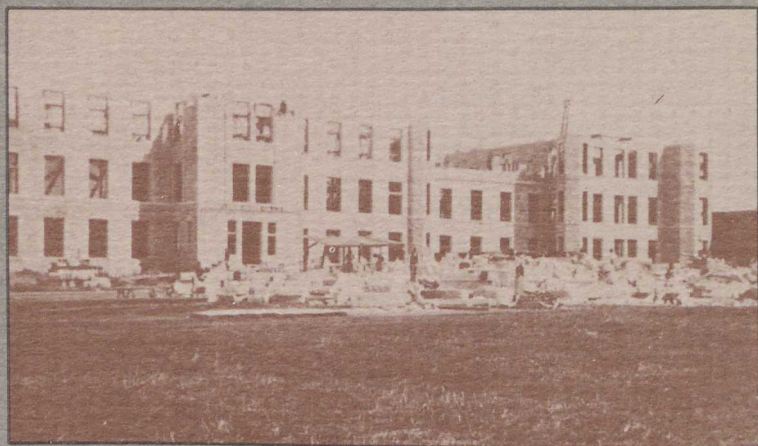
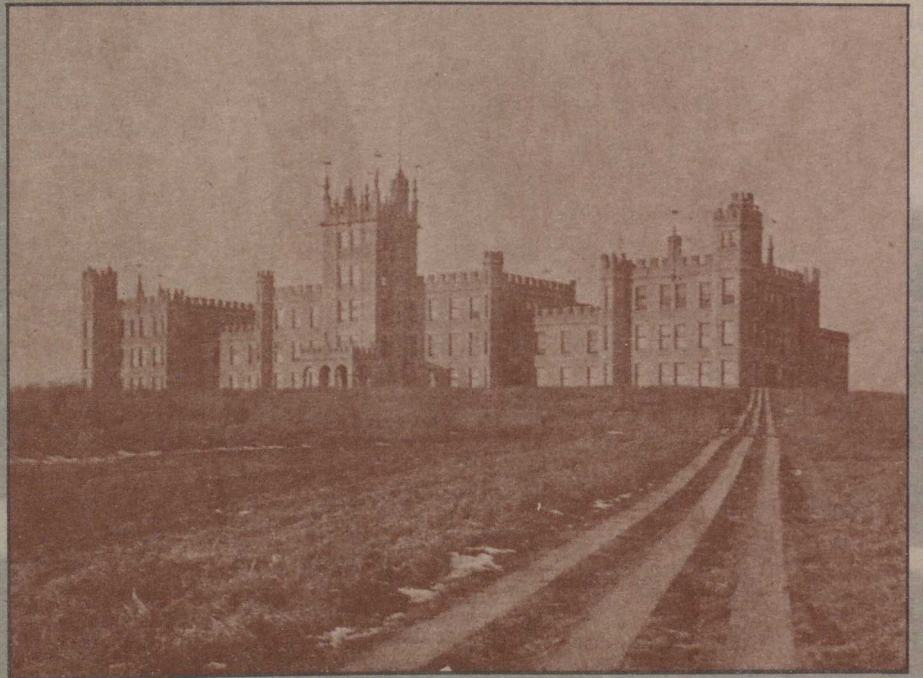
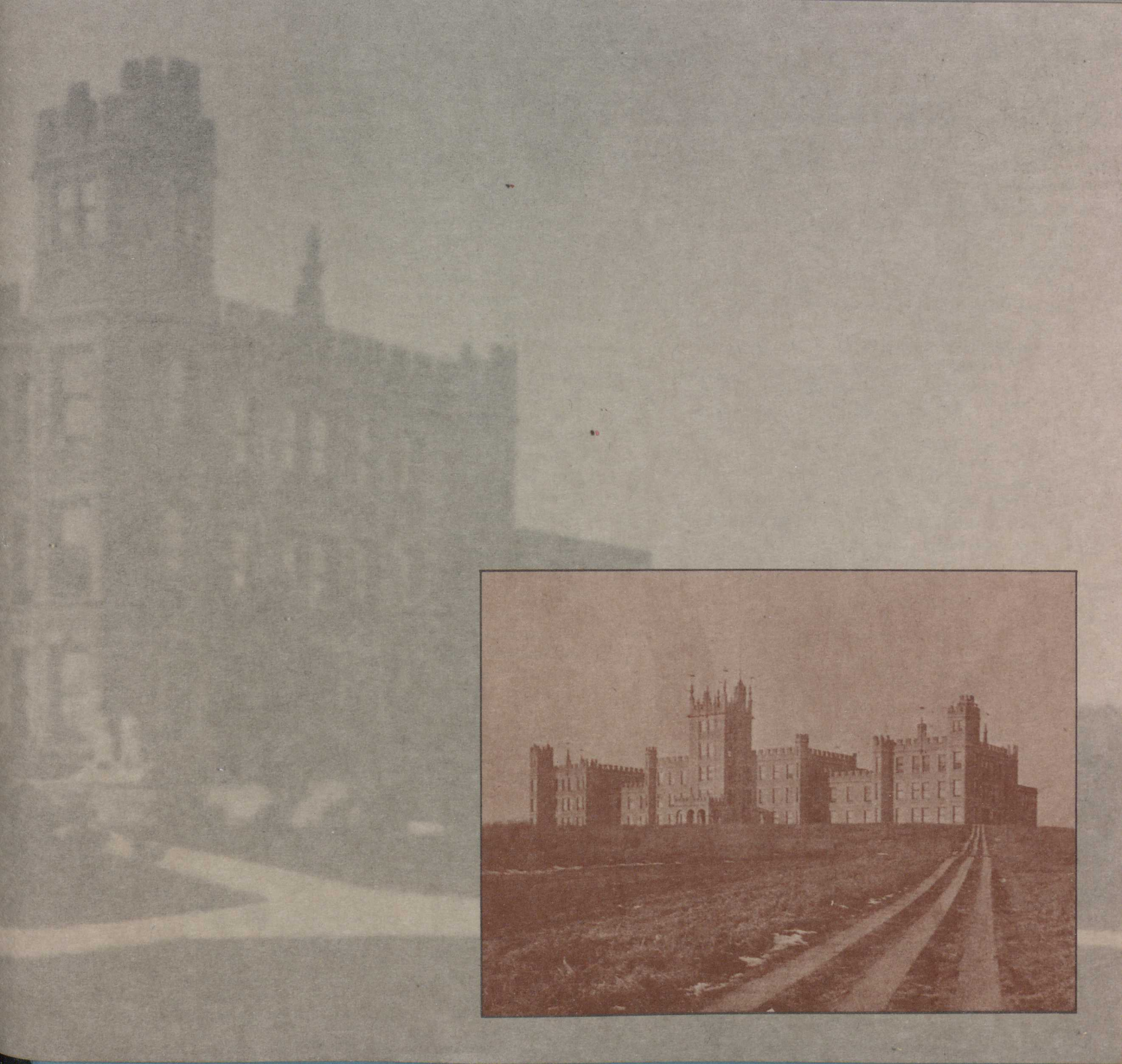


TOWERS  
VOL.  
XXXX





# CONTENTS

Mary L. Uhl, "The Castle on the Hill," the  
Growth of *Towers* and a Dedication to E. Nelson  
James, page 4

## POETRY

Larry Voves, Prelude to a Sky-Dance, page 6  
Robert Prochaska, Sea Horse, page 6  
Michael Antman, Night Walk, page 9  
Don Fisher, Nostalgic, page 14  
William Hoagland, Once I Went Mad, page 15  
Virginia Shreve, "Acquainted with the Night,"  
page 16  
Thomas Sanfilip, Into the Lights of Chattanooga,  
Into the Skies of Tennessee, page 27  
Patrick J. Pentecost, Lilo's, page 28  
Jeff Abell, Getting Back, page 29  
Michael Antman, The Butcher, page 34  
Nancy V. Ries, With Charon, page 36  
Michael Summers, teacher, page 37  
Alice Wentworth, Amberly, page 38  
Patrick J. Pentecost, Fred, page 41  
William Hoagland, And As I Drive, page 42  
Christine Okon, Jazz, page 43

## PROSE

Mary Ellen Metcalf O'Donnell, A Day in the  
Life, page 11  
Richard D. Finholt, Odysseus Wounded: James  
Dickey's *Deliverance* as an American Epic,  
page 18  
Greg Kaster, Mr. M. H. Leber and the Bells of  
Saint Basil's, page 31  
David Roediger, An Analysis of and an Alternative  
to Skaggs's Interpretation of "Black Is My  
Favorite Color," page 45

## GRAPHICS

Christopher Williams, print, page 7  
Marlene Bauer, watercolor, page 8  
Bill Diaz, oil painting, page 10  
Keith Lowman, print, page 13  
Ed Spahr, ink drawing, page 14  
Elizabeth Cummings, ink drawing, page 15  
John Foote, pencil drawing, page 17  
Jeff Pearsall, watercolor, page 18  
John Guger, sculpture, page 24  
Karin-Maria Lund, weaving, page 24  
Terry Beckman, bronze plaque, page 24  
Martin Kascewicz, copper vessel, page 25  
Elizabeth Rich, copper vessel, page 25  
Roberta Whitney, ceramic piece, page 25  
Martin Kascewicz, neck piece, page 25  
Joe Milton Allen, pencil drawing, page 26  
Gordon Schmitt, oil painting, page 28  
Dan Spahn, craypas drawing, page 29  
Gordon Schmitt, print, pages 30 and 33  
Howard Schwartz, pencil drawing, page 35  
Jim Hollich, multi-media, page 36  
Dick Browning, pencil drawing, page 37  
Christopher Williams, print, page 7  
Clay Johnson, photograph, page 40  
John Dzuryak, silkscreen, page 42  
Howard Schwartz, oil painting, page 43  
Pat Strandell, pencil drawing, page 44  
John Dzuryak, photograph, inside back  
cover

Photographs of Altgeld Hall on the cover and  
inside front and back covers are courtesy of the  
University Archives.

Dr. James was photographed by Karen Eckert.

## STAFF

EDITOR: Mary L. Uhl

ART EDITOR: Carol Mitchell

ADVISORS: E. Nelson James  
William Wolf  
Ed Syrek

### EDITORIAL STAFF

Michael Antman	Thomas Sanfilip
John J. Cebula	Christine Smith
Janet K. Fair	Deby Sokol
Ray Heilmann	Joanne Starzec
Bill Hoagland	Marcia Stepanek
Christine Okon	Michael Summers
Robert Prochaska	Nancy Ulbricht
Mary Rohde	Tricia Vidinich

Michael Warns

### EDITOR'S NOTE

*Towers is published twice yearly by the Xi Delta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, National English Honorary. Its purpose is to stimulate creative and critical writing and to promote an appreciation for literature and art within the university community.*

*The prose and poetry in each Towers reflect the choice of staff members who carefully read, discuss and select the best of the material submitted. Authorial anonymity is observed in selecting material. Five faculty judges choose prize winners from the manuscripts and artwork selected by the staff. Awards reflect the choice of the judges only and are chosen anonymously.*

*In this fortieth volume of Towers, we have tried to parallel NIU's growth with Towers' by picturing Altgeld Hall in the various stages of its development and by including a brief history of our magazine's evolution. The Towers staff is proud to dedicate this special issue to a friend and advisor of Towers for the last twenty-five years, Dr. E. Nelson James.*

## AWARDS

LUCIEN STRYK AWARD FOR POETRY  
Judge, Philip Dust, Assistant Professor of English, NIU  
Coordinators, Christine Smith, Marcia Stepanek,  
Michael Summers

Undergraduate: nothing deemed worthy  
Graduate: nothing deemed worthy

J. HAL CONNOR AWARD FOR CREATIVE PROSE  
Judge, Lynne Waldeland, Assistant Professor  
of English, NIU  
Coordinators, Ray Heilmann, Michael Warns

Undergraduate: Greg Kaster, Mr. M. H.  
Leber and the Bells of Saint Basil's, page 31  
Graduate: Mary Ellen Metcalf O'Donnell,  
A Day in the Life, page 11

E. RUTH TAYLOR AWARD FOR CRITICAL WRITING  
Judge, James Mellard, Associate Professor of English, NIU  
Coordinators, Janet K. Fair, Joanne Starzec

Undergraduate: nothing deemed worthy  
Graduate: Richard D. Finholt, Odysseus  
Wounded: James Dickey's *Deliverance*  
As American Epic, page 18

MAUDE UHLAND AWARD FOR FRESHMAN WRITING  
Judge, Grant Voth, Assistant Professor of English, NIU  
Coordinators, Christine Okon, Deby Sokol

Nancy V. Ries, With Charon, page 36

TOWERS AWARD FOR ART  
*Two Dimensional Art Awards*  
Judge, Win Jones, Assistant Professor of Art, NIU

Undergraduate: Jeff Pearsall, watercolor, page 18  
Graduate: Christopher Williams, print, page 39  
*Three Dimensional Art Awards*  
Judge, Lee Peck, Assistant Professor of Art, NIU

Undergraduate: John Guger, sculpture, page 24  
Graduate: Elizabeth Rich, copper vessel, page 25

## **"The Castle on the Hill," the growth of *Towers*, and a Dedication to E. Nelson James.**

Mary L. Uhl

Altgeld Hall, Northern's oldest building, is a symbol of the University's beginning and growth\* and of *Towers'* evolution as well. Established in 1938 and named for Altgeld, "The Castle on the Hill," *Towers* was originated by the members of Sigma Tau Delta (national English honor society) and Nu Iota Pi (journalistic fraternity) who recognized the college's need for a "publication through which students may find literary expression." Prior to this time, student literary efforts had appeared periodically in the student newspaper, *The Northern Illinois*. In 1939 and 1940 the first two volumes of *Towers* were published under the direction of E. Ruth Taylor, J. Hal Connor and Maude Uhland, for whom *Towers* awards are now named. Sigma Tau Delta members sold copies of the first two volumes on DeKalb streets to help defray expenses.

World War II halted publication of *Towers*, but student literary work appeared in *The Northern Illinois* often, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Ruth Taylor, the paper's advisor. And Sigma Tau Delta members were even able to publish in 1945 and 1946 a literary supplement to the newspaper, *Budding Branches*. Publication of the magazine resumed in 1947, with the college's financial assistance, and it has continued uninterrupted to the present. Each year staff members have judged 600 to 1800 literary entries with attention to quality, originality and student interest. Originally poems on "The Castle on the Hill" were featured; over the decades plays and essays were added to the format and were dropped in favor of the present poetry-short story-criticism makeup. The format was expanded in 1957 to include artwork and awards for the best poetry and fictional prose. In 1963 *Towers* moved from annual to biannual publication. A year later cash awards were presented for creative and critical writing; finally a freshman writing award followed in 1965; graphics began to earn awards in 1966. And thus *Towers* grew over a thirty-five year period to

its present appearance as the fortieth volume, with a circulation of 7,000 copies per semester.

This special issue of *Towers* is fittingly dedicated to the one person most responsible for *Towers'* growth, Dr. E. Nelson James, who in 1973 celebrates his twenty-fifth year with the magazine. Dr. James began working with *Towers* when he came to Northern in 1948. He became faculty advisor in 1956 and has acted in that capacity to the present day, overseeing many of the changes that have led the magazine from its emphasis on written work and castle-adorned covers to its increasingly professional integration of varied art and literary types.

In addition to his work with *Towers*, Dr. James has served as local advisor of Sigma Tau Delta and as Executive Secretary of the 26,000-member national organization. He is also editor of the Sigma Tau Delta literary magazine, *The Rectangle* and of the *Sigma Tau Delta Newsletter*. He has served Northern as Director of Professional Publications, Acting Director of the NIU Press and as head of several university committees. His own professional work centers around Restoration and 18th Century Drama; he has published *The Development of George Farquhar as a Comic Dramatist* and has contributed to a *Bibliography of Restoration and Eighteenth Century Research: 1900-1968*.

Each of Dr. James's achievements is impressive in itself, but to the thousands of students who have staffed *Towers*, have contributed to its contents, and have read its pages over the past quarter of a century, his most impressive achievement has been his wise direction of *Towers* toward ever-increasing artistic and professional heights. Surely, all hope for his continued direction of NIU's literary "Castle on the Hill" for many years to come.

*\*pictured on the inside front and back covers*



Dr. E. Nelson James

## Prelude to a Sky-Dance

one moonlit night  
we walked across the black sky  
wincing and laughing at the stars  
that pricked our feet,  
playing kick-the-can  
with the dusty earth,  
scooping up handfuls of heaven  
to throw at passing gods.  
we saw so many of them  
that night.

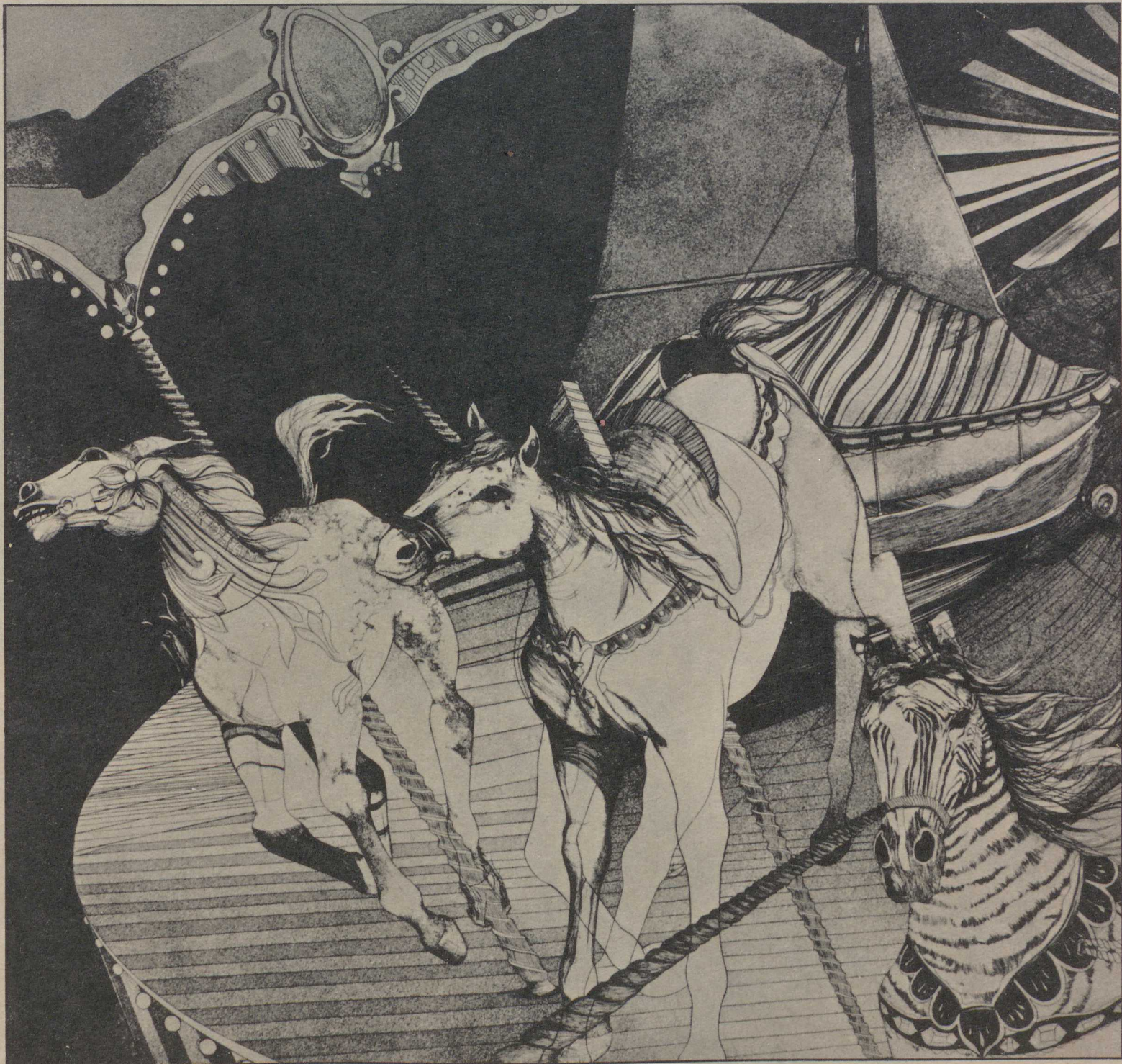
larry voves

robert prochaska

## Sea Horse

I worshipped them  
in glossy pictures.  
Sea horses were inside me,  
settling in my private sea.







Marlene Bauer • watercolor

## Night Walk

I walk down the streets unkempt with trees.  
The first-floor man is eating again. In the window,  
the streetlight slips off his crystal shaker  
and dimly limns this familiar meal.  
He sprinkles on his lamb, on his apples,  
and over his pale wine.  
The heaps of grains overflow the sill  
and shower onto my shoes. I walk on

past the insistent creak of his elbow  
and into the humming night.

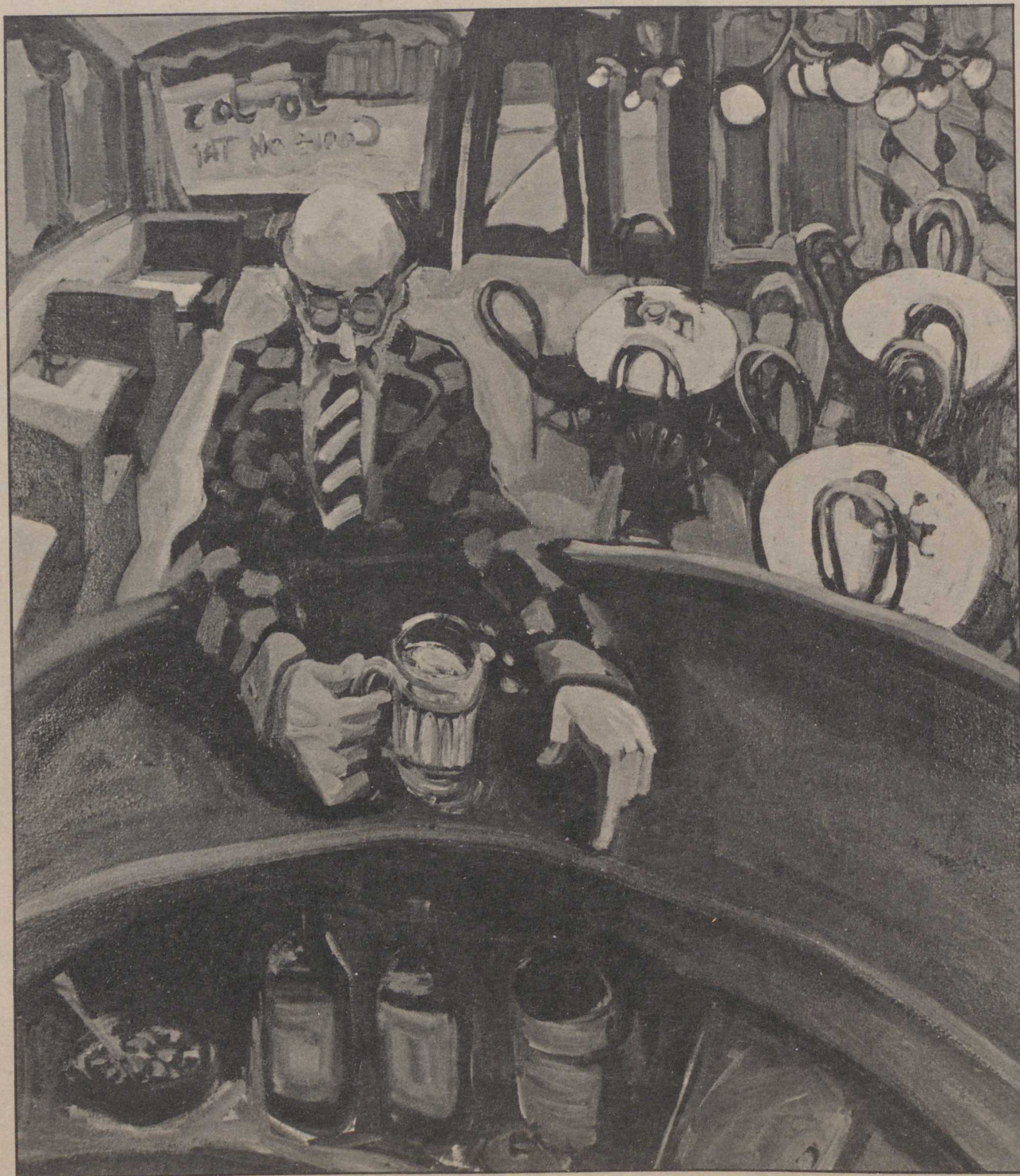
Further back in my dream of the street  
the vaulted auditorium stands  
impaled against the earth by ancient beams  
driven by one of several possible gods.  
I grab at the wood and tilt my head  
at the angle of the beams,  
everything about me gaping open.  
(Pitted by all the corroding grains,

the soil cracks as the roots disentangle  
and slip silently out of the ground behind me.)

Years later, I stand in an empty playground.  
The winter air is sharp and flawless.  
I sweep my eyes past the stores  
like blocks of ice in the street,  
past the laminated Santas  
mounting the lightpoles in a showy passion,  
and past the billboard whose shining letters  
drip in insidious patterns over my eyes.

Above, above all this, the trees float,  
roots swimming in the wind.

michael antman



# mary ellen metcalf o'donnell

## A Day in the Life

Graduate Award

Friday, 19 February  
10:00 a.m.

A toilet flushes somewhere in Ertrasville and no one notices. A red-haired woman lumbers down broken steps, clutching a bundle of dirty laundry. Marie Boulange scrapes wads of fuzzy mildew off her black patents while cousin Louise pours rancid milk over boiled cornmeal mush. Across the street, in a dingy fourth-floor apartment, Pierre Roquefort sits in his bathtub, mirror in hand, tweezing the black hairs from his left nostril. . . .

. . . This small dark particle that once was part of me—that grew from me—that I myself produced with my own body. . . . And now this cold, pronged weapon takes it between its jaws, plucks it away from my flesh. I place it in my palm, this minute speck of fiber that lived in me and from me and with me but lives no more. How useless was its existence—to take root, to grow, to spend a while in me—and to what end? To be torn from me by my own hand. It is I killing myself—a kind of semi-suicide.

And what now is to become of you, tiny hair? Shall I drown you? Send you through the drain? And where would you travel? Or shall I cast you aside, throw you to the floor and abandon you to be swept away into some corner of this room—to have you come to rest, perhaps, in some crevice in the woodwork or lodged at the foot of the washbasin? And maybe one day, when I am gone from this apartment, someone will be scrubbing this floor and buff you loose from your niche and discover you and wonder from whom you were severed—what human being gave you life—who he was—where he is—if he is dead. And I will never know that this person is looking on you—as I am now looking on you—and that he is wondering about me whom he has never known.

Yes, I abandon you. I cast you aside, hair, and permit you to lodge wherever chance chooses to whisk you. And one day someone will find you, perhaps, and think about me, as I am now thinking about him. I cast you to your destiny.

11:00 a.m.

Pierre Roquefort opens a tin of marinated squid. . . .  
. . . . It's come again. I know it now. It's come upon me just as before, blobbing languidly through the fibers of the carpet. The Crud. Only now it's inside me; it's taken me. From my very pores it issues—to haunt, to terrorize, to remind me that patiently it lurks and dwells within me. It beckons to me. Closer I peer into myself. One pore—one small dark speck on my nose—deeper; it becomes a pit. Deeper, deeper—yet deeper I enter into myself through this single pore, this chasm; I am engulfed in its infinite black expanse. An eternity of blackness, unbounded. I float through the airless void and am abandoned to it. Then out of this vast, timeless moment of time looms an orange earth—a world that propels itself toward me, that breathes to me, swells to me, then vanishes—submerged beneath eternity. And I feel myself sinking with the dull blorp of a stone through a quagmire. And I know it is the Crud—eternal inhabitant of this, my living flesh.

2:30 p.m.

Pierre Roquefort plods his way along the Rue Blasé to the intersection at Rue de la Naušee. He enters a café. A tinny-sounding phonograph woefully mourns, "Nobody knows you when you're down and out. . . .  
. . . . Look at them—all of them—sitting in upholstered chairs, sipping coffee, laughing, smoking, slapping backs, pretending they don't know. The Home-Made Man reads his newspaper—reads it—and turns the page and reads some more. He wipes his chin with his napkin and drinks some more coffee. He looks around—he doesn't see me—he thinks I am late. I am not late. I am watching him sit in his chair and read his paper and sip his coffee and wipe his spattered chin. I see him look toward the door for me. He checks his watch. I see his hairy wrist. His head is greasy. The oily folds of his fat neck blob around his collar. He reads his paper and pretends he doesn't know—pretends he is engrossed in his paper—pretends he likes the coffee he slurps.

I loathe the Home-Made Man—loathe him and all of them. They make me vomit. Laughing pigs, liars. They know. They know it as I know it. They hide it: drown it in their coffee, smash it into their upholstered chairs, trap it between the pages of their newspapers, singe it with their cigarettes, choke it with their laughter, and then they go home until next

time. And they will return to this place again tomorrow. And it will be the same again. They will hear this same song and submerge its message beneath their slurping laughter.

The Home-Made Man looks around for me. I see the oily stains on his collar. He does not see me. He checks his watch and folds his paper. He rises from his upholstered seat. His face is red. His face is an oozing lesion, and his eyes bulge from the wound. He knows. He knows it. I loathe him. I watch him move to the door. He leaves. He thinks I forgot about our meeting. I did not forget. I have seen him.

4:00 p.m.

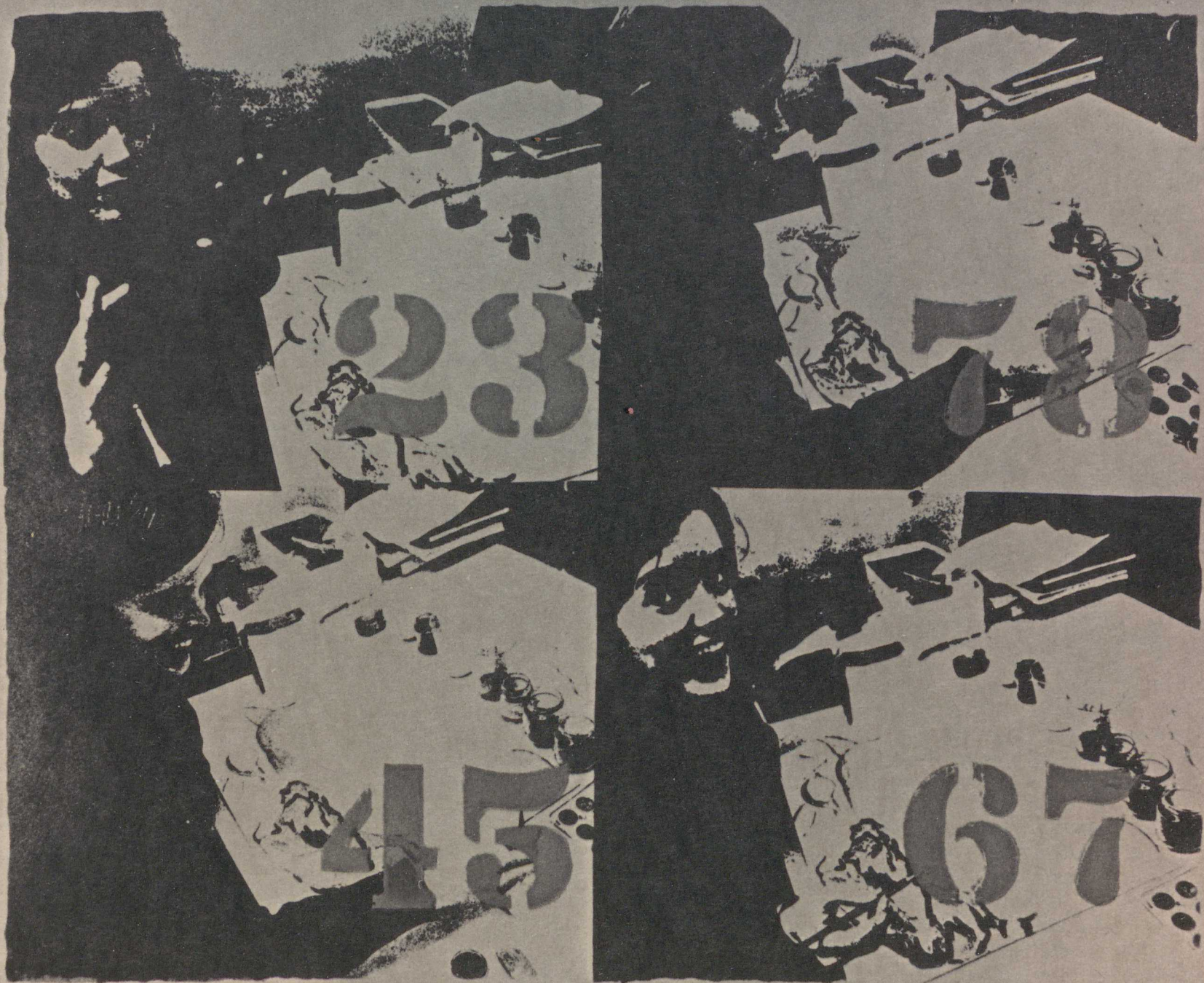
Pierre Roquefort peels a prune. . . .  
. . . . Rosie likes prunes. If Rosie were here we would taste these prunes together. She would be wearing her green taffeta dress, and she would tell me of her travels. We would recall the old days, when everything was different. And she would ask me if I had any prunes, and I would give her six of them. She would prepare them for me—especially for me—the way I like them,—stewed. She would peel them and slice them into halves and remove the pit. The pit. The prune's pit—pit of the prune. That even a juicy fruit should have a pit—a stone. Beneath your glossy, wrinkled skin—within your tender, sweet flesh, a stone, a pit, a stony pit. And by it and from it you take life; you grow. From it we all grow. Out of the pit we all emerge. Our existence from the pit takes shape. The center of all existence, the source of all being is the pit, the black and stony pit.

Pit of the prune, pit of man—it is all the same. It dwells in us and we in it—inseparable. And nourished by it, we germinate and are bred—bred by its slime. The Crud—extending itself languidly, calculatingly, from the pit till it oozes through our flesh and issues from our pores. Abandoned to it, we slowly sink and are submerged forever beneath its oozing slime. To the pit we return until forever. The cycle is completed.

And now I understand. I have always known, but now I understand. The world will one day understand, for I shall go forth and reveal the truth to all humanity.

10:30 p.m.

Pierre Roquefort begins work on his Book.





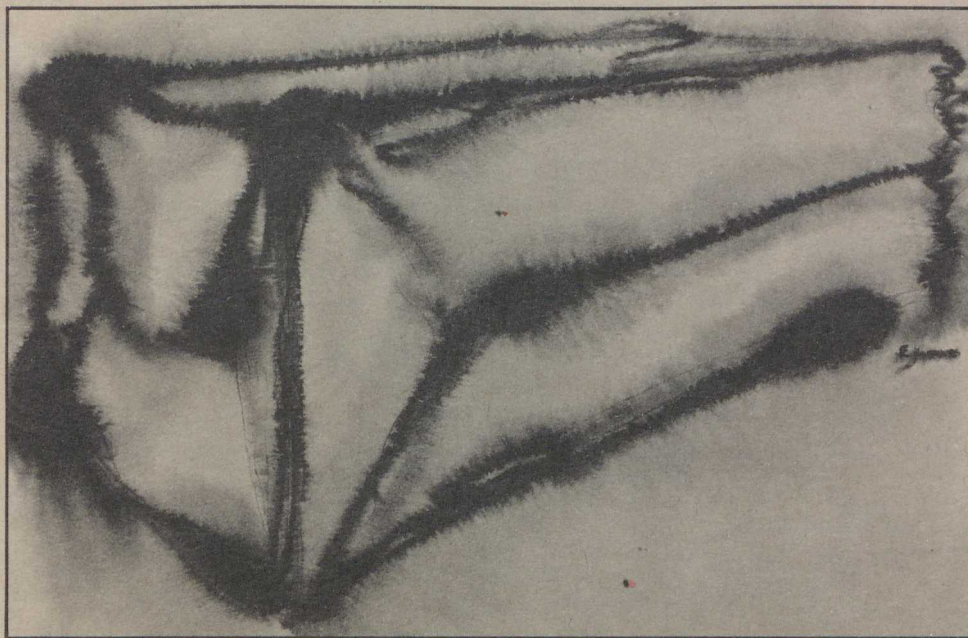
Ed Spahr • ink drawing

## Nostalgic

Reading Scott Fitzgerald  
These last nine months,  
My life's grown almost classic  
And sort of ivy league.  
Soft pastel girls fade in and fade out,  
And half-hidden faces leave  
Hazy impressions as baggy pants float by.  
Romance, red toenails  
And long, thin cigarette holders  
Lend that sad Dionysian air  
To life turned half-way round,  
And muted, dark voices sigh in a soft-focus dream.  
Blasé, still sensual seem my ways  
Of living those grand and melancholy days.

don fisher





Elizabeth Cummins • ink drawing

## Once I Went Mad

Once I went mad,  
Curled up on the couch,  
And hid from our wallpaper  
As its trees on trees on trees  
Moaned with a wind in my head.  
Moonlight spread like fireflies  
Gathering at the window,  
And out on the gravel road  
Kids roared by, tossing beer cans  
From their old cars to our yard,  
Laughing at my mad laughter,  
While locusts screamed on  
About nothing.

william hoagland

# virginia shreve

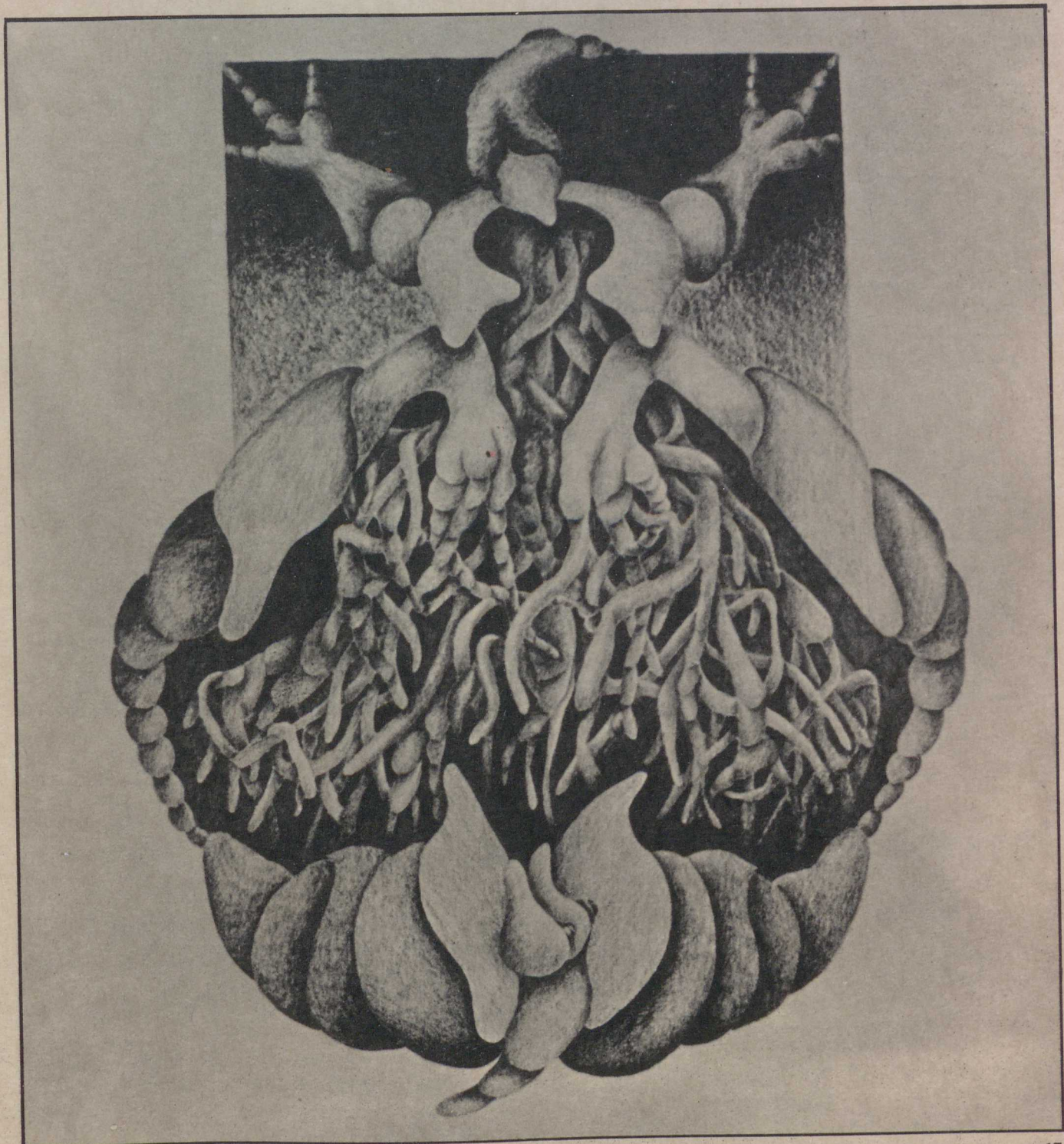
## "Acquainted with the Night"

The hours of the night pass like cats.  
Each night is a test.  
I watch the clock and wait for dawn.  
My life gripped like a rough rope  
in my hands,  
I sit in the corner taking my pulse.  
Outside, branches form webs entangling my thoughts.  
In summer it was the brittle scraping of crickets;  
now it is the silence that follows me  
hollow-eyed through the dark.  
I cannot bear to hear the dead names.

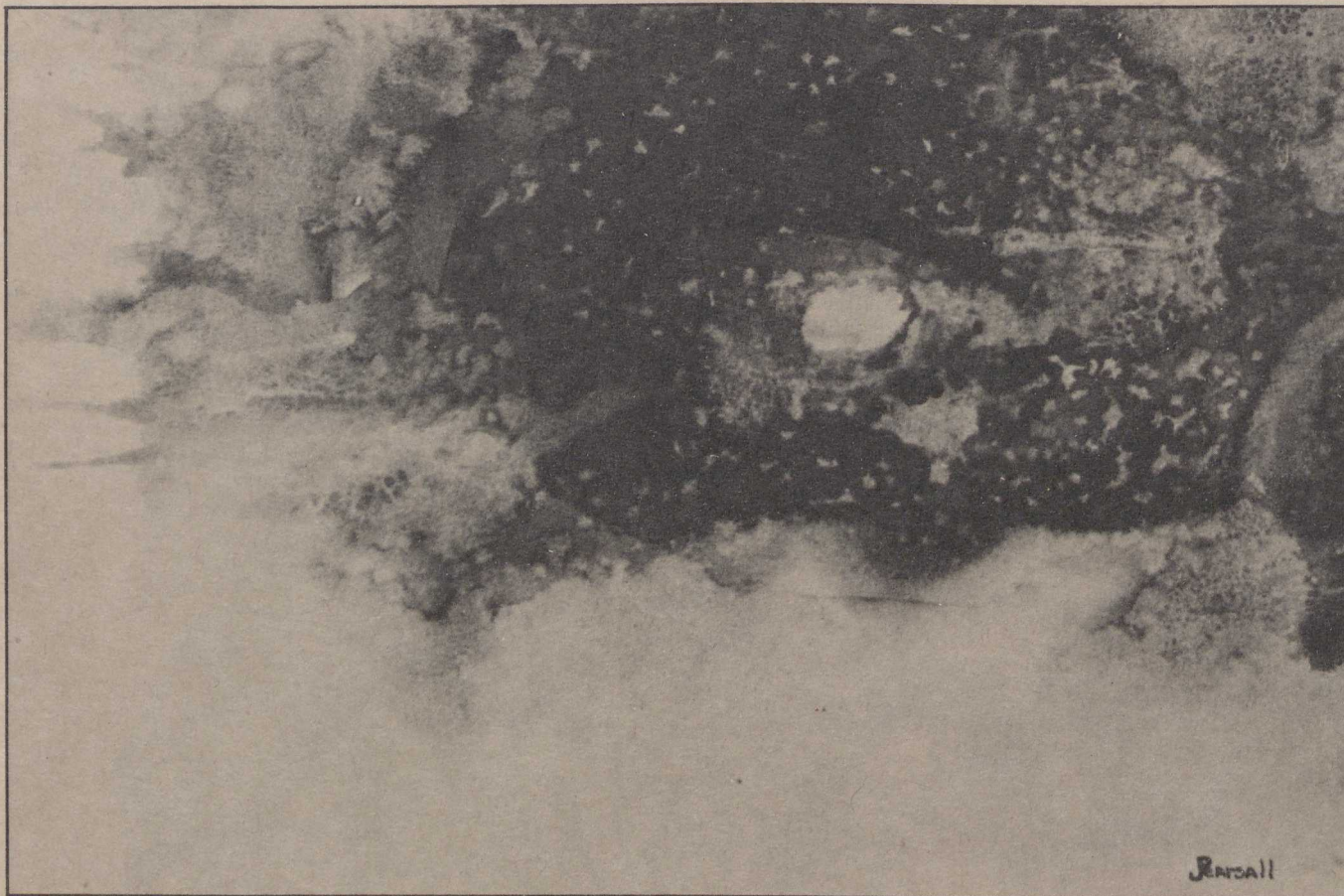
The only way to escape is to pursue.

Twenty-one years stacked in orderly rows  
like nice smooth white stones,  
clean, faceless, and polite.  
The blank moon is a hole  
through which my life is seeping  
the night clutches at me with clawed fingers  
of its own dark heart  
the glass face of the clock glitters  
in jagged prisms on the floor  
where I broke it  
mouths mouths blooming out of stone,  
savage red man-eating flowers  
I am screaming  
I am sealed in this envelope of flesh  
bracelets of scarlet drop like petals. . . .

If not death, at least a purging?



John Foote • pencil drawing



Jeff Pearsall • watercolor • undergraduate award

## Odysseus Wounded: James Dickey's *Deliverance* as an American Epic

Graduate Award

richard d. finholt

It is like being asked by Papa himself to join him on a canoe trip down the big two-hearted river. And if the river happens to flow through the heart of darkness, the journey takes on an epic significance demanding an American-bred hero of at least Hemingwayesque stature. Such are the associations that James Dickey must have made when creating the character of Lewis Medlock, for *Deliverance* was surely intended as an American *Odyssey* with Lewis cast as Odysseus.

The various parallels between the classical epic and Dickey's version of it seem obvious enough. It is with the variations on classical norms, with the embellishments on ancient themes, that I am primarily concerned. These seem to have derived from distinctly American and uniquely modern literary and cultural concerns.

C. S. Lewis has stated that the triumphs and tragedies of Homeric epic were played out against a "background of meaningless flux"; in other words, there were no cosmic implications to the epic hero's actions, no ultimate rewards for his good acts or eternal damnation for his errors as there would be in Christian epics of later centuries. The action of *Deliverance* is played against the same background; as the narrator, Ed Gentry, says in a moment of revelation during his epical climb up the side of the cliff, "The river was blank and mindless with beauty. . . . I beheld the river in its icy pit of brightness, in its far-beloved sound and indifference, in its large coil and tiny points and flashes of the moon, in its long sinuous form, in its uncomprehending consequence. What was there?" (p. 177).<sup>1</sup> The experience of *Deliverance* is very much a return in time (symbolized and epitomized by the line that Ed describes between the urban South and the rural South [p.48]) to a pre-Christian era, much like the modern, when values were grabbed on the run and meaning was where one found it, and when the hero's role was not diminished by the indifference of the cosmos to his actions but heightened thereby, because the hero was *all* that men had as the object of their faith. This is Ed's discovery after the initiation rite into heroism that he undergoes on the cliff: in an indifferent universe governed by no laws except natural forces (the synecdoche of which Ed sees in the running of the river [p. 176]), "who knows what might not be possible?" (p. 178). All things are possible to the hero who liberates himself from the ties of our too-easy civilization and who makes himself ready to start with the nothingness that was all Odysseus had to work with: "I think," Lewis states early in the narrative, "the machines are going to fail, the political systems are going to fail, and a few men are going to take to the hills and start over" (p. 51).

Jay Gatsby, Fitzgerald insists, "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself." Fitzgerald, I think, saw this same vestige of romantic individualism in Hemingway, this same passion for self-exaltation

as the only bulwark against the void, against *nada*. The place to start when post-Christian man starts over will be with the self. "We are what we pretend to be," Kurt Vonnegut has said with a shudder. But in this reality, a Hemingwayesque hero like Lewis finds the hope of deliverance; as he says, "It depends on how strong your fantasy is, and whether you really—*really*—in your own mind, fit into your own fantasy, whether you measure up to what you've fantasized" (p. 59).

Lewis, like Gatsby, walks that thin line between the ridiculous and the sublime, and Lewis is as much an enigma to Ed as Gatsby is to Nick. But Ed, unlike Nick, has the hero role thrust upon him when his Odysseus falls wounded. It would have been inconceivable for Homer to allow Odysseus to fall victim to the Cyclops, thrusting the mantle of heroism on any of the nondescript members of Odysseus' crew. But Dickey, having witnessed the fall of Christianity and of Romanticism, is living in a more desperate time, a time that demands not greater heroes but that every individual rise to his inborn potential for heroism, that every individual demand his inalienable right to pursue the course of his survival. Dickey is applying the principles of Jacksonian democracy to epic heroism; every man should have the opportunity to be his own hero.

*Deliverance* is something other than just an epic; it is a *Bildungsroman*, a novel of Ed Gentry's education in the mysteries of epic heroism. Ed begins by being amused by Lewis' mystique of survival:

"I know," he [Lewis] said. "You think I'm some kind of narcissistic fanatic. But I'm not."

"I wouldn't put it that way, exactly," I [Ed] said.

"I just believe," he said, "that the whole thing is going to be reduced to the human body, once and for all. I want to be ready."

"What whole thing?"

"The human race thing." (p. 51)

But when the time comes when the "whole thing" is on the line for him, Ed forgets about the ridiculous extremes of Lewis' philosophy as he realizes that his deliverance lies in his ability to make Lewis' philosophy work for him: "I wanted to kill him exactly as Lewis had killed the other man" (p. 180). Hemingway dead by his own hand, Gatsby the victim of that "foul dust" of American

materialism that "floated in the wake of his dreams": they were the real-life and fictional representatives of the American frontier spirit, making a last stand against the forces of civilization that threaten to cut off individuals from their last lingering sense of source. Lewis is the prophet-hero, cast in the mold of Hemingway and Gatsby, come to call the many and to choose the few; his message is: *be ready*; forget the artificial complexities of civilized life and get back to the business for which man was put on earth; take aim on the target that was the sole purpose of Odysseus' voyage—"bare survival" (p. 53). Ed Gentry, the quintessential contemporary American—fat, balding, soft suburbanite that he is, the unwilling disciple of Lewis—is mundated in the lesson that Dickey would have us all learn: as Lewis tells Ed, "You've been sitting in a chair that won't move. You've been steady. But when the river is under you, all that is going to change. There's nothing you do as vice-president of Emerson-Gentry that's going to make any difference at all, when the water starts to foam up. Then, it's not going to be what your title says you do, but what you wind up doing. You know: *doing*" (p. 51).

*Deliverance* is very carefully framed around Dickey's intention to provide us with a myth for our time. The epic actions of Lewis and Ed are acted out in a *real* world remote from the casual unreality of the American mainstream. Lewis and his crew are drawn slowly, but inexorably, down the river into this real world; they are drawn by circumstance into what Lewis calls "the most serious kind of game there is" (p. 132) (that is, pitting one man's desire to live against another's desire to see him die), and the river draws them out of this epic theater just as inevitably as it drew them in. Ed remarks once back in civilization that, ironically, it is the story they invented to cover the *real* story that "became part of a world, the believed world, the world of recorded events, of history" (p. 241). The irony is that what society and its literary critics would condemn for its unrealistic larger-than-life quality, Dickey would insist is more real precisely because it *is* larger than life.

Throughout his ordeal, as his mind struggles to believe the reality that is unbelievable, Ed compares their situation to the kind of epic that a contemporary American knows best:

From where we were the cliff looked something like a gigantic drive-in movie screen waiting for an epic film to begin. I

listened for interim music, glancing now and again up the pale curved stone for Victor Mature's stupendous image, wondering where it would appear, or if the whole thing were not now already playing, and I hadn't yet managed to put it together. (p. 154)

"I think he means to pick the rest of us off tomorrow," I said out loud, still stranger than anything I had ever imagined. When do the movies start, Lord? (p. 157)

The first lesson the would-be epic hero must learn, it seems, is to accept the reality of his larger-than-life situation. He must learn the necessity of accepting the responsibility he would much rather leave on the larger, stronger shoulders of Victor Mature or John Wayne or Clint Eastwood or Lewis Medlock—"The assurance with which he had killed a man was desperately frightening to me," Ed says of Lewis at the height of his dependency, "but the same quality was also calming, and I moved, without being completely aware of movement, nearer to him. I would have liked nothing better than to touch that big relaxed forearm as he stood there, one hip raised until the leg made longer by the position bent gracefully at the knee. I would have followed him anywhere. . . ." (p. 135). Dickey has been accused by some reviewers of designing his novel around a possible adaptation for the movies. But this is not as dishonest a motive as it may appear, for the movies by their larger-than-life unreality capture the essence of the epic grandeur that is so much a part of every individual's archetypal fantasies, and they provide the heroes we need to convince us that man still has the capability for survival. Now Ed finds himself miscast as the epic hero in a classic kill-or-be-killed situation, and the thought makes his "tongue thicken at the possibility" (p. 189).

Dickey sees in archery the perfect dramatization of the epic struggle of mind to master matter and of will to conquer fear. The arrow becomes the extension of the hero's will, and the rightness of its flight to the target mirrors the rightness of the archer's resolve. As Ed remarks, "there is no skill or sport, not even surgery or golf, in which confidence is as important as it is in archery" (p. 195). And as he approaches the test of his own resolve, to settle the question of whether he will kill or be killed, he declares, "I knew that my next battle would be with hysteria, the wild hysteria of full draw, of wanting to let the arrow go and get the tension of holding the bow out of the body; to get the shot

off and get it over with. . . . I was full of the transfiguring power of the full draw, the draw-hysteria that is the ruination of some archers and the making of others, who can conquer it and make it work for them" (pp. 196-197). The archery shot is the perfect test of the epic hero; the proof will be in if the archer hits what he is aiming at, if he has the grace, under the pressure of death if he misses, not to miss. Lewis stands at full draw for a full minute, a difficult situation for an archer since the steadiness of his aim ebbs away with his strength, waiting for the right moment to shoot the man holding the shotgun on Ed. He hits his man dead center.

We expect this steadiness and cool from Lewis, but we do not know what to expect from Ed when his time comes, and this is the essence of the American epic: will the common man, given his opportunity for deliverance, be able to conquer his hysteria? At his first glimpse of his enemy and target, Ed's resolve fails, and pity and fear flood the hearts of all those readers in suburbia who suspect the same all too common cowardice in themselves: "This is it, I thought, but my first hope, one I could not keep off me, was that I could stay in the tree until he went away. My climb up the cliff had left me; all I wanted was my life. Everything in me was shaking; I could not even have notched the arrow" (p. 194). The reader has even more reason to be apprehensive, because earlier in the narrative we have seen Ed miss an easy shot at a deer for no other reason than his realization that this was a real deer in an authentic hunting situation and not a paper target on an archery range. Lewis asks him at the time, "Where's my old steady buddy?" And Ed replies, "Your old steady buddy exploded . . . high and wide" (p. 106). What steadiness can we expect in a life and death situation?

Our popular image of the hero, nurtured by Hollywood, is that he is the reassuring calm at the center of a hurricane of danger. He is the one whose aim is steady in spite of the forces, both physical and psychological, that threaten to dislodge him from his task. This is what Ed expects of Lewis, and he tells him that he knows that Lewis would not have missed the deer in the same situation. America's most popular screen hero at this time is Clint Eastwood; the source of his popularity seems to derive from the sense of cool implacability he conveys. A case in point would be the already classic bank robbery

scene in the recent movie *Dirty Harry*; scenes like this one have made Eastwood the successor to John Wayne that Steve McQueen might have been. Eastwood, still chewing on his hot dog lunch, walks slowly and gracefully to the middle of the street and calmly requests a shotgun-wielding bank robber to halt. The man fires, wounding Eastwood. Eastwood does not duck; he does not run for cover: Eastwood stands. He raises his ponderous .357 magnum handgun to eye level, left hand gripping the wrist of his rigidly steady firing arm, and takes deliberate aim. The gun kicks with a will of its own, fighting against the will of the man, the bullet trying to go anywhere but where the man wills it; standing rigid yet relaxed, the hero is ready for anything that might happen. Eastwood and his director, Don Siegel, are apparently aware, as their box office success proves, that this is what the common man has always expected of his epic heroes in proportion to the extent that he has not expected it of himself. Odysseus, for example, strings the bow which none of the suitors are strong enough to string, draws down on the handle holes of the axes set in a row, and makes an incredibly difficult shot under the most oppressive and dangerous of conditions. And he does all this, Homer tells us, having never gotten up from his seat. *That is cool!*

Ed sets himself up for a shot reminiscent of that of Odysseus. He is sitting in a pine tree where he makes an "alleyway of needles" like Odysseus' alleyway of axe-heads, and the effect of this tunnel through the needles, coupled with the square of the peep sight, shuts his target, the malevolent mountain man, "within a frame within a frame" (p. 197). And the startling "intimacy" this creates between himself and his target causes an internal crisis that somehow heroes like Eastwood, Lewis, and their prototype Odysseus never seem susceptible to: "The whole careful structure of my shot began to come apart, and I struggled in my muscles and guts and heart to hold it together" (p. 197). We can identify so strongly with Ed's susceptibility because we so strongly want to identify with the epic hero's *insusceptibility* to such panic. The common man finds himself balancing on the brink of an Odyssean shot, wavering between hysteria and control. Where does the city-bound contemporary American Everyman, suddenly thrust into a role that calls for Clint Eastwood cool, find the spiritual stuff "to

hold" himself "together"?

The epic hero seems naturally and mysteriously to have his "muscles and guts and heart" together, but what is the source of this inner resonance? Dickey, I believe, suggests an answer in his poem "Winter Trout." The protagonist, who is bow fishing, takes aim on a trout,

With a shot like Ulysses'  
Through the ax heads, with the great weapon,

Somehow the perfect shot goes wrong. He interprets it

As a sign of the penalties  
For breaking into closed worlds

Where the wary controllers lie  
At the heart of their power,  
A pure void of shadowy purpose  
Where the gods live, attuning the world. . . .

The archer here is not in tune with the forces that attune natural existence, whereas the trout is; the evasive move of the trout is instinctively right, while the shot is merely technically correct. And as Lewis teaches Ed, archery that is "not purely instinctive" is not really archery (p. 39). This lesson in archery may provide us with an explanation for the inaccuracy of Ed's shot at the deer and, if we can believe that he has sharpened his instincts somewhere along the way, the accuracy of his shot at the mountain man. This explanation is part of Lewis' all-encompassing code for living, his mystique of the body as the source of deliverance. He tells Ed that in the hills, far from the noisy unreality of the city, "you could make a kind of life that wasn't out of touch with the other forms of life. Where the seasons would mean something, would mean everything. Where you could hunt as you needed to, and maybe do a little light farming, and get along. You'd die early, and you'd suffer, and your children would suffer, but you'd be in touch" (p. 54). The hero's natural inner resonance, then, proceeds from his being in touch with the natural forces that attune the world.

Dickey's use of the archery shot as the symbol and dramatization of the hero's resonance with the forces of nature appears to derive from a distinctly American contribution to the mystique of epic heroism. It appears, in fact, to derive from the mystique associated with James Fenimore Cooper's

fictional representative of the American frontier spirit, Natty Bumppo. Natty, it will be recalled, is involved in a shooting contest with Billy Kirby in *The Pioneers*. Billy, on account of his justly famous "steady nerves and quick eye," is the favorite over Natty, but Natty kills the turkey, while boasting, "I'll show you a man who's made better shots afore now, and that when he's been hard pressed by the savages and wild beasts." He tries to convey to Billy that there is more to the mystique of shooting than self-confidence and steady nerves; he tries to explain that the heart has to be right for the shot to be right, and that God punishes the man who puts the gun to his shoulder with evil intent. Later in the novel, when he comes upon Billy and some others shooting wantonly at a flock of pigeons, he rebukes them, telling them that, though they may waste nature with their buckshot, they will never have the "true aim" necessary to survive in the wilderness. To prove his point when they challenge him, he brings down a lone pigeon with a single ball, an impossible shot; "use but don't waste," he tells them. Lewis would seem to have the same moral affinity with natural forces that made Natty so invincible; Lewis, like Natty, has the aim true enough to bring down a bird on the wing with an impossible shot; in his case it is a quail at forty yards with an aluminum target arrow (p. 16).

Ed's ability to send his arrow to its human target, his "grace under pressure," is surely meant to signify his achievement of the moral secret of "true aim." During his climb up the cliff he undergoes this renewal of his basic instincts and achieves the return of his psyche to its natural source. The mind-frenzying danger of the epic drama forces him into a position where he has "to make love to the cliff, to fuck it for an extra inch or two in the moonlight" (p. 183). He finds that he is "moving with the most intimate motions of my body, motions I had never dared use with Martha, or with any other human woman. Fear and a kind of enormous moon-blazing sexuality lifted me" (p. 182). Notice that he says "human woman." It is the forces that make the river run with which he is now intimate, so intimate as he has never been with another human being, so close to the source of sexuality as he has never achieved at the height of the best orgasm of the best fuck he has ever had. Only once before had he felt so close to these "strong powers" (pp. 31-32), and that was when he felt that the "gold-glowing mote" in the



model's eye was alive and seeing him. And when he saw it again during intercourse with Martha, he imagined that it promised deliverance with its promise of "other things" behind the obscuring wall of practical sex (p. 38). Now, on the cliff, so frighteningly close to the non-human powers, he longs to see that same gold mote behind the powers of the river: "I held madly to the human. I looked for a slice of gold like the model's in the river: some kind of freckle, something lovable, in the huge serpent shape of light" (p. 182). The irony here is that the gold mote for which he longs never did represent the kind of human qualities he seems to ascribe to it. It always was the primal graces of the wilderness, the mindless forces in which human life began and to which it seeks to return, that he was longing for when he fell in love with the gold mote.

The real climax of the story occurs when Ed purifies his body enough to gain the capacity to discover or possibly to create the crevice which saves his life; in ecstasy he declares, "I had both hands in the cliff to the palms, and strength from the stone flowed into me" (p. 172). The purification of the body leads to purification of the mind, as demonstrated by his discovery that, "The river was running in my mind, and I raised my lids and saw exactly what had been the image of my thought" (p. 176). The secret strength of the hero is now his; his body has brought his mind in touch with nature; his understanding of the human situation has merged with the existential reality of natural law. His aspirations for humanity are running in harmony with his expectations. His imagination is vibrating in harmony with the way things are; his nerves steady with the realization that human actions were never intended to matter very much, that there are no eternal cosmic repercussions, only temporal human thrashings about; and his mood reflects the all-pervasive tone of the universe that he had seen reflected in the river: "It was not that I felt myself turning evil, but that an enormous physical *indifference*, as vast as the whole abyss of light at my feet, came to me: an indifference not only to the other man's body scrambling and kicking on the ground with an arrow through it, but also to mine" (p. 186, my italics).

The ancient Greeks, who shared Dickey's understanding of the indifference of the universe, also understood the enormous burden the epic hero had to bear when he accepted the entire faith of

the common people. All the epic hero had to sustain him was his self-confidence; he was forced to share his followers' faith in his own strength, courage, and purity. The ancients knew, with a special poignancy that can again be felt with the re-emergence of the hero as the only bulwark of the common man against the void, this: that the greatest danger the hero faced came from within him. They knew that the hero faced the possibility of self-destruction when he lost the sustenance of his inner resonance; they knew that the epic hero becomes the tragic hero when his necessary faith in and reliance upon himself turns into a flawed pride. Perhaps by recognizing Dickey's awareness of this irony, we have found the means to explain Dickey's use of a condemnation of human pride, taken from Obadiah, for his epigraph. It is a choice that has puzzled critics, since Lewis and Ed (who has been initiated into Lewis' mystique of self-reliance) triumph over their enemies in classic epic fashion. Perhaps we can explain Dickey's choice of epigraph as a warning against the flaw in Lewis' philosophy; it is a flaw that keeps him just one step removed from epic stature: "Lewis wanted to be immortal," Ed tells us at the beginning of the narrative; but by the end, having been wounded by the river and taught a lesson thereby, Lewis "can die now; he knows that dying is better than immortality" (pp. 19, 283). Ed and presumably Lewis have learned the indifference to their own lives that is the key to putting one's body and mind in touch with all life, that is the key to the hero's power to stand steady when the quality of life hangs in the balance. They have learned that deliverance lies *downriver*; a man has only to give himself up to the primal pull of natural forces. So, Ed concludes, "Let the river run" (p. 176).

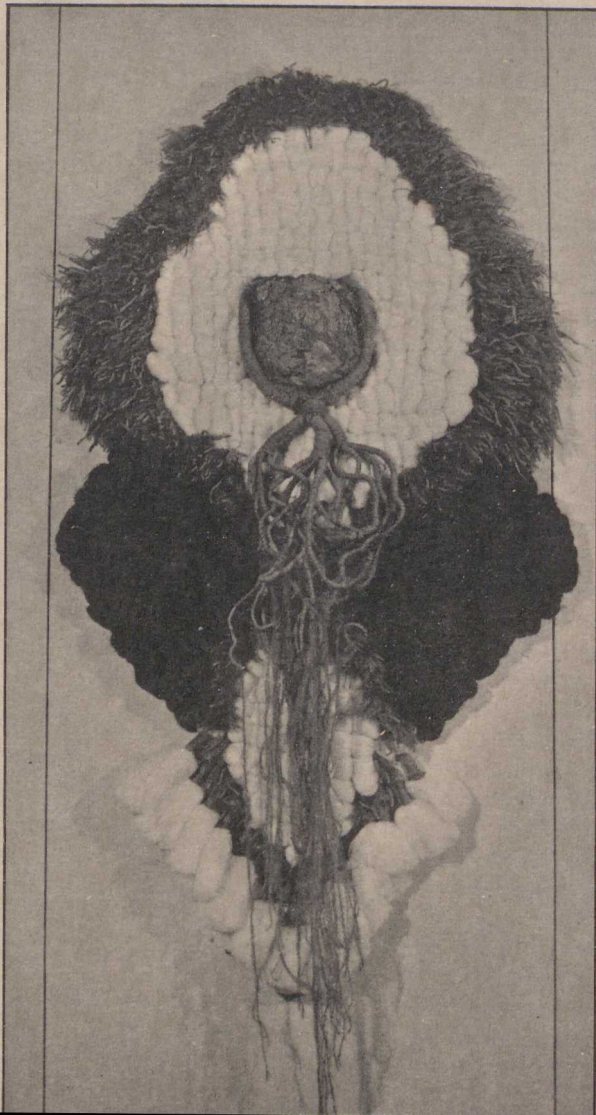
#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>James Dickey, *Deliverance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1970). All parenthetical documentation refers to this edition.



John Guger • sculpture  
undergraduate award

Karin-Maria Lund • weaving  
honorable mention



Terry Beckman • bronze plaque



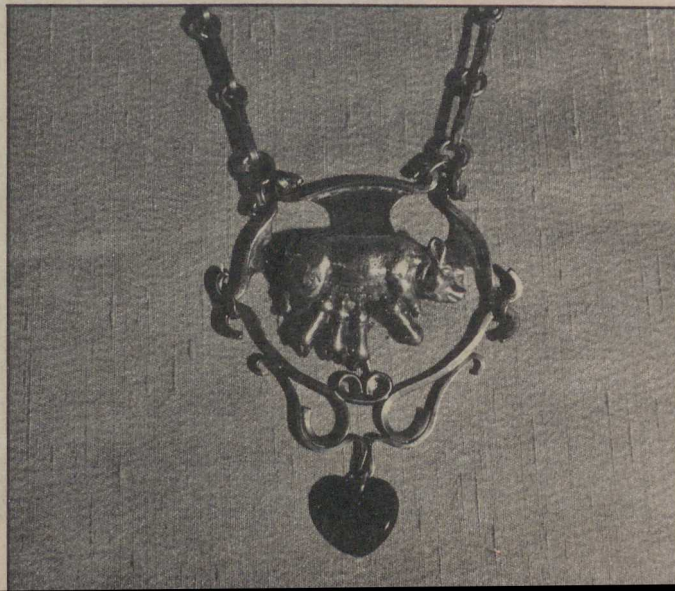
Martin Kascewicz • copper vessel  
honorable mention

Elizabeth Rich • copper vessel  
graduate award



Roberta Whitney • ceramic piece

Martin Kascewicz • neck piece



Joe Milton Allen • pencil drawing



thomas sanfilip

## Into the Lights of Chattanooga, Into the Skies of Tennessee

Far, distant from my home—  
It's a red dust brushes my face.  
It is a mountain rearing with her black trees,  
climbing to touch the moon dipped like a horn  
that I see,

Into the lights of Chattanooga,  
Into the skies of Tennessee.

There was a river, carried deep into the land,  
and where, I could not understand.  
Shimmering for me first in the night,  
home was then a sweet, sober delight,

Into the lights of Chattanooga,  
Into the skies of Tennessee.

And I took my new breath,  
with a shaking wonder through my skin,  
for as the green magnolias rustled,  
it was my home I thought of again,

Into the lights of Chattanooga,  
Into the skies of Tennessee.



Gordon Schmitt • oil painting

## Lilo's

Buck Owens noses his way  
past old slim jims  
and Alabama drawls.

Practiced tales of  
quick White tractors  
and Kansas overloads  
explode past fat cigars  
and two-day beards  
like diesel fumes.

Another quarter  
and Tammy Wynette  
makes Coors taste sweet.  
Steel guitar whines  
like brand new tires  
on a blacktop road.

Outside,  
metal cools and snaps.  
And a lady's dainty name  
gathers dust from fields of wheat.

patrick j. pentecost



Dan Spahn • craypas drawing

## Getting Back

The road home creates itself.  
A few blue potentialities  
hover in the darkness where  
the horizon used to be  
before its myth ran out.  
Not void, not blackness:  
this white road careers  
into being and ends  
out the back of my head.  
I am a projection, screaming  
headlong into a screen  
that can never quite contain  
my image. I could care less.  
Racing hell-bent, but I  
am not moving. If I stop  
to think, I make an emptiness.

jeff abell





## Mr. M. H. Leber and the Bells of Saint Basil's

For

D. S. Moore and all  
R. L. Sayers

### Undergraduate Award

The skinny and pointed black arms of the round white-faced clock which hung high on the rear wall of the smallest classroom in the school showed nearly eight minutes after the hour, and the majority of students were by now exhibiting familiar signs of restless anxiety. Who was this M. H. Leber person anyway, and more importantly, why was he late, unlike all of the other faculty members who never failed to magically materialize immediately following the annoying bell which announced the beginning of each class session? These questions were the topic of energetic and uninhibited debate and discussion among the 5th period junior and senior Russian Civilization students, as they awaited—with increasing uneasiness and doubt—the delayed entrance of their mysterious instructor.

From their seats in the second row, Christophenes Smith and Jonathan Abrams had a direct and unobstructed view of the doorway to the right of the left-hand corner in the front of the classroom, and their advantage allowed them the distinction of being the first ones to see the somewhat short and indistinctly dressed figure approaching without hurry from the hallway beyond. When M. H. Leber entered the room and stood before all present,

the students reacted with a rapid series of gasps, expressing their shock, surprise, and for some, disappointment. The gasps were succeeded by an awkward silence, disturbed only by the kind of speculative, gossipy whispering among individual students that characterizes every class period in every classroom on the opening day of school.

Mr. Leber analyzed the class with one brief but thorough glance, moved cautiously into position at the side of his desk, and then asked in a hesitant voice, as if he *really* didn't know the answer to his question: "Is this Russian Civilization, 5th hour?" His query was met with scattered and respectfully subdued laughter, continued silence, and a very few weakly mumbled "Yesses." Once assured that he was in the correct classroom at the correct time, Mr. Leber began to read aloud the list of names which appeared on the computerized printout enrollment sheet he held in his right hand. "Abrams, Jonathan; Burghardt, William; Caster, Lawrence, Grant, Crystal. . . ." When attendance had been called and Mr. Leber had begun to explain the subject matter, ideology, and sundry nuances and technicalities of the course, the students settled back to listen, to observe, and to form their initial impressions of their new instructor.

To Jonathan, Mr. Leber appeared to be an absent-minded and slightly eccentric genius who prefaced

almost every utterance with the words "I guess," who played one-man catch with a piece of chalk, a set of keys, or a ball-point pen while discussing Tolstoy, Dostoevski, tsars, and revolutions, and who occasionally confused his speech by chewing on the end of his narrow black tie as he spoke at length about the course structure and requirements—all of which seemed vague and quite abstract.

Christophenes, reclining casually in his seat next to Jonathan, kept glancing into the latter's face in an attempt to communicate his own reactions, but Jonathan would not turn his head in response. Like his friend, Christophenes also sensed some sort of rare creative thought and sensitivity emanating from the man who was now sitting before them at a small plastic-topped table, still talking and gazing into the unfamiliar faces of his students, trying to determine their inner feelings and thoughts.

In the remaining eight months of the school year, Jonathan and Christophenes managed to acquire a strange fondness—mixed with and partly inspired by a blatant curiosity—for Mr. Leber and their 5th hour Russian Civilization class. They became intrigued and fascinated with his subtle, almost imperceptible wit, his patience with and interest in everyone he encountered (including P.E. coaches, so it seemed), his respect for and sincerity with individual students, his ability to make Tolstoy, Chekhov, Pushkin, and Moussorgsky vibrant and meaningful components of his students' daily experience, and his quiet yet effective defiance of all the mundane and hopelessly useless tasks and regulations set forth by school board members and second-floor administrators. But for Jonathan and Christophenes, of even greater importance than all that was the knowledge, understanding, and love of nature and life which he openly exhibited. More and more, Mr. Leber began to appear as a kind of Renaissance Man, resurrected in a decade and century characterized by brutal warfare, technological dominance, specialization, individual isolation, and a disastrous forsaking of all the values and ideals which have guided more peaceful and less cynical generations of the past.

The first days of summer finally arrived, and on the last day of classes—before another school year was transformed into memories—Jonathan and Christophenes approached Mr. Leber, explained

their summer plans, shook his hand, and then departed from 5th hour Russian Civilization class for the very last time.

The following September classes began once again, but neither Jonathan nor Christophenes had enrolled in a course taught by Mr. Leber. Two-and-a-half weeks after the beginning of the semester, Christophenes concluded that "if [he] was going to learn anything that year" a change in his schedule was necessary, so he obtained permission to transfer into Mr. Leber's 3rd hour Western Civilization class. By the close of the first semester, Jonathan had reached a similar conclusion, and during the next term he frequented the Western Civ. class on a voluntary but regular basis.

For Jonathan and Christophenes the most significant metamorphosis of their young lives occurred the week the class began studying the history of art in Western Civilization. Mr. Leber and the other students would discuss the marble gods of Michelangelo, the scientific endeavors of da Vinci, or the colors of Gauguin and van Gogh, while Jonathan and Christophenes sat silently at their desks, sketching from their dreams, thinking haiku poetry, or just listening to the conversation around them.

When the second semester was but a few weeks old, the two friends began meeting in Jonathan's garage, where they would sit for hours, creating imaginary scenes with paint and canvas as they talked and argued about art, the Western world, and M. H. Leber. It was during this same time period that Jonathan and Christophenes began making unannounced weeknight visits to the residence of their five-day-a-week 3rd period instructor. Bringing original oils, manuscripts, and at times some companions, Jonathan and Christophenes passed entire evenings relaxing in the study of M. H. Leber's quiet and comfortable home, displaying their artwork—reluctant and embarrassed at first—or discussing politics, religion, parents, odysseys, death, and life. M. H. Leber exerted a powerful influence over the lives and personalities of Jonathan and Christophenes—an influence felt and silently understood by all concerned.

Another summer came and passed as quickly and as effortlessly as the one before it, and with only six

short days remaining until Jonathan and Christophenes were scheduled to depart for separate universities to begin their careers as college students, the two decided to visit Mr. Leber one more time. That night, Jonathan and Christophenes carried no artwork—they brought only themselves, their memories of the past two school years, and their anxieties about the uncertain future. When they exchanged good-byes and left his home around 12:30 a.m., both realized how much they would miss those late-night visits and how important their discussions with Mr. Leber would seem with the continued passing of time.

The piercing metallic ring of the bell signaling 6:00 p.m. transported Jonathan back to reality and prompted him to curse in an abnormally loud and crude manner. He was seated alone at a long table in the reference room of the university library, and in front of him on the desk top were the scattered pages of the letter, story, or whatever else one wished to label it which he had received from M. H. Leber in the afternoon mail. He had read the story (dedicated to Christophenes and himself) several times already, but once again he turned to the last two paragraphs and followed the words slowly:

One day he heard, at third hand, a piece of news. Some administrators had gotten together and, surveying the early registrations and searching for a place to pare the budget, laid the axe to Russian.

In his mind's eye, the Kremlin wall reeled and righted. Then, faintly, he heard the long-dead bells of Basil's ring; faintly, for the wind was blowing the other way.

Jonathan's mind revolved back again three years to that opening session of Russian Civilization class when M. H. Leber entered the classroom for the very first time—nine minutes late—and he thought of how his and Christophenes' lives had changed so much since then. They were both college sophomores now—Christophenes a writer, and Jonathan still painting in between majoring in history. In the

last year-and-one-half they had felt themselves coming closer together as two people, and in turn, they had sensed that their relationship with Mr. Leber had become increasingly intimate and less formal.

Jonathan gathered up the pages of the story, straightened them, inserted them into his American History folder, reached for his notebooks, and headed toward the exit. Outside, a cold and dirty drizzle dropped steadily onto the muddied streets and sidewalks, and the foggy air smelled of internal combustion, but Jonathan was smiling to himself and to whoever looked in his direction. He was aware of something from within his being—a *real* something—which he knew no office-dwelling school administrator would ever be able to experience or understand—a powerful something which not even a budget cut, phase-out, or curriculum purge could ever destroy.



## The Butcher

Dinner time. The world glooms deep blue  
and hangs like one exhaled breath;  
the snow is blue, and the floating faces  
are glazed beneath this tint.  
St. Demetrios and the butcher shop next door  
are stark against the stillness:  
Like a Delft plate, the scene is coldly impressed.

Yet things are fragrant, the breath stirs:  
a visceral scent is leaking from the blue.  
The spire of St. Demetrios visibly streams  
with the rush of remembrance from the shattered sky.  
The El rumbles through the butcher's head,  
makes the stained glass quiver,  
makes his boarded windows shake  
and ripples the sawdust heaped like sand. . . .

The El moves on into 1949. Crew-cut boys with asthma  
whoop past the long window of the shop  
heaped with Krakow hams and cutting boards  
stained brown with the daily drain of economy cuts.  
While hacking a roast, a sharp pulse  
beats in the butcher's temple. Finer cuts  
should be valued, as should the little pains.

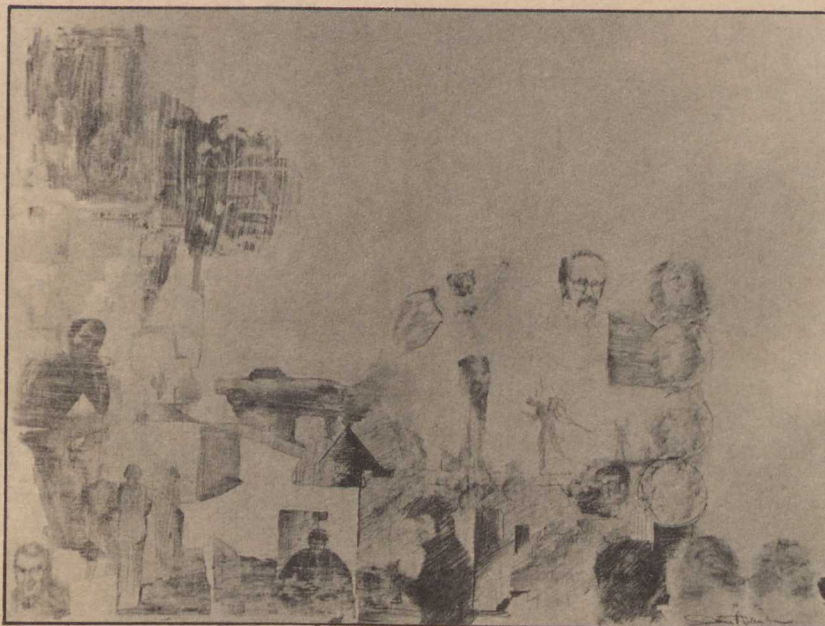
She comes by at five. In his upstairs apartment  
he makes love to Mrs. Kivitsky, hefting her  
with arms reined by ropy veins. Downstairs,  
preparing a buffet for her husband's dinner,  
laughing, losing a platter to the hardwood floor,  
he slices a finger on a jagged edge:

The blood of animal and man swirled thickly  
over the plate. One was scent, was hunger, was feeling,  
the other, he thinks, is pain.  
The butcher could stand here all day,  
could love again all day.  
But hunger stabs like a shard. Pain tightens  
the muscles that stanch the flow.  
He catches an El for home.

michael antman



Howard Schwartz • pencil drawing



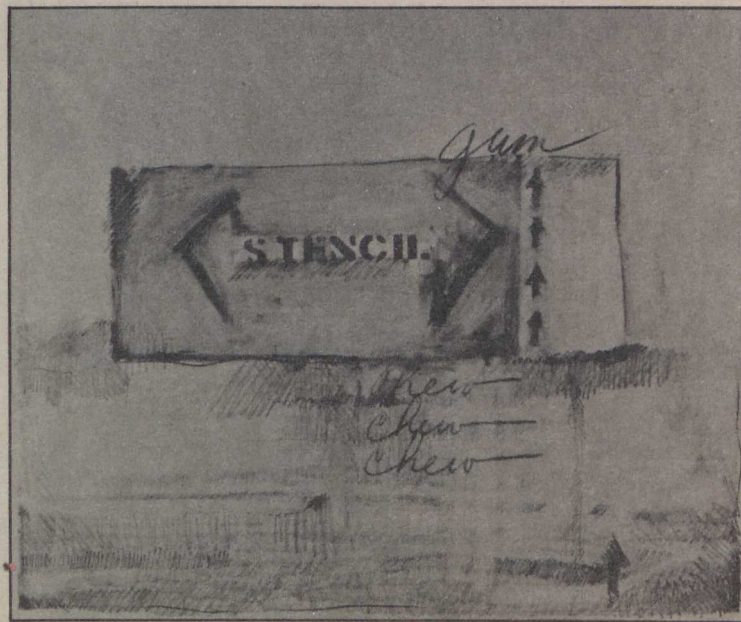
Jim Hollich • multi-media

## With Charon

Slowly, like wrinkles, into our lives  
Wanders a plague-like black being;  
King and serf are one beneath his scythe:  
They fall, rankless, without his seeing  
Who went, or why. As his presence  
Is noticed we squirm and often weep,  
But curse him not, lest he take offense  
In words, and row us early to sleep  
In unknown beds, where only stars  
Keep time. But deeply, we seem unafraid,  
For even as we sense or count the hours  
Falling, until we are solidly laid  
To rest, we think only of our surging breath  
And ponder not the wall-lessness of death.

nancy v. ries

Freshman Award Winner



Dick Browning • pencil drawing

## teacher

David worked in the envelope factory  
making flats into receptacles  
tying down lines with strings  
but meeting matching parts, cementing old friendships,  
sealing wax work—weren't his.

breaks usedta be for drinking lemon juice  
tensing "walk down my throat" through his teeth  
laughing uproariously with the windows  
"envelopes are just translucent stiff's"  
rats jeered at him from the paper stacks.

michael summers

## Amberly

This is a gentle land!  
The moorland wears a blanket of heather  
And thatched-roof cottage hugs a garden small.  
Delicate flowers make a patchwork bright,  
While purple clematis climbs the garden wall.

This is a gentle land!  
Where cobbled lanes wind their lazy way  
By friendly inns that "do a proper tea."  
And overhead the silver beech are arched  
Above the hedgerows, leading to the sea.

This is a solemn land!  
The church of sturdy Saxon stone was built  
With blackened door close to the timeless sea,  
Where wide and hallowed steps are worn by man,  
As past and present here are one in Thee.

This is a solemn land!  
In the chapel, amidst the dark and solemn silence,  
An endless line of splendor is portrayed  
In gold and ruby glass. And cross and crown  
On altar tell that life was gladly paid.

This is a mystic land!  
O king, this holy place your sorrow marks.<sup>1</sup>  
Betrayed for power, wisely did you say,  
"Worthless and vain is the power of kings!  
Praise Him! Whom heav'n and earth and sea obey!"

This is a gentle land!  
As strong sea mists bring a veil of myth  
On rolling hills and rocky, spray-swept shores,  
The sun sparkles like gems on green hillside.  
Oh, gentle land, have I been here before?

<sup>1</sup> The eight-year old daughter of Canute the Great was buried in the church in the early 11th century.





Clay Johnson • photograph



## Fred

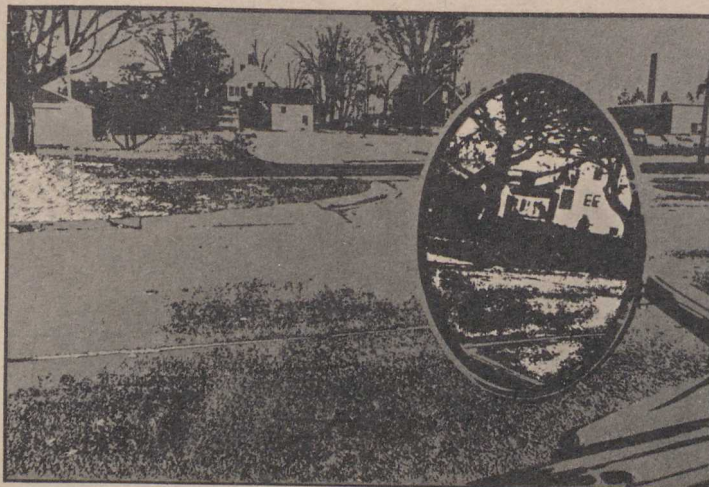
He moves with winter steps.  
His cane punches holes  
in snows from boyhood blizzards.

He sees his mother's kitchen.  
His father severs chunks  
from small brown loaves  
and jokes of growing sons.  
Within his father's laughing mouth  
is night that hides a peasant's home.

He thinks of thick boots  
that weather Russian storms  
and stomps that drum  
for drinking songs  
and ripple draughts of vodka.

Now,  
his shiny shoes  
touch foreign sidewalks firmly,  
like the closing of a book on souvenirs.

patrick j. pentecost



John Dzuryak • silkscreen

## And As I Drive

Sparrows sitting on the phone poles,  
Barn roofs, fence posts,  
Darting from the road-side gravel  
To the leafless trees:  
They are but spots  
In my imagination.  
Houses, dogs, road signs,  
A lone mule in a cornfield,  
Dead cats, dead squirrels—  
They all float by—  
And then a snowman,  
Half-melted,  
Like a sinking plaster Mary without child.  
And as I drive,  
Singing until my voice cracks,  
The snow-clouds grow  
And dusk comes quick.  
On curves the trees take on white ashes  
As the headlights pass,  
Then darken  
Like old photographs.  
And I am frightened  
By my hands  
As they crawl like pale spiders  
Across the steering wheel.

william hoagland

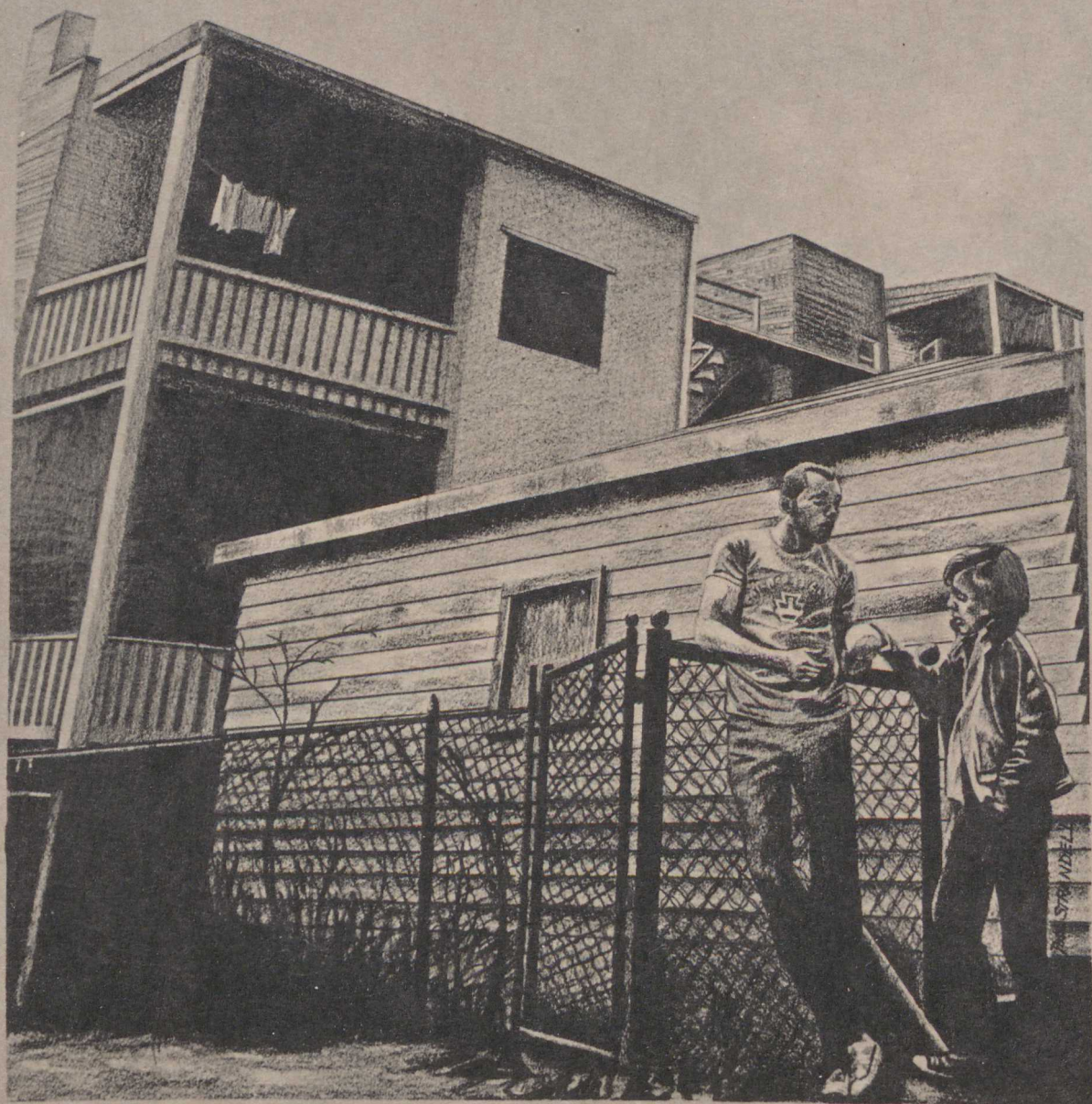
# Jazz

when saxophones screech for blood  
I am soothed by rescue percussion  
that enters  
and flees like some mad rapist piano  
riddling the mind, perforating, freeing me  
into the light blue  
as black sweat, sweet torment, jazz.

christine okon

Howard Schwartz • oil painting





david roediger

## An Analysis of and an Alternative to Skaggs's Interpretation of "Black Is My Favorite Color"

During the ghetto rebellions of the 1960's, some naïve white merchants wrote "soul brother" on their store windows, in an attempt to keep the stores from being looted. At the same time liberal intellectuals were painting "soul brother" on their prose in order to keep their clean consciences intact. "White guilt" became a cocktail party topic. Some whites chose to adulate those who attacked white institutions most bitterly. In *Radical Chic*, Tom Wolfe ably shows how such people dealt with guilt by wallowing in it. The trouble was that some of the blacks meant business about liberation. For white cocktailers unable to make the long jump between picking up martinis with Eldridge and picking up the gun with him, other methods of avoiding guilt were necessary. Scapegoating and dilution of blame have proven to be the best of such methods. In scapegoating the liberal intellectual needs only to find a segment of society which is supposedly more racist than his and to denounce that segment. Hardhats, poor whites, Southerners, Midwesterners, Archie Bunkers, rednecks, workers, and straights have all filled this bill. Dilution of blame works more generally. It

describes racism as an ineradicable flaw inherent in the absurd human condition. It may be that, technically, everyone is a little guilty, but for that very reason no one can really be blamed.

Bernard Malamud's "Black Is My Favorite Color"<sup>1</sup> points out the dangers of failing to deal deeply and critically with one's own motivations in racial matters. A critical essay by Merrill Maguire Skaggs, however, falls into the common blame-avoiding traps; "A Complex Black-and-White Matter"<sup>2</sup> features both scapegoating and dilution of blame.

Skaggs centers the first five pages of her essay around the insight that Nat is an "unreliable narrator" (p. 385) whose perceptions about his relations with blacks cannot be trusted. This is a polite way of saying that Nat is, however subtly, a racist. Skaggs is right but her point is hardly "complex." Nat's racism is obvious from his description of black beauty in terms of proximity to whiteness (p. 379), from his stereotypical view of blacks as happy, lively folks (p. 377), and from his patronizing view that he has something (usually material) to give blacks for which they should be eternally grateful but are not. Skaggs is

making a valid point at too great length. Nat is a racist, but to see the story solely in terms of Malamud's providing clues by which he "deliberately undermines our confidence in Nat" (p. 385) is extremely reductive. The story becomes a puzzle, the pieces of which form an indictment of Nat. Nat becomes a summation of hangups (isolation, immaturity, etc.) and not a human being with whom readers can identify. Nat is a scapegoat.

Nat is belittled by Skaggs in several inappropriate ways. Initially, he is labelled a "schlemiel," a charge from which Skaggs backs off quickly, saying Nat is a man "transcending the outlines of a pratfall prone schlemiel (p. 384)." Later she imagines that Nat's clichés and dialect show his inferiority because, "The literary effect of any non-standard idiom or dialect . . . is always to make the reader consider himself more educated or socially aware than that speaker" (p. 386). Yet Skaggs gives no evidence to support this generality.

Next Nat's immaturity, isolation, poor self-image and inability to receive are considered, not as parts of the human experience which link us all to Nat, but as aberrations contributing to his unreliability and his racism. Scoring Nat for his "generosity and good manners, both of which he always tries to exhibit" (p. 388), Skaggs hints at conscious insincerity on Nat's part. But just three pages earlier, she admits that Nat appears "in every way sincere" (p. 385). Skaggs becomes too one-sided and accusatory in viewing Nat.

If her comments concerning Nat alone do not fully betray her narrowness, her views on his relations with blacks certainly do. Malamud's blacks are human. They may be as giving as Ornita is or as grasping as Buster. They are victimized by racism, but they may also be racists (anti-Semites) themselves. They may be hurt by police violence or they may be the agents of brutality against Nat. Somehow, though, Skaggs sees these blacks (She calls them "Negroes") as ideal. They can ferret out the subtlest forms of racism in Nat "because they sense exactly what is in his heart" (p. 389). When three Harlem punks approach Nat with an open switchblade and the question (to Ornita), "What you doin' with this white son of a bitch?" (p. 382), Skaggs sees merit in their action because Nat fails to call his employees "Mister" when talking to the punks. To her, black anti-Semitism is also justifiable because it seeks "to

strip Nat of his sense of personal nobility" (p. 389). These are not only fractured readings of the story but also racist ones. Blacks are seen to have animal instinct and are capable only of being percipients reacting to white actions.

The effects of idealizing blacks and denigrating Nat and of making a one-sided analysis using Nat as a scapegoat are to isolate us from Nat. We feel judgmental and superior to Skaggs's Nat. His universal qualities are dimmed. Perhaps sensing this, after five pages of her interpretation, Skaggs does a turnabout. Nat, who was earlier seen immersed in problems resulting from his very particular hangups about race, who was (or almost was) a schlemiel, suddenly becomes Everyman. And the racial problems are no longer based on prejudice alone but are also symbolic of "many forces—of which race is only one—that prevent two individuals from loving what is in each other's heart" (p. 391). Skaggs is finally speaking of matters which are "complex," but, alas, she never follows them through.

After five pages of over-proving Nat's racism, Skaggs devotes a scant page and a half to "complex" issues. She raises some good points, fails to support them, fails to see that they are in opposition to preceding portions of her essay, and ends by simply diluting the guilt instead of really analyzing the universal significance. Skaggs's mentioning Nat's physical isolation from Charity and his view of himself as being in a "ghetto" (p. 390), along with other images of isolation, seems to indicate that she is aware that isolation is central to the story in a way that transcends its being a mere "clue" that Nat is unreliable. But she never takes up the specific ways in which Nat's position is like that of many modern people. Instead she again resorts to generality, saying, "Because Nat Lime is so expertly drawn . . . his unsuccessful attempts to communicate with others begin to resemble a general human predicament" (p. 390). This is a meaningless statement, for there is no reason to link expert drawing with generalization. Deft characterization particularizes at least as much as it generalizes. The vacillating phrase "begins to resemble" warns us that Skaggs knows she is presenting scant evidence. Rather than examining in detail the concrete aspects of Nat's isolation and linking them to his general value as a character facing common modern problems, she merely drops the phrase "general human predicament" in order



to arrive at her gloomy rhetorical conclusion: "For if the humanly fallible, short-sighted, but well-meaning Nathan Lime cannot break out of his ghetto, then what hope is there for those of us with less eager compassion?" (p. 391). Once resting solely upon Nat, guilt now rests nowhere. Everyone is absolved because everyone is doomed. Scapegoating and dilution of blame have triumphed over painful but necessary self-examination.

In forging a brief interpretation of "Black Is My Favorite Color" which avoids the pitfalls of Skaggs's essay, we can nonetheless use a few of her points. She has established (too volubly) that Nat is a racist. She has shown that charity fails to cement lasting relationships. And she has shown that the questions of isolation and identity are central to the story. Building on this, we can examine Nat's situation in the story. We can see in his general imperception and in his world of needy people how his situation resembles that of many modern men. And we can see how Malamud feels the problems of identity and isolation should be met.

"Black Is My Favorite Color" is a slice of life. To call Nat a schlemiel is not nearly as important as to realize what he concretely is in the story. Terms from outside the story have a place only after hard inside information is examined. Nat is a Jew, a capitalist, an isolated child, a white in Harlem, and a mama's boy. The central thing is Nat's isolation. He is isolated from blacks and from Gentiles; he is not a big enough capitalist to reap huge benefits but is still alienated from his customers (blacks into whose community he is intruding) and his employees (Charity Sweetness). He has very limited experience with women. He has a poor self-image in terms of the broader culture but feels superior to blacks. He lives near whites with whom he finds no friends and near blacks who often attack him. Nat's general significance is fed by his being, like so many modern men, segmented. He exists on the fringes of many worlds but finds identity nowhere.

Thus this slice of life deals with difficult problems—race, isolation and identity. It does not, however, either blindly blame Nat or term the situation hopeless. None of the other characters are "together" enough to stand as models to judge Nat against. None profit by spurning Nat's attempts to span the gulf of blackness. Buster is friendless; Ornita is without a lover; the three punks are at a level of

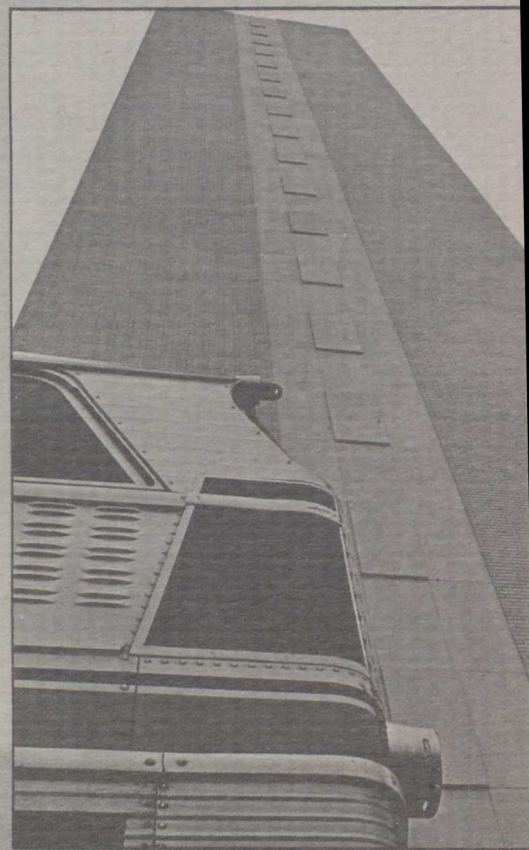
humanity capable of referring to a woman as "black pussy"; Charity eats alone in the bathroom. All are in need. Nor are all Nat's efforts to reach out ugly. As Skaggs admits, he does love Ornita. He tries to lift Buster's spirits after the police attack Buster's family. He fights three armed blacks after Ornita is slapped. He gives repeatedly, not just once. And for a time, however short, he is rewarded with Ornita's love.

Thus values like love, hope, perseverance and courage are present in the story. They flicker and dim, but their very flickering makes us wish they would flame. Those who violate them for no good reason (such as the black punks) deserve condemnation no matter what their color. By the same token, Nat bears great responsibility for his failure to succeed in implementing these values. He, like other modern men, must abandon racism even in its most subtle forms. But first and most important he must understand himself. He must not lightly dismiss anti-Semitic attacks like Buster's "how was I to know he didn't like movies" (p. 378). He must realize that refusing to face relationships with one's own people (as he apparently shuns Jewish women) only makes relationships with those of other races more strained. He must think enough of himself not to care whether or not people think he is better looking than Ornita. He must consider why white capitalists are not welcome in black ghettos. He must see that employees owe him nothing by virtue of his being an employer. He must find something other than material bribes to offer friends. Malamud indicates that Nat and all of us must find personal worth and identity and must examine racial attitudes. For Nat's mother's warning that "if you ever forget you are a Jew, a goy will remind you" (pp. 380-81) aptly predicts the fate of those who abandon themselves and seek identity solely by giving to and identifying with others.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Bernard Malamud, "Black Is My Favorite Color," in *Idiots First* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1963), rpt. in *The Process of Fiction*, ed. Barbara McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), pp. 375-83. All page references are noted parenthetically within the text.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill Maguire Skaggs, "A Complex Black-and White Matter," in *The Process of Fiction*, ed. Barbara McKenzie (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), pp. 384-91. All page references are noted parenthetically within the text.



John Dzuryak • photograph