

[Vol. 47]

# TOWERS



# Towers XLVII

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Untitled, Gary Nichols  
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Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, Illinois  
Fall 1976

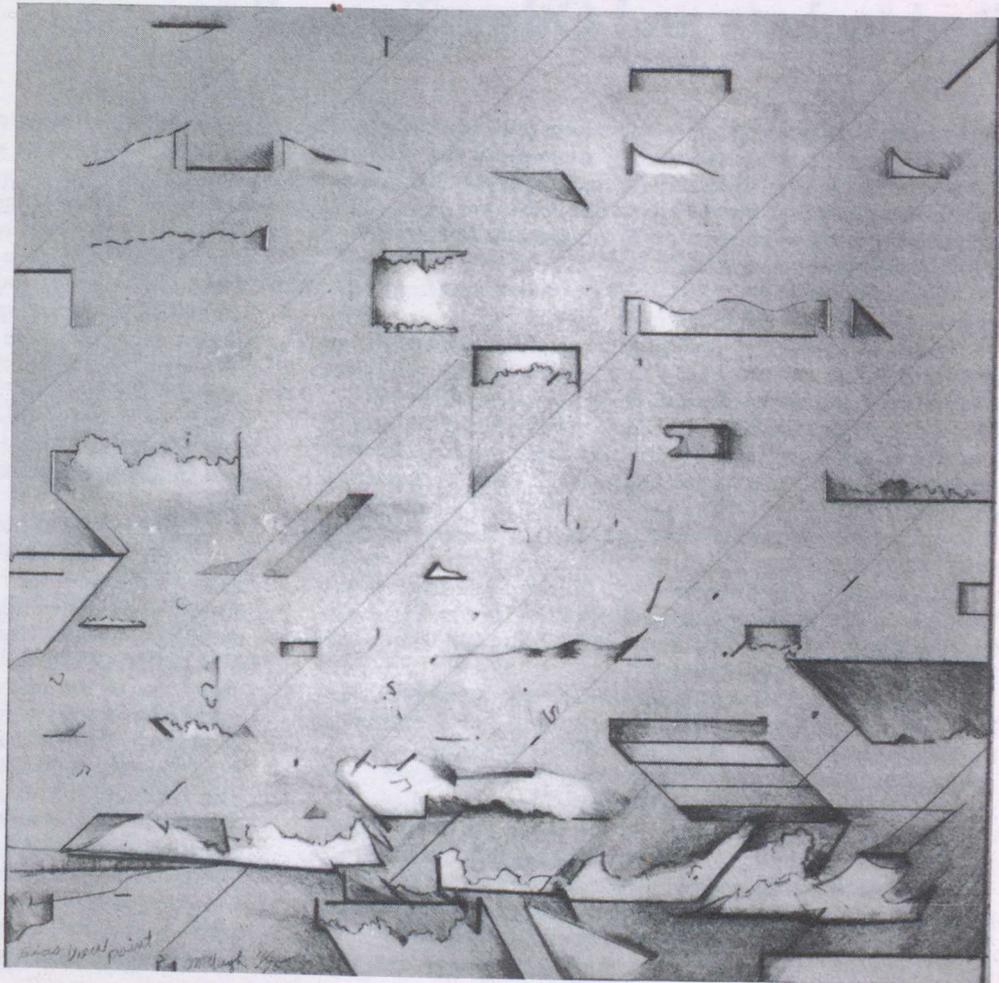
# Triumvirate

Three silos rise, slick bellied,  
silver caps from shredded mother.  
Swelling bloats of sullen Field,  
she lies bludgeoned, golden  
beneath her attackers

staring at the whiteness,  
so white the anonymous sky

Thin sticked from gutted moor,  
They, three penetrations,  
with heads toward heaven.

*Dona Spencer*



# Red Jackets and Other Tragedies

If all present must be accounted for, count me there— in the mirror. I saw myself slightly throughout the entire drama—watched my reactions, my small part, as I simultaneously felt them. It was like calling up a talk-show on the radio and not turning down the sound—without the three-second security lag.

"Crystal," said the father, "come look at these jackets."

This is a pretty common statement for that general area. Substitute a name and you have the phrase that is daily recited during book rush by sooners gold-rushing the dry good section of the college bookstore where I work. There seem to be a lot of labelers running loose on campus this year who, as soon as they see something obvious, like say a drinking fountain or a bus which never fails to make schedule, verbalize it. "Look," they say, "there's the bus," and so forth.

Dry goods is a homey-type euphemism for Huskiewear which is the house-organ name for collegiate clothes bearing the fighting Huskie dog emblem and the words Northern Plains State on the flaps or pockets.

I was watching Crystal's father because he didn't look like the type who would lift anything and I dread the day I have to see a shoplifter. This bookstore operates on the balance of terror theory. If my supervisor sees me overlooking a shoplifter, I pay for the crime by losing my job. Some of the older girls have a favorite story that they use to terrify new employees. It entails a fake lifter who is periodically planted in a given department to test the loyalty of a salesperson. With my dumb luck, this one was probably the stooge, but I watched Crystal's old man anyhow. He was a

tweed and pipe type who appeared to have been put up on blocks some time ago—like an old hot rod too good to junk.

"I don't want a jacket." This comment was delivered somewhat remotely by Crystal, as if she was talking through a tube from under the ocean. It was followed by a more to-the-point postscript—something to the effect that she did not need a jacket either, especially one red vinyl, hooded number with NPS emblazoned on the pocket. She was standing in the aisle across the way, touching, but obviously not feeling, a rack of Superboxes—this year's introductory, free to Freshmen and foreign students, gift-pack, which was once free but now costs 99 cents. Not a dollar. 99 cents plus tax.

Either I shifted positions or the world turned because I could now see Crystal's mother and myself seeing her in the full-length mirror where people model their Huskiewear. The Mother was pulling The Jacket from its hanger and waving it at Crystal like one waves a hanky from the train in vintage movies. Crystal had eased out of the picture.

Mother spoke with about the same relative impact as Crystal, that is to say, she kind of breathed words. "Oh yes, this one," she said. "Let's us try it on." She checked her next observation by eye. "You'll need at least an 'M,' maybe an 'L.'" I mentally measured Crystal for an "S" and maybe even an "Extra-S." She had the bone structure of a moth.

But the deliberation, at least as far as the parents were concerned, was over. Crystal would have a jacket. They reiterated the ferocity of plains' weather,

the relative uselessness of the girl's present jacket, and so forth.

With the measure of anonymity the mirror afforded me, I calculated the plot of this drama. Like a particularly crucial point in a t.v. show, when you have been let in on something the protagonist hasn't and you would give anything to let him know so that you could sleep that night and he could avoid disaster, this part drew me in. I silently prompted Crystal. "Come on, girl," I pled. "Tell them. Today a jacket, tomorrow a practical career as a nurses' aide."

I re-stacked T-shirts furiously as I waited for Crystal to move. Too symbolically, she seemed made of glass. Or maybe she was a geode—all surface hardness, but brittle and delicate where the eye can't penetrate. This possibility of fragility seemed to determine her real character. She was, objectively, not quite spindly, but probably once was. She had rhinestone-cornered, pink plastic glasses and new shoes—if scent is any indication. The shoes seemed to hurt, unless that was her usual way of moving—a little pinched and jerky.

She had arrived at the rack of jackets and my hopes began to quail as she reached vaguely for the red one. Her mother had switched from a wilted commanding to a martyred pleading and was coaxing Crystal in a small voice to at least determine the correct size. "That's it," I noted smugly. "First the sucker line, then the article itself, complete with strings." I mutely decided that she was definitely an "S"—and that only with many sweaters.

A fourth player, a miniature version of the older man, now lounged near. "C'mon, Dad," he said, "C'mon."

That was all, but the intonation implied that he had been through this movie before and was fighting, in a polite way, for Crystal's cause. He seemed to address me as much as them and was becoming teenaged embarrassed.

Crystal stabbed the jacket with one finger. It flapped and crackled. "Yes," she agreed, snatching and holding the thing at arm's length like a noxious beast, "It's a great jacket. Why don't you buy it, Dad, to wear to the Rotary?" Then turning, still distracted, to the woman, "Or you, Mother?"

Then all the extras in the wings had entered armed. It was Dad, and Mum wearing the colors of country and King, and Crystal and I in black. Junior acted out some amateurish Fool center stage. Ta-dah!

Crystal's mother moved away then. She walked as if her feet hurt her too. But she did not have new shoes. She had polio.

In that way the civilized people will do, I wavered between customary reactions, that is, the habitual or polite emotional response, and present experience. It is harder to dislike a person with such an obvious cross to bear. As if the physical deformity forgives the personality ugliness.

The mother almost clung to the father, looking as if she would just as soon swoon, but was hedged in and held up with the same amenities that made my opinion of her soften.

Crystal's father heaved a great, patient bear sigh. "Crystal," he pronounced, "let us approach this maturely. We will buy the jacket for you for our peace of mind, and you will if you wish, exchange it for one you like next week when we are gone. Surely, you

don't want your family to worry about your health the whole time you're in college?"

"You want to spend your money?" said Crystal, as if she were asking them to dance. She was clearly, if calmly, out of hand, I thought to myself. "Give me cash. I'll buy something I really want and need —like, uh, like . . ." She searched the area wildly for something to fill in the blank, then finished abruptly, "a douchbag."

"I don't want or need a *Goddamn* jacket." The "goddamn" was delivered loudly, but clumsily, like something foreign and too big for her mouth.

"Chryssie." It was Mother. She certainly conveyed shock, embarrassment, and disappointment quietly, I noted.

"Chryssie," I echoed silently. The mirror fairly quaked with tumescent emotion. "C'mon. It's a Trojan horse of a gift and you know it, but you've read the book. You can still substitute a second ending."

The brother was gone from sight. I glimpsed Crystal on the way out and heard her call back, "You two are so full of shit."

I no longer liked Crystal either. Mother and Father held the red jacket together, frozen in place like some off-key nativity scene.

I saw my superior approach. Or rather, I heard him approach. He makes the sound of an adding machine when he walks. It seems someone had lifted something. I saw the channel flick over.

Gay Davidson

# Rocker

she remembers,  
vaguely,  
a rumpled pile  
of torn newspaper  
burning in the fireplace  
and something of  
a young man who  
kissed her smooth cheeks  
and listened as she spoke—  
dreams, fairy tales . . .

the memory flickers,  
the hearth is cold,  
ashes cling in the wet wrinkles of her face.

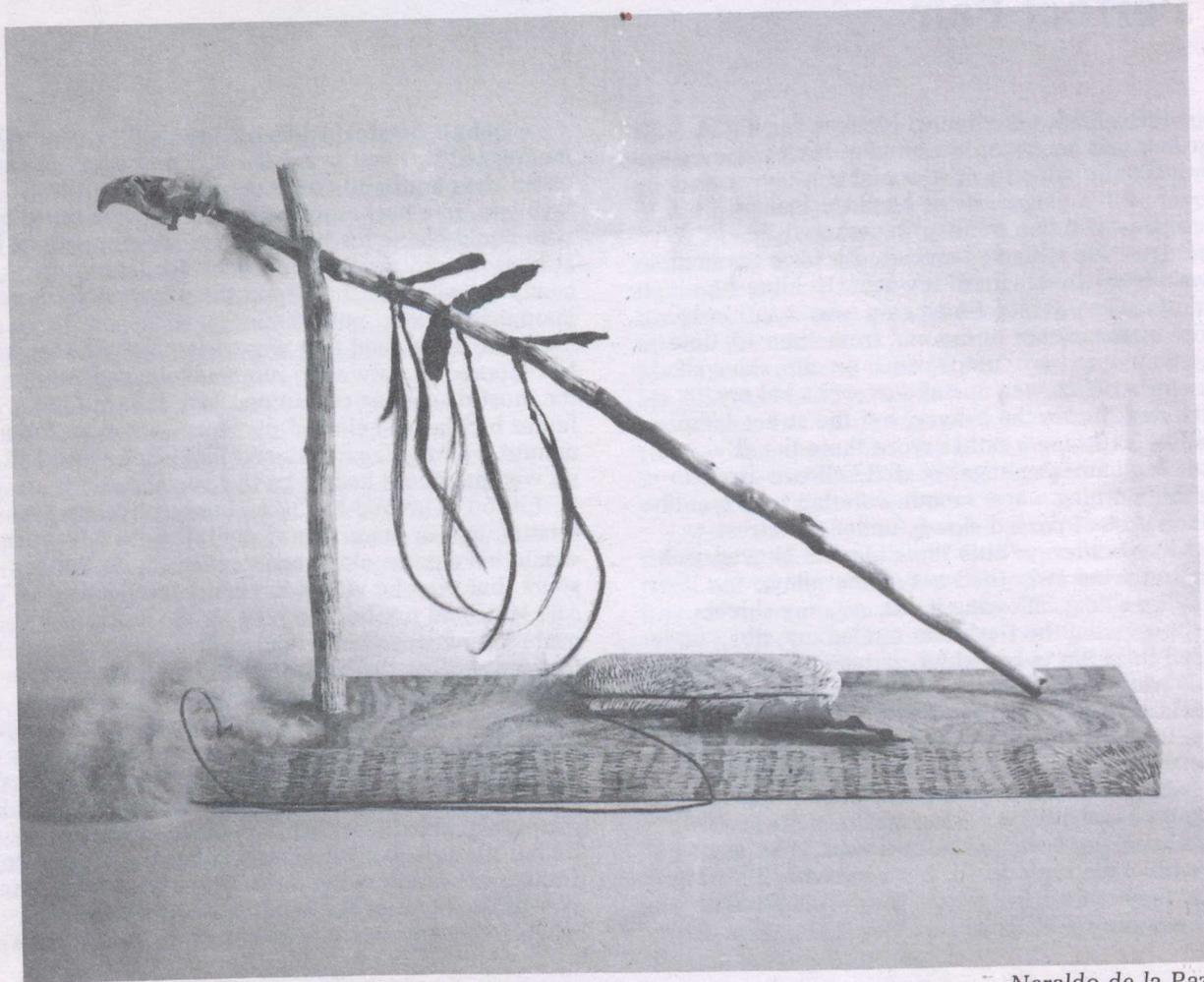
*Melodie Provencher*

# Salmon Fishing

Shoulder to shoulder,  
We cast grey waters.  
The day shortens;  
The south blows showers in.  
A loon wings toward solstice.

We draw the salmon  
Landward, their mouths bloody,  
Filled with steel and rain.  
Those that escape us  
Swim on to meet great bears.

Rodney Baker



Neraldo de la Paz

# The Perfect Pair

Wrapped in a thick new flannel blanket, lazy little Pip had grown into an enormous bundle. It was a little after seven on an early winter night. I covered his face over with a corner of the blanket, leaning my cheek against the flap to keep the wind from whipping it free. He struggled awkwardly for a moment, pulling away from the cradle of my arm. Holding him firmly and close to my face I made my way cautiously, glancing out of the corner of my eye from time to time, feeling my way over hard lumps of ice on the sidewalk.

The doctor's office was upstairs over the bakery. It was pitch-dark inside the bakery, but the street lamp lit the window exposing a rather worn three-tiered mock cake. A glimmering sugar-coated bell was fixed to its top. In the morning warm mouth-watering tarts would fill the window. As I passed slowly under the street lamp the glossy border on little Pip's blanket glowed rich blue. A puff of wind swooshed out of the alley, catching my long coat billowing it out, sending shivers up my legs, quivering the flesh that circled my ribs.

I clutched little Pip even tighter, burrowed my nose into his soft warm fluff, reaching with my toe for the edge of the landing. The sweet scent of his bath calmed me. Inside. I caught my breath. Cleared the cold tears from my eyes. An automatic device pulled the door shut behind me, sending an unexpected clang up the steep hollow stairwell. Looking up the steps toward Dr. Schwarz's office, I wanted to turn back. The steps had always filled me with dread, but now with little Pip in my arms, they were frightening. They went straight up without stopping or turning.

A baby's head was like an egg shell to hear my mother tell it. I had heard it—over and over—the story about the poor baby down the road. Lying there, wee one, in a basket, one-day-old helpless thing, and who could blame his little brother for stopping to look at him, for wondering about him, for letting the candy bar slip and thud upon the poor baby's head, upon that sunken, pulsing, living, soft spot. The last I had ever heard, and that was years ago, all that he had learned to do was to rub his belly and mutter with the most disgusting repetition, "me full, me full." My father had never believed the story, not even for a minute. Father was convinced that since there had been no wedding there had to be the punishment.

Little Pip arched his back. I uncovered his face and secured him in the crook of my left arm. My husband would have come along and carried Pip to the top of the stairs, but then he would have had to wait in the cold car. He could not bear to go near the doctor—it made him woozy. I had fainted dead once myself, but that was before the babies started coming. And Pierce hated to wait. It put him instantly into one of his worst moods. He had already done all the waiting he ever intended to do.

Pierce and I were a perfect pair. He adored tiny babies. He loved toddler games—on his hands and knees, scaring, laughing, tricking, under the kitchen table, behind the sofa, hiding in the clothes closet, peeking through the crack in the door. The babies scrambling, over-excited, shrieking wildly until everyone was exhausted. I enjoyed them most when they commenced

to grow up, when they sat on my lap listening to the stories that I read.

Tense and trembly I grasped the stair railing and pulled myself and Pip to the top of the steps, entering the waiting room without looking back. The waiting room was oddly modern; it didn't blend with the rest of the old store building. Perhaps an old doctor would have left it old, but the wide wooden floor boards had been covered over with plushy red carpet—already it was worn and dull in front of the door. Pale blond wooden benches curved around the corners of the room interrupted by two doors and a shelf for magazines: *Fortune*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Parent*, and *Jack and Jill*.

Opposite the door and above the book shelf was a long, horizontal mirror that caught every look as it came through the door. I sat down on the hard slippery bench and lifted Pip from the tangled hump of blankets, smoothing and rearranging the folds and layers. We were alone in the waiting room. I could hear the mumbles of doctor and patient and sensed we would not have long to wait. "Be patient," I whispered to Pip, kissing the five little fingers, cooing and coaxing him to squeeze my finger. He twisted his head back, not looking at me, not interested in me, but stared instead at the wall behind me. I turned to look. There was nothing there. Nothing but ugly venetian blinds standing open against the dark windows. It was only December, but the sooty window ledge gave it a dead-winter look.

"Philip Potter," called the nurse appearing briefly from within. She was an old professional. A small

cluster of gems perched on the winged tip of her eye-glasses. A silver chain went around her neck and connected up with the eye-glasses. The slightest shake of her head set the chain to rocking.

"Come on big boy! That's us!" I smiled encouragement to my little man. Nurse got right down to business; motioned me to put him on the examination table—at the paper sheet end of the table. Her cheeks sagged down around the corners of her mouth like wax in a Wax Museum. I unfurled little Pip's wrapping, showing off his All-Star legs. Nurse clicked her ball point pen, shoved her fist into her pocket, moved off into the back room where during the day I had seen blood standing in test tube racks and at night urinal decanters were polished and waited for tomorrow.

Alone we waited—Pip and I. And who cares where it began. Under the altar of God or on some back road, out of high purpose or out of a weakness for hot kisses; we end up in a room like this. All in the same white gown, lying on a sanitary paper sheet with legs spread wide, waiting in the cold for the thrust of a trusted doctor's hand, staring mindless at a light or a hinge or a knob . . . others before me . . . and after me . . .

"What's the complaint?"

He startled me. His shoes were soft like bedroom slippers. It was old Dr. Schutz. I had been expecting Dr. Schwarz and I should have demanded an explanation, but then Dr. Schutz would surely have suspected that I was disappointed.

"Last week when I brought Pip in for his first check-up, Dr. Schwarz said everything was just fine . . ."

My voice wavered. My throat ached. No control, I hated myself for being so easy to cry. Female.

Dr. Schutz was shorter than I. White tufts of hair curled around his pink ears. His blue eyes looked as if he had just heard a joke. He watched me as I worked to undo the silky romper. I regained control by concentrating on the romper—its Mother Duck, its little ducklings, white ducklings, embroidered ducklings, perfect waddly ducklings—Pip's little belly bulged smooth and springy like bread dough waiting for the oven. If it were bath time, I would blow noisy kisses on his bare belly and I would make him laugh. ". . . and now this," I said unpinning the diaper. Little Pip's testes were swollen tight and had turned blue.

"Hydrocele," he announced.

"What's that?"

"Nothing to be concerned about. Painless."

That's what I didn't like about Dr. Schutz—his one word sentences. And besides, it didn't look painless.

"Well—what should I do for it?"

"Nothing," he grunted.

"Will it stay like this or will it go away?"

"Oh, probably it will disappear—mysterious—like it appeared."

He seemed to suppress a laugh. I had been a fool to worry. I wanted to save face, to escape without a trace of my ineptness flickering through his mind.

"What caused it?" I asked as if he were the repairman.

"I don't know."

Thinking that he had finished, I began putting little

Pip back into his romper. He must have sensed I was dissatisfied for he paused across the table from me and gave Pip a second look. I expected him to say something like, "next thing you know, he'll have himself a paper route," but without looking at me, without taking his eyes off little Pip, he asked, "Do you have any other children?"

At first I was flattered by his interest. "Yes," I beamed. Then gazing dreamily at the baby scales along the wall, I remembered the times Dr. Schwarz had placed the babies gently on the scales. Ten pounds and thirteen ounces, he would call out proudly. Six weeks later he would announce thirteen pounds and ten ounces. Greater accomplishments I had never had.

"Does this baby look anything like your other children?"

I stared silently. It was a puzzling question. My children were as different as day and night. One was quick—so quick that his daddy took him everywhere, and the other so beautiful, so beautiful that perfect strangers would stop me on the street. Pip didn't look like either of them—"No two kids are alike," I assured. Strangely, I remembered my husband coming into the hospital room one hour after Pip was born. He walked through the door and said to me as I lay peacefully under the white, heavy sheet, "That's the most different looking kid I ever saw in my whole life." The woman in the bed next to me raised herself up on one elbow. "I've seen lots of babies," he continued, "but this one is something else." "I bet he looks like me," I giggled—it was an inside joke. When our first was born, my

family had said, "He looks just like the Potters." The Potters insisted, "He was the spittin' image of old man Turner." We were bound together, the three of us, by their platitudes. When they saw Pip they asked one another, "Who does he look like?" And now Dr. Schutz was asking the same question. All that I had wanted to know was about the testes.

"He looks like me," I explained.

"Epicanthal fold." He pointed to a peculiar fold of skin at the corner of Philip's eyes, next to his nose. "Do you have an epicanthal fold?" he asked looking directly at my eyes over the top of his glasses.

I looked at Pip's eyes and said, "My niece has an epicanthal fold."

"And almond-shaped eyes?"

I couldn't remember.

"Definitely slanted eyes," he persisted and with his finger he traced the oblique angle of the eye on Pip's cheek.

It was miserably hot standing there in my winter coat; I wanted to take it off, but it was too late.

"Slanted eyes," I repeated.

I had nearly forgotten. It was the next morning and the sun streamed through the south window showing off that other woman's flowers, giving an elegance to our hospital room. It was that fantastic moment. I was getting my first look at little Pip. All of my life I had wanted to see him and now I inspected him timidly. He looked all right to me except for the fact that since I was lying flat on my back—from that angle—his eyes appeared to be slanted. I pulled myself up on one elbow, turning

his head this way and that. Sometimes his eyes looked straight and sometimes they looked slanted; I couldn't make up my mind. I remembered at the time, a mother telling me once "twenty-four hours can make all the difference in the world." I had decided to bank on that. When Dr. Schwarz came by on his morning rounds, he was accompanied by an oriental nurse. "Good morning," he smiled, pulling the sheet back, pressing his hand knowingly here and there over the general area of the womb. "What's wrong with the baby's eyes?" I blurted suddenly. He and the nurse raised their eyebrows. "They look kind of 'squished,'" I added. "You would be 'squished' too," he laughed. "Look, I took X-rays last night—the baby has a broken right arm, snapped just below the shoulder. Nothing to worry about. It'll heal in no time. It doesn't hurt him. No cast is necessary."

If only Dr. Schwarz were here now, none of this would be happening.

"We had one in our family a long time ago," Dr. Schutz said to me, then putting his stethoscope in place he pressed the silver bell into little Pip's chest, listening here and then there, making an ugly pattern of red rings. Little Pip squirmed, twisted his body into a sweeping crescent, contradicting the fetal position. I straightened him up, hoping Dr. Schutz hadn't noticed.

". . . lived 18 months," he concluded.

There was no clock to tick. What difference did it make if he gained 8 ounces or lost three pounds. Somebody's brat was running wild in the waiting room. Somebody coughed impatiently.

"The heart is good—normal, in fact," He turned toward the back room as if he wanted the nurse, but then changed his mind, turning again to Pip, placing finger inside each of Pip's hands, tugging at him. "He should try to pull himself up, but he doesn't."

I couldn't remember what babies were supposed to do.

He flattened little Pip's fist out. "Short, stubby, fingers," he commented. Philip's hands were masterpieces. Any mother would have been proud. I had thought they were going to be huge hands—like my father's hands; I saw my father with a hammer in his hand . . . he flung it across the barnyard, slamming it into my brother's back . . . his cap fell off . . .

"Extremely susceptible to upper-respiratory infection. High frequency of pneumonia. But with penicillin he should outlive you," he added in his kindest tone of voice.

I grabbed Pip up. It was all over. I intended to stomp out the door, but my eyes could not hold the tears. Tears splashed down all over Pip's blanket, soiling the satin border. I put him back on the table and shuffled in my coat pocket for something to blow my nose into. I heard water running. The doctor was at the sink. I watched as he washed up—prepared for the next one. Above the sink was a glass cupboard containing medicines for cuts and colds. I blew my nose, but it didn't do much good. The two tissues were soaked with stringy, bubbly, tears. I wasn't fit to be seen on the street. He hadn't even asked me to sit down. I wanted to sit down.

Dr. Schutz dried his hands, folded the towel, pressed it to his lips, placed his toe on the garbage pail lifter,

chucked the towel inside, called aloud to his nurse, clanking the lid back in place as he turned again to Pip. The nurse came from her sanctuary in a swift urgent manner. And as if I wasn't there he said to her, "Do you see this, and this, and this?" She nodded her head automatically after each "this." Without uttering a sound she lowered her sagging face into her bosom, clicked her ball point pen, and returned to the back room.

"Do you know anything at all about retardation?" he asked, posing as an educator.

"There are two children in my neighborhood," I said to answer his question.

"What do you think it is, the neighborhood?" he chuckled. His belly jumped up and down it was so glad to have fun.

His simple-minded suggestion reduced me to ruin—he thought I was stupid.

"It's a very strange thing, but the parents of a retarded child—they all come and tell me that this one, the retarded one, is their best child."

I had never heard a worse lie. I could ditch Pip in a minute, erase this last hour right out of my brain. I had never done anything to deserve this—and neither had Pip. I could escape. Pip was stuck. Absurd as it was, I nodded my head, "That's hard to believe," I was able to say.

"I'm not asking you to believe that this child is better than your other children. All that I'm saying is that invariably when a child like this gets to be 20 years old, his parents tell me—in fact they insist upon

it—this child is the best! Look at it this way . . . he will never hate you . . . he will never leave home . . . he will never wreck his old man's car . . . he will kiss his mother on Mother's Day . . . and you won't have to send him to college."

"What about school?"

"I know some very fine people that have a child like this. They get a great deal of enjoyment out of caring for their child. You know how it is . . . some people enjoy going to a baseball game . . . some enjoy working for the church . . . he probably won't go to school."

And all the while he grinned and gestured, pacing slowly, shuffling back and forth in slippers that had seemed like bedroom slippers.

It wouldn't be anything at all like a baseball game. I knew that much. My young friend pulled a tray of spicy cookies from her oven; I was there and the kitchen smelled outlandishly joyful but the boy was not excited. "Cookie," she pleaded with him, "Say cookie, say cookie." The boy took the cookie, turned it over and over with his delicate fingers and then ate it silently. "I need a sitter," she explained, "to take him . . . well, I might as well be leading an elephant through the super market." I had not offered to sit.

And old Zetta Flatt gave her teen-ager a birdee-whistle for his birthday. He sat in the car all day long waiting to go somewhere, pulling the slide whistle, making birdee songs. I walked by on my way to the mailbox. He stopped his whistling and looked me over. I did not say "Hello." I did not want to see his mother. She would want me to eat a piece of his cake.

That was not my idea of a son. This was not my idea of a son. I could not stay in the doctor's office. I had to go home. I had to wrap little Pip, protect him from the cold, take him home and feed him. It was only hours ago that I had taken the baby moccasins down from the closet. They were in a box with a picture of a beautiful doe leaping over a thicket. I had polished them from a bottle of non-toxic white shoe polish, on the box a rosy baby lay at his mother's breast. I had removed the shoe laces and scrubbed them vigorously in the bathroom sink, hung them to dry and laced them in again, stuck them on little Pip for the trip to the doctor. Now they looked like clown shoes.

I really knew how to waste time. I could waste time better than anyone I'd ever known. Tomorrow would be a total waste. There was no point in anything I would do tomorrow. This way and that, I twisted the blanket around Pip. The doctor wrote his findings on a 5" x 7" history card. "Tell you what," he tucked the card into Philip Potter's folder, "Don't tell your husband about this—wait a year—it might work out—you know—like you want it—O.K?"

I left by the side door, moving without fear down the steps, walking on ice without a care, dropping Pip on the front seat. It startled him, but he didn't cry. He had no spunk. How could I pretend for a whole year?

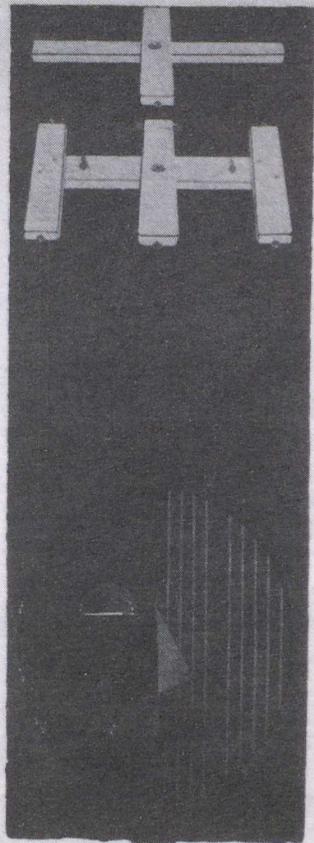
At about nine o'clock that night, I sat on the davenport with Pierce. "What did the doctor say?" he pleaded. "Pip is defective. He'll never go to school. We'll have to take care of him for the rest of our lives," I said looking toward the bedroom door where Pip

now lay still tangled in his blanket.

Our bedroom was dark, but the lamp from the living room lit the foot of the crib. The white lamb that I had pasted there seemed to be coiling away from the jack-in-the-box on the floor. Looking straight at the crib, Pierce said, "What difference does that make?"

*Lois Blanche Logan*

Frances Whitehead



# Myself: portrait

She was callow,  
naive,  
and a roamer,  
a freelance,

and this  
(being her first journey  
to the shore)  
aroused an intense fascination  
in the mysterious rhythms of the sea,  
the  
persistent parade of waves,  
the foaming rippled insignias  
in the  
sand,  
the exotic creatures housed in the beach.

She  
scurried with sandpipers  
and seagulls,  
teased crabs at low tide  
and  
convinced a jelly fish to  
save  
his paralyzing venom  
for a more threatening antagonist.

But eventually  
she  
invested her interests  
in the rigid briar  
limestone skeletons of the coral reef,  
lured by its multitude of  
intricate form, brilliant color  
and  
sucked through the currents,  
raped by the reef,  
divorced from the previous unity of her body.

(they  
tossed her back  
—stripped nude—  
to lay  
subjected  
to the  
ridiculing eyes  
and  
pincers  
of psuedo-sapiens)

Amanda Doenitz

# Elgin

There was a time  
When my world  
Collapsed.  
My mother  
Pulled me from the house.  
Grandma kept Dad calm.  
He had been doing  
Strange, artistic things;  
Cooking with too much wine,  
Crying like a drenched kitten,  
Buying a pony and painting  
The pony-cart crimson.

There was a time  
When my mother woke me  
Much too early  
And I kissed Dad  
Who cried and said  
"There, there, go back to Mom,"  
And then  
The evenings grew stiller  
Without him.

There was a time  
Almost forgotten now  
When Grandma was known for doing  
Strange, artistic things;  
And when I talk with her,  
Those who died and those she loved  
Are one.  
She takes too many naps.  
She has to forget one whole lifetime.

Sometimes I fear  
That my father will keep me calm  
And a small boy  
Will come to kiss me,  
And I'll cry and say,  
"There, there, go back to your daddy,"  
While my husband starts the car  
Because my hands shake too much.

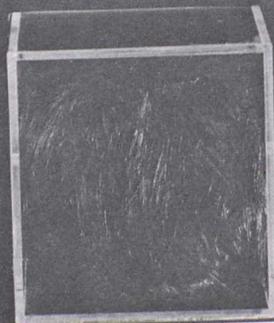
There was a time  
I think it was Thursday  
When my husband  
Pulled our son from the house.  
I wonder which of us  
Will return first.  
My son has been doing  
Strange, artistic things.



Removed - June 2 - 1978

Documented at intervals of 1 week

Duration - 90 days



Stephen Prina

# Blue Eyes Wasted

Blue eyes wasted, and your hair plastic contained  
you shave off your hair to see how  
it'll look  
growing back again

pictures taken at week intervals  
show your eyes  
Death dull  
shaven also

your mother's eyes are open wide  
scared  
telling me she doesn't understand  
why you do these things  
with such beautiful eyes (hers blue also)  
and your father's hair

Heredity resides  
in a clear plastic cube container  
(under the guise of irregularly aborted  
thick brown hair, brown like your father's)

Perhaps heredity has something to do with it.  
I know of many men who hate their fathers.  
Hated so much they wanted no resemblance commented on,  
mentioned  
or even a name to show their blood relation

Blood sisters. Two girls cutting index fingers  
holding them together, smearing blood, friends forever, sisters

So you have no blood brother  
and not even your father  
to consider pleasantly

You see your father as hair,  
your hair,  
thick, wavy, brown,  
like your father's.

So you shave it off.  
Every curl  
every trace of brown

It took your lifetime to grow it  
and many past generations to pass it on.  
On to you.  
But, your heredity is not in your hair  
Nor is your father.

Inside flesh, Inside you  
and inside your past generations  
lies your father

Head shaven  
you stand testimony to art  
this shaving of heredity  
is a piece of your art, hanging on the wall

I only see four views of your face  
(with your father's hair)  
followed by four more pictures  
(shaven, your anti-genetic art)  
And I, in my personal reaction

to your personal statement  
(your art)  
see only a pair of  
Blue eyes wasted  
and your father's beautiful hair  
plastic contained.

7-12-76 Mammouth, Kentucky

*Colleen Murphy*

## Sunday, August 29

I'm in a terrible mood. I can only compare the mood I'm in to little jagged bits of glass. It's mostly my nerves. My nerves are terrible today because of last night, once again, I walked into The Candlelight Tavern, sat down, and started in.

The way of course it went was this: Soon, after about three beers—well, I just like myself immensely. I was a pretty decent fellow after all, a damned decent fellow after all. I did admit the fact that yes, I was in some ways, perhaps even many ways, rather full of shit as a person, even perhaps in a very fundamental way full of shit; that I was vain, an absurd and even grotesquely absurd little ham, a performer, a displayer of poses, a teller of every conceivable kind of lie but damnit, I thought, at least I knew it, at least I admitted it, at least I never let myself get away with anything, at least I disliked myself. And, I considered, you couldn't say that for most people, for probably any of the clowns around me in the place laughing their guilt-free heads off.

Of course, I had to also admit, in calling myself a pretty decent fellow I wasn't actually disliking myself *then*. In fact, I realized, I was approving of myself while what made me at least conceivably a pretty decent fellow was the fact that I never approved of myself. So, I had to conclude, in calling myself a pretty decent fellow I was no longer a pretty decent fellow, I was a jerk again—worse, a jerk who approved of himself, who called himself a pretty decent fellow after all.

And yet—the thought of course soon followed—wasn't the fact that I could draw such a conclusion

against myself as *that*, so ruthlessly honest a conclusion against myself as *that*—wasn't that at the same time proof once again that I never let myself get away with anything, never let any cheap trick to comfort myself get by?—wasn't that proof in short that I was a pretty decent fellow after all? A thought which of course I immediately recognized as a cheap trick to comfort myself . . .

At last, though, I decided that since I enjoyed regarding myself as a pretty decent fellow more than I enjoyed *being* one (since being one required that I dislike myself), I would regard myself as a pretty decent fellow and get drunk, enjoy myself.

"Hey Fred," I called to the bartender's back in a hearty decent fellow way, "how about a refill here."

Turning around, he seemed a little surprised I knew his name but he called back, "Here it comes."

"So," I said as he brought it over. "What's the good word?"

"Not much," he said and glanced at the number of dimes I slid into his hand, and returned to the register.

Fred was all right, a fine guy. Oh, I thought, he could be a pain in the ass sometimes with his absurd sense of importance, that stupid insulting gravity, and he enjoyed—really enjoyed—cutting drunks off saying, "Okay, let's take it home" with a very wise tired patient smile while he waited for the drunk to make one false move so he could come charging around the bar and twist the guy's arm behind his back and run him out the door into the street like the guy was a big leaking bag of garbage, and then walk back shaking his

head very wisely and sorrowfully—but really, I thought, what the hell, we're none of us perfect, all born in sin as they say, and we'll all be bones in the same ground when it's over—

I let Fred know how I felt by the way I said, "Long night ahead, huh?" with a warm sad all-forgiving smile.

"Guess so," he said from the register where he stood leaning with his arms folded.

Fred was all right. So, I felt certain, was the guy on the stool to my left. He was with a young lady and they both seemed very nice, talking quietly together, so quietly I couldn't quite hear them. And how nicely they were dressed! He had a light blue sport jacket over a very clean white shirt and she had a nice crisp green blouse with a white sweater she wore unbuttoned over just her shoulders. They both had mixed drinks. I noticed his ring. I waited for her to lift her glass and I noticed hers. It seemed very nice that they were married, sitting there together, and both so pleasantly dressed—

"Excuse me," I said, leaning over the bar toward them. They both looked at me politely and I said with calm quiet warmth: "I just wanted to tell you, I think you both look very nice tonight," and returned immediately to my drink to indicate that was all I really wished to say.

They both thanked me very kindly, even shyly, and I winked and nodded just once from over my beer and returned to drinking it because that was all I really wished to say, because they needn't feel required to begin a conversation with some stranger simply

because he happened to think they were dressed nicely.

After a few moments I did wish, however, to know just the one thing: were they enjoying themselves here tonight?

They said they were, and that was good to hear.

"It's a nice bar," I said looking it over a bit, "a quiet bar."

He agreed and smiled agreeably. She glanced around the place nodding her head and smiling, her eyebrows raised.

"It's a perfect place," I said, "if you just want to sit and have a quiet drink, if you just want to relax together. Been married long?"

"Pardon?" he said.

"I noticed your rings. I was just wondering how long you've been married, or maybe that's none of my bee's wax."

He said not at all, that they'd been married eight years now.

"Eight years," I said. "Now *that* is really something."

"Well—"

"Seriously," I said. I told them they could not imagine how refreshing a thing that was to see nowadays, how rare a thing. "Damn it," I said, "you just don't see that anymore. Here you are two people, two people devoted to each other, caring about each other, companions. Do you know what I mean by companions?" I said and locked my fingers together and held them up for the couple to see.

He said he knew what I meant but that, truth to tell, they had plans for becoming legally separated.

"And yet," I said opening my hands, "here you are, having a quiet, rational drink together, talking it over, discussing it. You know what that is?" I said. "That's maturity. That is what is *known* as being a goddamn grownup. Listen," I said and lifted my glass, "here's to the both of you, no kidding," and drank. I felt wonderful.

"You know," I signed, "maturity is a wonderful thing, a rare thing. It's something—well, it's something hard to define exactly. For example, how would you define maturity?"

"Well—"

"I would say it comes down," I said, "essentially at least I would say it comes down to a feeling, a sense of a kind of wholeness. Do you know what I mean by wholeness?"

"Wholeness," he said.

I told them they suggested something of what I meant by wholeness in their ability to so quietly discuss their plans for legal separation. He raised his eyebrows thoughtfully and nodded his head and she did exactly the same and I wondered whether perhaps I shouldn't just keep the conversation at a more lighthearted level, discuss different kinds of drinks or movies or interesting places. But I didn't feel like talking about any of those things and I said, "Actually, I don't want to get into anything very long and involved. I mean I'm sure you didn't come here tonight to listen to a lecture on what kind of *lives* we should all be leading. I did want to just say though, as long as we've gotten into this business about wholeness—but why don't I buy you another drink first, what are you drinking? Let's all get

a fresh round." I called Fred over.

But the guy insisted no, he was fine, thanks, really, and she held up her glass to show me she was fine too.

"You're sure," I said.

"Really, we're fine."

"Well get me another draft, Fred," I said and put a dollar down. "Anyway," I drawled, "where were we?"

"Wholeness," he said.

"Exactly," I said, "You see, what I mean by wholeness—thanks Fred—what I mean is—well, let me put it this way. We all have—each one of us—we each have notions about ourselves, right? I mean you think of yourself as—well, for one thing, your name. What is your name by the way?"

"Bob," he said.

"'Bob,'" I repeated. "Okay then, you, Bob—mine's Ted," I said and nodded once to both of them. "You, Bob," I continued, "like almost everyone else in the world, you think of yourself as 'Bob.' I mean, that is, you think of yourself as your name. I didn't mean everyone in the world thinks of himself as 'Bob,'" I said laughing.

"No," he said, he didn't really think I'd meant that.

"Anyway, the point is," I said, "you do think of yourself as this certain thing, as this person, as this identity. Oh your idea of yourself, your notion of yourself, might move *around* a little, change as you change, but there it is anyway, this feeling about yourself that you are this thing which you know or at least have ideas about. Okay, but you see," I said (hot now), "right there is what I'm talking about. You're divided—

not just you. I don't mean just you, Bob, all of us, we're all divided within ourselves into at least—at the very least—two things, right? Into this one thing that we call our self, that you say is 'Bob,' that you react to as being 'Bob,' as 'me,' as 'this: me: Bob,' " I said tapping my chest three times. "We're divided into that on the one hand, and also into whatever is saying 'This is me: Bob' whatever is seeing you in you, and whatever that is—well, that's you too. So there you are," I said and held out my hands: "Split."

"Mm!" he said.

"Oh but that's nothing," I assured him. "What happens with some people is worse, much worse, it's even comical. Christ they have knowers within them knowing their self know they're knowing their self and a knower that knows they're like that and would like to change, like to gather all the pieces into one, but it can't of course, because it's just another piece itself."

He said that sounded like quite a predicament and took his cigarettes out of his shirt. She thoughtfully shook her head in agreement with his remark.

I couldn't quite tell whether they were interested or just being very polite. I decided to jump ahead straight to the remedy.

"It's pretty bad," I said, "but there's a cure."

"There is," he said.

"Did you ever watch an animal?" I said. "Really watch for instance a cow—or now, say a dog, do you have a dog?"

"No, we don't," he said.

"Or even a baby. Do you have any kids?"

"No, we haven't had any. We were—"

"Okay, but you've seen babies."

"I'm not sure what—"

"Did you ever notice with babies—and also dogs and horses and cows and even flies and worms and bugs for that matter—did you ever notice? They all have one thing in common, right?"

"Well—"

"The one thing they have in common is this," I said and leaned a little over the bar toward them, accentuating my words with precise taps on the surface of the bar. "They do . . . not . . . see themselves, they do not see themselves because there is no part of them that could ever possibly separate from the perfect wholeness, the perfect entirety of their self to take any . . . sort . . . of look."

I sat back and held up a finger. "I think," I said, "I know what you'd like to say right now."

They both looked up a little nervously when I said that.

"You're thinking," I said, "'This guy is advocating simplemindedness as a virtue, he's telling us we should be ashamed of our intellectual superiority to the cows and rocks and vegetables,' right?"

"Well, no, I—"

"Listen, I can see how you could get that impression. And you're absolutely right Bob about that kind of thinking, about envying the simplicity of babies and animals and trees. That kind of thinking leads to despair, it leads to *flights* from the self, it leads to attempts to completely lose yourself in states of passion or obsession or drunkenness or even love or hate or any

stupid desperate self-consuming state. And you're one hundred percent right about those states. They are flights, cheap temporary flights. And they're not *only* cheap, not *only* insignificant and cheap: they're harmful. You return from them even less whole than when you left, even less able to make the most simple little move—to even *think* about making a move—without setting off a whole boiling swarm of little bickering selves inside, a whole incredibly stupid *debate* over whether you really *should* put your pants on before your shirt. I could not agree with you more," I said. "But you see, I'm not talking about any flight from the self. What I'm talking about is not a state in which you end up returning to the same miserable stupid heap of yourself in pieces. In the state I'm talking about you've never left yourself. What you've *done* is—you've totally, you've absolutely, *entered* yourself."

As I said this last I sat up a little straight, lotus-ey, my hands cupped in my lap, and went on in a quieter, more concentrated voice: "In that state you would never hesitate, never question, never choose, never choose because there would never be alternatives. In that state you could only *do*," I said and lifted my hands apart and brought them gently together to illustrate an act of Pure Doing. "There would be no difference," I said staring at my hands, "there would be no difference between you and what you are doing because you would be that doing, one with it, utterly—in other words—*utterly* one with yourself as pure . . . act. To separate yourself then would be like trying to separate—it would be like trying to separate the hand

from the motion of the hand," I said and very slowly (a bit sensually in fact) rotated my folded hands. "And how can you do *that*?" I said and stared for a long moment at my hands, allowing Bob and his wife time to consider how you ever *could* separate the hand from its motion. And then I looked at them both—not with the answer, but the *humor* of this ultimate question, this ultimate paradox, twinkling in my Zen Master's eyes.

He sat jiggling his knee and staring into the ash tray in which he was twirling the lighted tip of his cigarette into a neat one. She was fiddling with the top button of her blouse, smiling very nervously, *bravely*.

"Bored, huh?" I said.

He looked up quickly, about to protest, but I said, "Forget it, really."

"No," he said, "listen—"

"Oh come on, I'm not blind for God sakes, you were bored. But so what?"

"Listen," he said, "I wasn't bored."

"Sure you were," I said. "In fact, what you were thinking was, you were thinking, 'This guy is so drunk'—let me finish—you were thinking, 'This guy is drunk, he's had too much to drink and now oh Christ he's all full of the old bull manure, the old let's-all-be-budda-buddies-bit,' right?" He sat tapping and tapping his cigarette as he stared into the ashtray, shaking his head in disagreement. She sat rigidly staring into her drink. "You were thinking," I continued, "'This guy—this guy's disgusting, this guy's a big fat blowhard, let's get out of here Mabel' or whatever the hell name of your little poopsie there. But listen, it's

not that I care one way or the other. I *don't* care. All I'm saying is why don't you just come out and say that, say, 'Hey look, buddy, I think you're a nice fellow but you're boring me and my poopsie so we'll just take a rain check on your little routine.' You can say that to me."

I was, of course, aware all the while that the speech I was giving *now* was the *real* routine, but I was nearly overwhelmed with the aching pathos of it and could hardly have stopped. Besides, I was a little upset—flabbergasted in fact—that they could have been bored by my conversation, by so expansive and—well, *attractive* a manner as I'd been displaying.

When he was finally able to interrupt me (by grabbing my arm saying "Wait a minute, wait a minute") he told me I was all wrong, that he hadn't been bored at all. "I was," he said, "a little confused with some of what you were saying there, but it sounded pretty damn interesting, and pretty damn *true* too." He went on to say that he *did* also think it might be a good idea, just for my own sake, if I were to ease off a little on the beer, that I did seem a little wound up and it might be best if I were to relax just a little, have some coffee perhaps—

But suddenly I had begun feeling very bored, very empty and bored with everything and wished for nothing more than to get away from their polite concerned faces. I said I had to use the john, would they excuse me? I did have to use the john, but it would also give them a chance, I figured, to leave without any embarrassing explanations. I patted the guy on the

shoulder as I got up.

Returning, I found they really *had* taken the opportunity to leave. I remember thinking as I counted how much money I had left that they were awfully nice people but rather simple really.

I still had plenty of money on me and decided that since I felt suddenly so tired—exhausted in fact—I should try something stronger, something with a good kick, some scotches just to get the old enthusiasm back, the old fun. So the rest is for the most part pretty blurred—although I do remember in a vague general way a great deal of enthusiasm.

At any rate that's *about* how I was last night. I may have added a few touches, I don't know. The point is, though, I'm in a mood like little jagged bits of glass. Nerves, etc.

I stayed in bed today as long as I could because every time I opened my eyes there was a beautiful day at the window—sun, birds, etc.—and I would not, I *would* not face that contrast. I would not in fact, even get up to pull down the shade. (Had it been drizzling piss or something outside I might have been up as early as 9 for a long comfortably bitter walk through it, my hands jammed fiercely in my pockets, scowling at my scowl in the store windows, etc.) The fact is I would probably still not be up but along about 4 o'clock a fly—a huge one—began buzzing very near in a dreary-hot-1-room-apartment way and then began landing on my face. I put my head under the sheet but it was too hot and I could smell my breath and hear him buzzing very close to let me know he was waiting.

I finally threw the sheet off entirely and stood up out of bed shouting "All right! Shit!"

I've been up for about three hours now. I went for a walk as soon as I got up. I had to get out of that room. Though there was something almost appealing about the perfect squalor of it—including, I discovered, even the standard stiff bits of woodsy-colored vomit clinging to the rim of the toilet bowl—my nerves needed some air. I walked for about an hour, thinking, among many other things, of what I would like to have been saying right then, right then, to different people I know, people to whom I'd said something quite different or not anything at all. "Excuse me, Mr. Marconi," I wanted to be saying before him at his desk, "but I just thought you should know: I think you stink, I think this job stinks, and I think perhaps you'd better just go find someone else to play Mussolini of The North Reference Room with sir because, sir, I quit—qua peesh?—I have had it and I quit." And so on.

Right now I'm in a Prince Castle hamburger and ice cream stand. I've been writing all this down for an hour or so. (My pockets always hold a small notebook with which to record any conclusions I might draw that seem especially illuminating or at least intriguingly complicated.) I should mention, if only for the sake of thoroughness, that between writing this I had a vanilla single dip. The ice cream was stiff (I didn't have what it takes to wait for it to soften) and hurt my teeth in a way that made me very quietly whimper with hate. It seems also worth mentioning that the cone was stale and a very deadly ruthless-looking young shaver turned

around in his seat beside his mother and, calmly sucking on his milk shake, settled into staring very hard at me as I ate. I avoided his eyes by watching a fairly young couple as they waited for their three cheeseburgers, two fries, small coke, and a strawberry shake. The girl behind the counter recited for them in a musical way each item as she set it into one of the white bags they use here which read: "Prince Castle" in Robin Hood lettering and picture a brawny-chested prince with a knowing wink and smile, holding a triple dip cone in one hand and a huge hamburger in the other. The guy paid for it and she carried the bag. He was a little dumpy, dough-like, with a loose stupid mouth, and she was just barely on the pretty side of plain so that I figured from his dumpy loose-mouthed vantage point he thinks she's really sharp. They drove away with him behind the wheel of a very new-looking sky-blue corvette. Also explaining a lot, I figured.

After they left I thought about them some more before turning back to my little notebook. I pictured them having to wait for a slow freight and decided to eat while they waited as it would otherwise all be cold by the time they got home. I pictured her picking out his for him, picking out hers. I pictured them eating, chewing a little wetly and not saying anything. I pictured her daintily kissing the grease off each finger, him very quietly, just audibly, burping; both of them perfectly comfortable and satisfied and mild, both of them absolutely calm, happy and stupid and healthy as pigs, as two little potatoes in the ground, as—and so on and so on until I ended up having to take very long and very steady

breaths to stop quivering.

And that's pretty much how I'll be thinking the rest of the day.

Except that, as it gets darker, I'll begin to feel a little quieter, a little less vicious. It's already a little dark, the sun's down anyway, the boy and his mother are gone, the girl behind the counter is joking shyly with the cook, and I already feel a little tired. By two or certainly three in the morning I'll be able to sleep. But just before bed, just before I lie down (I know all this by heart), I'll all at once feel something a little mysterious and queer (the stars at the window standing just-so from each other, the moon, etc.) and I'll find myself feeling somehow curiously reverent of All Things In General After All. I'll feel like calling up someone, my sister perhaps, to talk very quietly about nothing in particular, but it will be much too late of course. Finally, feeling just a little sorry for myself and wonderfully tired, I'll go to bed and I'll sleep.

Now: As to why I've bothered writing all this down, any of this down. Well, first of all: I'm tired of always ending up going to movies all day whenever I get in this mood, or wandering in the aquarium staring at the fish, staring at the fish, or ending up back at the bar again, a dark bar on a sunny Sunday afternoon. So I thought as a change it might be interesting to do this, to come in here and write all this down, that's all. But of course to whom? To whom am I writing? Well, surely to no one in *particular*. Actually—actually I'm writing to someone who is less anyone in *particular* than he is a rather murky *swarm* of listeners, with no

really distinct faces, floating—hovering—about me here, listening very carefully, judging very carefully. So of course with such an audience as *that*—well, yes, it makes it pretty likely, *probable* in fact, that all these personal disclosures have not been made with any real disapproval of myself, but rather as a *display* of disapproval, a display designed to ultimately suggest to these listeners the idea that I cannot after all be entirely fraudulent, not while I'm still capable of recognizing myself as so. And yes, to whom am I addressing all *this* now if not to those same grim listeners; so that perhaps even these *last* "disapproving" remarks are *part* of that display, part of that fraud—

Or perhaps not, I don't know, I don't really care one way or the other right now, I'm too tired.

John Manderino

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
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These results are based on a simulated data set. The distribution of the data is assumed to be normal. The results are based on a simulated data set. The distribution of the data is assumed to be normal. The results are based on a simulated data set. The distribution of the data is assumed to be normal.

# Cottonbound

With some of August  
caught in batting,  
the pilled lump of pallet  
smells the way she did.

Tobacco . . . woodsmoke . . . slippery shale  
Each layer a generation, another summer,  
Hot . . . hootowl . . . heartripping cry  
And then the whippoorwill.

Cottonbound, snapping beans on porchswing,  
cracking rocks out of pockets in the hills  
to show me "pretties."  
Cottonbound, you glittered one night  
across snowfields in Minnesota  
Snow and cotton bound me up with you.

Next day, they called to say  
you had passed on while padding  
a quilt, "jist as natchrul . . ."  
"Fluid about the heart or gout," they said,  
but I felt you had not passed from that,  
but from yearning to catch old Time  
on a line and sinker, draw him by a pincer,  
match his eye.

You cached these crazy notions in the quilt.  
Sunbonnet . . . flour sack . . . Sunday silk  
Though your berry mind  
was not in it, but out

Uprooting hens and finding speckled eggs,  
fretting for your forty-year-old babies  
playing barefoot where the milksnakes  
crawl as thick as mud and big around as your ankle.

About if the booger man was real, then what,  
and if Jesus hung that long  
of if tickfever  
would bring you down that year.

You "proibly" knew, 600 miles away,  
I grew to you like a snail to its shell,  
or a chameleon frog to your well bucket  
or bachelor buttons to the clay.  
You most likely knew my fear.

Gay Davidson

# Mulberry Saint

Mulberry saint,  
purple-stained Madonna with  
No hope of heaven.  
(Angels all have boy names.)  
In this tree, I am halfway there  
And still in spitting distance of Hell.

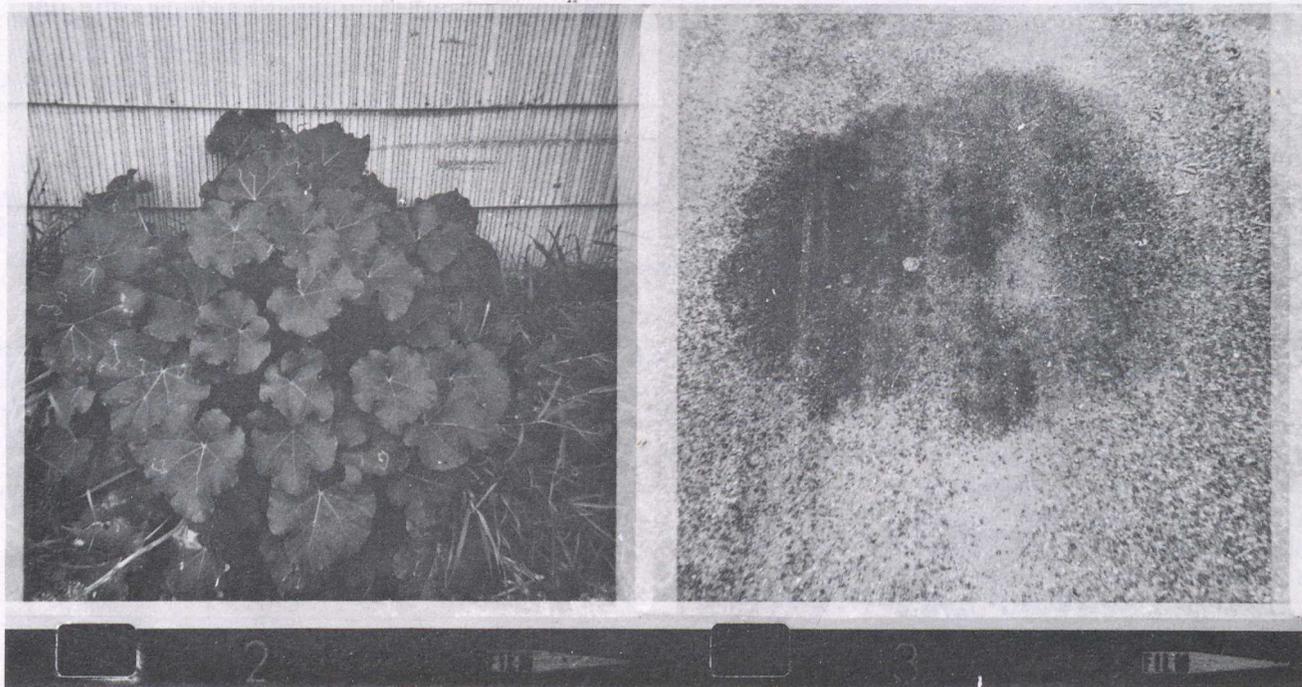
Inside, Christ runs up and down  
the cross like a flag on a stormy day.  
Resurrected, to keep the peace,  
By Corn-fed Fred, the apostle

Outside, all I know of Sin  
is the Tennessee Stud is one.  
I remember the taste of singing it,  
arms outspread like Danny Thomas,  
While being bathed at age of five.  
(Sin tastes like soap.)

When the heads go down like cattle  
and the prayer is being mispronounced,  
I sidle from the sanctuary  
Into hot, sweet-scented sun,  
and revel in mulberries

Then the benediction starts and finally  
The bells. The organ wheezes once.  
I begin my perilous descent and  
Finally sitteth at the right hand  
of the warden and feel holy, and full.

Gay Davidson



Gary Nichols

Wet cellophane cracker paper

sticks to the bottom of my glasses and I read

saltine  
saltine

as I drink icy restaurant water.

Our conversation is over.

I swallow hard.

The last bite of crêpe is cold and tasteless.

You tap your spoon on the table.

It catches the light and I stare at

the glimmer, tired.

You stop abruptly.

I ask you how much the check is,

avoiding your eyes.

Stephanie Everhart

# Thisbe Under Invoices

Miss Cecilia Thisbe knows  
That doors, like minds, are better closed.  
She patters over parquet floors  
Closing windows, closing doors.

Her handwriting, which never cramps,  
Graces letters bearing stamps  
Of "Please remit" and "Bill enclosed."  
Miss Thisbe's never uncomposed

Enough to make a small mistake,  
So colleagues let her undertake  
The smallest tasks for smaller pay,  
And Thisbe riffles through a day

Of carbons inking tiny hands;  
Memos, orders, and commands.  
She stifles daintily a cough.  
Her rubber finger won't come off.

The blessed hour comes at last  
When workers drop their paper ballast.  
Then Thisbe nods behind her post;  
Smiles at some, scowls at most,

And scurries to her tidy nest,  
Dines, retires, gets her rest,  
Dreams of invoices, and cov-  
Ers herself. She dreams of love

So rarely now, when warming rains  
Remind her, despite her clerical pains,  
How once she masked her lover's snores  
By opening windows, opening doors.

Her eyes pop open as the light  
Files away the fears of night.  
Gracefully she dresses, turns  
Off all lights, swiftly returns

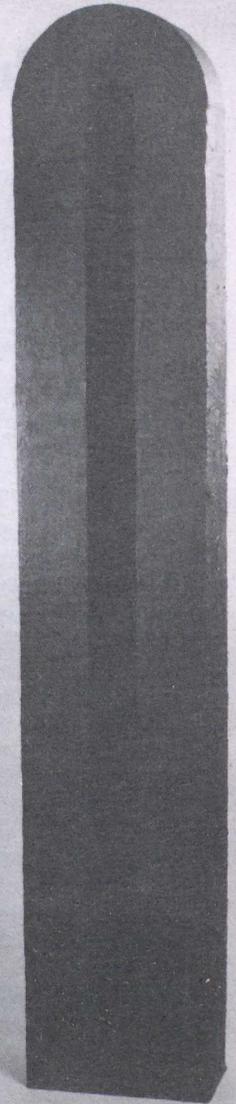
To work, embracing metal desk  
As if she took the greatest risk  
In leaving it. She bustles then,  
While invoices pile up again.

Her hands are grimed with office stains  
As if she fixed commuter trains.  
Her head bows like a Roman arch  
Though she's too dignified to crouch

In front of filing cabinets.  
Attending to her bassinets,  
She learns to love her tiny chores,  
Of closing windows, closing doors.

*Gloria Wardin*

*George Jirasek*



## Two Cheers For Mae West

"Listen to this one," Dodi tucked one leg behind the other and turned toward me, "when I told him we wanted to go out tonight, he looked me right in the eye and said 'Why—why would you—why would you want to go out—without me?'"

I waited for her to continue. Of course it was preposterous, married women going 'out' at night; risky business.

"Jee-sus," she started then delayed while she searched for her cigarettes, tapped the lip open and lifted one to her mouth. The red flame whirred and shimmered casting an indecent glow on green eye shadow, on firm red lips. Jutting her chin out, Dodi erected the long white cigarette to meet the top of the flame. The hollows of her cheeks caved in like silk curtains against an open window; she ingested the smoke, fixing an aura in my family sedan as we drove along on the highway to the Ramada Inn. I was old enough to be her Mother, but in the car we were ageless.

"Sons-a-bitches," she snapped at the ashes.

"Men! They all want to own ya'." Dodi turned and looked out the car window into the dark night. Waves of brown hair caped her shoulders. She squeezed a finger into the front pocket of her white linen jeans, fishing out an elastic hair band. Out of habit she gathered her hair at the nape of her neck. I doubted that any man could own her.

Generally women were dull companions; sitting at coffee blazing tales, dabbing at red eyes over slights, fingering crumbs, plotting revenges; pitiful bitches, pouring their womanhood over me as if I were their moral

sieve. I couldn't take it. Dodi was good looking, beautiful I suppose; honey in the hive. Men couldn't help themselves. A star, unannounced.

"You know what he told me one time, she continued. "He said you and I wouldn't be going out like this if we weren't looking for something we didn't have—God Daammn!" She rubbed the cigarette into the tray under the dash and flashed me a troubled look. It was beginning to rain. I had to put an end to this dredging.

"When is a woman complete?" I said to myself out loud. Married women run to the "Y" together, they leave their offices and lunch together, they leave their work stations and go to the Rest Room together; mingling with one another at the Art Guild, the Women's Club, the WCTU, the Mother's Study Club, the La Leche League; joining Auxiliary Anonymous, becoming Volunteer Unlimited. Dodi liked going places with me; we avoided those everyday haunts. We had had good times. If tonight was to be good, then to hell with "just" reasons. I wanted to bust through those swinging doors at the big red Ramada, to stand next to Dodi and share in the instant magic of a room full of men and their blown-up ideas. Most of my life I had clung rigidly to the notion that anything to do with the body was seamy—and a seamy woman was the worst of all possible humans. It was regrettable (but nevertheless true) that men "got off" on the body. Women were higher creatures. Women could love the ugly. We waited at a stop light. I looked out my window into the grey wall of a truck.

"Smell this," she giggled and stuck her wrist under

my nose. The blessing of Jasmine wafted about, her veins looked like smooth jade. I remembered again "The Great Shopping Trip." We (Dodi and I) had rented a plush motel room, Royal Blue bedroom carpet, two White French Provincial beds, two head-to-toe body mirrors, two hundred miles out of town. We tried to forget husbands, children and what it was costing.

"It's worth it," she had said, "not to have to watch that damned TV tonight."

Dodi had brought along for the occasion a bottle full of tall wavy grass, clover and dandelion scents. She poured it carelessly into a roaring stream of bath water. It made the whole room smell damp and sweet; it went under the door and into the hall. I had no bottles to bring; instead, unwrapping a white sliver of motel soap I bathed quickly in three inches of curdling water.

"I look better with my clothes off than I do with them on," she had called to me. When I came from the bathroom, she was standing in front of the mirror rubbing a delicious goop all over her body—fascinated by her own image. I brushed my nipples with a drop of musk oil, glancing out the window at a panorama of alley ways and tarry rooftops.

"Shit," she exclaimed. "If any man is going to love my body, he'll have to love it, stretch marks and all." Her breasts were full and very pretty. We dressed in our most smashing tops and slacks. Our eyes were like fires coming out of the lamp-lit mirror. The hue and cry of the sunny street beckoned below. I had always been a terrible shopper, never knowing what looked good on me; everything had its possibilities and made its indistinct

impression upon me.

Dodi had been there before, it was a convention town, she had gone with her husband. We walked through Wagner's ready-to-wear. She yanked a blouse from the rack and turned to me matter-of-factly, "Don't ever let me catch you wearing anything like this—I'll kill you." I gave it a serious look. Without hesitating she moved on to ear-rings. Immediately the best looking pair out of one thousand caught her eye. Two hours later, from a motley array of down-town shops, she had purchased a long sleeved print blouse, a pair of apple green gabardine pants, and a white safari jacket.

I bought nothing: Maybe tomorrow.

She had gone to "Alterations" with the slacks. I waited on the main floor feigning an interest in 500 ear-rings, then wandered into a rather large mirrored alcove entirely dedicated to perfume. Everywhere I looked, soft light bounded off prisms of rose glycerin. Crystal swirls of woody mist sparkled in cardboard cartons. A gentleman came to help. "Would you like to know something about this perfume?" His voice was thick and personal; he exacted a nod from me. Picking up a heavy looking bottle etched in black lace, he began, "Marcel Rochas, a French couturier, visited America back in the thirties and fell in love with a blonde American girl who he evidently could not forget; the black lace on this bottle is in memory of that girl. Guess who?" I looked at him; he had high cheek bones, I could not guess.

"Mae West ! She is in her seventies now, but if I

had the time I would chase her to the end of the world." He was alarmingly experienced. I reached out to examine the black lace bottle, but my hand bumped awkwardly into a counter sample knocking it over, clanging it sharply against the glass counter top, freeing the stopper; before I could set it upright a large mass of it had escaped and the smell flew wildly about the room. I grabbed some motel Kleenex from my purse, dobed it up, shoved it back into my purse. He stood helpless. Everywhere I looked I could see me. I fled to Alterations, but he didn't follow me.

The car windows are steaming over, I flick on the air conditioner.

"Hey! Stop! Stop! Stop!" Dodi motioned to her right. There's a Super Valu Store," she shouted.

Right; I remembered now. I was supposed to remind her to pick up bread and milk. I waited in the car while she ran in to get a loaf of bread and a gallon jug of milk. Now it was raining harder. We had shopped together in the afternoon, but it was not the same. We had driven down town; she bought a pair of slacks for her husband and I bought socks for mine.

"Nobody will be there on a night like this," I said as she got back into the car. "Dodi, if nothing happens by 11 o'clock, I'm getting the hell out of there—going home." She came alive.

"I'll make sure you don't die there; if you can't make anything happen by 11 o'clock, by God, I'll kiss you myself." She laughed outrageously. I couldn't be sure she was joking. She had spirit—loved the ridiculous; she would do it just to make me squirm. She liked to

make people squirm. One night we arrived at the Ramada too late to find a seat in the lounge and ended up sitting in the dining room. At the next table was a man sitting alone eating a steak. She stood up, walked over to him, and asked him to dance. She expected him to quit chewing, lay down his fork, to swallow it whole, and sweep her over the floor. "He's not your type," I had forewarned. "He just fascinates the hell out of me," she insisted. "But I'm eating," was his first reaction. "Eat later," she teased. "You're too bold," he confessed. She came back and sat down, buzzing like a bee that'd been tinkered with. Demanding action, she sidled over to the guitar player and requested *Hey Jude*. It must have been everyone's favorite; we were left stranded, alone with their fresh ashes and warm booze, with that man and his half-eaten steak.

"Nobody likes to be turned down.

I offered my consolation, "If that guy didn't have the desire, forget it—it wouldn't have been any good," But she fell into a hurt silence; it would ruin our night 'out.' I tried again. "Look at it this way. Desire is always the man's idea, if he has his wits about him he makes the conquest or almost makes it." It reminded me of old wives' tales of sex in the dark under hand-stitched quilts, coming out of nowhere shooting into a still lump—floating a bell-ringer skyward like some carnival hero. I hadn't convinced Dodi either.

"Hell," she fired, "lots of men want the woman to make the first move."

"Maybe," I suggested, "maybe it works with a husband or a good friend. But it's chancy with a complete

stranger. Think how many times a day a hooker must get turned down," I added absent-mindedly. At 12:30 the guitar player waved her to him and kissed her while he coiled his hook-ups.

On our next night 'out,' she put away her boldness. We sat demurely in the Ramada dining room, casting subtle thoughts about. It didn't pan out. Men were fools for not noticing us. It was degrading; after two hours, not one man had said, "I love your ass," or "would you like to dance." We were dying there in those Captain Chairs under the rustic styrofoam ceiling beams.

"Dodi, if you want to have a good time," I offered, "you will have to run around with a younger woman."

"Pick up your drink and follow me," she said. We stopped at the motel desk and she asked for the manager. A fat, bald, sixtyish man appeared; an assortment of keys hung from his belt.

"I want to go swimming in your pool," she announced. I was stunned.

"Well," he fumbled for words and looked her over, "the pool closes at 10 o'clock—it's after midnite—people are sleeping—can't swim now—it's too late—they'll call the desk—we'll get a flood of complaints."

We stood our ground. Dodi wiggled it for him and gave him her best country smile.

"Well," he decided, "if you don't make any noise—no splashing, yelling, or anything of that kind—"

"How do we get there?"

He pointed to the door.

It was an indoor pool, bordered on two sides by motel rooms with sliding glass doors. All the rooms were in

darkness. Underwater lights lit the water like a stage. She slapped her body into the water with a resounding splash; the sleepers slept on.

"You wouldn't believe how good this feels," she was jubilant. "Get your ass in here!" she taunted. I unzipped my slacks and let them drop to the floor. She must have been shocked to pieces. In one grand gesture I downed the gin and jumped in. It was a beautiful thing to do, because I can't swim. We laughed for the gods, splashing up and down, she in her jeans and sweater and me in my flesh-colored underwear.

"I don't know what that son-of-a-bitch thought we were gonna' use for swim suits," she said after a while, "we could get arrested for this." I hadn't that much to drink; I climbed dumb-like from the pool, standing in the dark shadows, pulling my clothes on, thinking no one would ever know . . .

. . . "Here we are again," I announced, straining to see the turn-off through the swishing, curling water on the windshield. The Ramada light was no help perched at the top of a 90 foot pole. I relaxed a bit as I maneuvered into a parking space. Locking the car we headed for the double red doors. "I think I'll bring a fish next time and put it in the fountain," said Dodi. I liked it better when she was cussing her husband. My clothes feel like hell on me," she complained, "it's my body—I want it to be perfect—let's go to the Rest Room." We waited there a few seconds, the red shag swallowing up our rainy tracks.

Silently we pushed back out into the simulated old-sea-vessel hallway passing the dining room, leaning

through the swinging doors, stopping inside the lounge. This had to be the lowest form of recreation devised by anybody. I wondered what we were doing there. But then there always was this pack of people squeezed into this small room, pitch black, with a loud band summoning up my crudest instincts. I spied a table with one empty glass; we moved in, bumping our way past the bar studs. Dodi sat on a little padded bench next to the rustic wall, facing the mirrored bar. I sat facing her.

"I can't see what's happening," I said feeling gypped.

"I'll tell you what's happening; right now that Farmington Provision guy is shooting hot glances your way." We had been here four times in the last nine months and he had been here every time; he must come here every night. He was massive, deceptively handsome; the first time he asked me to dance I couldn't believe my good luck. I asked him his name; he answered, "D-d-d-dick." The same band had been packing them in for 15 months; how routine it must be for the, watching the different women dance then ditch him. He worked at "Provisions" cutting up hogs into hams and hocks.

"God, Francine is here again," reports Dodi scanning the room; Francine is a middle-aged divorcee, rather dowdy. "She has on a terrible, black pantsuit." I felt utterly stupid sitting there like that, not daring to look.

"How come you have all that bench and I have to stand?" His words came out sort of "down-home."

"Would you like to sit down?" Dodi smiled up at him.

He jumped the wrought-iron railing and said, "Hi, my name's Darrell. I'm a farmer." We all shook hands.

"Doesn't feel like a farmer hand to me," Dodi had

a way; I guessed I'd never learn it.

"Farmin's gone modern; I got me a tractor with air conditioner, heater, am-fm radio, 8-track tape deck, C-B radio, and carpeting."

"What are you doing out tonight?" asks Dodi, getting right to the point.

"I went to this meeting with a bunch of my neighbors' the damndest thing I ever been to in my life—ever hear of Ducks Unlimited? I'll tell you what it is; it's an organization that raised \$5,000,000 last year and spent it to breed wild ducks so that every duck hunter would get his limit." His dark eyes gleamed; his lips looked warm and tense.

"You went to Ducks Unlimited, but you don't hunt ducks?" I was sympathetic.

"That's right. What did you say your name was—my name's Darrell." He was embarrassed. "I don't kill anything," he wanted to talk about it, "ducks, rabbits, squirrels, birds—I turned 5 acres of my land into a wildlife refuge."

"Do you kill animals?" he asked Dodi.

"I kill animals," she disarmed him, "squirrels, chickens, rabbits . . ." She moved like a devil, "Kiss me," she begged. She kissed him, but he pulled away. "I'm married," he protested. "That's a woman's excuse." I felt a tap on my shoulder; I spun around befuddled.

"Hi! I'm Chuck—Darrell's my neighbor." He was so young and naked, a twin to that timid, eager kid in *American Graffiti*—the one with thick glasses.

"Do you farm with your Dad?" I blurted out. He nodded and with a quick grin he asked, "Do you want

to dance?"

Right off, the lights were dispensed with and the guitar man commenced singing, "Hey! Its Good—To Be Back Home Again . . ." He wanted to dance close to me squeezing my back, sliding his hand under my sweater; it felt good. I had to go to the Rest Room. Back at the table to pick up my purse, Darrell is explaining, "I've got the most jealous wife a man ever had." "He ain't kidding," Chuck added. "One time I went by his house and all his furniture was sitting out in the yard . . . I though he was moving'." "That's no lie," said Darrell, "if she ever found out I was sittin' here with another woman she'd kill me . . . it would be the end of our marriage . . . before I left the house tonight she took my billfold away from me." He said he had to leave and he did; I went to the Rest Room.

Dodo met me in the hall. She was really rolling; it was no fake Exit. "Let's get the hell out of here; I'm through with him."

"What happened?" I had never seen her like this.

"I was dancing with that Chuck kid and he undid my bra, the little bastard."

We pulled out of the parking lot, it was late, we headed home. The streetlights and headlights bleared my vision, I hardly remember them at all, "If you start it, if you make the first move then you have the right to end it whenever you want to end it . . . is that it?" She weathered my accusation. "That's pretty sophomoric." She didn't deny it. She opened the glove compartment and busied herself reading something or other she had crumpled in her hand. The streets were dry now and

there was a late night business about them. It seemed as if someone was hollering somewhere, it seemed to be coming from the van driving by my side.

"I think they're yelling at us, Dodi. What's going on?"

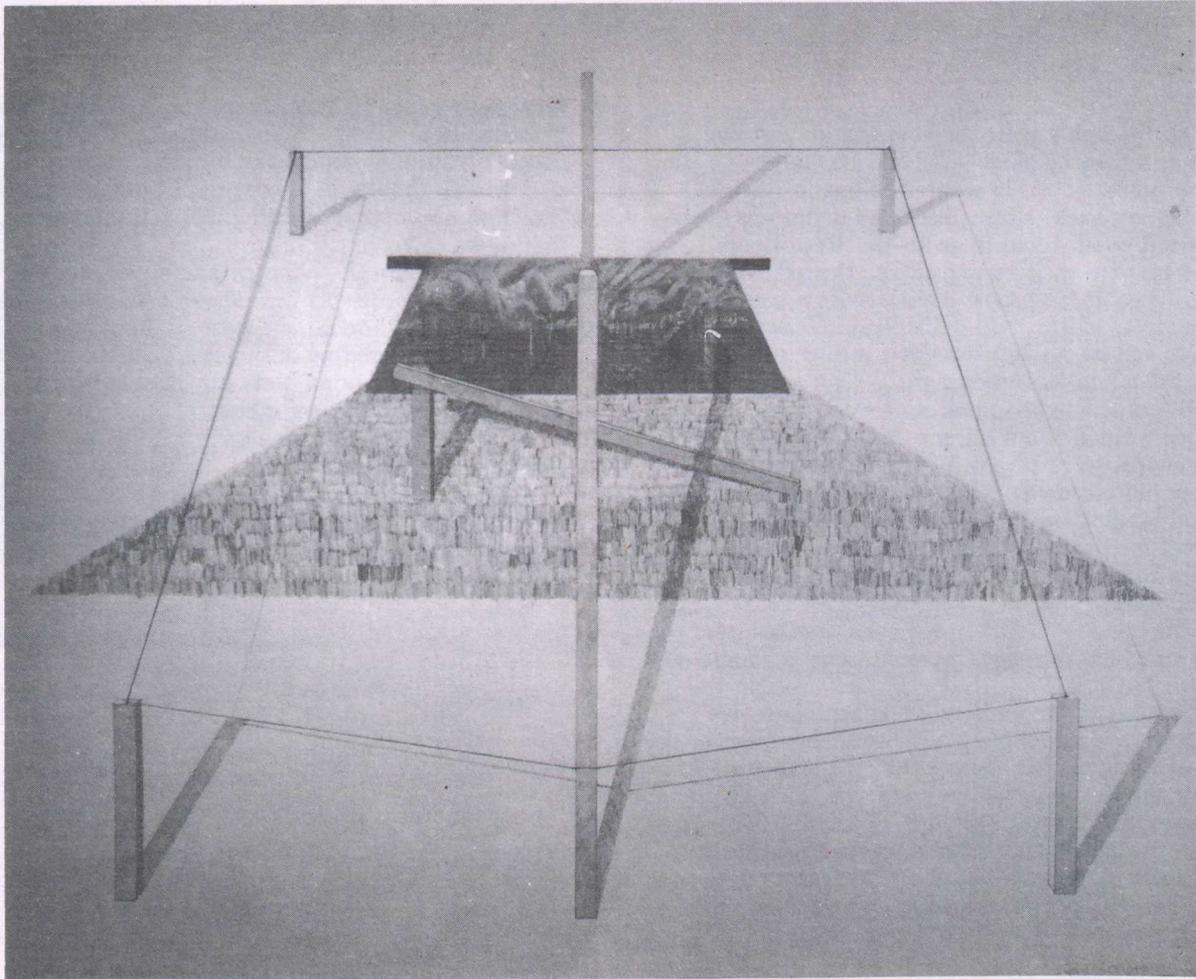
"Roll down your window and ask them what they want."

I rolled down the window and stuck my neck out to see who it was. It was me. Those crazies had customized their van. installing mirror glass in their side windows. He zipped the window down and yelled, "let's go drink some beer." The wind blew his dead hair over a long nose and a loose learing mouth.

A red light was coming up . . . "Faster, faster, faster," cried Dodi.

I kept my foot off the brake and shoved in the light switch. Panic-stricken by my unexpected blindness, I gave no thought to the intersection. We breezed through bold, leaving the crazies behind.

*Lois Blanche Logan*



# To Thomas Pynchon

I was waiting for the Cosmic Machismo in all its glory  
To move silently across the cinema screen  
So I could watch the old movies and cry myself to sleep  
About some other time and some other space

I was waiting under Gravity's Rainbow for a golden pot  
To retire in its purple velvet case  
So I could touch the rainbow and savor it  
Except its red, green, orange, and blue blinded me to earth

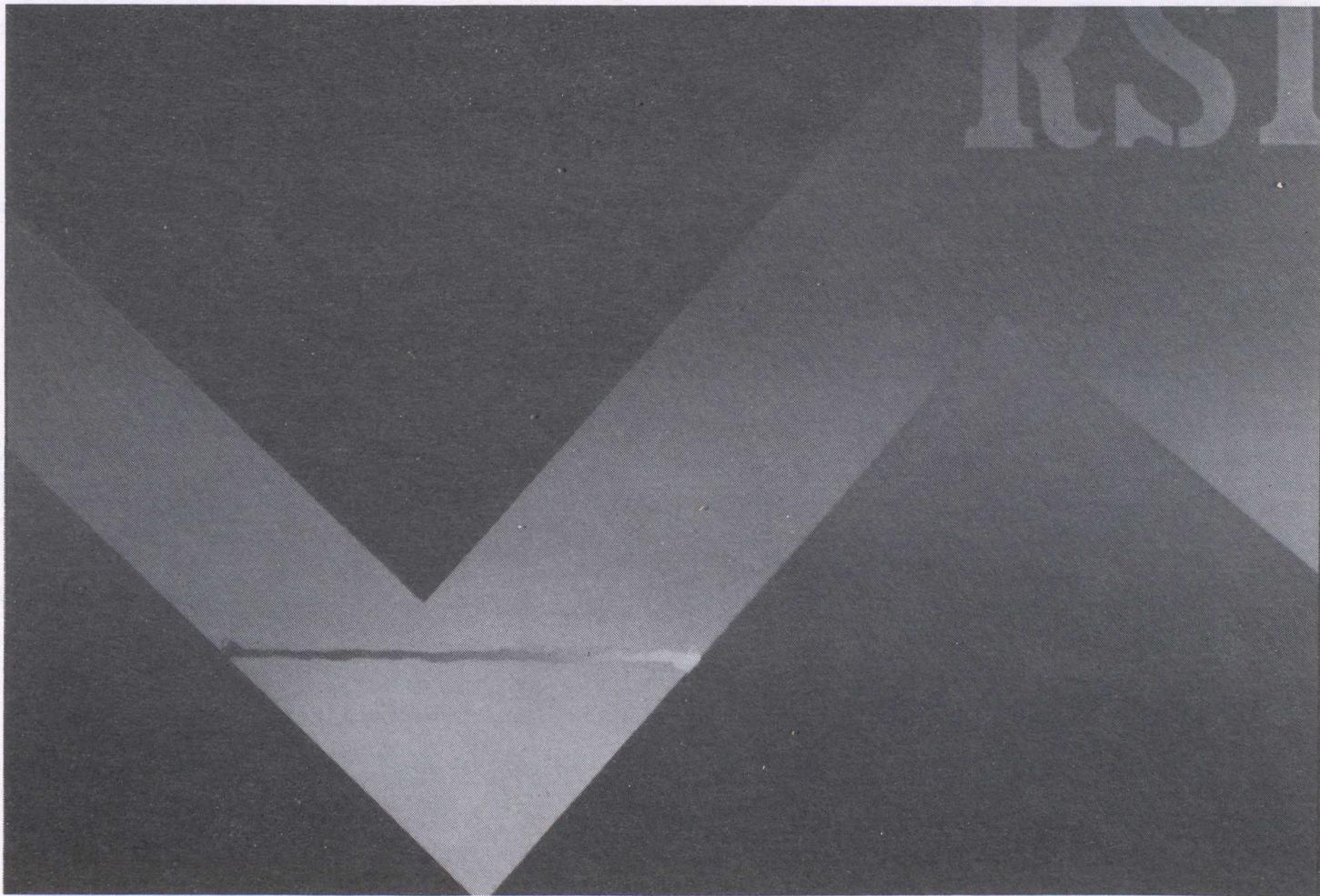
I was waiting Beyond the Zero for the number one  
To enable all the stomachs and backs  
So I could switch them on and off at will  
Only the logic will not work and the people are dead

I was waiting at the Casino of Hermann Goering  
To deal myself the hand of hands  
So I could never lose again to anyone  
Not to the scapels, the sutures, the screams, or the gas

I was waiting In The Zone for a main line rush  
To caper above the pyramids on Egyptian cotton  
So I could drink the sun and caress the aether  
Inside my wings of white powder, and then I awoke

I didn't have to wait long for the ghost-life Counterforce  
To come and show another one of those special movies  
So I could eat some more fresh popcorn  
And drink from the stars which hang from his feet

*Carl Ludwigson*



# The Poetry of Richard Brautigan

There is something wrong with this poem. Can you find it?

Richard Brautigan, "Critical Can Opener"

While the major publishing houses are cutting back on the amount of poetry published each year, and while young poets are struggling to get enough money together to privately print chapbooks, Richard Brautigan is proving that a poet can be commercially successful in the seventies. Both *Rommel Drives On Deep Into Egypt* and *The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster* have gone through multiple hard cover printing; copies from the gigantic paperback runs can be found not only in bookstores throughout the land but also in places which are generally considered anathema to poetry, such as supermarkets, train stations, and head shops.

After perusing the jacket blurbs ("His poems are, by turns, brutally realistic or surrealistically witty," —*Time*; ". . . [Y]ou're startled by what's being set down, or by a single twist either in content or in image, or by the honesty with which the poet is expressing himself . . ." —*Poetry*), the reader who has enjoyed Brautigan's novels may also expect to find the poetry just as aesthetically pleasing; but Brautigan continually confounds expectations: *Trout Fishing in America* and *A Confederate General from Big Sur* challenge traditional notions about both the American Dream and novelistic structure; *In Watermelon Sugar* and *The Abortion* parody the romance;

*The Hawklime Monster* is subtitled "a gothic western," just as *Willard and His Bowling Trophies* is subtitled "a perverse mystery." Each of Brautigan's novels is an imaginative and largely successful experiment with form.

His experimentations in the poetic genre, on the other hand, are almost complete artistic failures. When the reader finishes *Rommel Drives* or *The Pill* he feels as if he has just finished a notebook of random jottings instead of a volume of poetry. Few poems run more than ten lines; many have fewer than ten words. We can thank the Japanese poets for teaching us about word economy, but I wonder if Jisso would appreciate the succinctness of "Nice Ass" ("There is so much lost / and so much gained in / these words.") or "Melting Ice Cream at the Edge of Your Final Thought" ("Oh well, call it a / life.") Less is not always more.

Thematically the poems run the gamut from anti-war ("Star Spangled Nails") to pro-fellatio ("I've Never Had It Done so Gently Before"); from the horrors of drugs ("Diet") to the wonders of penicillin ("Flowers for Those You Love"); from praise of a girl named Valerie (one poem in *Rommel Drives*) to praise of a girl named Marcia (fifteen poems in *The Pill*). Thomas McGuane, himself a young novelist of considerable talent, finds the style of Brautigan's poetry as hackneyed as its themes: "Apparently relaxed in their poetics, they are in fact strenuously a la mode.<sup>1</sup>" Though purportedly anti-poetry, the poems of Richard Brautigan, with their mixture of sex, San Francisco Zen, and strung-out metaphors, in fact follow rigidly the manner of the Padgett-McClure-McKuen-Cohen school.

Brautigan the novelist has often been accused of being a literary "Charlie Brown," innocently believing, as Johnathan Yardley has said, "happiness is a warm hippie<sup>2</sup>" and naively singing the praises of the organic millennium. I would take exception to this view; granted, each of Brautigan's novels is narrated by a rather shallow, idealistic nebbish. However, we must realize that the narrator is not Brautigan; that, instead, Brautigan's irony often catches his narrator as the main victim. In *Watermelon Sugar*, for example, the narrator celebrates iDEATH as the new Eden. But the reader can see the truths and horrors behind the illusions; he can see the death lurking in iDEATH. The novelist Brautigan, by a subtle manipulation and reporting of events, can undercut the romantic excesses of the unreliable narrator who embraces the pastoral ideal.

Yet the case for reading Brautigan's novels ironically is not helped by his poetry, which regretfully seldom exhibits any ironic element. While in his novels Brautigan is at pains to distinguish himself from the narrator (usually by appearing as a character himself), in his poetry he unabashedly speaks his own voice. As a result the poems are all too often personal to the point of being maudlin. The odes to Marcia which comprise such a large portion of *The Pill* are uniformly and effusively sentimental ("Pissing a few moments ago / I looked down at my penis / affectionately. / Knowing it has been inside / you twice today makes me / feel beautiful."—"The Beautiful Poem"; "Just because people love your mind, / doesn't mean they have to have your body, / too."—"Just Because"; "Do you think of me . as

often as I think / of you?"—"Please.'). When one reads such poems as these he cannot help but feel the same way as if he had just read someone else's love letter: embarrassed. Surely the poems have been written with feeling, but the printed page is a harsh arbiter and can turn heartfelt emotion into banality.

When Brautigan's poems are not so sentimental and shallow, Hallmark cards of a counter culture, they are often so esoteric as to defy analysis. "Crab Cigar" reads, "I was watching a lot of crabs / eating in the tide pools / of the Pacific a few days ago. / When I say a lot: I mean / hundreds of crabs. They eat / like cigars." "Third Eye" reads, "There is a motorcycle / in New Mexico." Poems such as these may carry some significance for Brautigan, but they provide too little information to be meaningful to many others.

The philosophical poems, on the other hand, suffer from a simplemindedness which renders them too easily apprehended. While the Zen of "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace" anticipated the ideology of Charles Reich and Robert Pririsig in its union of mechanism and humanism and technology and nature, other poems, such as "Deer Tracks," would find Karma merely through "Beautiful, sobbing, high-g geared fucking / and then to lie silently like deer tracks / in the freshly-fallen snow beside the one / you love. That's all."

What poems remain in Brautigan's canon are generally random thoughts which pose as poetry. "December 30" is typical: "At 1:03 in the morning a fart / smells like a marriage between / an avocado and a fish head. / I have

to get out of bed / to write this down without / my glasses on." One wonders how much the cause of poetry would have suffered had Brautigan stayed in bed that fateful night. In a laudatory article in *Poetry* Lewis Warsh states that "Brautigan writes poems whenever an interesting thought or phrase occurs to him."<sup>3</sup> Yet Brautigan's lack of selectivity is a problem; for one "interesting thought or phrase" ("Ah, / you're just a copy / of all the candy bars / I've every eaten."—"Xerox Candy Bar"; "He'd sell a rats' asshole / to a blindman for a wedding / ring."—"Negative Clank") does not in itself make a poem. If the term is to retain any validity we cannot accept Brautigan's notion (as implied in "Albion Breakfast" and "April 7, 1969") that anything a person writes is poetry.

Such random thoughts as found in "December 30" do liven up Brautigan's novels, however; but standing alone they are frail and shabby. Occasionally some of the absurd Brautigan humor can be found in his poetry, but too often he resorts to the cheap jokes of the "Negative Clank" variety, and, like a vaudevillian of old, Brautigan apparently subscribed to the dictum, "The more times you repeat a bad joke, the funnier it gets." Thus, the body of "A 48-Year-Old Burglar from San Diego" is a blank page (heh-heh), as is that of "8 Millimeter (mm)" (heh-heh-heh), "1891-1944" (heh-heh-heh-heh) and "'88' Poems (heh-heh-heh-heh-heh).

Only a few times does Brautigan's truly humorous self shine through the clouds of comic cliché. "The Symbol" finds Moby Dick reincarnated as a Californian truck driver who thinks, "Hoffa is a lot better / to us

whales than Captain Ahab ever was." The sequence of poems entitled "The Galilee Hitch-Hiker," one of Brautigan's earliest works, anticipates *Trout Fishing in America* (here Baudelaire sits in for *Trout Fishing in America Shorty*) in its synecdochical technique, its American theme, and its raucously absurd good humor.

Hardly any of the serious poems can be labeled successful, but "Restaurant" works as well as any:

Fragile, fading 37,  
she wears her wedding ring like a trance  
and stares straight down at an empty coffee cup  
as if she were looking into the mouth of a dead bird.  
Dinner is over. Her husband has gone to the toilet.  
He will be back soon and then it will be her turn  
to go to the toilet.

Here, for once, tone and imagery are tightly controlled and avoid excessive sentiment or obscure metaphors. The stark, flat language mirrors the bleakness and emptiness of a trapped life.

Yet most of Brautigan's poems fail; it is a gifted artist who in our time can achieve critical success both as a novelist and a poet (as have Dickey, Updike, and just a few others). Lewis Warsh has enthusiastically stated, "The readability of Brautigan's poems makes me not want to think too hard; they exist to give pleasure to anyone who wants to go along."<sup>4</sup> but therein lies the deficiency of the poetry: it is less art than it is a substitute for valium. To those of us who treasure Brautigan's novels, his poetry will remain an embarrassment. In a revealing comment to Bruce Cook, Brautigan has admitted that he only began to write poetry so that he

could learn to write sentences for his novels.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps, the, Brautigan's poetry should be viewed as his minor league, his testing grounds, and we can be thankful that he was a wise enough novelist to discard the contorted constructions, the sentimentality, and the clichéd counter culture worldview of his poetry. while retaining the flashes of whimsy and irony in order to produce works of subtlety and magic.

"I am a minor poet."

Richard Brautigan, "The Literary Life in California / 1964."

#### NOTES

- 1 Thomas McGuane, "Trout Fishing in America, The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster, In Watermelon Sugar," *New York Times Book Review*, 15 Feb. 1970, p. 49.
- 2 Johnathan Yardley, "Still Roving," *New Republic*, 20 March 1971, p. 24.
- 3 Lewis Warsh, "Out of Sight," *Poetry*, (1970), 444.
- 4 Warsh, p. 445.
- 5 Bruce Cook, *The Beat Generation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 206.

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