involves an experience with a male relative—husband, brother, father. The implicit punning of "relative" is not meant to amuse but suggests instead an intimacy between cosmic and biological functions.

Because we inhabit a relativistic universe, it is important to establish "the point of perch" or frame of reference; each perch is its own valid system of reality. Another variable, of course, is time:

Time, that flies, lights
On the optic nerve and beats its wings against
My brain.

Throughout this poem the immediate, the anguished moments of life are delineated according to shifting spatio-temporal coordinates. In the section that depicts the narrator's relationship with her brother, we find a vivid example of this characteristic:

I recall
The names and dates he wishes I'd forget.
How, feeling up my friend from school, he jabbed
His hand on a strategic safety pin;
The woman from Haiti whose hair came off in his hand
One night; and the night we said our name over and over
And over, while the cigarette between
His fingers smouldered and went out, and light
Held its breath an hour or two and then blew
Out the day.

We lay on the outer shore
Of space, cast up by a soundless solar
Wind from the depths of time. Each light wave touched
His hair with damp; I dried him with my breath.
But we grow old and grow apart.
Equally provocative are the associations surrounding the narrator’s memory of her brother’s death:

When we raise
Our eyes and fling them out like stones, rippling
The surface of the Milky Way, we look
Backward in time. My brother used to dive
For motes. They float among the atoms, scarce
As pearls, and each pearl plucked will buy the eye
Of a needle. Then he drowned. And now I skim
Galactic shallows, looking for the one
Husband of my sightless sisters. I glide
Along the currents of Andromeda,
Because my brother’s body, unfathomed
For two million years, preceding Perseus,
Lies broken on the reef, locked in a cold
Luminescence.

With remarkable skill Cherry establishes a mythic/cosmic point of perch for this human, pathetic event, and in so doing also establishes a human point of perch for the cosmos. Here, then, is a poetry of the earth, cognizant of its place in the physical universe; a late-20th-century updating of ancient, renaissance, and enlightenment humanity/cosmos epic paradigms. The two realms, far from being irrelevant to each other, are inseparable—although some poets shudder at such a notion. Morris Bishop, for one, takes an opposing view in his satirical "E=mc²":

What was our trust, we trust not,
What was our faith, we doubt;
Whether we must or must not
We may debate about.
The soul perhaps is a gust of gas
And wrong is a form of right—
But we know that Energy equals Mass
By the Square of the Speed of Light.

Quite the contrary, the new physics reveals that truth is far subtler (in both human and cosmic contexts) than we ever before realized; furthermore, poetic expression has the potential for demonstrating this point—perhaps even more convincingly than mathematical equations. Poetry that is able to synthesize the new physics with basic human needs can enrich our spiritual awareness along with our intellectual awareness.
III.

Three other poems succeed at achieving this synthesis by confronting what is perhaps the central epistemological dilemma of modern times: the dilemma of indeterminacy versus determinacy. Does God play dice with the universe, contrary to what Einstein so vigorously denied? Does the human brain have the capacity to transcend its own limitations as an instrument of perception in order to grasp things in themselves? Is there a universal harmony, whereby multiplicity is a higher unity, as both Leibnitz and Einstein believed?

The question is as much theological as scientific. Indeed, it is in the field of quantum mechanics, more than anywhere else in science (except perhaps evolutionary biology), that God becomes an integral part of the problems being confronted.

You say that photons clamor eternally, and that speaks to me:
my first vision was one of infinite light.

So asserts St. Augustine via the consciousness of Diane Ackerman. Her "St. Augustine Contemplating the Bust of Einstein" (from Wife Of Light) is as lively as it is metaphysical, and the bond that Ackerman strikes between these two noble time-and-God-contemplating kinsmen affects us deeply. The poem rings true: The more St. Augustine speaks to Einstein, the more Augustine begins to resemble his 20th century alter ego.

you want to drive a stake
under the nail of the universe
and draw God out
like a soft-shelled crab

These lines describe an impulse that both Augustine and Einstein have experienced, although Augustine insists that for him such a wish was only a passing phase:

Like you in my teens—a wooly
dream-gatherer—I worshipped the creature
over the Creator, prayed for
"chastity and continence, but not yet;"
then chained my senses together
like a great long molecule
blazing in some hyperbolic present.
I thought God dwelt in the motion of birds
rooting idly through damp sod....
But soon I became a house divided
between that geyser of color
and the asylum of God.

Augustine must finally reject Einstein's cosmos—he cannot accept the
displacement of the Godhead therein:

How elemental, the way you put it:
In the beginning
was the velocity of light.
But it means that God will never
be the same, now he's plummeted a peg
and had his secrets ogled.
You call this abomination Symmetry,
and that eludes me.

But despite their differences, Einstein and St. Augustine are far more
alike than either of them would be to a quantum physicist, for whom
reality, all creation, is based on probability. As the discoverer of the
Uncertainty Principle, Werner Heisenberg, explains: "The law of
causality is no longer applied in quantum theory and the law of conserva-
tion of matter is no longer true for elementary particles." Heisenberg
illustrates this point by considering the radium atom, which can emit an
alpha-particle:

The time for the emission of the $\alpha$-particle cannot be
predicted. We can only say that in the average the emission
will take place in about two thousand years. Therefore, when
we observe the emission we do not actually look for a
foregoing event from which the emission must according to a
rule follow. . . . We know the forces in the atomic nucleus that
are responsible for the emission of the $\alpha$-particle. But this
knowledge contains the uncertainty which is brought about
by the interaction between the nucleus and the rest of the
world. If we wanted to know why the $\alpha$-particle was emitted at
that particular time we would have to know the microscopic
structure of the whole world including ourselves, and that is
impossible.
(Physics and Philosophy, pp. 88, 89)

For Einstein, quantum theory was not erroneous, it was incomplete.
Whether the human brain could ever supply the missing pieces to this
cosmic puzzle was debatable; but for Einstein it was inconceivable that
the universe in itself was probabilistic. Einstein came closest to resolving,
for himself at least, this perplexity—not through equations but, ironically enough, through written discourse. In “Remarks on Bertrand Russell’s Theory of Knowledge,” Einstein had this to say:

[T]he concepts which arise in our thought and in our linguistic expressions are all—when viewed logically—the free creations of thought which cannot inductively be gained from sense experiences. This is not so easily noticed only because we have the habit of combining certain concepts and conceptual relations... so definitely with certain sense experiences that we do not become conscious of the gulf—logically unbridgeable—which separates the world of sensory experiences from the world of concepts and propositions.

Two poems—one by Robert Watson, the other by Howard Nemerov—offer dramatically different ways of wrestling with this enigmatic angel of uncertainty. In Watson’s “The Radio Astronomer” we encounter a character who tries feebly to make sense of things, then resigns himself to the indeterminate flux:

A radio astronomer in Utah lifts his ears
Over the moon and stars, sets them at empty space.
It’s 3 a.m., a quiet hour. Beneath the moon it snows.

... the sounds seem random, or does he hear
A wheel turning, the click of dice, noise of cards dealt out?
A casino in the heavens? The powers wagering there?

This is a universe of luck and chance. Galaxies
Spin in flight like snow, rattle in space, are gone.

Contrastingly, Nemerov’s “Angel and Stone” pleads for the recognition of determinacy—a determinacy that we can at least intuit if not directly perceive:

In the world are millions and millions of men, and each man,
With few exceptions, believes himself to be at the center,
A small number of his more or less necessary planets careering
Around him in an orderly manner, some morning stars singing together,
More distant galaxies shining like dust in any stray sunbeam
Of his attention. Since this is true not of one man or of two
But of ever so many, it is hard to imagine what life must be like.
But if you drop a stone into a pool, and observe the ripples
Moving in circles successively out to the edges of the pool, and then Reflecting back and passing through the ones that continue to come Out of the center over the sunken stone, you observe it is pleasing.

But if you throw a handful of sand into the water, it is confusion, Not because the same laws have ceased to obtain, but only because The limits of your vision in time and number forbid you to discriminate Such fine, quick, myriad events as the angels and archangels, thrones And dominations, principalities and powers are delegated to witness And declare the glory of before the lord of everything that is.

Even though their premises contradict, Watson and Nemerov show us exciting new ways to extract earthy metaphors—metaphors as starkly commonplace as sand and water, snowflakes and playing cards—for the purpose of illuminating, with a sensuous and powerful lyricism, the abstractions and perplexities of the new physics. Through such poems as “The Radio Astronomer” and “Angel and Stone,” Einsteinean cosmology is put into the context of everyday human experience; for such poems manage to rouse primal emotions, allow us to feel as well as understand the profound connections between our minds and bodies and the shape of the universe. Surely Robert Watson and Howard Nemerov, Kelly Cherry and Diane Ackerman are poets to have heeded Wordsworth’s and Northrop’s calling.

Notes

1 For a discussion of the role that discourse in general plays in science, see my “Science, Discourse and Authorial Responsibility,” San José Studies, 10 (W ’84): pp. 25–38.

Works Cited


Disease Progression in AIDS

C. David Pauza*

Introduction

From the earliest days of this epidemic, it was clear to many that a new viral disease was emerging. New cases appeared to be "clustered," arising principally among the sexual partners of infected individuals and later seen in persons receiving transfusions of what was ultimately recognized as contaminated blood. Despite these obvious indications of an infectious agent, the consequences of this infection presented so complex a scenario that it was difficult to assign a causative role to a single pathogenic agent. We now recognize that the uniquely heterogeneous collection of opportunistic pathogens that affect AIDS patients indicates that the disease agent is not responsible for these late stage, and life-threatening, infections but rather that it affects the very mechanisms of immunity that are vital for survival.

The etiological microbe bore originally a French name but is now designated as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Identification of this novel human virus opened the door to rapid identification of infected individuals and facilitated some treatment strategies based upon traditional approaches to viral diseases. Despite these efforts, however, the scientific and medical communities are still unable to provide convincing explanations of the means by which this tiny virus particle mediates such devastating consequences. This essay attempts to bridge the gap between the twin subjects of pathology and virology in order to provide a framework for understanding disease progression in AIDS.

The apparently overwhelming complexity of AIDS can be reduced to essential components of the interaction between the virus and the cells of

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the host that it infects; knowledge of the normal behavior of these immune system cells then constitutes a framework for interpreting the effects of viral infection. As a foundation for the discussion, I present some essential background information about the biology of HIV. These considerations provide a framework for understanding how this particular virus causes an immunoregulatory disease which leads inexorably to an immunodeficiency syndrome; the essential distinction between these two terms will be revealed as a critical aspect in our understanding of viral pathogenesis in AIDS.

Identifying the AIDS Infectious Agent

Overwhelming evidence indicates that the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the etiological agent for AIDS. Epidemiology documents the pattern of disease incidence as coincident with the exchange of blood cells from an infected to an uninfected individual. Increased familiarity with in vitro propagation of HIV now permits the isolation of infectious virus in >90% of the cases; this technology is a by-product of the intense research efforts to evaluate this pathogen. As regards the possibility that other infectious agents might give rise to AIDS, one must examine the host response to infection for evidence that reveals the primary (causative) as opposed to secondary (opportunistic) infections. HIV infection is most frequently documented by the acquisition of high levels of antibody that recognizes viral components, although why the antibody response fails to protect the individual remains a mystery. Thus, the HIV infection occurred at a time when the immune system was essentially normal and able to mount an antibody response to virus.

A consequence of HIV infection is the destruction of immune response capacity such that subsequent infections are not met with normal antibody responses. In other words, microbes that infect the immunosuppressed individual encounter a paralyzed immune system which is unable to generate an antibody response. Based on this reasoning, the primary (causative) infectious agent invaded a competent immune system; evidence for the primary designation lies in the appearance of specific antibodies recognizing HIV which can only arise via normal responsiveness of a relatively intact immune system. The secondary infection encounters an immune system already disabled by the causative pathogen and thus incapable of registering an antibody response to this opportunistic agent. In a commonly encountered example, syphilis infections are “silent” in AIDS patients; there is a lack of antibody response to the syphilis agent. Thus one can conclude safely that the primary infection (HIV) preceded the secondary one (syphilis). Moreover, the ability of HIV to mediate immune system destruction is shown again by the lack of immune response to the opportunistic
pathogen. This same reasoning can be applied successfully to suggestions that other infectious agents besides HIV are etiologic in AIDS.

Many isolates of HIV exist. Rapid divergence of viral genome sequence leads to accumulation of variants in the population. These are not strictly defined as serotypes because antibodies from any infected individual generally cross-react with many isolates and vice versa. A distinct but strongly related subgroup of viral isolates was designated HIV-2. HIV-2 has been positively associated with AIDS; whether its disease potential is equivalent to HIV-1 remains under investigation.

**Characteristics of HIV**

HIV is a lentivirus of the family retroviridiae. Retroviruses have RNA as their genetic material, and virus replication necessarily proceeds via a double-stranded DNA intermediate. The DNA form can exist as free circular DNA in the cell nucleus and can also be integrated into the host cell chromosomal DNA.

The virus particle is approximately 100 nm in diameter (1/1,000 the diameter of a cell). The dense nucleoprotein in the center of the particle contains the viral RNA and is characteristically rod-shaped. The appearance of this cylindrical nucleoprotein is an important criterion for including HIV among the type D retroviruses. The virus is covered with a lipid-containing membrane, and protein molecules heavily modified by sugar groups protrude through this layer. The exterior proteins are known as the envelope glycoproteins and are important for attachment of this virus to specific sites on susceptible cells.

Infection of lymphocytes *in vitro* revealed that HIV attaches to and replicates in certain subgroups of T cells and monocytes. These cells are found in the peripheral blood; the virus can also grow in related cell types that exist within tissues and organs. HIV is specific for these cells because they alone possess the CD4 cell surface molecule that acts as the cell receptor for virus. The presence of CD4 alone does not seem sufficient for HIV infection; cellular activation is also a necessary component for virus replication.

An unusual feature of HIV is that it contains a complicated set of proteins which regulate virus gene expression. These regulatory molecules control virus gene expression and the subsequent production of virus proteins. The presence and activity of these molecules provide highly specific mechanisms for the control of virus replication, and this exquisite regulatory capacity is most likely involved in the establishment of a persistent viral infection. The meaning of this feature will be explored subsequently in greater detail.
AIDS develops months to years subsequent to the initial infection by HIV. In addition, the abundant antibody responses that were discussed above attest to the fact that the initial immune response to HIV infection is vigorous, if ineffective. One way that the immune response can be abrogated is when the infectious agent resides primarily within cells and is thus inaccessible to the action of antibody. In this case, the virus grows at a dramatically reduced rate and at that low level of activity does not injure the cell or cause the immune response to attack the infected cell. In this way the virus remains, or persists, within cells for long periods of time. HIV is now known to be a persistent infection of macrophages, which are important cells for immunity mechanisms. The presence of the virus might directly interfere with the function of these cells; this is a postulated direct effect of HIV infection on macrophages. An important indirect effect will be discussed below. It is also worthwhile to emphasize that persistence is the mechanism used by HIV to remain in the body for long periods of time even in the face of an antibody response. A different type of infection is responsible for helper T cell depletion; in this aspect HIV seems capable of acute infection as well.

The Link between Persistent and Acute HIV Infections

The two contrasting types of HIV infection are reasonably restricted to the two main cell types involved in the infection. Low-level, long-term replication of the virus leads to persistent infection of macrophages, and high-level, short-term virus growth characterizes the infection of T cells. It is important to understand the processes leading to these individual types of infection so that rational approaches to therapeutic intervention can be pursued. First, I will discuss a few aspects of the normal interactions of T cells and macrophages to provide a background for understanding the control of HIV dissemination.

A normal aspect of immune system function is close contact between stimulating and responding cells. In fact, the only pathway for immunological activation of helper T cells requires direct contact between a macrophage and a T cell; foreign antigens are held at the surface of the macrophage and these materials are "presented" to the T cell as an activation signal. Normally, the macrophage receives a positive signal from this interaction and thus increases its immunological activity. The T cell receives a signal that initiates cell growth and proliferation. It is this increase in number of specific, activated cell types that leads to the amplification necessary to mount effective immune responses in the T cell compartment.

One can now envision the situation when the macrophage participat-
ing in this antigen presentation phenomenon is itself infected by HIV. As the macrophage comes into close contact with a helper T cell, it receives a positive signal and replies with the growth-promoting signal. In the special case when a macrophage is itself persistently infected, HIV is passed to the T cell along with the growth-promoting signal. The cellular interactions required for normal immune system responses are thus parasitized by HIV in order to gain access to the T cell compartment of the immune system. Importantly, virus replication is most productive, hence cell-lethal, when T cells receive growth-promoting stimuli in parallel to becoming infected.\(^{10}\)

In this situation, wherein HIV subjugates a normal immunological interaction to promote its own dissemination, one can recognize significant features of the mechanism of disease progression. In the initial stages, T cells, which respond to HIV by attempting to mount a protective immune response, are depleted selectively from the system.\(^ {13,14}\) Selective loss occurs because these cells recognize virus components on the surface of infected macrophages; efficient infection and destruction of this unique subset of the T cell population ensue. With time, the virus released from infected T cells spreads to an ever-increasing proportion of the macrophage population.

The consequences of this mechanism of HIV dissemination and T cell destruction are summarized in the accompanying diagrams of cellular interactions that are postulated to occur during the course of AIDS. The three typical cellular interactions are depicted in Figure 1. Uninfected macrophages present antigen (Ag) to T cells specific for that substance. A specific macrophage cell-surface protein denoted class II major histocompatibility protein (abbreviated as II) is an obligatory component of antigen presentation mechanisms and identifies uniquely the macrophage as the cell type able to execute this function. Normal interactions between the helper T cell (T\(_h\)) and the macrophage (here denoted by its generic name, monocyte) result in macrophage activation; T cell proliferation follows in response to the growth-promoting signal.

In Figure 2, the likelihood of this type of cellular interaction throughout the course of HIV infection is indicated in very approximate terms. In an early stage, the normal interaction is frequently observed because the virus infection has not progressed to the point where significant numbers of macrophages are involved. As the infection spreads and more macrophages become involved, the likelihood of this normal encounter will decrease accordingly, until it is rarely observed at late stages. It should be kept in mind that macrophage presentation of antigen is required for T\(_h\) activation; without T\(_h\) function, few normal immune responses can be supported. The second type of cellular encounter involves infected macrophages and T\(_h\) cells that recognize specifically HIV antigens; these T cells are required to mount protective immune responses to HIV. As
FIGURE 1. Three typical cellular interactions.
**Occurrence During Disease Course**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Stage I</th>
<th>Stage II</th>
<th>Stage III</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal T-cell/monocyte interaction during antigen presentation</td>
<td>FREQUENT</td>
<td>INTERMEDIATE</td>
<td>RARE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virus-specific T-cell recognizing infected monocyte</td>
<td>RARE</td>
<td>INTERMEDIATE</td>
<td>RARE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-cell of any specificity recognizing infected monocyte</td>
<td>RARE</td>
<td>RARE</td>
<td>FREQUENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**FIGURE 2.** Approximate likelihood of cellular interactions postulated as occurring during the course of AIDS.
discussed previously, this type of cellular interaction results in efficient infection and destruction of the very Th cells that are attempting to respond normally to HIV infection. This encounter, although relatively rare in the earliest phases of infection, would become prevalent during the middle stage and decrease again in the final stage. The fact that this type of interaction decreases in the final stage is of paramount importance to understanding the mechanism of disease progression.

Preferential depletion of T cells able to mediate anti-HIV immunity is a direct consequence of this mode of virus dissemination. In the final stages, where there are no remaining anti-HIV Th cells, virus spread can proceed unchecked, which is one aspect of the explanation for the conversion from asymptomatic to fulminant AIDS. The third type of cellular encounter further exemplifies the insidious nature of this viral pathogen. As the proportion of infected macrophages continually rises, the probability increases that any encounter between macrophages and T cells, regardless of the antigen specificity, will result in virus transmission and T cell destruction. This profuse distribution of HIV will become most evident in the latest stages of infection and may be an important mechanism for the severe T cell depletion that accompanies advancing AIDS.

It is important to point out that the mechanistic explanations of disease progression are necessarily oversimplified. Because of this distillation, two important features of immune system interaction with HIV have been obscured. First, some viral antigen arises from inactivated or degraded virus particles, and this material stimulates a normal immune response in the infected individual. This mechanism is most likely responsible for triggering the ebullient antibody response recognized in seropositive persons. Second, the slowness of disease progression in AIDS indicates that the immune responses to HIV are effective to some degree in reducing the rates of virus dissemination and T cell destruction.

Comparisons of the positive aspects of immunity to the mechanism for cell destruction discussed here have revealed some significant features separating these two processes; novel therapeutic strategies for combating HIV infection will be based on these comparisons.

HIV appears to remain cell-associated throughout its cycle of infection dissemination and reinfection. This obligatory cell-associated characteristic is likely to account for the observed lack of infectious virus particles in the blood of seropositive individuals. Moreover, this characteristic may explain why the abundant antibody response in infected individuals is relatively unable to eliminate this viral infection.
The Basis of Immune Deficiency in AIDS

The mechanisms of virus dissemination discussed above can be used to elucidate the immune deficiency that is characteristic of AIDS. The most important initial consequence of virus infection can be described as an immunoregulatory disease. This effect occurs in consequence of the gradual decay of T cells; however, the reason for this effect may not be immediately obvious. Normally, activated, proliferating T cells release a powerful hormone denoted interferon-gamma. One action of interferon-gamma causes the immune capacities of macrophages to increase dramatically. This regulatory loop of the immune system ensures that sufficient immunity is available to combat a wide variety of microbial infections. Interestingly, many of these same infectious agents are also important opportunistic pathogens in AIDS.

As T cell numbers fall throughout the course of the disease, the available sources of interferon-gamma also diminish. Lowered interferon-gamma leads to decreased immune capacity in the macrophage compartment. Consequently, the initial effect of HIV infection is to interrupt an important regulatory loop in the immune system, which gives the basis for the statement that HIV infection leads to an immunoregulatory disease. The loss of immune capacity in the macrophage compartment of the immune system is coincident with rapid destruction of T cells. When a significant number of T cells are eliminated, then the immune system is notably lacking in both the T cell and macrophage compartments. Thus, the cumulative insult of virus infection leads eventually to the immunodeficiency syndrome.

These basic features of HIV dissemination, persistent and acute infection, when viewed in terms of the abrogation of immunoregulatory functions and T cell depletion, provide a comprehensive picture of the disease process in AIDS. These studies form the basis for rational approaches to treatment and prevention.

What Are the Specific Requirements for AIDS Therapeutics?

The first, and most important, consequence of the pathogenetic mechanisms discussed above is that antiviral agents for treating HIV infection must be efficacious against more than one type of infected cell. Azidothymidine is a useful antiviral agent. However, recent disclosures of its relative ineffectiveness against HIV infection of macrophages reveal one possible reason for its failure to rid infected individuals of HIV. New generations of virus inhibitors performing the same functions as azidothymidine must be effective against HIV infection of both T cells and macrophages.

A second important consideration for new drug development concerns the persistent nature of HIV infection. Discussed above were the
situations wherein only a small number of T cells were actively infected at any given time. Accordingly, it is crucial to design therapeutic agents of low toxicity, so that they can be administered over long periods of time and provide some activity against the persistent form of the infection. In addition, these agents must be targeted specifically to infected cells so as to increase their effectiveness.

The third and final aspect of drug development to be mentioned concerns the ability to prevent virus spread from cell to cell. The suspicion is that this process occurs over very short distances, as T cells and macrophages come into intimate contact. Therefore, many agents that modify virus structure may either not get to the point of virus spread or the time of virion exposure to these agents may be too short to allow them to work effectively. In this regard, it seems beneficial to pursue approaches that alter the cells themselves in order to make them less susceptible to the initial virus infection. In the macrophage compartment, this alteration might be accompanied by the same compounds that increase the immune capacity of these cells, thus providing simultaneously two important therapeutic benefits: the compounds will prevent the immunoregulatory disease and they will forestall or eliminate the immunodeficiency syndrome.

**Conclusion**

The insidious nature of the human immunodeficiency virus is revealed by its parasitism of normal immune system activity to promote virus dissemination. In this way, the very immune responses intended to eliminate the infection actually serve to increase virus dispersal, at the same time as host immunity is being reduced. This fact and the recognition that HIV infects more than one cell type and demonstrates more than one pattern of growth attest to the extreme difficulties faced when dealing with this pathogen.

Increased comprehension of the pathogenetic mechanisms in AIDS gives new insight into the direction for future drug development and for the application of available compounds in more effective ways. Importantly, we now recognize distinct aspects of HIV infection and its ability to disrupt normal immune system regulation. With this new view of disease progression, specific approaches are envisaged that will correct the immune regulatory effect and thus enable the system itself to combat this viral pathogen effectively. One must hope that eventually our studies will help to alleviate the terrible suffering that accompanies AIDS.
References


Urban Cartoons

Rob Haacke
And if you hold it right up to your ear, you'll be able to hear the city.
I was standing in the corridor with my back to the teachers’ room. Sheaser came up the stairs, two steps at a time. We were supposed to be out in the yard with the rest of the lads. I was sorry I’d let him talk me into it.

—Well, Sheaser, I said.
—Well, boy.
—Did you see him?
—Yeah. He’s below in the Office. I saw him through the door. Go down yourself and have a gander at him.

He grinned at me and leaned against the railing and looked down the stairs. He was as cool as a breeze. Sheaser didn’t care about any of them.

—What’s he like? I said.
—Looks like a real killer to me, Sheaser said. That’s what they used to call him above in Dublin: the Killer. Go on down.
—Naw, I said. I’ll wait. We have him for History on Friday anyway.
—Go ’way, boy, Sheaser said. You chickened out.

I didn’t really care that he said that because I was thinking about Annette. Sheaser didn’t know I had a crush on her. I thought about the last time I saw Annette coming down the Folly on her bicycle as I was walking up and she smiled and waved and kept on going. I memorized her address and telephone number from the book. I even knew her father’s name. I wanted to talk to her more than anything.

—I suppose you have him sussed out already, Sheaser, one of the lads said to him coming out the gate.

—Who? The Killer?

The lads didn’t know who the Killer was. I felt good because Sheaser told me first.

—That’s what they call him, I said.
—Where’d you hear that, Sheaser?

Sheaser laughed and turned his head away. He had this laugh that was like a dog’s bark.
—Come on, Sheaser, Power said. Don't be a snake.

Power was always like that.

—He was thrown out of Dublin because he marked some poor young fellow for life, Sheaser said. Gave him a belt of the leather across the face.

—Yerrah, that's only a story, Power said. How come he got the Office then?

Sheaser gave this sly grin and put his hand on the top of his head the way he did whenever he wanted you to think he knew something you didn't. Even the brothers thought this was funny and they used to cod him about keeping his hair on. Sheaser had hair that he creased just above one ear and slicked across his forehead in a long greasy fringe that was always falling into his eyes.

—Wait till you see him, he said. You'll die.

—I heard he was sick, Power said.

—The drink, Sheaser said.

He got on his bicycle and ran the pedals backwards with his feet while he balanced himself with one hand on the gate.

—'Sco, boy, he said to me. We cycled home together. It was because we both lived across the bridge in Ferrybank. I always used to see him with a couple of the bigger fellows and once I saw him giving a crosser to a young one out of Annette's school. When he came up to me first I thought it was just to take the mickey out of me. He always had some story, wherever he got it, that he had to tell you. I wanted to tell him about Annette myself: I liked him when it was just the two of us. But we couldn't really talk on the bicycles. We went flying down the quay.

—Does your knob stand up in the morning? Sheaser shouted at this old fellow crossing the road.

It was things like that made me think twice about him. You had to get him in the right mood.

I saw the Killer on Thursday when we stood up to say the Hail Mary before Religion.

—Pale Harry, pull a face, the more they hit you, Sheaser said.

The door opened, and the Killer walked in. He was much older than I expected. He was very stiff when he walked, and his hair was gray and wiry. His neck was just shaved, and the dog collar on him looked brand new. I wondered how Sheaser could know so much about him when he'd only seen him that once. But that was Sheaser all over.

—He got the Culchie to put a bowl on his head before he came in, Sheaser whispered to me. Short back and sides, brother.

I didn't think this was very funny, but I laughed a little anyway and the Killer caught my eye. I sat very still in my seat, and my stomach felt tight and hard. The Killer had red patches on his cheeks, and the skin was loose
beneath his chin. His eyes were kind of sad-looking beneath his glasses. He looked at me for a second and then looked away. I put my nose down on the desk as quick as I could.

—Ferocious, I heard Sheaser say.
—Well, Brother Collins, the Killer said. What do they have for today?
He sounded the way he was trying to be cheerful but he didn’t really feel it. The Culchie gave him the book open at the page and sat on his high stool in the corner. The Killer sat on the edge of one of the desks. His shoes were black and shiny, and his black trousers had a crease that you could cut butter with. His socks were black too.

—Molloy, Sheaser whispered.
The Killer looked up. I knew he was going to pick me.
—You boy, he said. What’s your name?
I stood up in my seat.
—Francis Molloy, Brother.
—Sit down, boy, he said. Sit down. Answer me this: how can we know for certainty what God has revealed?
I thought I knew the answer as well as I know my name, but when he put me on the spot like that I couldn’t spit it out. My mind was a blank. I heard the ticking of the clock and someone shouted below in the yard and I stood there with the sweat running down my arms beneath my shirt.
—Is this one of the questions they’re supposed to have learned, Brother Collins? the Killer said.
The Culchie nodded his head. He wouldn’t even give me a hint. I pressed my nails into my palms till it hurt and curled up my toes in my shoes. I couldn’t think of it. The Killer put the book down on the desk beside him, put his hand through the slit in the black thing they wear over their clothes, and took a handkerchief out of his trousers pocket. He took off his glasses and wiped his face with the handkerchief. He had black circles beneath his eyes. His face looked even older without the glasses.
—Have it off by heart in future, he said. Sit down, boy.
I sat down and started to think about Annette. The Killer gave the book back to the Culchie and sat on the stool in the corner while the Culchie examined the rest of the class. Sometimes he looked out the window, and I thought he wasn’t even listening. But he was a decent old skin for letting me off like that. I said this to Sheaser afterwards.
—He’s as cross as two sticks, Sheaser said. But you’re a bollocks, Molloy. What are you?
I didn’t know why he was getting on to me like that.
—What did you want to draw him on you for? he said.
—What did you want to make me laugh for when he was looking straight at me?
—Go ‘way, boy, he said. You can’t take it.
I walked on ahead of him.
— What's up with you, boy? he said after me. You were charmed. He
has a leather as long as your arm, you know. Sambo he calls it. And he has
the leg of a chair below in the Office.
— No, I said.
— I'm telling you, Sheaser said. The Lamb saw it.
— He didn't hit him with it? I said.
Sheaser grinned and put his hand on top of his head and went in front
of me out the door and down the steps. I ran after him into the yard.
— He didn't hit him with it, Sheaser?
I don't know why I was asking him. The Lamb was a born liar.
— C'mere and I'll tell you, Sheaser said.
We stood in out of the rain in the door of the bicycle shed.
— You never heard about it? Sheaser said.
— I heard something, I said.
I didn't really. I was just getting vexed with him because he wouldn't
tell me straight out.
— Go 'way, boy, he said. The Killer came in to the other crowd for Reli­
gion the way he came in to us today: out of the blue, no warning or any­
thing. He asked the Lamb a question and of course the Lamb didn't know
it. He had the Lamb stand out to the line for the whole class and he made
fun of him to the rest of them and the Lamb got all white the way he does
when anyone says boo to him and he even cut himself with his fingernail
behind his back and got blood all over his cuff.
— How do you know that? I said.
— Didn't I see him after? The Killer had him down to the Office and he
showed him the leg of the chair first thing the way he was going to bate
him black and blue with it. Can you imagine the Lamb? He must have
been shitting himself.
— I heard he was in the Office, I said.
— Did you hear he gave a half an hour in there? Sheaser said. Did you
hear the Killer took him on his knee and asked him would he be a good
boy and have his catechism off by heart in future the same way he asked
you? And then he tried to feel him up beneath his trousers and gave him a
half a crown not to let the cat out of the bag. The same old caper he was up
to in Dublin.
— No, I said.
— Honest to Jaysus, Sheaser said. You were charmed, boy.
I didn't know whether he was having me on or what.
— How come you didn't know the answer anyhow? he asked me.
You're usually such a little swot.
— I don't know, I said. I thought I learned it.
— How can we know with certainty what God has revealed? Sheaser
said, trying to imitate the Killer. We can't. It's a trick question. The real
answer is, I have not seen nor ear heard nor habit entered into the heart of
man . . .
—I think that’s something else.
—What is it then? Sheaser said.
—I can’t remember, I said.
At times I didn’t like him so much. I didn’t feel like telling him about Annette.

The Killer came in for History on Friday and instead of telling us to open our books he sat on the edge of the table and brushed the chalk dust off his knees and started to talk to us about some book called “Old Celtic Romances.” It wasn’t even a history book but it was just as important, the Killer said, because the person who wrote it was trying to remember the stories that Irish people used to tell each other thousands of years ago and write them down so that other Irish people could tell them again today and they wouldn’t be forgotten. I thought about the people who had lived in Ireland thousands of years ago telling each other stories and I couldn’t imagine what they looked like or anything about them but the same stories were in the Killer’s book and I couldn’t get over that and I wondered if he would tell us what they were about. He started to tell us about the childhood of Finn Mac Cool, who was told by a poet to cook the Salmon of Knowledge so that the poet could eat it and know all things. Finn burned his thumb on the fish and he put it in his mouth and then he knew everything that can be known instead of the poet. But it was too much of a good thing for the lads and they began to get restless and finally someone made a noise at the back of the class and the Killer got vexed-looking and went behind the table and told us to open our books to William of Orange.

—Killer on the jacks reading old Celtic romances, Sheaser whispered behind me.
I bit my lip and stared down at the words on the page in front of me.
—Molloy, the Killer said.
—Yes, Brother.
—Molloy, he said. You were talking, Molloy.
—No, Brother.
You couldn’t tell from his voice whether he was vexed with you or not but I knew it from the way he didn’t move or say anything. I stood up in my seat. The lads were very quiet. I remembered what Sheaser said about the way he was in Dublin.
—Take your book and stand to the line, Molloy, he said.
I was afraid he was going to make fun of me the way Sheaser said he made fun of the Lamb. But he went and sat on the stool in the corner and looked out of the window, and I thought he was after forgetting all about me. It was very quiet in the room with all the lads bending over their books supposed to be learning William of Orange. I stood between the desks and the wall and I looked at my book too but I didn’t read it. The bold King Billy my father called him but it didn’t sound like the same
person in the book. My father told me about King James who was a Catholic and the siege of Derry and the Protestants shouting "no surrender" the way they still do today and the bold King Billy who wasn't even an Englishman and the way the Irish had to leave their own country after Aughrim and the Battle of the Boyne and they were scattered to the four winds, the Wild Geese they were called, and they ended up speaking every language in Europe save their own that they forgot and poor Sarsfield dying in Flanders and wishing it could have been for Ireland. The Protestants took all the land for themselves after that and they even wanted to castrate the priests (my father wouldn't tell me what that meant because my mother heard him but I found out from Sheaser). If I kept at him I could usually get my father to sing "Lillibulero" for me:

There was an old prophecy found in a bog
That our land would be ruled by an ass and a dog.
So now the old prophecy's coming to pass,
For James is the dog and Tyrconnel's the ass.

Of course it was only to show what an ignorant crowd the Protestants were that they'd say things like that about King James and his man. I couldn't imagine what it was like above in the North but when I said to my father that I'd like to go up there he said they were all troublemakers, even the Catholics, and you didn't have to go up there to know what they were like.

The Killer gave the whole class sitting on the stool and when the time was up he told us we'd have to know William of Orange for Monday. I was a little afraid he might have me down to the Office but he walked out of the room and didn't even look at me.

—Molloy, Sheaser said in the corridor. Take off your pants, Molloy.
—Go 'way and pull yourself, Sheaser, I said.
It was one of Sheaser's expressions, and it sounded different when I said it.
—Will you listen to him? Sheaser said. It's a good job your man didn't ask me to stand out instead of you. I was on a ferocious horn the whole class. I'm telling you: I could hardly walk.

We went down the steps with the rest of the lads and into the yard. I was pissed off with Sheaser and I walked ahead of him through the gate and across the field in front of the House. The field was wet and the mud stuck to my shoes. I heard someone kicking a tennis ball in the yard.

—Here, Sheaser, one of the lads said.
—Naw, Sheaser said.

I sat on the bank where the concrete part is and looked across the river at the Clover Meats factory. Sheaser came and sat beside me. He put his fringe out of his eyes with a toss of his head. I was glad he came over after
me and I wasn’t pissed off with him anymore.

—Did you hear Power has a biddy for himself? he said.

I had a heavy feeling the way someone was pressing down on my shoulders.

—Is it Annette? I said.

—Jaysus, boy, how did you know that? Sheaser said. She’d be a lovely bird though if she wasn’t such a little ride.

My arms and legs felt so heavy that I thought I’d never be able to get up and I sat there and thought about Annette in her blue school uniform with the yellow blouse and the stupid black tie that they all had to wear. Of course, it was all my own fault for not going up and talking to her.

—Power wanted to make out it was her mother asked him to take her to the pictures with him, Sheaser said. He was telling a crowd of us the other day in the bicycle shed. He started to rummage around as soon as the lights went out. He says she let him put his hand under her bra. Fingering the nipple he calls it: you’d think he was the fellow who invented it. One of the lads asked him did he like it. I don’t like it half as much as some of the other things you can do, he says. You know Power. Make you puke to hear him.

Sheaser picked a piece of grass and stuck it in his mouth.

—Maybe he made it all up, I said.

—Naw, boy, Sheaser said. Didn’t I see them myself last Friday after tea at the Savoy? They were shifting the whole time. One time she pushed him away from her. Shag off Robbie she says. When I heard it coming out of her! But after a few minutes he had his arm around her and they were hard at it again.

Sheaser took the piece of grass out of his mouth and spat over the bank. He stood up. I felt that something was after happening to me and I wanted to tell him about it. I stood up too. Sheaser jumped down off the bank.

—Remember the Killer today? he said. The hang-dog look of him! Boggling the biddies out the window the whole time. Old Celtic romances, my arse!

He ran away across the field with his hands in his pockets.

I told my father that the new man was telling us about Finn Mac Cool and the Salmon of Knowledge in History class. Those old fairy tales are all right for children, he said, but I hope he’s going to teach you a bit of history into the bargain.

The Killer came in Monday and stood at the top of the room with a book in his hand that wasn’t our History book and he just stood there looking at it and didn’t say anything for ages.

—On a tear again last night, Sheaser said. Oh, me poor head.

I pretended I didn’t hear him. I was thinking about Annette. I thought about the way you could sort of see her bra through her school blouse and her and Power at the pictures and what Sheaser heard her say to him. I
still felt bad. There was nothing I could do about it.
—Molloy, the Killer said. Molloy.
I looked up at him. He didn’t look vexed. His skin was all wrinkled and
his eyes especially were tired-looking.
—I want your book, you eejit, Sheaser whispered.
—Will you hand me your book, Molloy? the Killer said.
I handed him the book. I mustn’t have heard him the first time he asked
me.
—Out for blood today, Sheaser said.
The Killer gave a sigh and took my book and put his own book on the
table in front of him. Then he started talking about the “decisive battle of
modern Ireland” and the “Protestant ascendancy.” I saw the word
ascendancy lots of times in the history book but I didn’t know what it
meant. It was the sort of word that if my father heard it he would say, are
you any the wiser now for using a word like that? The Killer himself didn’t
seem to be very interested either. I thought he’d rather be talking about
“Old Celtic Romances” and I wondered if that was the book he had on the
table. There were the same stories in that book that people used to tell
thousands of years ago. But if you read them would you really know
about the people who were there long ago?
—Killer at the Battle of the Boyne, Sheaser said.
I didn’t let on that I heard him at all. I wondered if he knew that I felt bad
about Annette. He reached over my shoulder and dropped a piece of
paper onto my book. I couldn’t help looking at it. It was a drawing he was
after doing and it was the Killer to a T! He had the shape of the head down
pat and the glasses and all and even the sad eyes of him. I couldn’t get over
it. And he was after giving the Killer a mop of hair that covered his ears
and came down over the dog collar on him and he scribbled “The Killer”
at the bottom the way it was an autograph.
—Bring me that, Molloy, the Killer said.
—Oh Jaysus, I said out loud.
The whole class must have heard me. I stood up in my seat. The only
thing that I was afraid of was that he’d find out the name we had for him. I
knew he’d kill me but I still picked up a pencil and scribbled on the name
Sheaser wrote at the bottom of the drawing. I suppose the worst was
already after happening to me over Annette.
—Molloy, the Killer said. Go fetch the leather.
I got up and left the drawing on my desk and went to the cabinet where
he kept the leather. I could hardly feel the floor beneath my feet and I was
afraid I’d bump into the table or something. I picked up the leather and it
felt cold and light. I gave it to the Killer and put out my hand. He touched
my knuckles with his fingers to lift my hand up a bit and then he put the
leather over his shoulder. I heard one of the lads give a sigh. He hit me on
that hand and I lifted it up again and he gave me a second. He reached for
the other hand and gave me two on that as well. The first one on each hand was the worst. I went back to my place and put my hands on the metal legs of the desk and looked at the back of the fellow in front of me. The metal was very cold and it made my hands hurt but I kept holding on to it. The drawing was gone. Sheaser must have taken it back. It was sort of strange that the Killer didn’t ask for it again. But it was all the one to me. I was fed up. There wasn’t a peep out of Sheaser behind me.

The Killer put my book on the desk in front of me and told us to go on to Aughrim and the Treaty of Limerick. He put the leather back in the cabinet and went over to the stool in the corner and sat there looking out the window. I didn’t open my book to the page and I was half-hoping he’d tell me to but he never even noticed. He went away ten minutes early. The lads got up and went out in a gang. I sat there waiting for Sheaser to go out too so I wouldn’t have to talk to him.

—He never took his old book with him, Sheaser said.
—God, Sheaser, I said.
—How will he know, the bollocks? Sheaser said. He thinks he has it with him.

I stood up slowly and put my hands on the desk. They were still sore and they shook a little.

—Don’t you want to get your own back? Sheaser said. Put the fecking thing in your sack quick and let’s get out of here before he comes back. C’mon. ‘Sco!

I put the book in my sack and did the straps and went down the corridor after Sheaser, holding onto the sack for dear life. My heart was pounding and I was as nervous as a cat. We went past the Office and I looked up at the frosted glass in the door and I saw someone moving around inside. We went through the doors and down the steps. Sheaser took a fit of laughing. He ran away in front of me, bending over and holding onto his sides, barking like a dog the way he does. I caught up with him in the bicycle shed. He threw himself on the ground with the laughing.

—Oh Jaysus, he said. Wait till I tell the lads.

I felt hot and cold all of a sudden and I got one knee down on either side of him while he was on the ground and I caught him by the blazer and I pulled him over till I had him up against the wheel of his bicycle.

—We’re not going to tell anyone, I said.

I was shaking all over and my voice didn’t even sound like it was mine. Sheaser looked at me for a minute with his eyes wide open and then he pushed me off him. He was bigger than I was anyway.

—Go ‘way, boy, he said. What’s up with you?
—You’re some snake, Sheaser, I said. You’re some snake anyway.

I put the bag on the carrier of my bike and put the metal thing with the
spring on it through the handle and I was going to go off on him and leave him there.

—Listen, he said. I'll meet you by the bandstand over in a while or so and I'll tell you what we'll do with it. I have to go home to my place first. All right?

He put his foot on the pedal and he was gone out the door before I could say anything.

I cycled into the park and over to the wall on the opposite side to the school. I leaned my bike against the wall and sat on the bar with my hand on my sack. I wondered if I'd see Annette and as soon as she came into my mind I thought I saw her coming across from the Shop with someone and I got a pain in my stomach and I stood up beside the bike. But it was two young ones from the same school. I sat up on the bar again. At least I didn't tell Sheaser I was thinking about her. I was glad of that, if nothing else.

I saw Sheaser cycle up to the bandstand and I whistled and waved at him to come over. It was after getting dark and there was no one left in the park.

—Well, boy, he said.

I didn't say anything. He jumped off his bike and let it fall on the ground. He had a duffle bag over his shoulder. He put his hand on the top of his head and grinned at me.

—Look at, he said.

He got down on the ground beside the wall and opened the top of the bag. I saw he had a hacksaw and a trowel in it.

—Molloy, he said. Go fetch me my book till I bury it.

He dug a hole with the trowel right beside the wall, and then he took the hacksaw out of the bag and put it on the ground next to the hole. I took the book out of my sack and held it in my hand. It was the book the Killer was talking about, "Old Celtic Romances." There was a drawing on the cover of a bearded man with no clothes on kneeling on a rock and looking at his reflection in a stream. I opened it and started to turn the pages.

—Give us it, Sheaser said.

—No, I said.

—What are you going to do with it? he said. Give it back to him? Here, Brother. I took the loan of your book, Brother.

He jumped up and caught hold of the book in my hand. I tried to keep it but he pushed me back against the wall and got it away from me. He cut it down the back with the hacksaw while I was looking at him and tore out some of the pages and he threw it all into the hole and put the clay back in with his hands and stamped on it and threw leaves on it the way no one would know there was something buried there. I stood there till he was finished. I didn't try to stop him.

—in nomine patrii et filii et spiritu sancti, he said.
He grinned at me.
— I’ll see you, I said.

I got on my bicycle and I cycled around and around the bandstand, waiting for Sheaser to go. When he was gone I went over to where he’d buried the Killer’s book but it was dark and I wasn’t sure I had the right place. It didn’t matter anyway: Sheaser was after ruining it.

It was late but I didn’t feel like going home so I went back to the bandstand and sat on the steps and looked over at the school. There were no lights in the windows and the House was dark too. A young one in a raincoat came along the path and as she passed me a car went by on the road and I saw her face in the light and it was Annette. I only saw her for a minute but she had her uniform on under the coat the way she didn’t want anyone to know what school she was from. She didn’t see me at all. She looked kind of frightened to be out on her own like that. I waited till she was gone before I stood up to go home.
DARVIN came home from the doctor's office with the news that he was being sent back to the hospital. "They're sending me up to the big hospital this time, up to the city. I'm going to get to meet my maker in the big city." Darvin's pride at being sent to a city hospital made him sound like he was almost happy.

"Well, it ain't exactly New York," Waldeane said bitterly; he could have at least shown some concern over her future. "This leaves me up shit creek without a paddle." Waldeane, who had waited at home for him on the bed, studied him suspiciously. Life had taught her to be wary. A gal with a gimmick had to keep an ear to the ground and a sharp eye out for the snags. Not that she necessarily distrusted life. Life had given her the gimmick that set her apart from everybody else, but it had also taken away her little girl and her ADC. And if Darvin went, so would his welfare checks.

"You can go with me. Get on welfare in the city." Darvin sat down in the space vacated by Waldeane's leg. They had two chairs and a kitchen table in their room, but they never sat on them when they could sit side by side on the bed, her huge thigh snugged up to his emaciated one.

"It wouldn't work. The welfare people got records. They'd trace me back here to Bickville." She took cigarettes from her pocket, lit one for him, one for herself. "I should have gone with you. They don't push a gal from the Big Apple around. Not doctors. Not nobody. Down here y'all respect a Yankee like myself."

Darvin coughed, cleared his throat. "How much better could my big honey babe do for me than a big city hospital?" He spoke in the cute, mock baby voice he used with her. "A hospital where they don't treat nothing else but TB?"

"Which hospital? What city?" Alarm narrowed the wide flat space
between her eyes; it was the breadth of this space, the length of nose, and the deep set bovine brown eyes that had given rise to the awful name that had plagued her family: the cowface people.

“What difference does it make? When a man dies in the city what’s the difference what city or what hospital he dies in? I had the nurse write it all down,” he said grandly. He removed a card from the pocket of his second-hand sport coat and tossed it on the pink chenille bedspread as if the details of his admission were beneath his interest.

It was this particular talent, this ability to turn a handicap or misfortune into pure style that Waldeane found irresistible. She had recognized his talent the first time she saw him. He had gotten off the bus, a skinny little man with a paper sack in one hand and a radio in the other, and squinted at the hand-lettered Bickville Bus Depot sign that hung under the dead neon sign: Greene’s Pool Hall. He had grinned at her without seeming to notice her cow’s face. “Tell me, pretty lady, where the hell I am at? My ticket was for Paris, Rome, and this place don’t look foreign to me.”

Waldeane could read well enough for both of them. “Corinth Sanatorium. I knew I should have gone with you. My aunt died there and she wasn’t but thirty-three. I’ll be out on the streets.”

Darvin, however, was lost in his own illusions. “It’s bad this time. Real bad. They don’t give me no hope at all,” he said with ebullience. “You got to promise that you’ll come see me. I’ll have me the prettiest girlfriend on the ward. I hear city hospitals has rooms where girlfriends can visit. We can still make our baby so you can have a memory of me when I’m gone.”

Waldeane knew about the foolishness of men. When she had first run away from Salt River and her family and come to Bickville with its Main Street and stores and restaurants, she had thought men were to be treated as if they had good sense. Boys taunted her in the streets and she felt that they had the power to look right through her wide skull and know that her thoughts, too, were no smarter than a cow’s. She talked a little thickly because of her wide palate and she was ashamed of the way she sounded until she met a man in Greene’s Pool Hall who told her that she talked just like a girl he had known in New York City when he was up there in the service.

She told the farm boys and the motorcycle hoods in Greene’s and the sales clerks and the waitresses that she was from New York, and when she went to the welfare office she signed a paper saying that she no longer collected welfare from New York. The boys on the streets added “Big Apple” to their whistles and catcalls when she passed, but it was all right now, a little flattering even, because she was special and different on the outside and private and smart inside her wide head. She was now a gal with a gimmick.

She said to Darvin with undisguised ridicule, “Of course they don’t
have rooms in Corinth Sanatorium for boyfriends and girlfriends to do it in private. I know that place. My aunt hemorrhaged to death and she coughed blood up all over the sheets and the nurses’ shoes and they didn’t even have a curtain to pull. Now if it was a New York hospital they’d have such a room. They’re not chintzy in New York like they are here. Besides, it don’t make any difference. I wouldn’t have money for the bus.”

“Then we won’t have our baby.” Darvin’s spirits fell. Tears began to roll down the sides of his nose. When he cried he lost his pride and looked like a faucet someone had forgotten to turn off; the rest of the time he looked like one of those pale yellow Easter chicks.

“Don’t cry. We still got a couple of days,” Waldeane comforted. “We can make a baby and I can get back on ADC. And there’s always leaves to rake and grass to mow. A gal from New York always has a gimmick up her sleeve.”

The next day they walked to the west end of town where the doctors and lawyers and store owners lived. But because it was only the first week in October there weren’t enough leaves on the ground yet to pay somebody to rake and the grass on the lawns wasn’t growing fast enough to mow. Windows were good this time of year, but they could only do the first floor because Darvin got dizzy on a ladder and Waldeane was too fat and stiff to go up. Darvin held onto Waldeane’s arm. They had to walk slowly because she wore houseslippers to accommodate her arthritis and weight and he had to be careful about getting enough air.

Waldeane stopped to let Darvin breathe. She sized up the windows of the big old house across the street where last year the woman had given Darvin the sport coat. Windows were best for freebies because they had to look out and see you with the bottle of Windex and paper towels, and they couldn’t miss how much different you looked from them when you went traipsing through their houses to get to the insides. They never really saw you in the yard. Besides, windows coincided with the time of year people cleaned out their closets. She had her tricks. She would tell housewives she wore the slippers because she didn’t have better and then sell the shoes they gave her. Her best trick was to let her period run down the legs of her slacks. Women couldn’t stand that. Sometimes they would give her money just to get her to move on. Or sometimes they would get interested and be all polite and concerned and call her over and say in a real quiet voice that she had had an accident. That type was always good for soap and washrags and boxes of Kotex. They were the ones that would ask her about her face in roundabout, nosey ways, and she would tell them that you sure could tell who hadn’t been to New York City because a lot of people up in New York looked like her.

The house across the street stared back at them, the two windows a pair of eyes with the shades half pulled down like a sleepy, indifferent person.
“What’s it going to be this time, love?” Darvin asked. “Windows or leaves?” He laid his head on her shoulder. Their walk from the other end of town had exhausted him.

“Full time housework.”

She repeated the phrase to the woman behind the hooked screen door. Beyond the woman was a polished floor, a blue patterned carpet that ran the length of the hall, gold mirrors, silver.

“No thank you. I have a girl who comes twice a week, but you’re very kind to offer. You’re the ones, aren’t you, last year, the windows?” The woman’s hair was blue, too, but different from the rug, pale like the sun-fish she remembered her daddy used to catch in the river. Darvin stood behind her and she saw him, without looking, through the woman’s eyes.

“Yessum. We just come back from New York. Me and him been butler and housekeeper to a lawyer couple in Manhattan, but Darvin, he’s from here and got homesick,” Waldeane lied. “Now he’s taken sick and I got to find me a job.” She was getting too close to the truth and she sensed for the first time the awfulness of her fate.

“Just a moment,” the woman with the blue hair said. She disappeared into a room and returned with a five dollar bill which she slipped through the edge of the screen door without unhooking it. “Good luck and I’m sorry you’ve had such a hard time.” She closed the front door and bolted it.

“Goddammit. I should’ve pulled the blood. We did better last year. Plus, I didn’t count the sport coat.”

“What do we care about money?” Darvin put his thin arm around her thick waist. “We still got love.”

“Big mouth, a lot of help you are. What am I gonna do? I can’t make it on yards and windows. Besides, there’s my arthritis.”

Darvin gave her a romantic look, yellow and fuzzy and a little goofy. “We can make us another baby. I’m your man for the job.”

“In your state of health? Get serious.”

Darvin was hurt. “Then that leaves you no choice, no choice at all. You’ll have to go back to your folks in New York.”

It was the first time, even in retaliation, that he had expressed a concern for her future: it carried the weight of doom. She had never quite gotten around to telling Darvin about her gimmick. He had his talent. She had balanced her gimmick against it: he carried his illiteracy with a flair and she was a Yankee, a gal from the Big Apple.

Darvin said, “When I’m gone you can’t go back to the street. You can’t go back to your immoral life.”

“My immoral life!” Waldeane drew back her fist in mockery of a blow. “That’s not what the judge said. It wasn’t me that got charged with immoral conduct.”
It was because you were out with other fellows.” He squared thin tubercular shoulders. “A woman can’t go off and ignore a man. A real man has certain natural tendencies. That judge was a pansy.”

“But she was only nine years old. And the other men was business. Nine years old and they took her away from her mother. There’s nothing that can replace a mother’s love.” She tried to cry, but the tears stayed in her throat. At first she had cried whenever little Waldeane was mentioned and sometimes she woke in the night and felt the bed beside her for the absent child. But even the most despairing grief is replaced by practical considerations, so that now Waldeane’s sorrow at the loss of her little girl was tinged with resentment that the ADC had gone with her.

She took hold of Darvin’s elbow and guided him in the direction of downtown. “I’m not beaten yet. Yankees don’t give up so easy.”

She parked Darvin on the loafers’ bench in the square and walked up the grimy marble stairs of the Courthouse. On the first floor were the courtrooms with their tall windows and dark ugly furniture. Judges and courtrooms didn’t scare her. Here they threatened you, but they never got around to actually putting you away. In New York it would be different; up there they wouldn’t even know your name; they’d put you away in an institution you’d never get out of. Her feet burned; in New York you couldn’t wear houseslippers on the street, and it got too cold in winter. On the second floor was the Judge’s office: Hon. T. Harold Height, District Court, Bick County, was in gold on the door.

The secretary looked up from her desk with a sniff as if she smelled something bad. “Can I help you?” she said in a cross voice, and before Waldeane could answer, “The Judge is in conference and cannot be disturbed.”

The door to the Judge’s office was open. He was on the telephone. He looked like a boiled onion in a three-piece suit.

Waldeane said to the snooty girl, “I’ll wait.” She pointed to the empty overstuffed chair opposite the secretary’s desk. “They ain’t just here for decoration,” she said with wit.

The girl said nothing and went back to her typing. Waldeane listened to the phone conversation beyond the open door. The Judge said that his wife had a terrific hangover from the country club dance and that’s why he and Waldeane had missed church Sunday morning and the meeting of the church finance committee. It flattered Waldeane that the Judge’s wife should have the same name as she and her little girl. The Judge’s wife was probably pretty and well dressed. Waldeane imagined the other Waldeane holding a drink and laughing with a crowd of men around her who all looked like the Judge. But the image of the other Waldeane began to make her feel a little cheated, as if something of her very own had been peremptorily taken from her: people like the Judge’s wife could afford to have their own name. The phone conversation went on. The Judge had
shot in the low eighties when he went out with Bill and Rog last week; a continuance would be fine, he had a full docket anyway. Don’t forget lunch Friday at the country club. He hung up and dialed again. The second conversation was much as the first. Waldeane studied the hunting scenes around the wall: men in red coats on horses and hounds bigger than her daddy’s coon dogs. She didn’t have much time, and time is the poor’s only weapon. There wasn’t a judge or welfare worker she couldn’t wear down, given the time.

It was warm for October and it was hot in the office. Waldeane felt her armpits pumping, her power escalating. The girl got up from the typewriter and turned on the air conditioner.

"Hot, ain’t it? Sure gets the sweat going," Waldeane said, falsely affable. The girl wasn’t of the Judge’s class or the woman with the blue hair; she had a common uppity way; she didn’t have the manners to be pleasant. The girl went quickly into the Judge’s office and closed the door.

When she came back she said, "The Judge will see you now."

The Judge remained seated when Waldeane entered the office. He was reading something. When he looked up he said only, "Yes?"

"My feet hurt. I want to sit down."

"Then sit. What can I do for you today?"

She chose the furthest chair. "Last winter you took my little girl away and put her in a foster home."

The Judge interrupted her by holding up his hands as if she had thrown him something and he was trying to catch it. "You people must learn that once I make a decision it stands. If you people would just take the responsibility to begin with instead of coming up here after you’ve destroyed your children’s lives."

"Yessir." Waldeane spoke into the front of her dress. It didn’t win you anything to argue with authority.

"If you girls would have a thought before going out and getting yourselves pregnant. If you’d think about the quality of life you’d be giving a child." His pale onionskin lips pursed.

"Exactly, sir. But you remember my case, don’t you. It was my boyfriend that caused the trouble."

"They always do, don’t they?" he said with condescending humor.

"Exactly, and that’s what I’m here about. I’ve gotten rid of my boyfriend. Told him to pack up and hit the road and never come back. Everything will be fine for my little girl. She will have the quality of life now."

"And you’ll have your ADC back," he said with a wink. "Now, honey, let me give you a piece of fatherly advice." He was perhaps about her age or younger, she guessed, but lawyers were always better preserved than her kind. "You’ve got no problems now. Let sleeping dogs lie. Go home and have your fun, but be careful this time." He called to his secretary in the outer office, "Miss Simmons, would you show this young lady out."
"I'm from New York," she tried to say, but it was too low because the judge said, "What's that?" He didn't wait for her to answer. He walked to the outer office, "Miss Simmons!"

Out on the street Darvin got up from the loafers' bench and crossed to meet her. "Success?"

"Of course. I'm from New York, ain't I? It's just going to take time. You know how courts are."

Darvin was indignant, "You know what that means. They'll just put you off." Tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He snuffled, lining up his nose for the runoff. "It's the end. I can't go to my reward in Corinth and leave you alone without a place to go or a little memory of me. I'll have to put you on that bus to New York and never see hide nor hair of you ever again."

"No, never. I will never go back to New York."

They made love in the twilight of Bickville. From the Bickville First Baptist at the other end of town the electric chimes washed over them, the bed, the table and chairs with their torn plastic seats, the old stove and refrigerator, the geranium on the window sill. The chimes made all the hymns sound alike and as if they were being played underwater.

"They sure know how to do it in New York," Darvin said gallantly. "Nobody in that hospital will have better memories than me." He reached his neck to kiss her cheek, but was overcome by a coughing spasm. He coughed until he spat up blood. Finally, he went to sleep. He breathed in rattles like wind against a loose window on a cold night. His death would rob her not only of him but of her life as well. For one thing, she would have to give up sex as a luxury. Before Darvin sex had been an occasional roll in the hay with a drunk or a farm boy someone had set up for a few dollars. Darvin's was the first sex that had not contained the element of mockery. Sometimes he even made her forget that she was cowfaced and a tub.

Worse, she would have to go back to Salt River. She still had an aunt and some cousins on the river. But she hated the smell of dead fish when the river went down, the dull, dirty, little house her aunt lived in, and most of all, again being known as one of the cowface people. She had escaped that fate once; she would never go back.

In the morning she got up early, dressed Darvin, and made them lard and biscuit sandwiches for their pockets.

"What are these smelly things for, love?"

"To eat. Poor people don't eat Big Macs in the welfare office. Be sure to take your hospital papers and cough a lot."

The welfare office was in the swanky new shopping center next door to the Winn-Dixie.

"So the rich bitches going to the grocery can watch us with our food stamps. In New York they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't humiliate us
Darvin, who looked all in, made one of his cute smart-aleck faces. "I thought everybody in New York was rich."

"Did I say that? You misunderstand. Everybody in New York looks the same. Everybody looks a little bit rich. When we get in there don't forget to eat your sandwich."

They had to wait and Darvin looked like he might be about to go under. When Waldeane was called she pulled him up by the elbow. "You can't go on me yet, Buster," she said with brusque affection.

Miss Dotson, the welfare lady, looked up from her desk. "Waldeane, you're back from New York," she said without irony.

"No ma'am. I never went."

"But I thought at your daughter's custody hearing . . . ."

"I did my reforming right here in Bickville. Me and him has got saved and we are living in the light of Christ." She jostled Darvin, who grinned his nicest fuzzy chicken smile and removed the lard smeared biscuit from his pocket.

"Very good. Now what can we do for you?"

Waldeane felt sympathetic towards Miss Dotson; she was too gullible for her own good. Still, it was an ill wind that blew nobody good. "I'm here to get back on your rolls, please ma'am."

"You, Darvin, are currently receiving benefits. However, Waldeane, as you know we never did receive notification from New York that you have been taken off their rolls. Perhaps you'd like me to write another inquiry?"

"I want ADC. I'm pregnant again."

Miss Dotson put the pen in her hand down on the desk in a gesture of exasperation. "Now, Waldeane, you know the rules. A doctor's certification is required."

"I don't have the money for no doctor." She patted her huge stomach. "A blind man could see I'm pregnant. I figure it's due in about six weeks."

Darvin wiped crumbs of biscuit from his lips with the back of his hand, and then on his sport coat. "I would go out and get a job to support my woman here and the young'un on the way, but I got to go back to the hospital. It's curtains for the boy this time," Darvin said with toothy pride, handing her his hospital papers.

Concern replaced the exasperation on Miss Dotson's face. "Yes, I see how it is. Now what can we do?" she asked as if she really wanted suggestions. "Of course. Waldeane, at a time like this you'll want to be with your own people. Our office has an emergency travel fund. I'll send someone down to the bus station to buy you a ticket to New York."

Darvin's bus to Corinth was not leaving until the afternoon, so he had
time to walk Waldeane down to Greene's Pool Hall. Along with a paper sack containing her clothes she carried the geranium that she had kept on the window sill because it was the only thing she owned in the apartment and she was afraid no one would water it when she was gone.

"You'll write to me when you get to New York. You have the hospital's address?"

"Who's big enough to stop me writing to my honey love?" She set her flower and sack down and lifted him under his armpits like you would hug a child. If she got to New York and wrote him a letter he'd never let on to anybody on the ward that he couldn't read. He would brag and show his letter from New York and never understand a word in it; that was the kind of style he had.

"Well, take a good look, sweetheart. This is the last time you'll see me either alive in the flesh or dead in my coffin."

"You won't get rid of me that easy, Buster. I'll just say hello to the family and turn right around and come back."

"Once a girl from the Big Apple gets back on her own turf she'll forget ol' Darvin ever existed."

"No sir, Bub, you've spoiled city life for me. You find out about that special room at the hospital for boyfriends and girlfriends."

As the bus pulled away from Greene's Pool Hall and Darvin standing beneath the dead neon sign, Waldeane was beginning to doubt her own gimmick. She wasn't sure what towns lay between Bickville and New York or if there would be shelter in any of them. She guessed that if the bus stopped within the next 50 miles she could hitch a ride back to Salt River. But she could never go back to being a cowface person after having been a girl from the Big Apple and known real love like she had.
So She Danced . . .
Dreams in Motion

Richard Flanagan

My mother had a toe amputated not long ago. She is 86, and a middle toe was so bent and sore from arthritis that she finally agreed with the doctor who told her that removing it was the only cure. So she had it done. I called her up the next day and asked how she was. “Oh,” she said, “I’m like the bride: sore but satisfied.”

She’s still sore but no longer as satisfied. You can get one toe removed and, sure enough, that takes care of that one. But she has nine more, all of them 86 years old and arthritic. She won’t do it again, she says. The pain is constant, the more so if she tries to do what she likes most to do, go out with a friend and shop or have a drink and some dinner somewhere. No pleasure without increase of pain.

Still, when my brother visited her more recently, she forced him to take her down to the activity room so she could have a dance or two. Won’t dance with the other old women down there and there aren’t any men to speak of. So she danced with my brother for a while and then they came back to her apartment and had a drink and she put her feet up again. She laughs to tell about it, my brother and her and all the old women.

“We were a cut above that crowd,” she had said to my brother, quoting some television commercial.

“More like a breed apart,” my brother replied, doing the same.

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When I would wake up she would be gone.
An urgency I’ve never known snatched her from the house some minutes before the pharmaceutical company’s 7:45 whistle wailed out to the west hills and then to the east hills to tell the workers what they already knew: they were running
late, punching-in was going to be the usual glowering elbowing struggle. The company had two time clocks for several hundred workers. If you were late twice you were fired. You had to be there early enough, then, to get in line to punch in before eight. At the end of the day, you couldn’t leave your bench or office before five, so you spent another 15 minutes or so waiting to punch out.

Only a new hire questioned this unpaid half hour a day. Nobody else said anything.

I didn’t know about time clocks and punching in. I am inventing myself at ten years of age here, and I’m not giving myself that knowledge. Nor am I giving my mother the need to tell me about it. If she had such a need, I didn’t know. She probably told my father once or twice, but it would have been one of those things my mother and father did not talk about in front of the children. That was a huge category, including almost anything important in the life of the family. You didn’t tell the children and you never argued in front of them. You were not obliged to smile or make light. But whatever was wrong either stayed wrong or got right without including me.

My mother would try but fail to wake me and with the time clock looming leave for work without knowing whether I would get up and make it to school. Mostly I did, rejecting the beige and gelid oatmeal she had left in a pan on the stove and the clean clothes she might have put out for me in favor of the warm and supple clothes I had worn for days. Not the small matter it may seem. Breaking down one pair of corduroy pants, washed, wrung, hung out to dry and as a result stiff and scratchy as medium grade sandpaper—one a week was enough.

Snyder’s wife screams into the blacksmith shop. The automatic wringer on their washing machine—her hand followed a shirt directly into the counter-turning rollers and before she could in her agony break the machine the rollers consumed her to the elbow.

My mother walked down Fair Street, that’s west on Fair Street, then turned south on Guernsey, not named for the cow although that would not be unreasonable in this part of central New York State. She walked three longish blocks, across West Main Street and Hayes Street and onto North Avenue where she turned east and entered across the street the drug-manufacturing company founded by the man whose name was the
It used to be Piano Street because pianos, rather good ones, shipped everywhere, were once made there. Poetry would demand that the street thereafter be called Drug Street, but that’s not the way it worked out.

Snyder, bent over, his leather apron hoist to his waist, a horse’s lower leg protruding like a nightmare phallus between his thighs and nearly up to his chin, applies the red iron to the white gristle of the hoof. A hiss from hell; smoke rises to the ceiling; the horse does not stir.

Age ten and what did I see? I saw it all. I saw Snyder and I saw John Dolan in the dark summer of the blacksmith shop. Who can claim as much?

My mother tapped her days away on a typewriter in the advertising department of the drug company. Everything in those days was in-house. Whatever promotions urged the populace of that time to buy aspirin tablets and vaginal suppositories emerged from an office just down the corridor from where whiteclad workers fresh from their struggles at the time clock, surly and robotic, created the aspirin and the little lozenges with all the concern for purity their boredom and resentment left to them.

The wind shifts from easterly to westerly. I am sick at home and listening to the radio when I should be in school turning the pages of the Washburn arithmetic book, an odious device descended from the 19th century for the humiliation of children. I listen to Don MacNeill’s Breakfast Club on the Philco in the living room. I lie upon the pseudo-Oriental rug and wonder about the mystery of its figures. Feverish, perhaps, I rehearse with my finger the endless routes of the tan or pink or gold traceries upon the deep blue background. Within a half hour of the wind’s change, the effluvia from the drug company’s chimneys slip through the cracks of homes in the wind’s path with the stealth of practiced killers. Don MacNeill sings, “Good morning, Breakfast Clubbers, Good Morning to Yuh,” and I inhale the waste from the manufacture of aspirin, diarrhea preventive, and vaginal suppositories as well as from experiments to produce materials whose poisonous qualities are not yet a matter of record. ”Good Morning, Breakfast Clubbers and Howdy Do Yuh!” I am a toxic waste dump.

If I travel six miles north of town I pass the plant where cabbage is made into sauerkraut. Six miles farther and I pass a rendering works where the bodies of dead animals are dumped by the truckloads into vats and made into, one heard, glue.
The smell at either location will make your face fall off if you pause even a little. Death is assured, my friends and I agree, as ineluctably as though one were to cut somehow the little web and cord of flesh between your thumb and index finger. Humankind knows no cure for and the drug company does not even study these calamities.

People worked in those places. They did.

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"I've lost my toe, but I haven't lost my soul. Let's have a drink and talk no more about it. It's just morbid. If it just didn't hurt so much all the damned time...."

Years earlier, when my daughter, her first grandchild, began taking dance lessons, my mother said, "If I could have been anything I wanted to be in my life, I would have been a dancer." Her expression was wistful. Then it changed. She looked at me steadily and said in an aggressively neutral tone, "Young people have it all so much better nowadays."

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Between the carpets in the living room are two feet of bare floor. It is the place where my mother and I dance and where I have seen my mother and father dance. I push my marbles up and down that place, making sure with a little shove that my favorites win and giving a play-by-play account of the race. Or I play with my penis, funny stiff little thing that gives me a dry buzz maybe five or six times in a quiet afternoon. We have a book of stories by Pierre Loti with whole paragraphs of asterisks. Even at age ten or twelve, I know why those asterisks are there. They excite me very much.

I revile myself for my weakness, knowing that a boy doesn't get to be a Dodger or a Giant or Tommy Dorsey if he does THAT. I can't say how I know that, where the sense of shame came from. Some connection with the mysteries of toilet training and etiquette, perhaps. I come into the bathroom to urinate. My father is shaving and my Aunt Doris is talking with him. My mother has followed me into the bathroom for some reason. And there we all are.

With an abandon I now reflect upon enviously, I throw back the seat and do what I had come to do. My aunt, whose ladder didn't quite reach the lowest branch anyway, finds in this event such hilarious components that something inside me makes a permanent record of it, effecting inhibition and
behavior change with swift and deadly efficiency. She says (and I quote): “He doesn’t even close the door!” And resumes her cackling progress along the edge of psychopathy.

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“Come on and dance with your mother,” she would say to me, “and I’ll teach you how to dance. Come on.” Her arms extend toward me, she flirts and overcomes my reluctance, which was feigned anyway. I like dancing with her—and she did teach me, although she always said that I just picked it up naturally. Maybe so. We dance the fox trot or the waltz, sometimes to a piece on the radio, sometimes we sing, and when I was able to, we harmonize on a piece and dance at the same time.

You Tell Me Your Dream and I’ll Tell You Mine.
We Were Sailing Along on Moonlight Bay.
When You Wore a Tulip, a Big Yellow Tulip, and I Wore a Big Red Rose.
A Wild Sort of Devil, But Dead on the Level, Was My Gal Sal.

She dances, and I dance with her.
When she would get home from the drug company at 20 after five, she would make supper, a magical performance. Out of nothing, something. Not precisely nothing, of course, but by Thursday evening, the Sunday pot roast was mostly pot. She might then serve something called rice and curry, which required that she first brown about as much ground beef as could fit into a thimble, over which she would then say a few words and it became even as the parable of the loaves and fishes: enough for all.

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John Dolan pumps the bellows and the red and yellow fire sings and he arranges the shoe in the fire. He moves with a perilous slowness, swivelling as though on a kind of pivot around which his body swings as he moves from fire to anvil and he finds the shape in the shoe with a power and grace I will never know and hardly expect to see ever again. The shop fills with the ringing of the ritualistic first blow on the anvil, then with the muted blows upon the shoe and the paradiddle on the anvil once again. It recommences as he turns the shoe and if I’ve ever seen anything since with the beauty and the
terror of that act, I’ve lost whatever it might have been.

***

My mother’s father was a cutter. Part of West Hill was carved up into blocks and sent down a railroad track created for the purpose. The track went by my mother’s childhood home, halfway up the hill, and continued until the load was dropped at a cutting factory in the middle of town where my grandfather worked from six in the morning until six at night cutting the blocks of granite into usable sizes and shapes.

The noise from such work cannot have disappeared entirely; it must remain part of the cosmic hiss and scream.

The sidewalk my mother traversed to get to work and home again was made up of slabs of the granite from the West Hill quarry. It may be that her father cut some of the very slabs she walked upon, but I doubt it. I want the symmetry of it, but something says no. The sidewalk slabs, still in use in many parts of town, are beautiful, much broken up here and there by time and action, tree roots ascending slowly to raise the slabs, roller skates and hopscotch chipping away the large and small slates, but the slabs remain, the Cambrian and Devonian granite swirled with Mesozoic whirlpools and Pleistocene embossments, a geological timeline that segues into a biological continuity: my grandfather, my mother, and me on my skates.

When he came home at night, he would sit down to supper and say to his wife and three daughters: “Let your vittles shut your mouths.” After supper in the summer he would tend the garden, in the winter set up his last and make new soles for the girls’ shoes.

On Sundays, after dinner, my mother’s family would go for walks across the fields, gathering wildflowers they would place beside the gravestones of relatives in a cemetery four miles from where they lived. Daisies, poppies, black-eyed Susans, Queen Anne’s Lace. After this eight-mile walk, they might pick berries and currants on the hill near the quarry track.

***

On summer mornings, I wake up to low thunder beginning at the top of Fair Street and then increasing with an awful intensity as a team of great-hooved horses draws a wagon and driver down to the blacksmith shop on the corner. The wagon has a crust of manure and the driver is clad in overalls. He is shirtless, his arms bare and tattooed, and he holds the leather reins in one hand. Brass globes on the top of the halter glisten. I fall back onto my bed and the fragrance of the manure and the massive animals washes over me.
She walked at a hundred beats a minute, except in the winter when she must be careful on ice and hard snow. I knew the sound of her walk, turning the corner onto Fair Street, as though I were having a dream and she was entering it. I would stop doing what I was not supposed to be doing or start doing what I should be doing. Or disappear.

"I know you hate 'em just the way your brother does. And the doctor says I should stop." She lit her cigarette and made a futile gesture toward waving the smoke away. Plaintive and defiant, she said, "I don't have many pleasures left and I'm going to keep the ones I've got. What was it Ray said yesterday when he was in here? That made you laugh so?"
"He said that so-and-so was about nine years older than baseball."
She hooted. "That's it. Well, so am I. About nine years older than baseball. The doctor says I shouldn't eat salt. Now, can you imagine? Eat a hardboiled egg without salt? Why!"

She lifts her skirt and apron above her knees and dances the chardas, just a few steps, grinning, so pretty. A Christmas tree behind her blinks and shimmers. I look up at her. I am warm with embarrassment and wonder.
DEAR Shem:

"The bar I was in today had a door with six-foot-long plastic strips that hung down to about a foot from the floor, three or four different colors for the plastic, and I kept looking at them thinking, 'Rattle in the wind.' Only there wasn't any wind.

"The street outside smelled like burnt armpits. Lots of sun, lots of dust. No, that's not right: hot library books. Everybody looks at me in the street, naturally, plump honky broad walking everyplace. Lagos is absolutely beautiful. Filthy and beautiful. Okalunje told me today when he dropped me off downtown on his way to work, 'If you must write home about the primitive conditions, write a letter, please, not a postcard.' When he was a kid some Peace Corps girl dropped a postcard on the sidewalk, about men pissing by the side of the road, somebody picked it up and gave it to the newspapers, and she had to leave the country. Some things the same (except the Coke is warm, is all), some things different. Everybody's a gentleman here, so I guess gentlemen read each other's mail."

She was sitting up in bed to write, plump honky broad naked she thought, because it was so hot she didn't even want to lean on the pillow. The oscillating fan breezed her left breast more than her right, making one side chill and damp, the other swampy, warm as love.

"I miss you," she wrote, "brother mine. Funny, hunh? I picture you stretched out on that God damned couch with those casts and bandages and your face looking like a deflated basketball. Next time you ride a God damned motorcycle on the freeway, wear armor, okay?"

She remembered the time he tried to make it from the bathroom to his bedroom naked and she came up the stairs, barefoot in the carpet, and he hadn't even seen her see him flying, parts and whole, like a quick bite on TV of someone streaking a golf tournament. Come on, she thought, cut that out. Shem's father, Noah, that's who Shem's sisters saw naked. Greek god, she thought, my ass. She ran her left hand under her left buttock on the bed, then awkwardly under her right, to wipe the sweat out.

F. A. Hart

93
“Anyway,” she began to write again, “Nigeria isn’t primitive at all. America, now, that’s primitive. Nigeria is . . . new, Shem, every other God damned building down by the quai looks like Exxon threw it up so fast they forgot to wipe the warehouse dust off the windows. Beggars in the street, very unprimitive lepers with no hands and no feet, they hold the tin cup up between stumps that look like badly sharpened pencils. Never give them any money, Okalunje said, otherwise they’ll drive you crazy.

“Tomorrow Okalunje says he and Beatrice are having a party. I’ll go into town, go to some dance thing at a museum, maybe have lunch with Beatrice”—Okalunje’s wife—“then come back and there’ll be a party, which they say isn’t in my honor, and I know they’re lying. They’re being very nice to me. You should come, honky houseguests get good shit.

“No more motorcycles, idiot. Ever again.

“Love, love, love—
“Belle”

Seal the letter up so no gentlemen read it; prance around the bed, flying, parts and whole, to tighten the sheet; stand with her back to the fan so she could at least start dry; then lie down in the dark on the so far sweatless side of the bed, further from the fan but still a nice change. I have lingered in the chambers of the swamp, she thought dreamily, by seaboys wreathed in oboes red and . . .; and then she slept.

When Beauchamp walked into the party, they were already dancing the bloody highlife.

No one had heard him at the front door. He saw Beatrice across the room, through the weaving dancers, look up and jerk her head back with the relaxed-face, mouth open bland surprise that is the Nigerian look of recognition. He threaded his way over to her to say hello.

“Delighted you could come, Mr. Beauchamp,” Beatrice said. She was with a nervous, sleek Yoruba man in a three-piece suit, and another woman, who was wearing a garish wrapper skirt and matching head kerchief and blouse as though she’d been to a traditional dance. The wrapper must be married to the bloody three-piece suit, Beauchamp thought. That sort of culture mix always gave him a feeling of tired amusement. Beatrice was wearing Western.

“Christ’s sake, Beatrice,” Beauchamp said, “don’t go U on me this early in the evening, Tony”—Beatrice’s husband—“and I have been mates for years.”

Beatrice grinned. “Don’t swear, Beechie, or I’ll tell everyone you’re the new houseboy.” He threw back his head and laughed, then remembered to introduce himself to the three-piece suit, who was some damned thing or other in the Interior Ministry. The Interior Ministry looked very much as though Beatrice and Beauchamp’s manner towards each other was giving him intestinal cramps.
Beauchamp took one of the giant plastic cups from a sideboard and filled it with Heineken’s from a sweating, barely cool quart bottle nearby, and looked around the room for Tony. Off and on for years Beauchamp had worked with Tony in Beauchamp’s construction business. Bloody fool’s probably in the kitchen oiling some permanent secretary, he thought.

Sitting in the far corner of the room, huddled on a couch with a young Nigerian male, was the American girl Beatrice had told him about. Rather plump for Beauchamp’s taste, but pretty enough: lots of curly dark hair above big liquid eyes and a plump little chin, pleasantly loose tapered shift down to substantial but well-shaped calves. Part of the shift stretched taut across the small of her back; around the side and front it hung loose, moving faintly and rhythmically as the girl leaned sideways on her elbow to talk to the young Nigerian, and breathed. The movement of the fabric, combined with the utter stillness of her face as she watched the Nigerian yammer at her, gave the effect of some terribly complicated toy. Well, Beauchamp thought, perhaps; actually.

Belle had seen the white one come in, glanced after him, then ignored him. Why am I so self-conscious, she thought, good God. The Nigerian next to her on the couch was saying, “... country, truly wonderful Miss Aarons, but what we Nigerians cannot understand is why you must do all that atomic testing. ‘Give peace a chance,’ that is what we Nigerians believe.”

Which, Belle thought, is why you starved all those Ibo children in Biafra. Of course. She was feeling very cross, and cross with herself for feeling cross. “Isn’t it restricted now?” she said. “I mean underground, or something? I don’t know very much about it.”

The Nigerian tipped his head back, looked at her with quizzical, bland surprise, and said, “You don’t say so.”

The room...as her couchmate went on about politics and the wonders of America, which she had never had explained to her so well, as he talked Belle glanced across the room and back, listening just closely enough, putting into her mind so she could half watch it in momentary memory as little bites of visual: Beatrice and Tony’s living room with the concrete floor waxed red; heavy, graceless couches and chairs with broad, flat, sloping arms; perhaps two dozen people with big plastic cups in their hands, except for the leathery, shrimpy old lady sitting alone by the front window sipping something clear that she poured into a liqueur glass from a flask in her purse; native dress predominant but not universal for the women; the men—then it clicked for Belle, that the men who were wearing the flowered dashiki/pegged pants/robe combinations were all younger, aloof, and isolated or with one other dressed like themselves but silent, while the suited men seemed to be the evening’s lawyers and vice-presidents. The suits were either talking to each other, or attended.
A voice next to her said, “You’re Belle Aarons, then. My name’s John Beauchamp. Sorry to interrupt, old man”—to the Nigerian, who looked up in mid-word—“just have to pay my respects to the guest of honor.”

She held her hand out and smiled. God, how rude, she thought, meaning the interruption. Beauchamp was the only male present who was not wearing either traditional clothes or a suit: short-sleeved shirt and fiercely pressed khaki pants.

“You’re a friend of Tony’s?” Belle said.

“Been for years. Lovely party.”

Belle’s couchmate leaned back, stiff as a board, watching.

“It’s wonderful to meet so many people,” Belle said. “Am I really the guest of honor? Tony and Beatrice keep saying they were going to have a party anyway.”

“Well, of course you are our honored guest,” the Nigerian said. He might be in his early 20s. “Tony has spoken of you for years.”

“How did you know Okalunje, then?” Beauchamp said.

Belle made herself pause, then speak slowly. “He was a foreign student in Pasadena—in California—and lived with us for a year. He always said he would like to have us visit. So I did.”

“You must have been awfully young when he was there,” Beauchamp said. “That was before I knew him.”

“I was twelve.”

“Well, then.” Beauchamp, as he spoke, could see the Nigerian’s mouth tightening as he leaned forward, straight-backed, where he sat next to the girl, preparatory to feeling excluded and slipping away. Beauchamp murmured something about talking with her later and moved off before the Nigerian could.

The music had stopped a moment after Beauchamp arrived, and as he left the couch it started up again, and most of the young males in dashikis sidled rhythmically, shuffling loose-hipped towards the center of the room, very few women and no suits dancing, the music like an amplified brassy heartbeat played through maple syrup. Belle talked, and listened to the music, and listened to the talk. “Dear Shem,” she wrote later:

“Lovely party. I guess. I felt like a watermelon at a county fair, God, everybody wanted to get a look at the plump honky broad, but they were awfully nice. Okalunje did a toast to me, and Mom and Dad and you guys, only he couldn’t remember Sara’s name but don’t tell her that for God’s sake. I’ve got a little bit of a headache, I’ve never seen anybody, certainly not me, drink that much beer. I think it’s stronger, too.

“The only other white type besides me was an Englishman named Beauchamp that’s been in business deals with Okalunje. I think I’m going to have lunch with him tomorrow, Beauchamp I mean. I’m running out of sights to see in Lagos—I guess I’ll be glad to get back to Europe. It’s nice here, though. The dance recital and the museum were fun yesterday but
the weather makes everything seem weird, it's clouded over and hanging up there grey as a bastard the way it does at home sometimes and it feels like the inside of your head has a tiny little electric charge.

"Beauchamp is—well, odd, that's all. I think all the Nigerians at the party except Okalunje and Beatrice thought he was a terrible slob, or a terrible racist. He grins all the time. Middle aged. Sort of smirky and kind at the same time, like he knows what you're thinking and feels sorry for you. Not very high class English, anyway."

Sometime in the middle of the night the wind woke her. There were palm trees outside Tony and Beatrice's house and the softening and hardening strain and rush of the wind through them, strong and gusty, had made her wake—heart pounding, chilly and sweating, thinking of locomotives. It took her a long time to get back to sleep.

"So your parents sent you to Europe and Africa for the summer," Beauchamp said at the lunch table the next day. They were in the restaurant of the Federal Palace Hotel and the waiter had just brought them glasses of thick, acidy red wine. Belle sipped hers, made a face, and put it down dead center in front of her hands on the table, gathering her strength for the next sip.

"Yeah. It's been lovely. France and Italy and Greece for a month, little over a month, and now down here. I'm still . . . how long have you lived here?"

"Nine years," Beauchamp said.

"Do you miss home? Where is home?"

"Chester. In the north, near Wales."

"Do you miss it?"

Beauchamp smiled and looked away. At the far corner of the nearly empty dining room, across a muddle of white-starched table tops, two black waiters stood near a doorway, smirking to each other, both with their eyes fixed on Belle and Beauchamp. As Beauchamp's eyes met theirs the taller, their waiter, said something to his friend and smirked more broadly, still watching them. "Yes and no," Beauchamp said. He was looking at Belle again.

"Cryptic," Belle said. What a nuisance he is, she thought.

"Not intended. I grew up very poor, Miss Belle, so I don't miss that one bleeding bit. But much as I love the work and the money and all that here, and Lord help me some of the people, I miss the white faces. Not nice, I'm sure, but there it is."

Belle felt, momentarily, real outrage, a tightening of the skin all over her body. Then a solid, tight lump dropped quite painfully into the bottom of her stomach, and the tension in the rest of her body eased, and she took a long pull of the awful wine. "No," she said, "it's not nice at all. But I know what you mean."
“How,” Beauchamp said, “do you like Okalunje?”
“Why do you ask?”
“Morbid curiosity.”
“Do you like him?” Belle asked.
“We’re mates. Yes and no.”
“That’s the perfect answer,” Belle said. “Yes and no.”
“And you?” Beauchamp said.
“I just told you.”
Beauchamp grinned, and reached slowly across the table and stroked her wrist, lightly, one-fingered.
“Don’t do that,” Belle said.
“As you say,” Beauchamp said. He pulled his hand back. “We do have a bit of an audience, anyway.”
Belle looked at him, blank and tight, then at the two waiters, who were grinning now.
“Damn, that’s rude,” she said.
“My touching you?”
“Them watching.”
“Is, isn’t it? I’ve lived here so long, I’m used to it.”
“Is it just for the money you live here?”
Beauchamp stared at her, his smile softening. He looks simian, Belle thought. Broad shouldered, low browed, hunching over the table as though about to inhale food from a nonexistent bowl without picking it up. “No offense, my lady,” he said, “but you’re really a very nice young woman.”
“Thank you, but you didn’t answer my question.”
“The money’s part of it, then, but not just that. Not just that at all. I like it.”
“Why?”
“You really have very nice wrists, too.”
Her stomach still hurt, but she could feel her mouth spreading into a grin. “Jesus, you’re irritating,” she said.
“I like it because the people are nice to me, because the society, the bush, the freedom, the whole bloody thing are.... Well, I’d never thought it out before. Like learning to like whiskey. I don’t mean being a sot. Learning to like it. You may miss the Nestle’s cocoa after a bit, but you’ll not want to give up the malt.”
“Tell me more about it,” she said. “Tell me”—she laughed, once—“everything you can think of about it, now that I’ve made you think about it.”

He drove them to his flat after the lunch, creeping through a driving, crashing, skull-pounding rain. Can’t even see the bloody street, he thought. When they got there and he parked, they ran like idiots for his front porch and then stood so she could look back out into the wall of
falling sky. She thought, My God, it's like another planet. Dirt street studded with irregular rocks jutting out of the slick butterscotch mud; some buildings nearby dirt walled, other concrete, most with corrugated metal roofs; a woman hurrying by with a plastic mesh shopping bag hung awkwardly in her hand, full of some unidentifiable tuberous lumps; staring, the woman was, at Belle and Beauchamp who stood there shivering and grinning and staring back.

"I hope this is good brandy," Belle said. Brandy, my ass, she thought.

"It is, actually. But we won't find it out here." They went up a narrow flight of stairs into a high-ceilinged room with a terrazzo floor.

She had stared at him, in the restaurant, when he had offered her the drink at his place, superior brandy in place of the ice cream of unidentifiable flavor that the hotel passed off as dessert—had stared in wonder, looked at his direct stare back out of the deepset eyes, and his hunched shoulders that made him look like a depilated gorilla. That is, she had thought, the dumbest God damned pass anybody has ever made at me. Then she had said yes.

At the head of his stairs, just into his parlor, he said, "Wait here, love. No, seriously, don't move. I'll get the brandy. We'll do all our dripping here, you see, and be much more comfortable in the long run." Then he took off his shirt, rung it out onto the stairs, threw it into a corner behind him, then did the same with his pants, and walked buck naked away from her into another room. She was still staring, open mouthed, when he came back with a towel wrapped around his waist, two short snifters half full of something dark that caught glints of light from an unknown source, and a second towel.

"See," he said, "all for the best. No, don't take the glass, I'll hold it while you..." She took a long, slow drink, keeping her eyes on his.

He set the glass down, and leaned forward slowly, and then came the last inch into a kiss. She responded and thought as she did, It's like lipping a chocolate mousse, and we're both the mousse. The thought made her smile. He leaned back, grinning. "Now then," he said.

He slipped the shift up over her head, and her pants down off her feet, and with exquisitely gentle rolling pats dried every square millimeter of her, and walked her into the next room.

Later, as he drove her back to Beatrice and Tony's, she said, "Will I see you tomorrow?"

He glanced at her out from under those damned apery eyebrows and said, "Don't mishear me, Lady Belle. But give it a thought. Does it matter?"

She stared again, then grinned to herself and leaned over and kissed him on the cheek.

Dear Shem, she thought as they drove the rest of the way, the rains started today. And I tell you, brother mine, the rains... The rains are
amazing. Just amazing.

When he pulled up in front of the house to drop her, he said, “Give Tony and Beatrice my love, love.”

She turned towards him, almost absentmindedly. “Well, some of it, anyway,” she said. One last look and grin, and she got out of the car and walked to the house and in. My God, she thought, what a letter this would be. I wish to hell I had somebody to write it to.

The weather, the next day, was dry.
Mitsunaga’s “Sick Lady and Her Faithful Rooster”

What ails her? Megrim? Cramps? His raucous clucking? Lurid self-absorption is the bait the rooster goes for. Up toward her white averted face he stretches that brown neck. She loaf in grief as if it were her Cockaigne, spurns the king of fools, St. Peter’s pet. When he would have her rise, she wills to squat. Tender attentions only make her sick and though he worships with a liquid eye this goddess of the whine, or merely Queen of Shake, his wings offend her moony skin—useless wings. He could not get away if he wished. Besides, paint has fixed her frown and nothing can undo his taut concern.

DAME INFIRME ET SON COQ FIDELE
Painting attributed to Fujiwara Mitsunaga, 12th Century.
Put 'Em Up!
(For Kyllikki)

For this one handsbreadth of life there are too many books such as Renoir's Women to lay on a coffeetable at ninety bucks a lay when for nothing I can float in your beams like a big mote in one side from the shadows and out the other disappearing into the shadows or spend the life I have moving in the wave of you love curling and green until I tumble at last onto the shore.
J. R. Solonche

Chopin Preludes, Opus 28

As though
He were going for a walk
In the garden of the piano, talking
To himself, gesturing, picking up stones
& throwing the stones over the wall of the garden,
But you are there beside him,

Behind him,
Like a shadow he pays no
Attention to, listening to him, rapt,
Enraptured, flattered beyond imagining
That he should be saying all this

To you,
A perfect stranger,
Watching each stone sail over
The wall of the garden as if each stone
Were a pearl, wanting to

Show him a particularly round
One he missed, introduced as
A lover of "good music."

Is it your fault
The maid was out & the door
To the garden was open? Is it
Your fault he has such bad habits?
Bringing Peonies into the House

We cut them before they open fully, before
The peonies bloom to the size
Of cabbages, too large, too heavy for

The stems which are slender pliable wires,
Before the peony blossoms sag & bend over & bow
Down to the ground & the grass. We bring

In enough peonies for three vases,
The large white porcelain vase
In the living room, the blue glazed vase in

The bedroom, the small crystal bud vase
In the bathroom. The whole house
Breathes peonies. We live in a peony flower.

We have taken the peonies in to die.
If we had not cut them, if we had left
The peonies alone on the stems which are like

Pliable wires, if we had left them to open fully,
To bloom to the size of cabbages too large,
Too heavy, they would be sagging now,

Bending over, they would be bowing down
To the ground & the grass, they would be like
Old women who were once beautiful

Young girls & who fell asleep in chairs
On the porch & whose heads are weary from being
Beautiful so long & drop on their breasts,
Or like the drooping heads of morons.
Two Poems on South Africa

1.
The president of South Africa keeps a big Bible in his living room.

The big Bible has a black cover and a red satin ribbon which marks the page.

The president of South Africa reads from the big Bible every evening.

He reads aloud every evening to his family chapter and verse from the big Bible with the red satin ribbon and the black leather cover. The president of South Africa sleeps very well at night. So does his family. The entire family sleeps very well at night because they hear chapter and verse every evening from the big family Bible. Except the seven-year-old granddaughter of the president of South Africa, she does not sleep well at night. Instead, she has nightmares and wakes up in the middle of the night screaming. She dreams that the big Bible is covered with the skin of a seven-year-old black girl.
and that the girl is still alive
while her grandfather, the president of South Africa, reads chapter and verse,
she dreams that blood squirts from the binding
of the big Bible because the binding is the spine of the seven-year-old black girl,
and that small white bones fall
at the feet of her grandfather and small small white white teeth drop to the floor
at the feet of the president of South Africa and
nobody sees and nobody sees and
everyone smiles and everyone smiles and nobody sees
and everyone smiles and and and

2.

In South Africa
black children die because they are black children.

In South Africa
army trucks roar up around churchyards,
soldiers leap out, surround the fenced enclosures, lock the congregation in, finger cannisters of tear gas, brandish rifles, wait
for small black hands to throw small stones at them.
In South Africa
soldiers love small stones,
soldiers love small stones as much as diamonds.

In South Africa
police officers shoot
people who throw stones at them.
Police officers are asked: How could it be,
if they were throwing stones at you,
that the stones have landed so close
to the man you shot. He was running away, wasn’t he?

In South Africa
police officers answer:
I think it was an act of God.

In South Africa
it is an act of God that murders
black children.

In South Africa
black children die for diamonds
and small stones.

In South Africa
black children die because
they are black children.
Lois Bunse

Chagall Can Never Make a Short Visit

Good paper doesn't repel stars.
Like a private library,
it lets them sink into texture
having to do with leather,
dusk and floors holding quiet.

Only Chagall offers Tablets.
His Moses, with that one eye, receives
the diptych, curved
like a woman bending over,
with speckles.

It's the word, written right there
for Moses to hold
in two hands.

In thumb-textured blue
a sea-otter, rocking
like the moon,
surfaces for lunch.

As for Chagall, his angels hold
his face towards them as they speak.
They give
into whims of their version.
The Hill Enters

the graveyard assembly of stones.
The posts stringing barbed wire around it turn
dark, get bluejay-riddled, stuffed with acorns.

The oak throws out its greenest, then roots
the hill. I see the Man and Woman’s faces.
They aren’t solid or grave. They steady,
lasting into summer. Her voice curves
from sheets blown as they’re hung on a clothes-line,
familiar as corrugated roofs picking up
tin-blue moonlight flashing. Here. I’m here.

You Can’t Name a Beast Unless

you’ve had a full description published
in a Scientific Journal, the scholar says.
I may kiss a frog all I want, be foolish,

but before he’s proclaimed, it’s useless.
Beast, if we hold hands, catch
flies, unnamed, it’s not done, I guess.

Let’s sun together, bore the voyeur
who doesn’t see you.
We’ve known each other before.
Contributors

Lois Bunse is a California Poet-in-the-Schools in Tuolumne and Stanislaus Counties. She is also a teacher of modern dance. Her poems have appeared in *The California Quarterly*, *The Berkeley Poets Cooperative*, and *Calapooya College*, among other publications.

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Lucinda Harrison Coffman is a former teacher of English, who is studying playwriting at Ohio University Athens, Ohio. Her M.A. is from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; her B.A. is from Eastern Kentucky University. In response to an open-ended query, she wrote, “The interesting things that have happened in my life can only be discreetly discussed through the medium of fiction.”

John Ditsky has had more than 1200 poems published in the magazines of half a dozen nations, including *New Letters*, *North American Review*, and *Fiddlehead*. He is also a teacher of American literature, modern drama, and creative writing at the University of Windsor, Ontario, whose literary criticism has been widely published.

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F. A. Hart has taught women in Shakespeare and other subjects in English at California State University, Fresno, for 22 years. In the early 60s he lived, taught, and traveled in Nigeria for two years, and then and later often visited Lagos. His fiction has appeared previously in San José Studies, Players, North Dakota Quarterly, and Sage.

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Robert Wexelblatt has won prizes for his articles and fiction from the Southern Humanities Review, the Arizona Quarterly, and this journal. A professor at Boston University for nearly 20 years, he teaches in the College of Basic Studies. He is holder of Boston University’s Metcalf Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

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