

TOWERS

TOWERS

thirty-four

Awards

TOWERS AWARD FOR POETRY

Richard Steele • Oedipus Chromatos page 11
Judges, James Kennedy • NIU; Anthony
Piccionne • NIU
Coordinator, Karen Yourison

J. HAL CONNOR AWARD FOR CREATIVE PROSE

Dennis Dillow • World of Guano page 16
Judge, Glenn Meeter • NIU
Coordinator, Barbara Lorr

E. RUTH TAYLOR AWARD FOR CRITICAL WRITING

Jack Hafer • For Lack of Love of Vitamins
or Cash page 45
Judge, Mary Sue Schriber • NIU
Coordinator, John Ferstel

MAUDE UHLAND AWARD FOR FRESHMAN WRITING

Nothing deemed worthy
Judge, Edward Oliphant • NIU
Coordinator, Russ Colman

TOWERS ART AWARDS

Ken Stanley • Icarus • Print page 10
R. Daugherty • Interstate • Print page 25
Terry Speer • Rings 1970 • Drawing page 30
George Tarbay • Untitled • Photograph page 44
Judge, Ben Mahmoud • NIU

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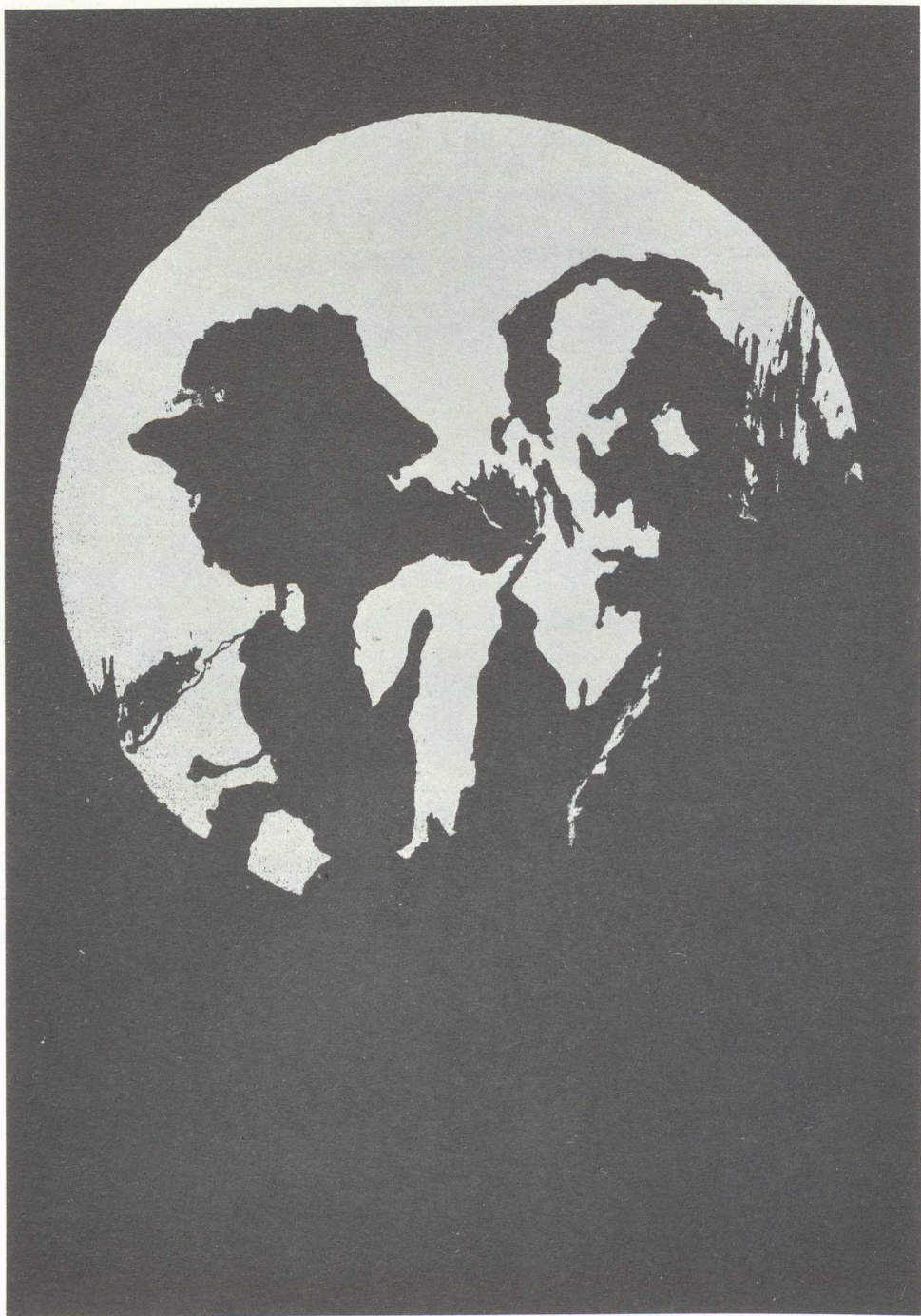
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I'm from Missouri

I bled for a long time
at first . . . slowly.
Only occasional lapses
then . . .
a sudden quietness.

They said it was all
imagination;
One does "not" bleed
words . . .
I'm not convinced.

They think explanations
serve a purpose—
as if sanity depended
on understanding—
give them time.

I see some who know,
mute people
sitting under the
trees . . .
All drained out.

Others keep trying
to grind phrases,
pretending they're not
dead . . .
But I'm not convinced.

Alex Newman

Tis the Season

By Marianne Pelc

Everyone was standing around trying to decide where Mary and Joseph should go. Mrs. Gibbs thought December 20th was too early to put baby Jesus in his crib, and Father Gorden wanted the Christmas tree lights to outline the eighteen foot cross outside the church. He and Mr. Gariboldi were discussing how slippery the roof of the church was and the hazards involved in walking across it to reach the cross. It had been snowing heavily for an hour, and the mumbling voiced their concern about anyone going up on the roof. Mr. Gibbs had just finished hanging choir angels on the telephone poles in the parking lot. He worked for the telephone company, and as he put it, "could climb in any weather". He lit a White Owl and yelled to Father Gorden who was trudging up a ladder to the roof, "Why don't you let us men do that Father, you're going to kill yourself up there." Father Gorden backed slowly down the ladder. "I'm going inside for awhile, do whatever you like. I'm so tired, I just can't do everything on my own, carry the weight all the time," he said, "I'm like a dead battery, I . . . I need to be recharged." He kicked the wet snow off his shoes and hurried into the church. "They should have never sent him to this parish," Mrs. Feeny said, "he just doesn't know how to communicate with the people." "I wish Father Petz was still here, I just loved him, this one is so unfriendly." "Well I think he's having a nervous breakdown," Mrs. Gibbs interrupted, "did you see how emotional he got, he just doesn't have the personality for a priest. Why he was actually crying at Mass one day."

I knew no more work would get done outside so I went inside to see how the tree decorating was coming along. My mother was busy sawing tree trunks so they would fit into the stands. The three Gariboldi children had started to decorate one tree next to the altar. They seemed to think that a plastic poinsettia would look very nice at the top of the tree. "We Don't Want that plastic poinsettia up there, Linda," I heard my mother say in a familiar tone. I knew the kid got the message, just like my brothers and I always did. "That little snip is bound and determined to put that damn flower on that tree," my mother whispered to me as she prepared to saw another trunk. Just then the decorated tree started to tip, and she ran off to catch it before it fell.

I walked to the back of the church and went into the soundproof cry room. I was finally alone and sat down

next to a miniature clay cave that everyone prayed would dry in time to shelter Mary, Joseph, and the baby. I was trying to decide what made me come and participate in this chaos. After all, I was an agnostic, but I suppose it was just one of those times when I was really down and figured that a word to the man upstairs, just for the heck of it, wouldn't hurt. Besides, it was Christmas time, what better place to begin anew, throw off the old and be re-born into faith and all that.

I knew when I came home for Christmas break and asked my mother to wake me for 8:00 a.m. mass she nearly went into shock. I'd had twelve years of "good" solid Catholic education, and my parents were convinced that it was a total waste of time and money. The only time it seemed that a religious "happening" had taken place within me was when I announced at my eighth grade graduation party that I wanted to enter the convent. This brought about a reaction of laughter and tears, and nothing was ever said about it again. After that the Providence High School for girls put me in a navy blue uniform and saddle shoes and for the next four years gave me D's in Religion I-IV. Notes were sent home that I wasn't producing up to my maximum potential, and it seemed like I was always getting sent on little visits to the Polish priest who used to be an alcoholic; or chosen to carry the nun's book bag, or take down the Christmas tree in the convent. I figured out right away that they were using the "be a friend" psychology on me.

When I was well into my Junior year of high school, I had developed quite a fine reputation as the only atheist in the school. I wrote themes denouncing religion and God as unnecessary to man's existence. I put my ideas into action by not receiving holy communion when the entire student body was herded into the gym for first Friday mass. Later I became a little bolder and skipped mass completely by hiding in the girl's washroom. The nuns always came in and checked for ditchers, but I always stood on the toilet so they couldn't see my feet when they looked under the door of each stall. Every Sunday a battle royal ensued concerning my attendance at mass. I usually conceded because my father became quite irate, and I had no plans of being a fanatic about the issue or ending up a martyr for my cause. "Father Gorden came over today," my mother would say, "he asked me why you're not attending mass. How do you think I feel?" Her eyes would always fill with tears, and I knew this was a really big thing with her. I didn't know why she got so upset; I figured it was my life and I should be free to choose.

Things continued like this till my graduation from high school, then no more was said about it and I slept on Sunday mornings. My parents and I had very little communication about important things. Or at least things that seemed important to me. Everytime I'd get up the courage to tell them an important decision, they would react the same way they did at my graduation party. "Don't be crazy, you're just going through a stage," my mother would say. How well I remember, the convent stage, the Peace Corps stage, the atheism stage, and the psychiatrist stage.

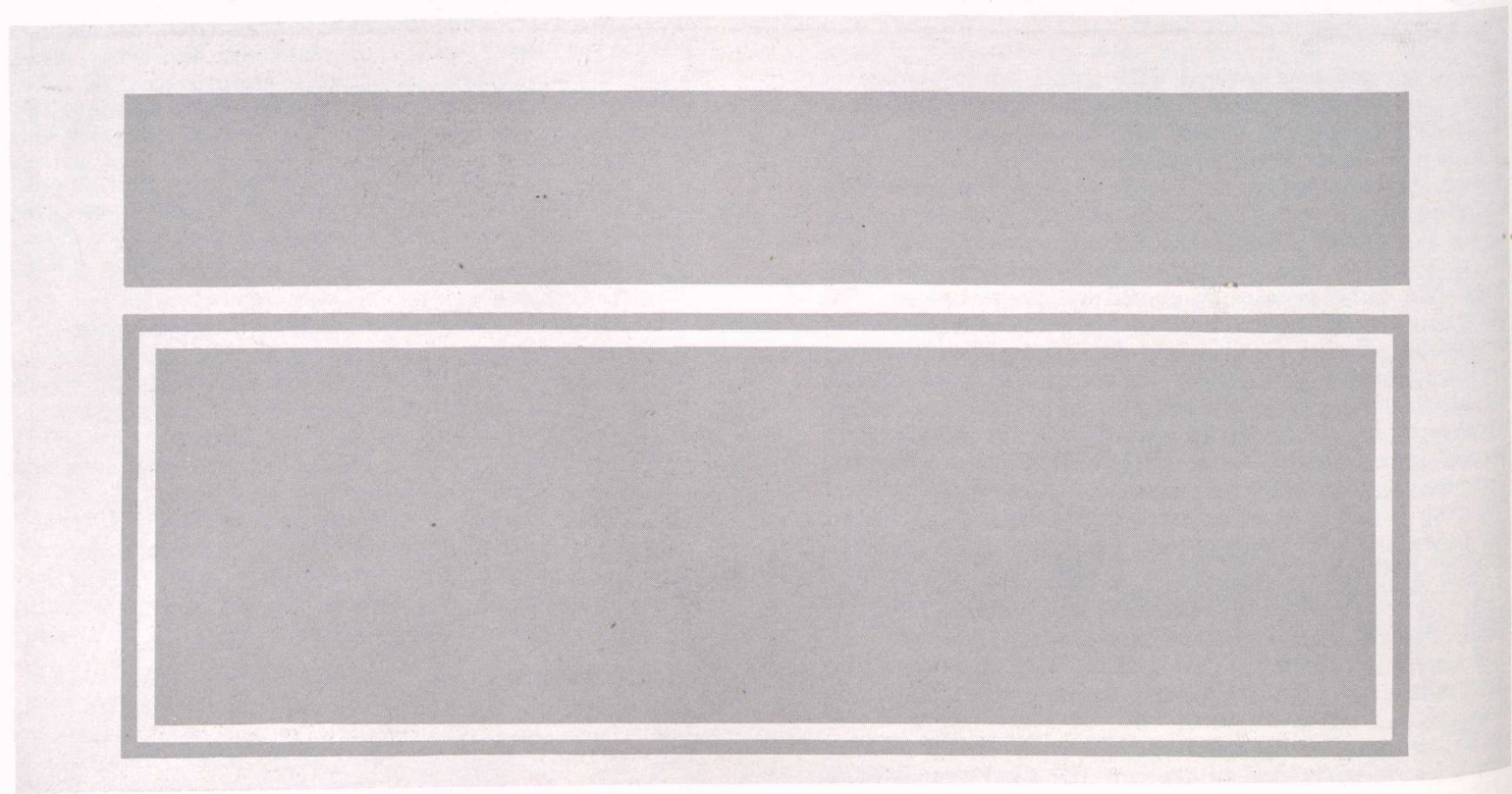
The ground was covered with a fine white blanket of snow, only the sidewalk outside the church had been marred by humanity. I went outside to see how the hanging of the lights was coming along. The idea for outlining the cross had been abandoned, and the lights were hanging from the matrix of the cross like a single streamer on a maypole. They ran from that point at an angle to the roof of the awning over the entrance. On this roof, Mr. Gibbs was being guided by several onlookers as to where the blinking statues of Mary and Joseph should be placed. Father Gorden had also ascended to the roof and was putting a large brick in the crib so it would not be blown away by a sudden gust of wind. Inside, my mother was spraying the trees with artificial snow so they would look realistic. Some of the children were sweeping up pine needles and broken ornaments, and others were hanging wreaths. I went upstairs to the choir loft and sat down at the big pipe organ. I was just about to break into a chorus of Misty when I heard Father Gorden's sickly voice yell at some children who were blowing out vigil candles.

I couldn't believe everything that was happening. Was this where one came to think, meditate, find peace? It was all so chaotic, so much what I didn't want. I was really trying to believe, I hope HE knew that I was. I don't know what kind of a person this God was or what HE wanted. Could he possibly enjoy people singing off key, funerals, green winter coats with purple spring hats, collections, tithing, the same expressionless faces every Sunday, blinking plastic statues and neon signs flashing JESUS SAVES, BABY! I didn't know, all I wanted was peace; none of the options. All I wanted was for this Jesus to zap up right in front of me and put his hand on my shoulder and say let's go get some coffee and talk. I didn't think that was asking too much. Just to have the chance to ask him a few questions, see if he really wanted the church decorated, and if it was okay to play Misty on the pipe organ, and would I ever fall in love

and get married or should I have entered the convent. I mean I couldn't be the only person who thought this stuff. I just wanted to ask him good human stuff, things that happen to people, not lambs of God. What if I brought a nice Jewish boy home, would he give me a break.

The lights in the church began to dim one by one. All the children ran outside to play in the snow. The trees were in place, the clay cave was dazzling under a pink spotlight, Mary and Joseph sat contentedly on the roof blinking to their heart's content, and the choir angels watched over Father Gorden as he maneuvered his riding lawnmower with the scoop on the front through the snowdrifts in the parking lot.

"Well, I'm glad that's over with," my mother said. "I wish these people would leave their kids home, they mess up everything." She stood at the back of the church and gazed at all the decorations. "It looks nice, doesn't it," she said.



people go to parties

just as Remora sucks all sharks the same
so do i drift from man

to man,
with-
out a
loss,
with-
out a
gain.

now tell me about L'Eclipse!

just as the King snake sheds skin unaware,
so do i exchange old modes
of feeling

for new
with-
out a

thought or catch of breath.

S. E. Mitchell



Oedipus Chromatos

Scene: It is winter. A few leafless trees on a painted backdrop. Stark blacks, whites and grays. Oedipus emerges stage right dressed in rags. His face is a stylized mask; the eyes are black rings. The Sphinx waits, stage left, her robe gray, her eyes painted huge and blue. The lights, initially bright, dim to darkness leaving the two at the extremes of the stage in the white light of the spots.

Oedipus

What by day (the sun a chip
Of white pain, sharp prick
To the soft eye) moves slowly
Through these corridors of light?
And what in the name of God
(A name like turpentine on the
Tongue, or spit in blood from
A murky lung—when cold—I cough
Alone against my pillow and
Am old) what in that name
Moves through these vestibules of night?

Sphinx

What moves in dimly lighted halls perhaps
And late in those dark hours pending morning,
In alleys, coalbins, cellars, shades of night,
Impending blackness of storms—
Is bait for the eye to nibble on;
In umbral fading forms, when caught by chance
A sideward glance reveals a flutter in the darkness
Sun conceals. Only look—you have but to fix
The moth-darkness with the sharp pricks
Of your eyes to find . . .
But I forget
That you are blind.

The light on the Sphinx goes out. Oedipus follows his spot to center stage.

Oedipus

If traveling blindly
Marked me in the eyes of others,
If in my flapping cloak
My poor frame was but casual
Reminder of universal shame,
I then have stood alone
On windy nights and sheltered

Under tattered roofs against the rain
And felt a pain—that this being so—
I could bear. But, if under the
Pelting sun every droplet colors
Merely to white the stones they
Go upon, if when day is done
No yellow glimmer of noon
Follows them through
The deep alcoves of night—
Then I am a polite . . . fiction
That had at best be done—
Old Oedipus who for a while
Bethought himself to have cracked
The Sphinx's smile.

The lights gradually grow brighter revealing a golden palace and stately columns, flowering trees and a blue sky swarming with huge white clouds on the painted backdrop. The Sphinx is gone and figures in smiling masks have moved onto the stage from the right and left, peasants and children who pantomime work and play.

Oedipus

And yet I can not bear to pass.
When I was King and it was spring
The dawn was a roseate grin
Spreading at noon into golden laughter,
And in my palace pleasing patterns,
Meanders, banter, and brocades
Sang to my eye;
The afternoon sun over cloud-shapes
Floating on a bridge of blue
Shone through the colorless air
And—diffuse—collected images of
Every wave, and everywhere bright colors
leapt from gaudy folds of old tapestries
hung low—all sprawling in my eye
When in the seven-gated city once with
My queen I rode in splendor long ago . . .
So now, perhaps . . . and on this common
ground.

(points to the workers and children)

Perhaps here within my grasp
And on this social plain I too
With migrant Mexicans, workers in the fields
Or in the arbors plucking down the yellow fruit,
May pluck a fruit for transport—
Even blindly
Or in the daily chore,

The round routine of office
Or of factory— may build
Once more my palace among men—
In the shrill of children
Search out my colors once again . . .
(the lights go out abruptly)

The backdrop shows the winter scene again. The pantomimists' movements are awkward and spasmodic. Their smiling masks have been exchanged for masks on which drooping black frowns have been painted. At the advance of the Sphinx from stage left to center stage Oedipus moves to stage right among the children. The lights slowly dim to darkness throughout the Sphinx's speech.

Sphinx

Magnificent!
Your children are dead—
Lie buried in your eye—
But you are still under that
Yellow cloud, even here
Where fireblight flashes
Across the skin of the pear
And where men breathe the common round—
The day-to-day—you come as one
Whose sight was ever dull, who would
In some mute, scarred prostitute
See a queen and take his love
Against an alley wall and
Call it blessed, who yet beholds
A pattern in the greasy folds of
Coveralls and promise in a Fieldhand's
Empty laughter;
Even after the fruit is gone you find
Old resplendence in the rind.
Are all the senses blind?
Do you not touch the rotten pulp
Or smell the stink thereof?

These are winter days
And between the early and the late
The tragic and elate move not
To the lavish music of your thought;
There is no life in the extreme.
What moves, old man, moves in its own
Despite—mad Oedipus in a ragged coat
Who finds delight in the swift rolling
Of his dead eye.

Oedipus advances to the center spot. He has torn his mask away. The face is one of an old man with long white hair. The Sphinx retreats to stage left and as Oedipus speaks colored lights begin to play upon the stage, growing brighter and more vivid until the entire scene—workers, children, winter backdrop—is illuminated, transfigured by color.

Oedipus

I will not give it all away!
It is an eye more dead than mine
That stops the play of light
Across the commonal—
And eye of night, a Sphinx's eye
That holds in thrall the prismic
Potentialities of Fall. Autumnal
Essences are distilled in colors . . .
Shall I run through all the seasons,
Even blind, and not find in winter—
This caustic winter—wherein leaves
A'quiver die and branches spare,
High-pointing to bare sky trace out
In black and white and gray
The sharp chiarascuro of a winter day . . .
In this not find the colors left behind?
The earth is indigo and the sea,
The winter sea is green, no . . . ultramarine.
My queen a woman of the streets?
My plain song toccata of deceits?
All my improvisation a puff, a boast,
A soft lie?
I mean to raise this fantasy
Aloft, and as I go let play
The gold flambeau . . .

But know it is the eye
Of mind that is the source
Of light; it colors, not the sun,
Not this external eye—
And knowing, undecieved, accept
The fantasy as fantasy and live it—
Court it in the night with
Candlelight—Happy Oedipus who finds
Delight in the swift rolling of his
Creative eye.

(Exit the Sphinx whirling and clutching at herself as if in pain at these words and at the colors which swirl over her cloak, no longer gray)

Curtain.

Richard Steele

Prisoner

Soul, a caged animal, paces
across my mind
baring its teeth
looking for fight,
prisoner of chains
of leisure
unable to break
them by work,
searching for something,
for some body, but
finding nothing.

Stephen Newton

Calling For Elijah

Jesus despaired
before he died—
a door slammed shut
the sudden draft
extinguished
his brain's candles one by one
like dominoes toppling

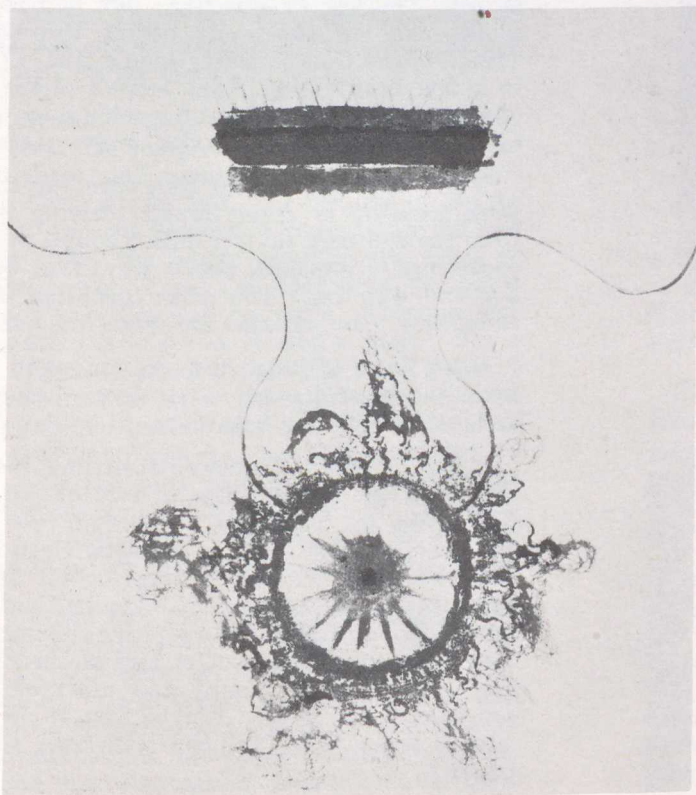
over

each

other

until
only the insane grin of Alice's cat remained—
and that fading too

Andrew Niekrasz



Pope Paul VI

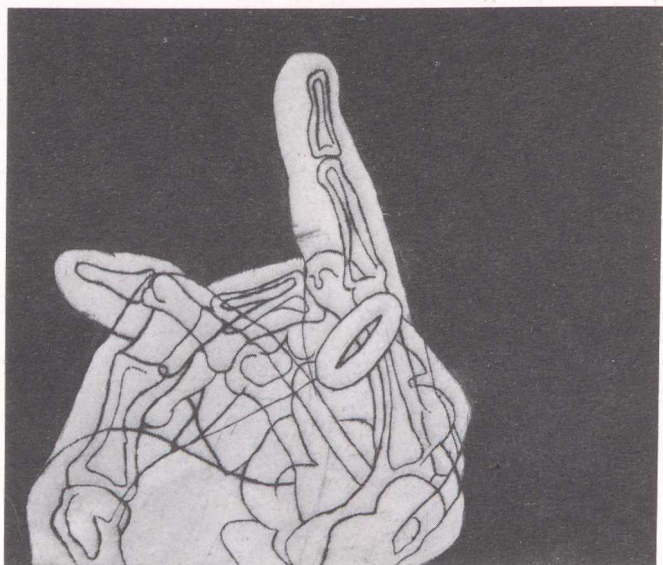
Wooden cross
in death hangs
pendant
from the wall,

pontiff
hanging too,
unerring, lessblood,
skull capped
within life's trinity,

you are virgin
to the world, cold,
stoned in the confessional,

wooden cross
of plywood sin,
christ and I
communal on the wall,
transfigured,
the only begotten sun.

James Minor



World of Guano

By Dennis Dillow

A cold June rain falling soft on the Quonset hut locker room. Ganderville on the wooden bench under bright humming electric bulb, face in hands, praying for miracles of sleep. What kind of life is this for me. Twenty year old college boy working hours like these. Eleven in the god-damn night to the seven o'clock of another day. Never enough sleep, sick from wanting it. Whoever invented eleven-to-seven surely never had to work it. He should be shot down like a dog. In the street like a dog.

Ganderville nodded, snapped awake and joined the line to the time clock. At least this will be the sixth night, the last one. Tomorrow morning — Saturday morning — and a taste of beer, a shake of the leg and a nice sound sleep at night when a man was meant to sleep.

The morning streets washed clean and Ganderville bounding up the cement steps ahead of the older workers. Vaulting the chicken wire fence of the parking lot and buzzing off home for a Saturday morning shower with an early sun in the face. To hell with galvanizers and Northwestern Steel & Wire.

He had meant to stop for a half dozen doughnuts but

was home all the same without them. It'd have to be Wheaties again, the last dusty dregs at that. But what the hell, it was Saturday morning and Sunday night's first eleven-to-seven was a thousand miles away.

During breakfast the phone rang and Ganderville nearly upset his chair as he sprang to answer it. Might be Sullivan with a party lined up. But on second thought, no. Not this early.

It was his mother's voice, far away and faint as a fading record. Yes, yes, he was fine. No, he hadn't missed any work. No, of course he hadn't thrown any parties. (Hadn't had time.) Everything's fine. You'll be home in a few days? Yes, Aunt Suzie's phone number if he needs anything. Stay out of trouble now, good-bye. My God, you'd think that he was twelve years old.

The Mister and Missus were spending the annual three week vacation at Aunt Suzie's, driving back and forth from the ball park in St. Louis, a couple of flat beers from paper cups, a somehow-they-always-taste-better-there hot-dog and why can't you make cornbread like your sister, May, haw, haw, another ball game the next day . . .

Good God, Mother, how do you stand it? You don't even like baseball. Let alone beer. Leave me out of it and let me have my Saturdays.

After breakfast Ganderville settling his bones in the easy chair for another page or two of tasteless trash. He had stolen the paperback. Couldn't face the woman at the counter. And now a harmless erection and putting the book aside with sleep dragging on his eyes. A few quick hours of oblivion, Ganderville, and you'll hit the town. No use fighting sleep. Like the one time last summer when you drank coffee and washed your face until you were a wreck, jumpy and miserable all day. You can spare a few hours. Maybe four at the most. Get up around noon. Old Sullivan will have something going by then.

He woke in a sweat a little past noon and thought of the air conditioner he had forgotten to turn on. He swung his legs from the bed and knew then he should sleep a little longer but then, no, can't afford losing another hour. Give Sullivan a call.

And Ganderville thought ahead with his quizzical grin of maybe two gals in shorts they pick up along the road, and Sullivan giving each of them a cold beer from the ice chest on the front seat. Gracious giggles and then, no, better not have any more, says she, makes me dizzy, you

know, and a shy smile but okay just *one* more and — ooh, a naughty joke from Sullivan who's so bold with his words. The honey blonde casting fate to the wind and calling for another beer and a joke from her we've heard before but we laugh all the same and encourage more. We stop in the country under some trees for a pee not quite out of their sight and then their turn behind the bushes — we promise not to look. Hey, your beer's getting hot, better finish it and have another but would rather kiss your lips and taste your pickled tongue. A feel of your nice young breast? No, they can't see us, they're on the blanket around the bend. And she says she's so drunk, so drunk and oh we shouldn't, and I say I'll just lay your shorts here on the floor . . .

Ganderville lurched. Asleep again you fool. And it's a quarter after two. He jumped out of bed and into the bathroom for a shave, and screaming bloody hell it can't be true it can't. But it *was* real, not something on the mirror. It was a nice red blemish, a pimple, on the end of Ganderville's nose. His hands gripping the edges of the sink, an anguished heart and a shaking head, but much too old to cry. The clarion call to battle. Chin up, my Ganderville staunch lad and face it like a man. 'Tis a mere bagatelle. Another brave look. The devil's due, I suppose, and have to stay away from Snickers and the Grove Press. A dab of Mom's fleshy cream and you can't even see it. A shave and you're a new man and not to be kept down. One last look and, yes, it's more to the right than to the left and I'll have to try to remember. Left profile at all time. Musn't let the girls see it. No dignity in adolescence. Maybe you're being tested like Job.

It was such a grand day that Ganderville dressed recklessly. Rundown loafers, T-shirt and jeans. Show the women he didn't give a damn what they thought of him. They start thinking you're trying to impress them and they get coy, put on airs, then you lose your mind worrying over color-combinations, brown shoes after sundown, the white flecks in your fingernails. Don't try to impress them, try to impale them, ha, ha.

Ganderville checked the mailbox. A polite dun from Sears and the foreboding envelope from college. Better sit down for this. These are your spring semester grades. A flushed face and the carbon copied list of classes. A flash of red and his future screeching to a halt.

Ask me where justice is to be found. Tortured bloody Christ and mountains of mundungus. English 376: F. For frustration and folly. Foolish you were, Ganderville,

for expecting mercy from Garret. As your buggered soul plummits to an all-time low.

Ganderville stared into his limp hands. He had thought that Dr. Garret had been more sensitive, maybe able to see Ganderville's potential. A golden seed in the chaff. Oh, the callous quack, up in front of our admiring youthful faces with his earthy stories and rocking everyone when he said fuck once. A hex on you, Garret. May your withered black soul rot in hell.

The thought of those hours wasted in study for the final exam, all for naught, made Ganderville shudder with rage. He had walked into the classroom witty and boundless, his brain swimming wonderfully certain with Fielding and Defoe, dates and titles, and when the dittoed sheet finally lay before him, he was struck senseless with its brevity. In fuzzy blue pica — Discuss in detail the literary merit of the authors we have studied — and Ganderville thinking it must be one of ol' Garret's jokes. But apparently not. Had Ganderville gotten the right test? Maybe a mixup, is this it. But it can't be. He had walked out of the room in a daze after writing only thirty minutes. The first one finished. A hazy recollection of studdering bullshit riddled with 1719, 1740, 1749.

He had waited two weeks and look what worrying does for you.

Ganderville drove into town and stopped at Woolworths for a hamburger and transparent fries. The face of Garret wavered nebulous and sneering in his brain. Two scoops of the strawberry, please. Christ, the price of ice cream. The draftboard would swoop down on him, snatch him away. It could sense ignorance and low grades like a vulture could death. Ganderville's foot kicked out on its own as he watched the gaunt, collared birds flapping in around him. Perdition and a struggle in the sand. What's this in the ice cream, a prize? Something hard between Ganderville's lips. A clean white crescent of fingernail.

We are but hopping little turds are we, and God has a double-chin.

Ganderville was sitting in his car again, swallowing away the desire to vomit. He had paid an outrageous price without mentioning the fingernail to the waitress, and now he wished he hadn't tipped her a quarter. His head was greased with sweat and hands shaking on the steering wheel and he knew that he would die unknown, unlaureled, uncanonized. A soft somehow familiar female

voice in his ears. He turned to see the white oval of Laura Morello's face in the open window across the seat.

Ganderville remembered his nose.

"Hello, Laura."

"Hi, Larry. How've you been?"

Ganderville nodding his head. "Good. Good I guess. Going somewhere? Need a ride?"

She said sure and swang in on the seat and Ganderville suddenly famous and astute in her presence as he backs the car out into the traffic, careful to keep his glowing red nose turned from her as long as possible. She was a goddess in tight white shorts and all those healthy lungs behind that blue print blouse, and Ganderville must take careful pains to impress.

"Nice day," he said.

"Yes. A little warm."

"A little."

Laura, I just want to wallow between them. Willard had once told Ganderville of how those breasts *spilled* out of the cups that time of Southern Comfort and the drive-in movie. Pendulous, Willard had said. And now, Laura, the seam of your tight white shorts must be cutting you in two. Just loosen them a bit.

"Anything happening tonight?" She was so sweet with her eyes of blue, hair a little less than raven wingish.

"Sullivan's having a party," Ganderville lied. Grasp- ing for straws.

"Oh? Who's coming?"

You're a divine young girl, Laura, and I would cradle you in my arms and marry you in the golden rays of a setting September sun if it wasn't for this nose of mine.

"I don't know. Probably everybody." And then, "Wanna come?"

"Sure, I guess so. But I don't have a way."

It was a gate swung open. Ganderville paused ever so coolly.

"I can pick you up. Be ready about five?"

"So early? Why so early?"

"Five-thirty then."

"Six."

"Okay. Six." Ganderville coming to life.

He drove away from Laura Morello's house wonder- ing at his composure. She seemed to have jumped at the chance, you sly dog. And he was glad he hadn't squeezed her shoulder to assure her he held no lewd intentions. There would be no groveling and snatching. We'll have a pleasant evening among friends, some soft music, nice cold sliced ham, a chat of times gone by. But maybe that's not what she wanted. Pure lust, if Willard could be believed. Ganderville was certainly glad he hadn't said any- thing as quaint and stupid as soft music. Jesus.

Ganderville way back in the seat, steering his automo- bile grandly back through town, sweeping around corners with modest speed, all beneficence and patience and im- perial smiles for the old folk slow in crossing. A con- quistador of the new horizon, bespangled with tolerant humility and breezy deference for the poor plebeians. And now we'll leave it up to ol' Sullivan to stir up the party.

Sullivan, the ignoble, mindless bastard, wasn't home. Gone with his father to Chicago for the weekend. Gan- derville couldn't believe his ears as he stared into Sulli- van's mother's eyes meek and pleading. God is perverse; a wink of His eye and you are paddleless up the well traveled creek of befoulment.

Should have known it couldn't be that simple. Sul- livan could have made a few calls and a party is born. But no. Bet He is chuckling now. But frown not when frivolous Fortune frowns on you, for there are better times in store. Just around the corner. A decision, a re- solve, Ganderville, best medicine for predicament is posi- tivism. A sweep of the hand and the clouds spin away and I'll buff my boots with a sanitary napkin.

Laura was waiting at the front door when Ganderv- ille drove up at a strategically timed six oh five. Keep them on their toes. She started down the walk toward the car. All willowy curves and navy blue slacks and that terribly healthy chest behind tight white sweater festooned with pastel flowers a bit too flashy for me. And on the seat a foot away I'm overcome with the sweet brume of her perfume but so feminine that I'm intoxicated and aflutter. And she says hi with genuine charm.

"You look real nice. I like your sweater."

"Do you really? I was afraid when I bought it that it might be . . . a little gaudy."

"No," says Ganderville, "I don't think so at all." As a matter of fact I can't seem to keep my eyes off it.

"The party started yet?"

He hesitated. "Looks like Sullivan just up and took off this morning. Guess there's not going to be a party."

"No party?"

"We'll just go to my house a while."

A most terrible silence followed. Ganderville couldn't bear the thought of looking at her face of disappointment. She's probably thinking I've tricked her. Oh please don't be sad, for I'm really quite nice.

"I'm supposed to be in by ten tonight," she said.

Why question reality, Ganderville. She can't stand the thought of being alone with you and your shiny red nose. You must wreak havoc upon her body while the wreaking is good. She is yours now and to hell with her feelings.

"What would you like to drink?" he asked, confidently studying her. She wasn't getting away now, even though the blight on his nose had probably spread across his face like a cancer. He looked like Quasimodo — a wen under a milky eye, beetle-brow and jutting teeth and breath like a privy.

"I think sloe gin," she said.

Probably trying to brace up. Courage from the bottle.

Ganderville pulled into a graveled drive and stopped the car in front of the Sportsman. Always touchy business, this, buying the booze. Two months from now he'd be twenty-one. Two hundred years as far as the establishment is concerned. Identification and red tape and it's so damned important to know when you were spewed into this world, and one and twenty you must be or they will hang your ass for usurping the privilege of your elders. From the old oak tree.

"Give me a cigarette," said Ganderville.

"I didn't know you smoked."

"Don't but makes one look older you know."

Ganderville walked jauntily into the cool gleam of the bar. A few old fellows were hunched over idle drinks and wrinkled hands, cackling at forbidden revelations. Senile sex is the most disgusting thing possible, for old

men are nasty. The bartender grinning at his old clients, looking down toward Ganderville, whose face is obscured in curling white smoke of cigarette. The beat-up air conditioner over the door making sounds of uncertainty. The damned bartender is ignoring me.

We spend half our lives waiting and the other half being disappointed. I say, major domo, a bit of the service, seal voo play. Suit you right if I walked out and slammed the bleeding door, but that's probably what you're waiting for. You sense my superiority and you detest it. Wounds your ego to associate with me because I'm on a significantly higher plateau of sophistication and you'd hate to return to the company of the vulgar after a smell of my refinement. Dis cigarette's about to get the best of me. Uhg, the smoke.

The bartender materialized in front of Ganderville. A suspicious look in his dull brown eyes. And when Ganderville pressed his lips together, bracing a swallow, the half-smoked cigarette shot out from between them and landed on the bar like a spent cartridge. The bartender's eyes down to it and then back up to Ganderville's horrified face. Jesus. A quick recovery of the dastardly little butt because it keeps me old. Be immutable.

Ganderville grinned. "New fangled filters. Greased or something."

"What do you want?"

"A pint of sloe gin if you please. Your sloest."

Yes, you take my money, you unscrupulous scum, even though it's obvious something's fishy. Out of the cool dark room and to the car and let the sigh of relief out slow for Laura mustn't think you've had any trouble. Clumsy of you to let the butt get away from you.

He drove silently meditating, wishing she would cheer up for Christ's sake. Terribly glum, aren't you, you stuffy bitch. Smile or this next dirge is dedicated to you. You'd think they were about to flip you into a vat of lye. You bitch, if you don't smile or laugh or clear your throat, I'll disembowel you with a garden trowel and stuff you with old newspapers.

"This your house?" she asked as they pulled into the drive.

"Yeah."

"It's pretty. I'm glad you've got an air conditioner. I'm wilting."

"I'll fix us a couple of cold drinks."

Out of the car and around to the back door because the neighbors might talk if they see. A frozen door knob and Ganderville looked through the window in the door to the housekey lying on the kitchen table and he was weak in the knees knowing he had locked himself out.

"What's wrong?"

"Think I locked myself out."

Give me a broom and a world of guano and I'll be happy in my work. But I can't take any more of this perplexing life.

"Maybe you'd just better take me home, Larry."

Ganderville's look of death, an icy dagger.

"No cause getting excited, now. Just keep calm." Looking to the windows which are sealed tight because of the damned air conditioner. Ganderville seized the garbage can lid and smashed in the glass. Crawling through. Down and around and to the kitchen door to let Laura in. Had to get in some way. The folks won't be home for a couple days and I'll have it fixed before then. Have a seat, put on some records. Get the house cooled down. This heat is intolerable, isn't it though.

He dropped ice cubes into a glass. A good sniff of this wretched red stuff and she'll be on her back kicking like a turtle. Some limey pop for a frothy head and the ice cubes swirling. I'll have a sip. Pleasantly disgusting, but I'll be loyal to my beer and ask her how she can stand that junk. Laura looking over some albums and her back to me, and as I once said when I found the Abbott and Costello movie on channel twelve, what could be better?

Laura put on Ganderville's least favorite album, one he had stolen at a party out of sheer perversity. She sat down at the end of the sofa and took a cautious sip from the drink Ganderville gave her. A little strong, she says, but that's to be expected. Another one of the female ruses because drinking is ungentle. She picks up the T.V. Guide and begins paging through it.

Ganderville journeyed silently to the refrigerator for another beer, faithfully patient for the alcohol to begin its magic. And back to the doorway between kitchen and livingroom in the dim filtering light of sinking sun to see her still poring over the T.V. Guide, searching out some cryptic cabalism. Her drink had not been touched.

"Better drink up." Why the hell did you play that record. Sickening.

Another bird peck at the sloe gin and Seven Up, her eyes never leaving the little magazine.

Ganderville disappearing into the kitchen for more beer. He could feel the tiny reeling and expanding in the front part of his brain and new hopes and budding possibilities were brightening his eyes. Yes, must talk to her. A bit of converse to set her at ease. But not until it gets darker because I have this freak show nose and I would die if I saw her looking at it. Ten more minutes and the sun will be down.

But what the hell could he say to her. She wasn't even going to college. Probably one of those who graduated from high school on her looks and liked to say things like "groovy" and "solid." What tripe. Her kind end up dying after seventy years of affection and T.V. Guide and consider themselves sophisticated because somewhere they've learned how to pronounce Johann Goethe. Ganderville remembered the sour taste in his mouth the time of Georgia VonCaller's party when he had wandered into her bedroom. Twenty or thirty paperbacks standing proudly between Buddha bookends. Nondescript titles at sixty cents a copy. The shrine of Erle Stanley Gardner and Agatha Christie. He had wanted to weep. In her big livingroom was busty sultry popular Georgia Von-Caller who could reduce to dust any horny admirer by merely hinting boredom. Ganderville had fallen into one of his hyper-contemplative moods. He hung back by himself a while and then slipped away unnoticed.

Now he stood with his tall glass of beer and regarded this female reading some cleverly alliterated article by some delightful vehement lady critic, and now he wanted to throw his beer in her face. We will see if they were mellons. A pinch and the bra hooks open, up with your fancy sweater. We would see if they would spill out.

But first, time for a pee.

"Think I'll put on something slow." Ganderville was careful not to slur. Laura looked up and nodded. He found his way to the stereo, the room tilting like the deck of a ship. Have to get something in my stomach or I'll be wiped out in another half hour. Retreat inconspicuously to the bathroom. The door quietly pulled shut, a cascade in the sink so she won't hear. Sound like a horse in a stream if I let it go in the stool. Mustn't offend. And

then the face in the mirror, the nose lit up like a polished plum. Good Christ.

God was testing him, that's what. A bet with the devil to try Ganderville's fidelity. Next thing you know ding-dong would shrivel up and drop off like a dead limb. Iniquity duly rewarded. Wait till dark, leave the lights off. Sit to her right.

Darkness positively melting in now. The door of the refrigerator open and Ganderville squatting, looking for snacks. Cheese.

"Want some cheese?" He appeared in the doorway again.

Her little smile, declining.

"Got my grades today from college," he said, as he settled down next to her. "Did real good."

"Oh, you're still going to school at Demerest?"

"Yeah. I'll be graduating next year. Taking up writing. Novels in particular."

"Really now."

It was the first time Ganderville had ever thought about it.

"Yeah." He munched on the cheese. "Haven't sent anything in yet."

"Why? No ideas?"

"Oh no. I've got plenty of ideas. Ideas coming out my ears. I can't decide on my nom-de-plume. Take a completely new name altogether, maybe, like Burton Porterhouse or Booker Bridgewater. Or my name with my initials, L. S. Ganderville, or L. Steven Ganderville, Lawrence S. Ganderville. Maybe I'll go by one name like Boz or Saki. The name's important though. Got to have a catchy name or you won't have a snowball's chance."

"Joseph Conrad, James Jones — what's so fancy about those names?"

She was trying to be wise now, throw him off, make the fool of him. Why didn't she just shuck down and get on with it. They both knew what the hell the game was. If she started talking literary merit at him, he would stab her in the throat with a letter opener. Did Willard have to put up with this crap?

He seized her drink from her hands and went to get her another. Half and half this time. If that didn't loosen scruples he'd break the damn bottle over her head and take her unconscious. Only so much one human being can put up with.

The livingroom was in heavy shadows and Ganderville pulled her up to dance before she could switch on the lamp. We need no lights. Not with this nose. W. C. Fields. L. S. Ganderville. Edgar Allan Ganderville — no, too pretentious.

Dancing slow with entwined arms, her breasts snug, her thighs brushing. The barrier had been toppled. Blind alleys and cul-de-sacs. She wouldn't get away from him now.

After the song she thanked him (for the dance? for relieving her boredom?) and started moving for the end of the couch but he beat her to it. Now she couldn't get the lamp without reaching over him. And if she leaned across him . . . Just let her try it. It would be the last mistake she would make. He'd grab her and be on top like a cowboy in the old saddle. Make quick work of her, the coy little tramp. Joseph Conrad her ass.

The darker it got, the better looking Ganderville became. We're all dashing in the dark with rippling muscles and clean necks, smelling of manly musk and Old Spice, dauntless and irrecusable, fit to be carved in carrara.

Ganderville's arm around her shoulder, tongue touching her ear and his cheese breath rebounding like a stag-nant fist in his face. Jesus. He couldn't come on too smooth with breath like that. But if he went for a shot of Lavioris, she'd turn on the light, slide over so his plague ridden nose would be gleaming in her face. Horns of a dilemma. Lead kindly light. Hell, he may as well stick it out, poison breath or no. His tongue went back to her ear and evoked a little moan from her opening mouth. His right hand in the dark lighting like a dove a few inches above her knee. The stereo had switched off but Ganderville wasn't about to give ground. Her arms suddenly up and around him. Yessir. The dove winging imperceptibly away from the knee, passing over Cash Bottoms to a caressing landing below a mellon. Ganderville wondering if he could get away with an innocent and gentle feel this early in the contest. Maybe. If only he hadn't eaten the cheese.

Her perfume fogging his brain, her arms tight on his back, and Ganderville's loyal right hand stealing under

her sweater easing along the ribs and his fingers light as mist on her breast. There was no objection when the bra was freed. Carthage would be destroyed.

She whispered his name and Ganderville had to bite his lip to keep from whispering back. Insincerity might ruin him. Stoicism at all cost.

Somehow sweater and bra were on the floor in a pale heap and Ganderville was trying to get a look at the fruits of the vine. But the room was too damned dark now and he would have to take Willard's word for it. One thing for sure, a good ten pounds each.

Must try to breathe through the nose, through the nose . . . a blast of this cheese might kill her. His fingers had gone cold with nervousness.

Laura Morello on her back under the air conditioner saying no, Larry, no, as he tugged at her stubborn slacks and she was still whispering no when she raised herself to help him with them and she had only stopped whispering when the beam of headlights swept through the three little square windows in the front door. The familiar sound of the family Oldsmobile crunching in the gravel driveway. An unexpected surprise. Air-raid sirens and submarine klaxons and jungle birds affrighted screaming from the perch.

"Hell and death!" Ganderville was up in a flash. "They're home! My mother and dad!"

Laura's sweater over her head, brassiere in the purse. Ganderville trying to put her shoes on for her. Fellows against the wall.

The thud of closing car doors.

"Wait until they come in the back door, then you go out the front." Ganderville talking into her face, then rushing away to stash the sloe gin bottle. Beer was one thing but sloe gin was quite another. His mother wouldn't understand. Behind the stove with the evil stuff for the time being. Laura with her hand on the door knob, Ganderville on the couch. The key turning in the lock and Laura slipping into the night out the front, Ganderville sound asleep under the air conditioner.

"Larry?" His mother's voice as the kitchen light goes on. "Larry? You home?"

Quite asleep. Far away, asleep for hours. The lamp switched on at his head and his mother touching his arm. Eyes blinking open with slow surprise.

"You sick? What's wrong?"

"Hey, you're home, huh. Just get back? Must have dozed off."

"What's wrong with your nose?"

She would have to die too, blood or no blood. This insolence could not be tolerated.

"Kind of a cold I'm getting I guess."

And they had told him how they had decided to come home and spend the last week of Father's vacation with him. Selfish of them to stay away the entire three weeks. She would cook him a roast tomorrow special. Pecan pie too. A gem of a mother. And good old Pop droning on about those scrappy St. Louis Cardinals who had pulled two games in a row out of the fire, by God, two games in a row. And ant poison in your coffee, Dad, if you don't shut up.

Ganderville told them, well, he might go for a drive before going to bed, get some air, maybe a hamburger.

He drove up and down the streets for an hour and Laura was not to be found. She must have called a cab from the coin wash on the corner or maybe given a ride by some lucky bastard she knew — or didn't know. And her with no brassiere under that sweater. Pull your hair out, Ganderville, you bungler. Drive off an embankment and put an end to it. How can you face her again? Enlist in the Marines and change your name. What kind of life is this?

Home again and a wave good night, but up at two in the morning with a fevered stomach retching at night- at nightmares of beer and cheese. A tortured sleep and a splitting head with sunshine on his face and a nose throbbing like a blinking Christmas bulb. Sunday is the cruel- est day . . .

Saturday had abandoned him and now he lay like an ashen rock in this bed and sunny room. And to make things worse, he suddenly remembered the grim spectre of Eleven-To-Seven, a mere twelve hours away, waiting to squeeze another six days' work from him. He closed his eyes.

"Larry." Now his father's voice, stern and hollow. "How in the hell did the bedroom window get broken?"

Ganderville pulled the pillow tight against his face and desperately tried to smother himself.

Summer Lead II

a summer
cast in lead
and copper trees tarnish green with leaves

a summer
of rusting roses
and bronze butterflies
beneath a gold piece sun
in a silver spun sky,

a summer
of smouldering you
and molten I
beneath metallic moons
and quicksilver stars,

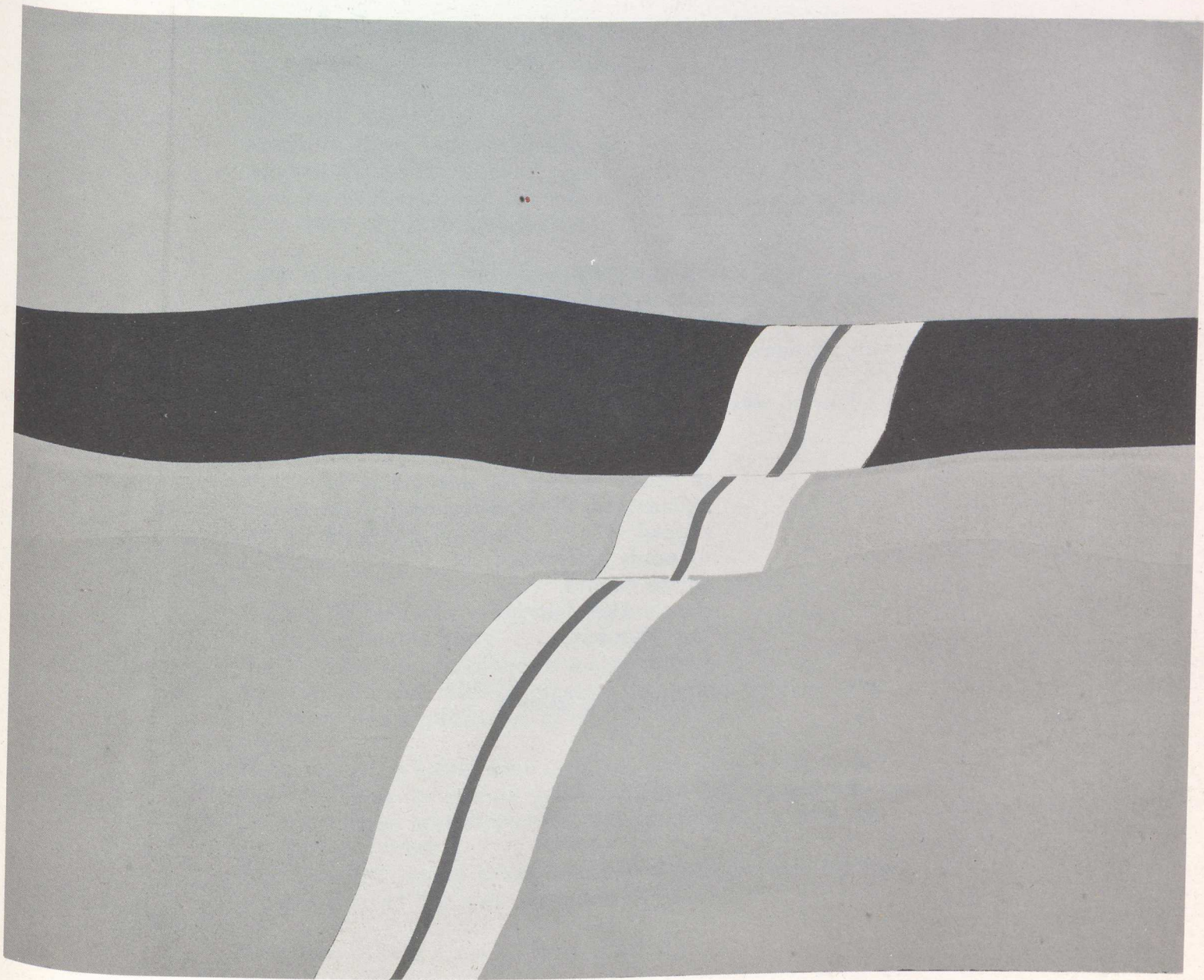
cast iron heavy on the heart

Gary O. Holland

Badattitude

And here's to those who know how
and to those who don't
and those who practice
saying "Now, move just a little . . .
that's it . . . ahhh . . ."
Blessed are they
for they shall inherit
the Holiday Inns.

Paul A. Yohnka



if theres any
thing i cant stand
its a messy jungle
passed off
as a vine
you might say
he caught on
immediately
at least
momentarily
slipped off
to sandy pastures
where camels
dont make it
but plymouth
makes it

Lawrence Clamons

revelations

to prove a rose irreducible, pulverize a scythe

i was all night
crescent, china likeness of omnipresence
against will and with it all my thoughts were of lips
and the wild man with barometer, the cosmic bellboy, cried:
 have you experienced eyes?

now the moon is a body bogus with america's hour
the moon, keeper of tardy parsecs, pocked and pitted whore
 of meteor,
whiles on old desirables, intimate strangers, diamonds: how
 the diamonds shine!
the facets, vulgar guides, draw me down to tides as would a
 seamed eye!

the lot of us are like our things: we've
penchants for, are pendants in
tremendous dust, the best
of kings

the war to pulverize a Scythe is the street
to the irreducible Rose,
the bit attar that links men's souls, all souls
and the wild man with barometer, the cosmic bellboy, cried:
 have you experienced eyes?

Have you slit a hemisphere or given your eyes a rest, ever?
have you, plus the face of another, looked into an opposite two?
have you given an eclipse eyes, seen its face illuminate, be
 fish-eye bright?
have you ever known ocean to conduct, fathom after fathom,
 the echo of the apes—freedom?

roses are: i hear i am to burn eternally

S. E. Mitchell

MOTORCYCLE

On Display In The
University Center
Gallery Lounge

free wheeling damner

Just some hazy miles
thumps, a sign or two
and lots of sun — — leaking through the grass

The hum that slips
along the road
is seeping from my head

spread around the priestly ribbon
of a one string guitar

I whisper little jokes
through my steering wheel
at the world

Used to be an old woman
who waved to Greyhound buses
that never stopped

It's all written on white
carbon paper, slip it in and everything's erased,
an IBM oblivion

Seems the Chamber of Commerce
wants a marble overpass
that goes from nowhere to nothing faster

protects the city children
from all the bad influences
like people who walk the long way
talk civil rights
won't buy American

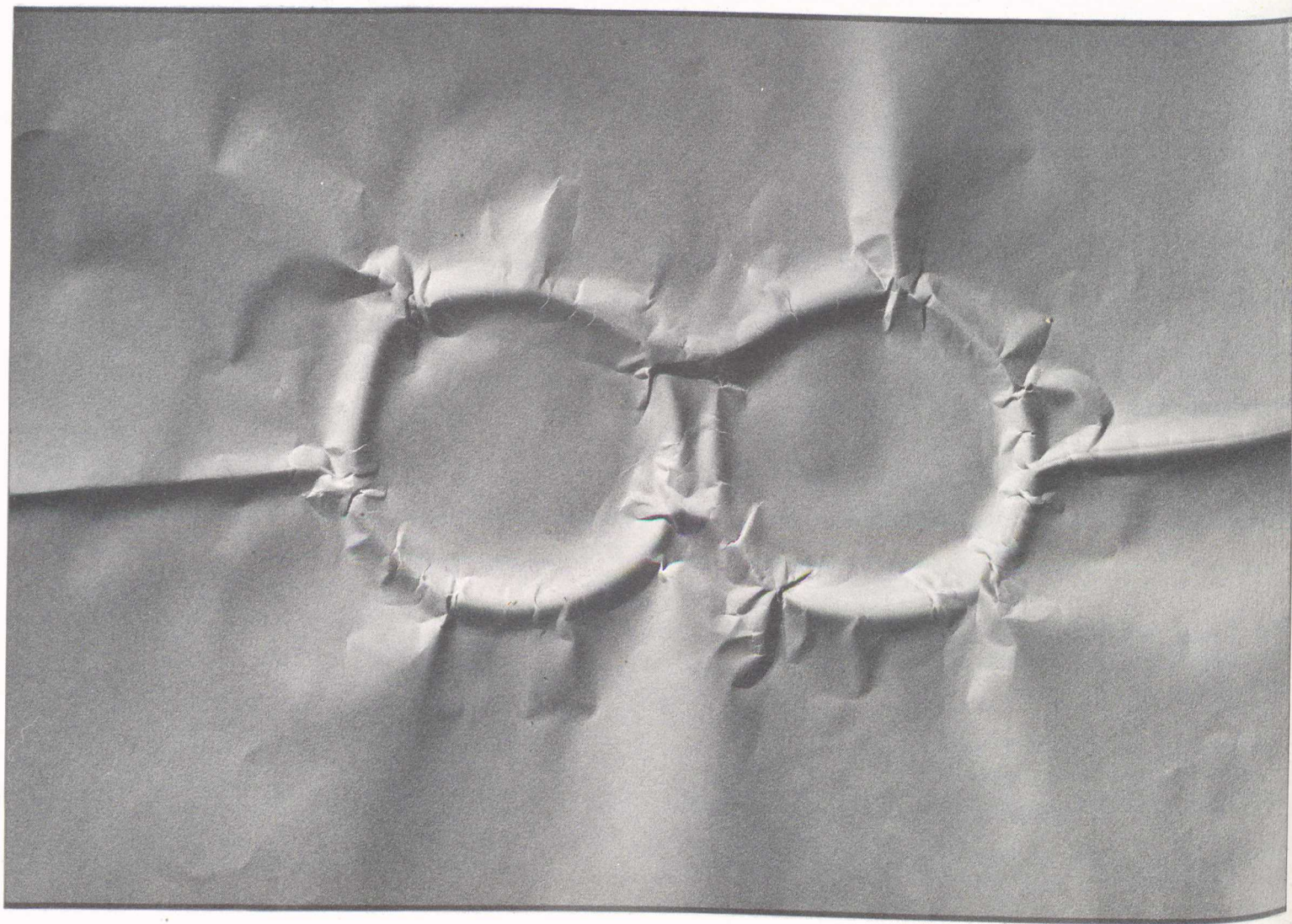
Me I like the thumps
that grab the pencils from my pocket
seduce my red car into

a collection of souvenir bolts
carried away each day
until I'm walking

The man with the suitcase Sunday morning
looked like a new kind of mailbox
from the Greyhound rear window

hello Mr. man, I'm sorry I've got to go
didn't see you until you were gone

Mish Quartana



Better Homes & Gardens

Eve, the apple vendor,
(a long legged broad)
had a half price sale
giving discounts
to soldiers, poets,
& others who have learned
to live with adversity.
Snake
works for Eve
(gives a good pitch)
to prospective return customers
Fig leaf me says
"Okay I'll Bite."

Paul A. Yohnka

Alyosha

By Andrew Niekrasz

"This has been your first battle, eh, comrade? You've never seen men die before, eh?"

Speaking to Alyosha, the old man tapped his pipe against the sole of one of his worn-out, black leather boots — boots which he had salvaged from one of the dead. The youth nodded timidly as he watched the ashes sprinkle to the ground.

"Well," the old soldier continued, "you'll see many more die. You'll get used to it." And, as if to emphasize his point, he turned his head to the side and spat on a corpse that lay nearby. "You'll get used to it."

The company of soldiers camped on a barren stretch of land which was about a day's ride from the nearest village. The carnage had not as yet been cleared away and burned, so that it would have been difficult from a distance to determine the living from the dead. To the north and west of the company stretched a massive, gray wall of mountains. Evening had already set in, and a deep-red sun lingered in the west. But for the tired grumbling of the men, the October air was still.

Alyosha was a rather tall, thin youth in his middle teens. His hair was the color of dried straw, and his dark brown eyes were set in a pale, delicate face. He had the hands of an artist: the fingers were long, slender. They were almost covered by the cuffs of a dun-colored, woolen jacket. He wore dirty khaki trousers and black leather boots. Facing the old man, he nervously tucked up his feet on the spokes of a wheel which had come off one of the supply wagons, propped his narrow chin on his knees and stared at his companion's wrinkled, powder-smudged face. The old man had red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes, and, whenever he grinned at the youth, he revealed a set of rotten teeth beneath his long, gray mustache. The area of his chin and cheeks was covered with ashen stubble.

"What's your name, comrade?" asked the old soldier, lighting his pipe.

"A-Alexis. Alexis Antonovitch Lopatin, sir."

"Alexis Antonovitch, eh?" The old man nodded, puffing on his pipe. "Where you from?"

"I-I was born in a small village — Szelonosk — not far from Moscow. After father died, my mother and I moved to that city. We . . ."

"How old are you, comrade?"

"I-I'll be sixteen next May, sir."

Talking to the old man, the youth glanced at his trembling hands. He decided to bury them in the pockets of his jacket.

They talked until it began to darken. Listening to the old soldier, Alyosha watched the crimson sun sink behind the jagged mountain tops. Its waning rays reflected off the old man's shoulders and gave them a rust-colored tinge. The old man's name was Smerchekov. At one time he had been a teacher of physical sciences in a secondary school in Petersburg. The old man would often comment on the machine-like mechanism, the iron laws, of the universe to Alyosha. Once he had torn out a shrub with large clusters of tiny, fragrant flowers and explained to the youth the movement of water as it is pumped from the roots and into the stem But he had left his teaching position years ago. He told the youth about his movements across the continent and his being a "well known factor" in ending the War. The old man predicted that the enemy would be sifted out and crushed in no time.

It was dark now. The dead had already been thrown into the wagons and carted off to be burned. The men, amidst groans and curses prepared to get some sleep. Smelling the thick, acrid smell of burnt carrion, Alyosha stretched himself on the cold, barren ground and pulled his blanket up over his shivering legs. Someone began to play *Evening Bells* on a balalaika. Alyosha listened to the words as a few of the men began to sing along to the slow, plaintive trill of the melody in their deep, resonant voices — he would have liked to join in also, but his mouth was too dry and his teeth felt strangely cold:

Evening bells, evening bells
How many memories they bring to mind
Of younger days in the land of my birth
Where I loved, where stands my father's house
Evening bells, evening bells
How many memories they bring to mind . . .

How many memories they bring to mind! thought Alyosha. Sighing deeply, he closed his tired eyes and tried to think about his childhood days in the village, about life in Moscow, about his mother being alone — but the day's battle lingered on heavily in his head . . .

The enemy rumbling on towards the company. The pounding of their horses' hoofs. Someone barking out orders. Guns opening fire like thunder. He shivering and feeling the urine trickle down his legs. Wild-eyed horses whinnying in terror and toppling over their screaming masters. Confusion. The whole world gone mad. The pounding of his heart. Quickness of breath. All alone. Nowhere to hide. A voice growling: "At them, you dogs, at them!" Men falling like sickled wheat at harvest time. His mouth dry. Teeth chattering. Explosions. The sky raining dirt and flesh. A smell of sulfur and charnel. One of the enemy charging at him, lips curled from his teeth, like a maniac, growling unintelligible obscenities. His hands shaking. Pulling the trigger and seeing the attacker's head jerk unnaturally to the side, a chunk of neck missing. The enemy retreating. Waves of relief running up his spine. The men beginning to cheer, to laugh. He laughing hysterically along with them . . . Thank heavens, it's over! It's over . . . It's over . . . It's over . . . I'm tired . . . Sleep . . . S-S-Sleep . . .

"Good night, comrade."

Alyosha felt Smerchekov poke him in the chest with the end of the old man's rifle barrel. He opened his eyes and glanced up at Smerchekov. "Good night to you too, sir."

The night air became colder, and Alyosha drew his blanket up to his chin. He wondered what his father, if alive, would have been doing at this time. Probably helping the villagers gather the wheat, he thought. He looked at the black sky and noticed huge patches of gray clouds creeping across its surface and hiding the pale yellow sickle of the moon. A few stars appeared in between the clouds. They seemed to him to twinkle like the points of bayonets in battle. Turning on his side, the youth soon fell asleep.

The sky was the color of slate the next day. Alyosha heard the low rumble of thunder in the west. He had already eaten his breakfast — a tin cup of tepid milk that had a sour, metallic taste, a slice of moldy bread and a wrinkled brown apple. He had then helped the men cover the wagons with tarpaulin to protect the supplies from an ominous sky. At the moment, riding with the company, he felt his head as heavy as a cannon ball. His temples throbbed to the beat of his horse's hoofs against the clay road. A cold wind whispered wildly into his ears, and it seemed to Alyosha that it held some terrible secret. He listened attentively for a moment but only

heard another growl of thunder. Turning his head towards the source of the sound, Alyosha saw the lightning reveal its livid claw. He shivered and looked around for the old soldier.

Smerchekov rode in back, alongside one of the wagons filled with the wounded. He was smoking his pipe. Seeing Alyosha, he nodded, whipping his thin, black horse into a gallop.

"How are you today, comrade?" the old soldier asked, catching up with Alyosha.

"Tired, And you, sir?"

"Rather cold." Puffing on his pipe, he pointed towards the west, towards the gray stretch of mountains. "We should reach the Urals soon."

"D-Do you think we'll see any action today, sir?" Alyosha looked into Smerchekov's wrinkled face, trying to fathom his fate in those bloodshot eyes.

Removing the pipe from his mouth, the old man bent his head to the side, spat on the ground and then checked his pipe. He put it back between his brown teeth and, puffing vigorously, stared vacantly ahead. Moments later, he answered:

"Do I think we'll see any action today? . . . Depends, comrade. I heard the men talking about the villagers of this region. Seems they've been supplying the enemy with livestock. The enemy may still be hiding out nearby."

They rode for what seemed like an eternity to Alyosha, and the inside of his thighs began to feel sore. He had never ridden on horseback this long before. He wished he could ride inside one of the wagons, like one of the wounded, and get some sleep. Besides, he thought, sleeping inside a wagon, he would not be as open to gunfire.

The commander, to Alyosha's relief, soon ordered his men to dismount and rest awhile. Alyosha got down slowly from his horse. He looked at Smerchekov who had pulled out a brown apple, carving the peeling from the rotten fruit with a long, rusty knife. Smerchekov offered half the apple to Alyosha. Taking his half from the old man's outstretched, yellow hand, Alyosha noticed a worm wiggling out from inside, and he gave back his share to Smerchekov.

"Too sensitive, eh, comrade?" The old man grinned, revealing his teeth.

Someone called Smerchekov, and Alyosha, sitting himself against a wheel of one of the wagons, was left alone. He watched the old man walk towards a lame, middle-aged soldier. The soldier, his left leg gone, held up a pair of torn, gray trousers which he had apparently taken from one of the dead. Hobbling about on one leg and using his rifle for a crutch, the cripple waved his prize under the chin of a grinning Smerchekov who, puffing on his pipe, nodded his head approvingly. Alyosha clenched his teeth and looked at his legs. He began to tremble slightly, feeling his insides contract. Why had he enlisted? He had thought that war was . . . The photograph of his father. His father's coat with all those brass buttons. That long sword at his side. Those black leather boots. That proud, white horse. Like one of those dragoons . . . If only he hadn't enlisted, he thought. Why didn't he listen to mother? He remembered how she had crossed herself when he told her the news. "Father's death is enough," she had said. He could still feel her soft, warm, heaving breasts as she circled her arms around his neck and pressed his head to her chest. That was some four months ago . . . He would have been home this very moment, maybe even moving back to Szelonosk. Eating baked potatoes, covered with bacon bits, with his hot *kapushnyak* or *borshch*. And then going off with mother to the forest in search of firewood. Inhaling the resinous scent of pines. Picking up cones which covered his palm and fingers with its sticky resin whenever he repeatedly rubbed his hand across their length . . .

"Daydreaming, eh, Alexis Antonovitch?"

Alyosha looked up and saw Smerchekov grinning at him, the pipe clenched between his brown teeth.

"I-I was thinking about home . . ."

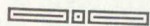
It was late in the afternoon, and they had been riding for over four hours. The sky had already begun to discharge a steady, needle-like drizzle. Feeling the cold drops tap the top of his head and wiggle down his face and neck, Alyosha absently turned up the collar of his jacket. He noticed that the company headed for the forest which formed a dark wall ahead and to their right. The pines would shield him from the rain . . .

Suddenly, the air reverberated with gunshots. Men began to fall from their horses, and Alyosha felt his horse buckle. Mother of God, not again! he thought, jumping from his wounded horse. It was an ambush. He saw the flickering of gunfire and the puffs of smoke coming from the trees ahead. "At them, rush them, you swine!" he

heard the commander scream, waving his sword above his head. Alyosha stumbled forward as the men, setting bayonets to their rifles, scampered around him. His heart drumming, he saw a hoary bearded soldier, hunched over so that his back was parallel to the ground, bump his head against the buttocks of his comrade who had stopped abruptly, bringing his hands to his stomach and grunting with pain. Alyosha trembled uncontrollably. He was afraid that he would begin urinating again. He tensed the area of his lower abdomen: his stomach growled. Staring at the trees ahead and holding his rifle in front of him, he did not see the wounded soldier lying in his way. One of his feet caught the side of the body, and he fell over it, the length of his rifle ramming against Alyosha's chest. He heard the soldier groan and, as if someone had just caressed the back of his neck with an icy finger, he shivered, immediately moving away from the body on all fours. Having crawled several feet from the wounded soldier, Alyosha felt a most eerie sensation to turn back and look at the body. He looked back at the soldier and saw that it was the crippled, middle-aged one. Turning around, still on his hands and knees, he slowly crawled back towards the soldier. Alyosha stopped suddenly. His hair bristled and his heart jumped in horror. There was an enormous hole, the size of a man's fist, in the cripple's chest. It yawned red, exposing the white of bone and brown, fibrous material. Alyosha felt his teeth chatter. He looked at the soldier's face. The rain had already saturated the soldier's hair so that the drops wiggled down his forehead, some sliding into the sockets of his glassy eye, others slithering around and over his thin nose and falling into his open mouth. He noticed that whenever the soldier breathed, he would make a whistling, hissing sound and his mouth would emit a red, frothy substance. Alyosha shuddered and grabbed his rifle. Taking a last look at the soldier, he saw the torn, gray trousers, now smeared with blood, lying at his side.

The impulse to desert came over Alyosha. It was a strange, confusing feeling — a feeling almost of relief. He did not pause to worry about its consequences. His heart pounding against his chest, he took a last look at the battle around him — at the men running blindly towards the flickering of gunfire and puffs of smoke before them. He saw Smerchekov at the head of the company, waving his rifle back and forth in front of him and hitting some of the enemy who had charged out of the forest. Alyosha remembered his father cutting the harvest wheat with his sickle . . . Swallowing hard, he began to run towards the shelter of the forest to his right.

The pounding of his heart increased his speed. He was almost there. He could smell the pines! Running even faster, he thought he heard someone calling him from the battlefield . . . He was there! Suddenly, he felt an explosion in the back of his left thigh, and, after hobbling beneath the outspread branches of pine trees, he fell to the soft, moss-covered ground. The last thing that Alyosha remembered, before becoming unconscious, was the burning, throbbing, wet pain in his thigh.



"If you're looking for Tanya, she's milking the cow," Varvara Ivanova told Alyosha, seeing the shy, questioning look on his face.

"Thank you." Alyosha stood still for a moment, watching Tanya's mother knead the dough for the poppy seed cake that she had promised them. Then, thanking her again, he hobbled out of the house, using his rifle as a crutch. Heading for the barn, he thought over all that had happened to him since his being wounded at the forest's edge.

He was certainly fortunate that Tanya had decided to pick mushrooms the following day after the battle. Finding him wounded and unconscious, she had informed her mother who immediately rode over to the village to get help. Someone had come and operated on his leg. He would not be able to use his left leg for some time, but Alyosha was happy. He was safe with the Surikovs.

Varvara Ivanovna's husband, Anton Surikov, had been killed in the War. She and her mute daughter, Tatyana, lived alone in the forest region but were within reach of the village. Tanya, who was several years older than Alyosha, was, like her mother, a rather tall, slender brunette. Her hair fell to her shoulders and would sometimes cover part of her delicate face and hide one of her dark brown eyes. She had a small mouth — a mouth from which a deliciously pink tongue would often emerge to lick its dimpled corners. Her name delighted Alyosha. *Tatyana*: the long form sounded dark and mysterious to Alyosha, while the shortened form, *Tanya*, seemed like a sound that a child would make.

Alyosha walked into the barn and inhaled the thick smell of hay and manure. Just like at Szelonosk, he thought. What luck! He found Tanya milking the cow under the hay loft at the back of the barn. Busy with the cow, she did not hear him approach. He stopped behind her, watching her work on the cow's udder, her small, delicate hands pulling vigorously on the swollen,

red teats — one, two, one, two — the milk spurting into the bucket. He began thinking about the golden haired, blue eyed Katya . . . That had been at Szelonosk, in the bushes behind her house. Katya pretended that she was the nurse and he, the patient. He was only a small boy then . . . Pushing her hair from out of her eyes, Tanya turned her head and saw him. The corners of her mouth dimpled as she smiled at the youth. Looking into her dark brown eyes and seeing her pink tongue slide lusciously over her mouth's upper lip, the youth felt his face redden. He stammered:

"I-I . . . your mother told me you . . . I'd find you here."

She continued rubbing the length of the cow's teats and smiled even harder at Alyosha who, face burning, examined his injured leg. Finally, feeling silly, he set his rifle to the side and sat down on a bale of hay. Tanya turned back towards her work, and Alyosha watched the way the cow moved its tail back and forth contentedly. Like a pendulum, he thought.

Moments later, Tanya was through milking the cow, and Alyosha asked her if she could show him where the good mushrooms were. "Er . . . long ago, mother and I used to pick them . . ."

Tanya nodded and, signaling the youth to follow, grabbed the bucket of milk.

The sun winked in between the branches of the huge, umbrella-like pines. A few, stray, pregnant, white clouds could be seen through the openings, and Alyosha felt the afternoon breeze pick up a little. He felt extremely happy. He had almost forgotten about his deserting company, almost forgotten about the old man, Smerchekov. Watching Tanya nibble on her poppy seed cake, he yawned contentedly, stretching his arms above his head and leaning against the soft, moss-covered tree trunk. Tanya saw the satisfied expression on his face and smiled back at him.

They had already picked three full baskets of mushrooms and were exhausted. Closing his eyes, Alyosha felt the breeze playing with his hair. That delicious, sweet scent of pine! he thought. The pines . . . He saw himself at Szelonosk. Walking behind mother. Walking beneath those huge, green umbrellas. The soft feeling of moss, like fur, whenever he caressed the sides of a tree trunk. Like fur. Seeing the puddles of water in the ruts made by the countless wagons that passed through. Wondering if there were any tadpoles swimming around in the pud-

dles. Feeling the cool breeze lick his hot body. His mother telling him to keep near and stay away from the wood huts, telling him there were goblins inside who ate little boys. The railroad that ran through the forest. His mother pressing his head to her soft chest whenever the trains rumbled by. The shrill cry of the approaching train. The sound of its countless metal wheels, like continuous thunder. The ground trembling beneath him. Crossing the little bridge to the other side of the forest. Hearing a woodpecker knock. Sometimes there were mosquitoes. They would bite all over, like tiny needles pricking his body. The breeze caressing his body, playing with his hair. The breeze playing . . .

Startled, Alyosha awoke. Tanya was leaning against him, smiling and running her fingers through his hair. He looked up sheepishly at her, feeling his heart begin to pound. She forced her other hand into his trousers, and Alyosha felt his face burn. He heard a woodpecker knocking against a tree nearby, as if in encouragement. It's not a dream, he thought. It's not a dream. Mother of God! A strange, uncontrollable sensation came over him, and he stretched himself on top of the female. Tanya began to make deep, animal noises in her throat as the youth cupped one of her breasts with his trembling hands. Touching her warm, sponge-like softness and hearing her groan, the youth felt himself grow . . .



One day, in the middle of November, Alyosha and Tanya decided to head deeper into the forest in search of firewood. They had hitched an old, black horse to Varvara Ivanovna's only cart. Alyosha, wrapped in a black, sheepskin blanket, sat in the little wagon while Tanya walked beside the horse. His leg felt worse, and he had to keep it warm constantly.

After heading west for a while, they found themselves on the crest of a barren hill. Alyosha felt the wagon dip as Tanya led the horse down the slope. He turned his head and saw the jagged, snow-topped Urals loom over the stretch of forest which lay beneath them. The wheels creaked over the uneven road, and the little cart shook. Finally, they reached the forest's edge. Tanya motioned him to be careful as he grabbed his rifle and got out of the wagon. She took his hand and led him into the forest. It was dark under the pines. The clouds, crawling from the east since morning, had already covered the late autumn sun. They would have to hurry, he thought. He did not want to get caught in the rain. It would be difficult for the old horse to pull the wagon if the roads became muddy.

Several hours later, figuring that they had gathered enough wood, Alyosha waited for Tanya to return with the last of the load. He had not helped much because of his weak leg. Not as much as before, he thought. Hearing the low rumble of thunder and the wind whispering secretively through the trees, he began to feel impatient. What was keeping Tanya so long? She would have to hurry if they were to reach Varvara Ivanovna's house before it began to rain. Besides, it was getting cold. He heard the old, black horse begin to whinny, and a shiver passed through him. He limped towards the horse.

"Easy, old boy, easy," he murmured, soothing the horse's mane. "We'll leave in a little while, in a little while . . ."

Hearing another growl of thunder, he left the horse and decided to look for Tanya. He headed deeper into the forest, towards the mountains. She had gone this way, he thought. Suddenly, he stopped. What if she should return and find him gone? He began calling her: "Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . ."

"Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . ." the forest echoed back.

Alyosha felt his heart begin to pound. He brought his thin hands to his mouth. "Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . ."

Again the forest echoed back: "Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . . Tanya! . . ."

Mother of God, where is she! he thought. She should have heard his call. He hobbled deeper into the dark forest, almost catching his healthy leg against the side of a rotten log which lay hidden beneath a blanket of low bushes. The thunder sounded once more, reverberating throughout the forest, and Alyosha quickened his pace. Was that the old horse whinnying again? he wondered, hearing a low thrilling sound beneath the rumble of thunder. Turning his head, he shouted: "Easy, boy, easy! I'll come back . . . I'll come back!"

"Come back! . . . Come back! . . . Come back! . . ." the forest answered.

Alyosha thought he heard gunshots. He stumbled on, feeling his heart drumming and his stomach growling.

Minutes later, the rain beginning to pour, Alyosha found himself limping into a clearing in the forest. A little windowless wood hut squatted in the center of the clearing. His heart was pounding furiously, and Alyosha

thought his lungs would burst. He paused to rest. Is she there? he wondered. Mother of God, let me find Tanya in that hut. He began moving towards the wood hut. He was almost there. The pounding of his heart increased his speed. He thought he heard someone moving inside the hut. "Tanya!" he called, pushing the door open with his rifle and hobbling into the dimly lighted room. He froze: his hair bristled in horror.

"Smerchekov!"

The old man stood facing him in the light of a dying candle, his rifle pointing at Alyosha's chest. "Ah, it's you! . . . our little wanderer . . . So you've decided to come back, eh, comrade?" Puffing on his pipe, he grinned at the startled youth.

Alyosha started at Smerchekov's rotten teeth. "Where's Tanya?" he asked weakly.

Smerchekov nodded his head to the side, towards the floor. "Her?"

Tanya lay spread-eagled in a red puddle. Her left breast had been blown apart, and thin streamlets of blood still wiggled down the sides of the dead body. Alyosha noticed the glazed look in her open eyes.

"T-Tanya!"

"We heard that a small company of the enemy was again operating in this region. So we came back to flush them out." Smerchekov pulled his pipe out of his mouth, tapped it against the butt end of his rifle until all the ashes had sprinkled to the ground and put it in his pocket. He spat on the corpse. "Thought she was one of the enemy. Came sneaking around in here . . . Well, no matter."

Both were silent for a moment. The rain tapping against the roof and the low rumble of thunder were the only sounds.

Watching the wax run down the sides of the candle, Alyosha thought over all that had happened to him — his first meeting with Smerchekov, his encounter with the dying cripple, his escape and resulting friendship with Tanya, and now . . . He stared at the flame of the candle, at the very wick. Something broke inside of Alyosha. He felt a burning sensation shoot up his spine and explode within his head. It became difficult for him to determine whether the tapping of the rain and the low rumble of thunder came from outside the hut or were but the echoing of his brain. He thought he heard the wind

whispering. It was all so strangely familiar . . . Yes, it did not matter in the long run, thought Alyosha. His mouth felt so dry. He bit his lower lip and looked up at Smerchekov's wrinkled, powder-smudged face, into his bloodshot eyes. He felt he had always known the old man, had often seen his ghostly face in his dreams. It did not matter. He began to laugh — a deep, husky laughter — as if the punch line of some great cosmic joke had suddenly been revealed to him.

"Follow me, comrade," the old man commanded, motioning with his gun towards the door.

Cityscape

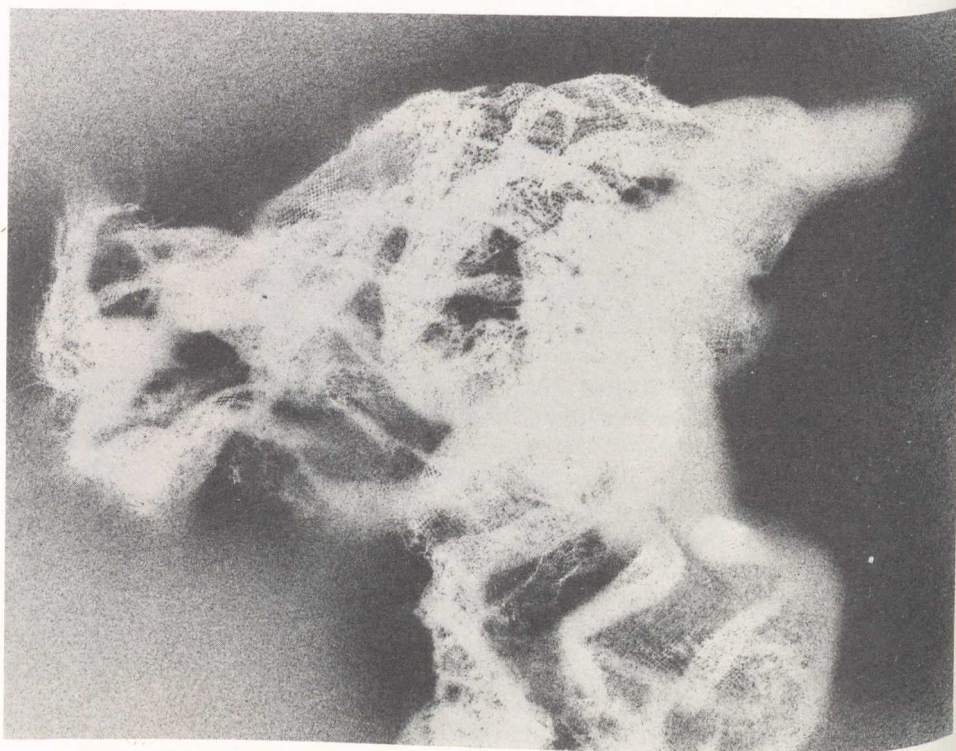
The snow dropped curtains
alabastard ground was found
when they departed

clotted white raped by
smoke and sooty winds blown from
factories' obscene

stacks by afternoon
struggling birds choked to death on
my mottled pock marked

lawn and I wondered
under my gasmask if I could
ever mow feathers

W. E. Ryan





The Second Coming

A promontory holy pageant the fool
comes strutting through
bellowing into and
sawing with his hands
the air we have to breathe If
you have seen him so or
sitting on his omniscient ass
instructing us in the way and
you know he knows ever so
adamantly that he knows Then
you know your mocking laughter
mocks itself mocking
in vain and
you are learning

Richard Finholt

Fat Lady On Needle Street

To the window
a woman comes
candled, watching
the dancing street
clown & crowd her life,

she stands,
behind yellow fall
of curtain

wanting,
waiting
for the balloon man,
head on a string
to nod by

riding
the air,
smelling of sawdust
and hempthread,

old woman,
fat lady at her sideshow
window,
wooden reflection
on glass,

passed away,

requiescat in pace,
this sun
day afternoon,

now,
only to be delivered
only flat truck to grave
flowered with balloon,
pinwheel, & cotton candy.

James Minor



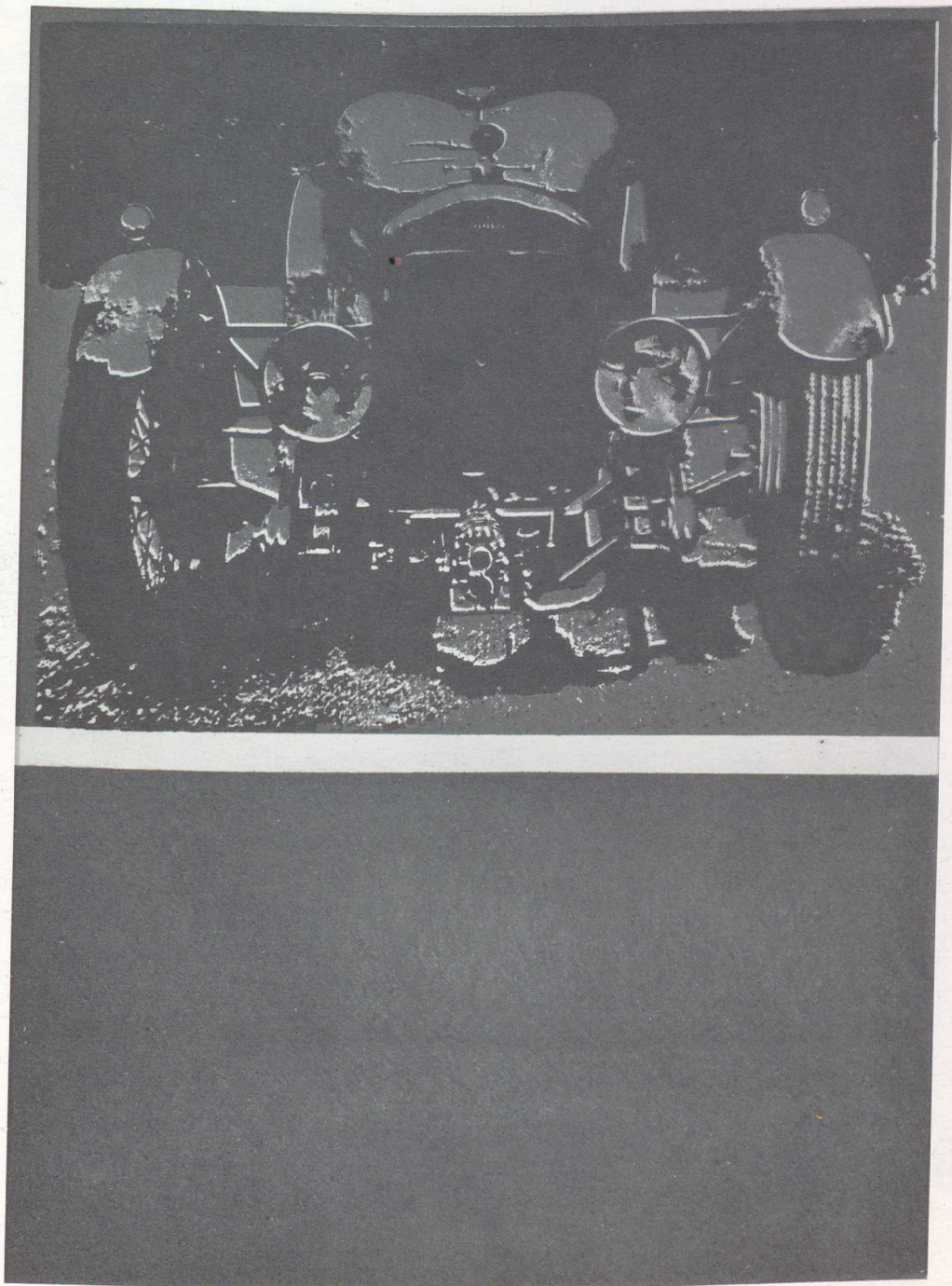
When Across The Earthball
Touch My Face

Always windblown,
Seldom showing surprise
With a smile . . .

Time tangled phrases—
Love / names

Your great automobile feet
Track the sundial
Crazy
 In search of
There it is,
 In search of
Before it is.
Over the earthball
Warn possibility
Of possibility.

R. L. Pour





For Lack of Love of Vitamins or Cash

By Jack Hafer

Though quite different in style and approach, two contemporary Midwestern poets, John Frederick Nims and James Wright, share in an important theme. Both are concerned with the society they find themselves in and more especially with the people on the fringes of this society — people who are apathetic, confused, ill, or simply lost in modern America, in small town or metropolis, and who continue to give the lie to the nineteenth century idea of progress.

Perhaps we unconsciously invert the emphasis when we speak of modern poets as "social critics". This implies a sort of "acting upon" society by poets, and, of course, to an extent, this is true. But in the poetry of a Wright or Nims, we find not the righteous indignation and heavy didacticism of a former age, but rather the poet being "acted upon" by society. His words are the reflection of society's thoughts, moods, and actions filtered through his own particular sensibility. What we find then is not "criticism" in the sense of making prescriptive moral judgments, but the poetic vision of modern man trying to focus on and describe events and attitudes. There is a difference both in moral stance and in technique between the poetry of a Wright or Nims and that of an earlier age.

For example, here are two lines from Samuel Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes": "There mark what ills the scholar's life assail, / Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail."¹ The poet exhibits a profound bitterness at these well-defined conditions which are imposed from without the scholar's life. There is no doubt in his mind, he is right, and he knows it. Compare then these lines from James Wright's "At the Executed Murderer's Grave" in which the judges are not men but "God's un-pitying stars". "Staring politely, they will not mark my face / From any murderer's, buried in this place. / Why should they? We are nothing but a man."² Thus, for Wright, the problems are not as simple and clear-cut as they are for Johnson. In a deterministic universe, praise and blame are meaningless, and thus in the poetry of Wright and Nims, the emphasis is not on the actual forces acting to produce social injustices, but on the plight of society's marginal characters. Although Nims approaches the problem in a different way, the title of

this paper, taken from "Penny Arcade", serves to show not only a correlation of theme, but also of attitude toward this theme. Thus, the intention of this paper is to demonstrate rather specifically how two contemporary poets, using different methods, deal with the same theme.

In the best poetry of James Wright there is a directness, an emotional intensity, and an honesty of expression that are striking no matter what the subject of the particular poem may be. These qualities can be seen most clearly perhaps in the poems dealing with society's misfits and outcasts. The method generally used in these poems is that of sensitive and sympathetic identification sometimes partial, sometimes complete, with the individual. For example, in "She Hid in the Trees From the Nurses", a rather formal and lovely poem, Wright speaks in the 3rd person, and yet at the same time, is inside the mind of the girl in the mental hospital. We see through the girl's eyes images expressed by the poet's language. The identification is partial, but the sympathy is complete and unmistakable. The girl, about whom the reader knows little except that she is an inmate, is hard pressed to answer these questions:

But why must she desert the shade
And sleep between the walls all night?
Why must a lovely girl run mad
To gain the simple, pure delight

Of staying, when the others leave,
To write a name or hold a stone?
Of hearing bobwhites flute their love
Through buildings loudly tumble down?³

A comparison may be made between this poem and "To a Fugitive", one of a number of poems dealing with criminals. Just as the lonely girl hides from the nurses, the fugitive, Maguire, hides from the sheriff and the cars. Here the poet speaks as himself and tells the fugitive to "Strip, run for it, break the last law, unfold, / Dart down the alley, race between the stars".⁴ As in the previous poem, the reader does not know the reasons for the restraints placed on the individual. What is important to us is the feeling evoked by each of these poems: sadness and the powerful yearning for freedom by these people who have been cut off from society. The impact of both poems stems from Wright's concentration upon the actual fact of the girl's and Maguire's restricted existence. The question of whether they are transgressors or transgressed against is irrelevant.

As we have seen, the title of James Wright's volume *Saint Judas* reflects a basic attitude of the poet. *The Iron Pastoral*, by John Frederick Nims, is indicative of approximately the same attitude, but with an important difference. While Wright usually does not mention reasons for the isolation of his characters, Nims, in many poems, focuses directly on one of the major causes for this isolation — the urban environment of modern man. Nims's characters are not honest young swains living in a simple world of clover and cows. Rather, they are denizens of an *iron* pastoral setting — the world of poolrooms and penny arcades, movie houses and all-night lunchrooms.

The poem which best represents this environment is "Penny Arcade". The "beggars of joy" who frequent the arcade are impoverished both financially and imaginatively, and it is here that they come to act out their fantasies. Here "the clerk controls the air gun's poodle puff". Irony like this runs through the entire poem. The arcade is a "palace", but it is pale and dusty under the elevated tracks. Men can control destiny only in a pinball machine, and the trucker is a "superman" only to the "test your strength" machine. "The stunted negro makes the mauler whirl/ Toy iron limbs"; and perhaps most pathetic of all are those who try to achieve the communion of love.

Some for a penny in the slot of love
Fondle the bosom of aluminum whores,
Through hollow eye of lenses dryly suck
Beatitude of blondes and fallen drawers.¹¹

Although the tone of the poem is ironic, a true sympathy with and compassion for the habitués of the penny arcade is shown in these lines: "For lack of love or vitamins or cash/ All the red robins of their year have gone." Nims is telling us that these men are not leading point-less sordid lives because they want to. Sometime, somehow, their lives have become stunted. In the case of the Negro, the cause is obvious; he is the extreme example of one who has been victimized by white society. The others, however, are somewhat different. Certainly they lack love or vitamins or cash. But why? The answer may possibly lie in the cumulative effect of Nims's "poetry of structures".

"Penny Arcade", "Poolroom", "Magazine Stand", "Movie", and "Elevated" are all poems about physical structures of the modern city. These structures have a perfectly legitimate function. But in the poetry of Nims, they are associated with a certain way of life. It would

come as no shock to the reader if he were to learn that Nims had written poems entitled "Bar", "Flophouse", "Beanery", etc. These buildings or structures are institutions created by men. But these institutions also create men in their own image. They foster a particular lifestyle among those who grew up surrounded by them. This is simply saying that we are determined by our environment. What the poet does is to *show* this actually taking place.

In poetry such as Nims's, selectivity is an important factor. That is, country estates and winter holidays on la Côte d'Azur determine men also. The poet's vision focuses, however, not on these men, but on the bum, the homosexual, the pool-shooter, and the "pale dead" viewer in the movie house.

Nims is deeply concerned with these people, and if at times he seems to mock them, we feel that he is also mocking himself and the whole of society too. For example, in "Movie", he says "Buried, we age like moles, a pasty clan".¹² He is a part of this life too. Or in "Poolroom", "Hither we drift from oaths of love or pain."¹³ Examples of this sort of identification are numerous.

Ironic contrast, especially through the use of heroic or exotic parallels, is the method generally employed in the poems mentioned so far for further demeaning the already lowly. In "Elevated", for example, the el is a Venetian gondola, and we "with Viking eye/ storm the ancestral headlands of the sky". But we feel that "the sad and seahorse shape of men" from a previous line is a more truthful description of us than daring Vikings.¹⁴

The poem "Airport: In Fog" demonstrates another facet of this device. Here the Stone Age is compared to the Machine Age. Chromium rotundas are simply modern rock stalls, and actress and banker are forced by the weather to stay inside as were their paleolithic counterparts. Modern technology in this poem, while it does not have an adverse effect on us also does not release us from the cares and wants of our humanity.

Our blood remembers rock, orange cartoon.
Scents in best linen the bearskin bed.
When arrowhead of Flightship falls, blood
shows
On chromium or flint identical red.¹⁵

Our technology then, while becoming more and more refined, is not leading mankind to perfection. The more

In a more recent poem "Autumn Begins in Martin's Ferry, Ohio", Wright pictures not the lunatic or criminal, but the great majority of American people living their lives of "quiet desperation". It is an ugly picture; for these people, while not physically chained, are very much not free. Polacks "nurse long beers in Tiltonsville" because they have nothing else to do; Negroes' faces are gray with heat and exertion, the ruptured night watchman dreams of heroes, and "all the proud fathers are ashamed to go home". With a kind of poetic logic the conclusion is reached. The poet, watching a high school football game, sees the results of the American "competitive spirit": ". . . sons grow suicidally beautiful . . . And gallop terribly against each other's bodies."⁵ Death, violence, and impotence combine to create the mood of the poem. In the poems discussed previously there has been a sympathy, a feeling of kinship, with the outcast. Here, the statement moves inexorably to its awful conclusion. In this poetic syllogism, there is a coldness indicated not only by the stark quality of the lines and language but also by the inclusion by inference of most of the American population in this dark vision of modern life.

In the next three poems to be discussed, Wright deals with the overtly criminal. Caryl Chessman and George Doty were murderers and rapists, and the name Judas Iscariot has come down to us as a synonym for ruthless betrayal.

"American Twilights, 1957", which is dedicated to Caryl Chessman, presents a brutal picture of prison life:

Tear and tormented snicker and heart
Click in the darkness; close, and fade.
Clean locks together mesh and part,
And lonely lifers, foot and head,
Huddle against the bed they made.⁶

As before, Wright identifies with the persons who, for reasons not stated, have broken the laws of society. He is not unaware of and does not ignore their crime, nor the import of their crime, for he says: "The land is dark where they have turned." But their punishment is a fearful thing: ". . . their very names are burned . . . [they] are buried under trestled rock [and] haunted by gallows." And, in the final lines, we hear the poet's call to both man and God: "Have mercy on man who dreamed apart./ God, God, have pity on man apart."⁷

George Doty, too, was a man apart. Reviled, hated, and finally killed by Belmont County, Doty lies in "the

quicklime hole of a man's defeat and shame".⁸ The poem which tells his story, "At the Executed Murderer's Grave", has for an epigraph a quotation from Freud in the form of four questions: "Why should we do this? What good is it to us? Above all, how can we do such a thing? How can it possibly be done?" These questions, asked perhaps in a moment of despair, can be answered, if only partially. In the language of psychoanalysis, we are psychically determined; in the words of James Wright, "We are nothing but a man". For better or worse, our lives are shaped and influenced before we are aware of it. George Doty, obviously a man of defective mentality, is society's scapegoat — a scarcely human something to be abhorred and done away with. Yet the poet, standing at the grave meditating on the life and death of Doty, feels a kinship with him. The executed murderer was a man — nothing more nor less: "Order be damned, I do not want to die,/ Even to keep Belaire, Ohio, safe". In the final lines, he indicates again his sense of identification with not only the executed murderer, but with all men. "Wrinkles of winter ditch the rotted face/ Of Doty, killer, imbecile, and thief:/ Dirt of my flesh, defeated, underground."⁹

The final poem in *Saint Judas* is the sonnet of that name. Here we see the poet identifying completely with one of history's most maligned figures. The title reveals the method. The conventional attitude toward Judas is reversed, and we see a mentally tortured human being stop to help a victim of a pack of hoodlums.

Banished from heaven, I found this victim
beaten,
Stripped, kneed, and left to cry. Dropping
my rope
Aside, I ran, ignored the uniforms:
Then I remembered bread my flesh had
eaten,
The kiss that ate my flesh. Flayed
without hope,
I held the man for nothing in my arms.¹⁰

For Wright, Judas becomes a figure of tragic dignity. This poem is the culmination not only of a volume of verse but a motif as well. Men may be ill, degraded, or violent, but they/we are men nonetheless. Through his compassionate understanding and identification with society's outcasts, Wright forces the reader of his poetry to a consideration of the basic problem of mankind — man himself.

unfortunate of us still rot in jail cells even if they are air-conditioned (but they're not) and lead half-lives in penny arcades or poolrooms.

For a final, though perhaps somewhat oblique, illustration of this idea, an examination of "non-Euclidean Elegy" is in order. This poem deals not with society's misfits but with everyone living in the twentieth century. Though light in tone, this poem has for a subject something which has affected us all. Lobachevski and Riemann were mathematical pioneers who posited a new geometrical system in which, for example, two straight lines running parallel to each other *could* meet somewhere short of infinity. In the poet's words:

In the foil-and-pastel tea room
Proper as aunty's kiss,
I think of Lobachevski,
Of Riemann who smashed all this.¹⁶

Then he speaks of Einstein:

Once forks and crystal
Were stars on a cloud-lace top,
Till Einstein, the whiteface heifer,
Got in Kepler's china shop.¹⁷

The well-structured, well-regulated universe is no more. This century has seen the acceptance of Einstein's Theory of Relativity and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and what they imply about the physical world. True and false are not the only responses available in polyvalent logics. Our world is not as steady as it once was, and we are not secure in it. For Nims even the gaudy magazine stand is "perhaps holy",¹⁸ and in "elegy", even if jokingly, "Tea rooms teeter like kites".¹⁹ An age in which the physical sciences and technology are so outwardly assured, but which are based — as we are coming to realize — on a shifting foundation, fosters in modern man a feeling of uncertainty, and even of *angst*.

The ambivalent attitude toward the results of our knowledge is reflected in the poetry of Nims with a special slant. While we are all affected by our environment, it is the person of lower socio-economic background who is hardest hit, if not by a non-Euclidean theorem, perhaps by a pool cue. These are the people who suffer not only mental torment but physical torment as well. In his own way, Nims had made the lives of persons on the lower levels of urban society more real for us, and if we bring to his poetry anything near the sensitivity which it displays, we must return from it with a more compassionate understanding of life.

In this particular theme found in the poetry of James Wright and John Frederick Nims, there is a strong sense of both poets' implicit rejection of some of the naive assumptions of the past. Technological progress has not made man a better creature. Our comforts are more numerous, but even they can warp us if we allow them to. Bitterly, we realize that lives can be misshapen before we can see external evidence of it. The more obvious results are our social outcasts, criminals, addicts, and homosexuals. Wright sees a person as a man, not as a result of determining factors, although he is certainly aware of them. Nims, on the other hand, looks at man's environment — his direct physical contact with life, and also with the more subtle mental environment of the Atomic Age. What both do, and do well, is speak with sympathy of and understanding for those whose voices are unheard in the isolation of the cell or under the roaring of the elevated.

NOTES

¹Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas, Poems, and Selected Prose*, ed. Bertrand H. Bronson (New York, 1964), p. 51.

²James Wright, *Saint Judas* (Middletown, Conn., 1959), p. 54.

³James Wright, *The Green Wall* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 22-23.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵James Wright, *The Branch Will Not Break* (Middletown, 1963), p. 15.

⁶Wright, *Saint Judas*, p. 48.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹¹John Frederick Nims, *The Iron Pastoral* (New York, 1947), p. 35.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 63.

