

Towers XLII

Northern Illinois University

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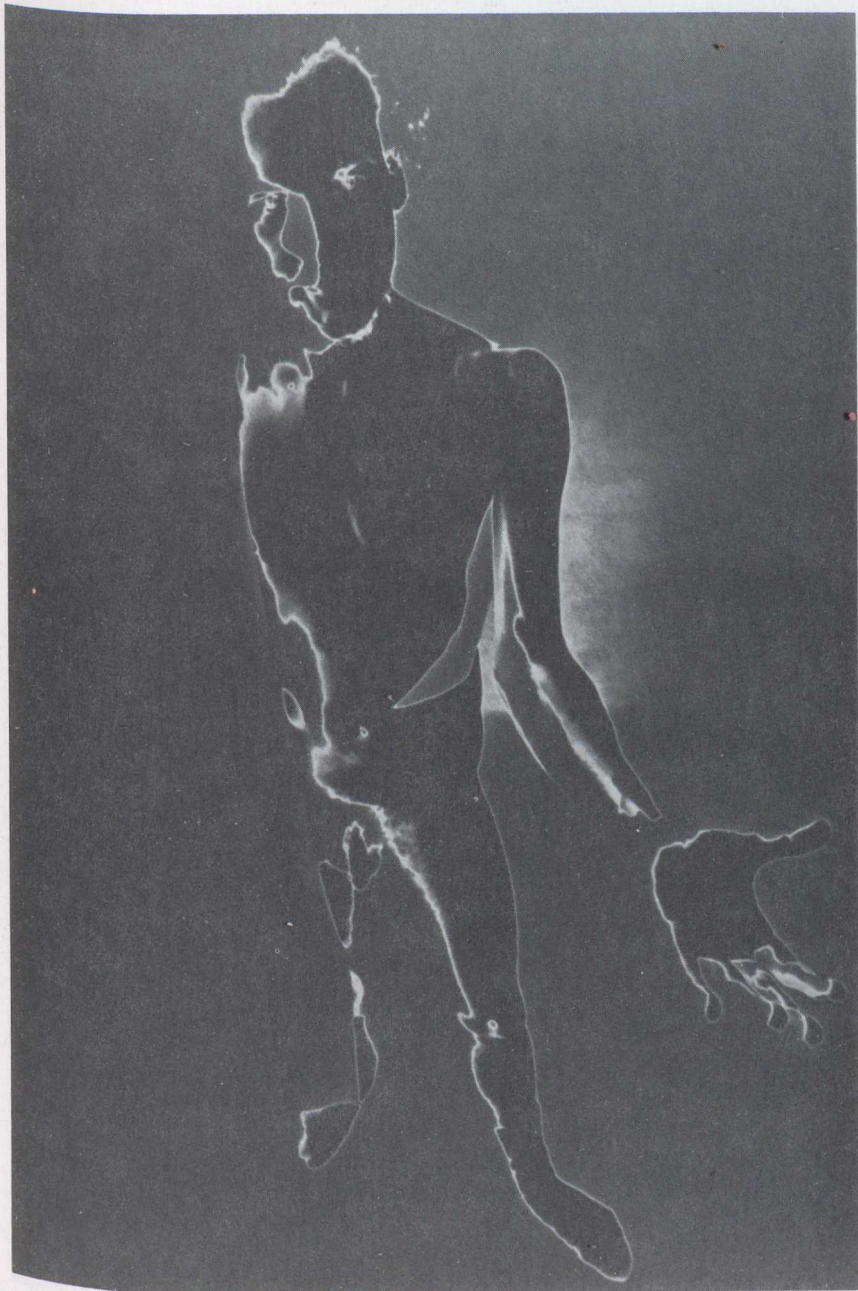
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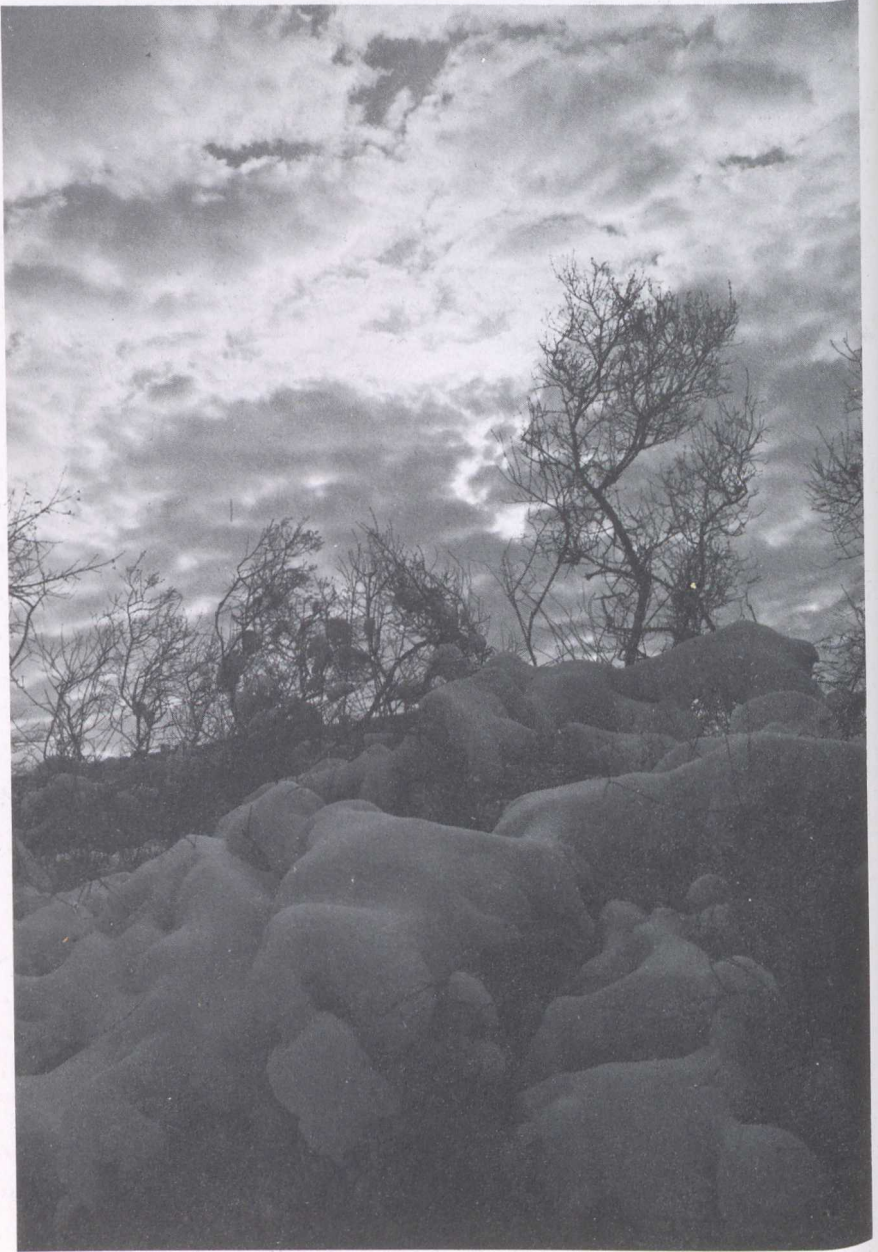
Lucien Stryk Poetry Award
In Memory of Anzio Beach by Lawrence R. Rungren
Honorable Mention
Morning Intrusion by Richard Schmidt
Judge: Lyle Domina

J. Hal Connor Fiction Award
Hampshire Hall by Dan McCarthy
Judge: Barbara Palmer



Photograph

Lou Krueger



Photograph

Dale DeBolt

HARD FREEZE ON THE ILLINOIS
JANUARY 12, 1974

Down,
down toward the base of the bluffs
blushed red by morning sun
promise of no warmth,

We encounter fields of white
whipped by winds
off the frozen river.

Lone gulls shriek above
the ice-locked islands.
Hoar frost,
gemlike,
imprisoning gnarled black trees.

We move silently
across a trackless wasteland.

At the rock,
I climb alone
into another time,
another place.
Yesterday, tomorrow,
a brief moment
as

The great black birds
hurl above the bluffs
beating the air,
sail out over the
ice-choked waters
toward a darkening west.

Philip M. Rubens

A POEM IN THREE PARTS

father

Lips slightly parted, tongue wetting them,
you breathe calmly, slurping softly.
Lying next to you, I think of my father's snore,
so often waited for--

my small body stiff on the edge of bed,
school shoes lined up, ready for a run,
eyeglasses on, listening.

Padded feet on cold linoleum.

Or on New Year's Eve, me and Pattie eating
the tiny sandwiches left from the party,
stifling our chews.

Waiting, nightgown fanned over my toes.

But then I heard him, first snorting,
and I would wait, he'd get louder,
and I would listen, until he smoothly snored.

My head cocked aside, my shoulder drooped.
But then it was quiet. WAS HE UP? WAS HE MAD?
His pause teased me, keeping me in limbo.

mother

Goddamn, why'd he have to find that hair?
In his egg, it is blond, can't it blend in the yolk?
Oh, I'm sorry. I must try. I'll wear a net, a rubber band.
But it won't work, cause I'm like her, and she
wore a blue bandanna.

Trickling out from the corners of the scarf,
her hair stuck against greased skin.
She'd crunch her brow in disapproval, hair popped out.
She'd shake a warning finger, hair fell out.

One time I had wanted chocolate milk,
but she was always soaking dishes.
I pushed through the water, greasy,
and pulled out a glass, matted by a long dark hair.

After cleaning the stubbled hairs
stuck on the ring in the tub, I bathed,
and stepped out, fresh and clean, where
my wet foot picked up a hair, curled long and dark.

I shook my foot, it wagged at the ankle,
but the hair was molded to my arch.
I seized it between toilet-papered fingers,
and dumped the hair into the trash.

and now me

“ But don't you see? When you and I
are sitting and watching Andy of Mayberry,
when we are eating breakfast and there's
nothing much to say, I see them.

He is sitting at the table, glossy-eyed,
and is repeating, “I am the King. I am the King.”
She is stuffing down the food, tugging
at her waist, and saying, “You talk like a sausage.”

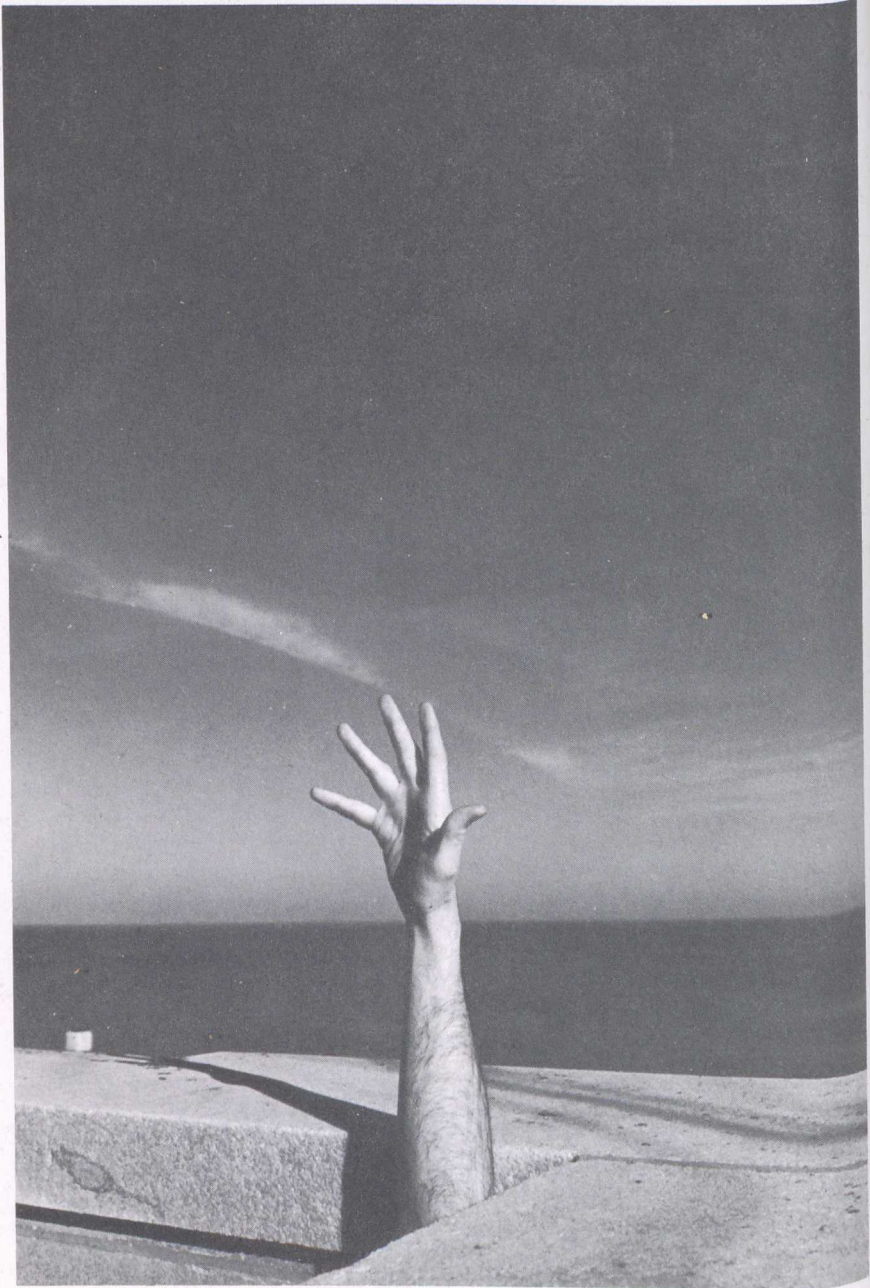
But I reject them. I reject them.
I do yoga and stretch my neck
so double chins won't appear.

And I reject them. I reject them.
I wash the tub every time.
I do the dishes right away.

Father, you are only the joys of autumn leaves.
The colored corn, gourds, and pumpkins that you'd bring.
Mother, you are only that day in the back yard.
You are kneeling in the grass, dead bird in your hand.

The pumpkin face is carved, and is now quite drunk.
The bird pulls out a worm, a hair, long and dark.

Mary Susmilch



Photograph

Dale DeBolt

IN MEMORY OF ANZIO BEACH

I have seen the sky open
like a huge mouth, with the tooth of every star
white, horribly smiling,
taunting me with its vastness.
I have been swallowed by oceans of sickly wine
that threw me up on strange shores
on the pale morning of dark evenings
with the hungover sound of freight trains
roaring through my ears.
I have sat nights in restaurants,
I have slept in gas station bathrooms
and spit tobacco on the tile floors.
I have slept nights beside picket fences
and spit tobacco on the dirt roads.
I have been spit into the jungles of broken men
and made to ravish the breasts of darkness
like some fiendish animal.
I have been kissed by silence
and taken in her arms.
On hot afternoons I have nearly choked
from her perfume that smells of death.
I have died a hundred times in her arms.

Lawrence R. Rungren

HARBOR DIRGE

The tug pulls family tours
To the Statue, past carnival
Green turrets of Ellis Island.

Few cameras are turned toward the
Sealed corrals, where driven men gathered
In coarse dress, clutching stamped papers.

Today there is only the echo
Of grey water bearing rank debris
Against a sinking wharf, green with slime.

Behind padlocks, in peeling halls,
Turnstiles are frozen. Silence of
The wail of groaners in the bay.

Richard Schmidt

MORNING INTRUSION

Cadmium red curtains sag
With gauded bulk, revealed in the dawn.
Sunlight streams through missing links
In the dust-grey venetian blinds.
Her sigh is a feeble purr, caught
In the throat like warm clotted milk.

I remember Circe singing in
Her wooded mansion, lulling all
But one.

Hidden by the unlocked door,
I see her arm, taut and powder
White, slither in tangle of sheets,
Where he spat out the seed, left her
To pour stale wine in darkness.

Dust hangs locked without motion,
Pulse in yellow shafts of morning.
The air is tumid and her breath comes
With pain. She steps toward the sill,
Fidgeting with her matted gown,
Prays for rain to wash her clean.

Richard Schmidt

HAMPSHIRE HALL
BY DAN McCARTHY

David Blackwhite always walked very fast down the street and held his back always perfectly straight. He walked fast because getting where he was going interested him even less than being where he was; he gaze was perpetually fixed upon some distant, future goal. His back was straight because, years ago, an old nun had caught him slouching in his school desk and had wrenched him into a posture from which he had never been able to unbend.

David enjoyed buying books and buying new clothes. His wardrobe, like his ideology, was well-tailored and well-coordinated, free of dissonances but enriched with enough contrast to give it life. He would appear at parties wearing a new sweater or a colorful insight, and surprise his acquaintances with the breadth of his library. When the opportunity arose for him to spend the summer studying literature at Oxford--Oxford, England--David jumped at the chance.

"But why should you want to go to Oxford?" asked his roommate, who alone in David's circle remained unimpressed at the mere mention of the place. "What will you do with yourself there?"

"Why, I shall read Henry James and James Joyce and Joyce Carol Oates," David answered lightly. "And I shall learn to live in the rarified air of academia," he added, knowing that this was stilted but knowing also that he meant it.

"Swell," said the roommate.

"Surely you can see what an opportunity this is for me," David insisted.

"I can see you coming back in September with a new tweed jacket," his roommate replied, and David's ears burned, for that idea had already occurred to him.

Because he was inordinately sensitive to needling of this kind, and because his roommate was inordinately good at it, David did not mention his plans to visit Hampshire Hall. This proposal was emphatically not in the nature of a sightseeing excursion. Mere sightseeing did not interest David particularly; that was for tourists--although he would, of course, have to see Westminster Abbey and one or two other places, for duty's sake rather than for enjoyment. He wanted to be able to say that, like Oxford, he'd been there.

Hampshire Hall, though, was something very privately special to David Blackwhite. He had seen a picture of it once in the TIME-LIFE rendition of the English Renaissance, and the image had attached itself in David's mind to his (until then) vague and abstracted concepts of Culture and Tradition. The reappearance of the image, later, as the setting of a hackneyed Gothic romance on the Late Show, only heightened the importance of the Hall as the symbol of all that was ancient, beautiful, and desirable. For David, the trip was rather like a pilgrimage.

On the plane which carried him across the ocean, David lost himself in Baedeker's account of its splendors. He sat with the big book open in his lap, dwelling richly upon the magnificent gardens, the orangery, the strutting peacocks on the stately lawn...He murmured the glittering descriptions like an incantation, until he felt himself transported to the bright terrace which, he knew, stretched across the west side of the manor house. There he would sit, gazing placidly over the broad expanse of lawn which led down to the river's edge. Then the Earl of Hampshire himself would pass by, a tall, austere-looking gentleman with grey temples and an impeccable manner. He would nod to David and to the other decorous visitor taking tea and scones in the misty afternoon sunshine. David would smile and nod also, and spread marmalade on his muffins, secure in the knowledge that this, really, was where he had always belonged.

Almost from the day he arrived at Oxford, David made preparations for his return home. He read his Henry James scrupulously--the nuns had taught him to be scrupulous--and in the bookstores bought other authors to put in his collection. He also acquired a tweed suit, and a habit of handling his knife with the right hand, in the English fashion. He did these things with a definite sense of their propriety.

His journey to Hampshire Hall was not forgotten, however, and he made elaborate plans for the trip with a map and a railroad timetable. His eager activity left David's classmates somewhat bemused.

"Why in the world do you want to go to Hampshire Hall?" asked the girl from Wheaton, Illinois.

"I want to view the famous portrait of Democritus," David answered, "And I want to photograph the peacocks on the front lawn." He wished suddenly that he had not mentioned the photographs; it sounded so hopelessly middlebrow.

"I don't think that you should go there, Dave," said the girl. "I have a friend who went last year and she came back terribly disappointed."

"She did, really? But why?"

"Well, because---oh, you know, there were a lot of other people there, and...like that. I really don't think you'd like it, Dave."

"I expect that there will be other visitors," David replied tolerantly, "I can hardly have the whole place to myself. But I don't intend to let the others spoil Hampshire Hall for me. Anyway, it isn't the sort of place that would attract really touristy tourists---is it?"

His friend pursed her lips into a little frown. Then she shrugged and said, "I don't know, Dave. I just don't know. You suit yourself." Her tone was so ominously unpleasant that David pushed her advice to the back of his mind and forgot it at once.

The appointed day arrived promising to be beautiful. The towers and spires of Oxford looked like a vision rising out of the morning mist into the bright sunshine. David strode toward the railroad station, not noticing. He walked very fast down the narrow street, his back straight, and his eyes fixed on an image still many miles in the distance. He carried an instamatic camera and a copy of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, which David's minister had told him he might enjoy reading.

"I want to go to Hampshire Hall," he told the man in the ticket window. "Uh, cheap day-return." He squinted into the man's face, self-conscious about his American accent.

The man gave him his ticket and some cursory instructions on where to find the right platform. David hurried aboard and took a seat--one of the last ones--in a large, informal club car. The train jolted suddenly and then moved heavily off. David opened his book and began to read.

By the time that he had read far enough to wonder whether his minister had been speaking ironically when he had recommended that book, David had caught the attention of a woman sitting across the aisle. She wore a pink pants suit and enormous pink sunglasses, and her grey hair was swept back and tightly knotted in the manner of with-it American matrons. She eyed David's camera and the cut of his coat, and said brightly,

"Why, I'll bet that you're from the States!"

"That's right," David admitted. "and I'll just bet that you are, too!" he added, with a touch of what might have passed for sarcasm.

"Yes, I come from southern California, myself," said the pink sunglasses. "You know, this is my first vacation without my family in nearly twenty-three years of marriage."

"How nice," David replied, not really sure that it was.

"How long have you been in this country?"

"Five weeks."

"Oh, that's nice."

"Yes, isn't it?"

And so it went. The pink sunglasses had an insatiable curiosity; she wanted to know every town David had passed through, every restaurant he had patronized, every sight he had seen. She told him that she thought everything about England was beautiful.

"And have you seen Westminster Abbey?" she asked inevitably.

"Oh, yes."

"Wasn't Westminster Abbey beautiful?"

"Beautiful."

"And have you seen the Tower of London?"

"Wasn't the Tower of London beautiful?"

"Oh, I thought the Tower of London was just--lovely."

David began to squirm in his well-tailored jacket. The woman's questions did not disturb him as much as the glances of the other passengers, whose mute expressions exclaimed to one another, "These Americans!"

When the time came for him to change trains at Reading, he was happy and relieved to leave her. He jumped off the train, out of the brackets, and into the crowded station.

"Where do I catch the train for Hampshire Hall?" David asked an idle porter.

"Next train, this platform," the porter replied.

"Oh," said David, somewhat nonplussed; this was not the answer that he had expected. "I thought that--"

"NEXT train this platform," repeated the porter in a way that precluded argument.

David mistrusted the information, but followed the porter's instructions, nevertheless. Under that man's watchful eye, there was really nothing else that he felt he could do.

He was barely out of the station when he learned his mistake. Fortunately, however, the train did not take him very far out of his way, and David emerged from the experience with a renewed sense of superiority.

"I will be glad to get away from these incompetent porters," he told himself, "and these vulgar tourists and these smug second-class railroad carriages. When I get to Hampshire Hall I will forget about them... What can all the commonness in the world matter in a place like that?"

It was raining when David arrived at the village station. He stood on the platform, drenched to the skin, waving frantically for a cab. The driver smiled when David told him his destination.

"I grew up at Hampshire Hall," the driver said. "My mother was the cook up there at the greathouse, back when his Lordship's father was alive."

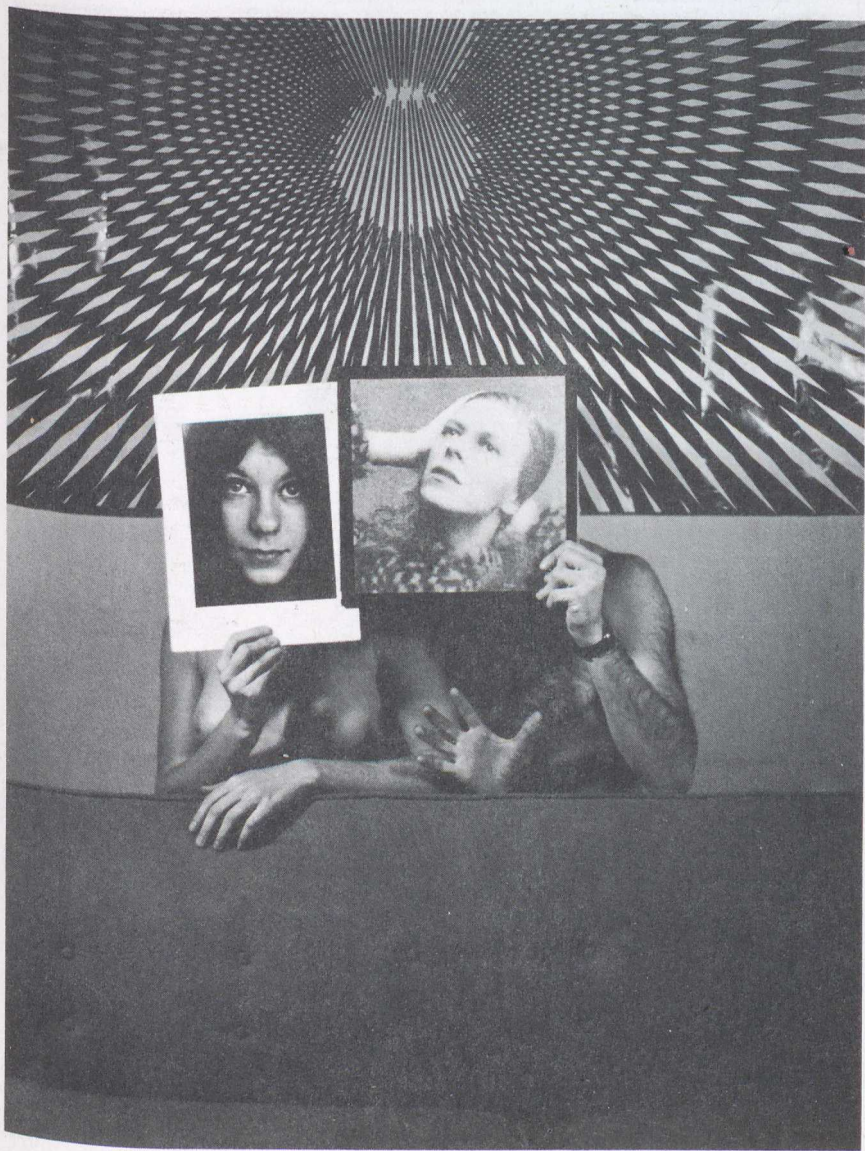
He told stories about his childhood spent on the estate, and pointed out points of interest as they passed along the drive toward the house. David settled back in the back and took it all in; the train trip mattered little to him now.

Finally they rounded the last turn in the drive and abruptly halted. David paid the driver and told him to come back in an hour. Then he stuffed his book and his camera beneath his coat and ran from the car through the steady downpour to the broad front steps.

The front door was gaping open, and the vestibule felt chilly and damp--as well as crowded. Hordes of tourists, driven indoors by the storm, appeared to have overrun the house. Women in pink sunglasses and their bald, bored husbands packed the Long Gallery, gazing in wonder at an exhibition of fabricated old-world costumes. "...as seen in the recent BBC production, *Son of Henry VIII*." They filled the Prince of Wales' Bedroom, awed and delighted by the heavy gilding and garish red wallpaper--innovations of the last century. And in the Great Hall, they lined up before a card-table where the Earl of 'Ampshire smiled and nodded beneath Ribera's laughing Democritus. His Lordship was autographing guidebooks at sixty-five pence a head.

David had been prepared for the circus crowds, but not for the circus. He staggered through a side door and out to the garden. It was still raining heavily, and as he wandered down the yew alley David felt the moisture running through his hair, into his eyes, his clothing, and down into his shoes.

At the other end of the alley was the orangery. David approached it slowly, for just inside the open door he saw one of the famous peacocks. The bird was standing on a sort of garden chair, its elegant plumage untouched by the elements. David stopped by the entry to look in as the bird fixed its gaze in his direction. And they just stood there, staring at each other.



Photograph

Steve Forkins

the descent of
a moon gone
wild, openlegged
vanity, grows upon water that
blushes black.
the descent of
your cloven eyes
unearths
every kind of
approach, and i touch your
wrist, the underside
where veins
are swollen, drugged
snakes on the
body of your trapped
heartbeat, uncoiling.

N. Dillon

one, a poem

the kite, soaring
has lashed the
corneal mirror within
which these taut
distances retreat
into echoes.
my face a sore
flower; i'm one
skeleton leaf
dancing with
a crazy, broken sky.

N. Dillon



Photograph

Carl Corey

THE DISTANT MERRY-GO-ROUND

we are falling asleep,
minds drifting west:
the window a cave
in the side of night
emits giant croakings
and wind of great wings.

but it's peace
we are dreaming:

awakening to the east,
direction of the worn
merry-go-round:
its cry for grease
we cannot separate
from tiny screaming.

Karl Elder

J, THINK I KANT

Now, if my soul's salvation has its basis in election,
I may as well dispense with joy my physical erection.
Immanuel! Immanuel! Oh, Christ! Have I a savior?
Or is my visa based upon my terraform behavior?
Have I a route that circumvents the fires of disaster?
And might I show a profit if I wager one piaster
That the path divine is woven with debasements and denials?
Is happiness so desperate a blemish on my finals?
But right or left or heavensent, dictation does not please me,
So if you find me sinful, have your SS Angels seize me.

Bruce McAllister

Computer Graphics

These images were produced at NIU under the instruction of Luciano Traversa of the Art Department.

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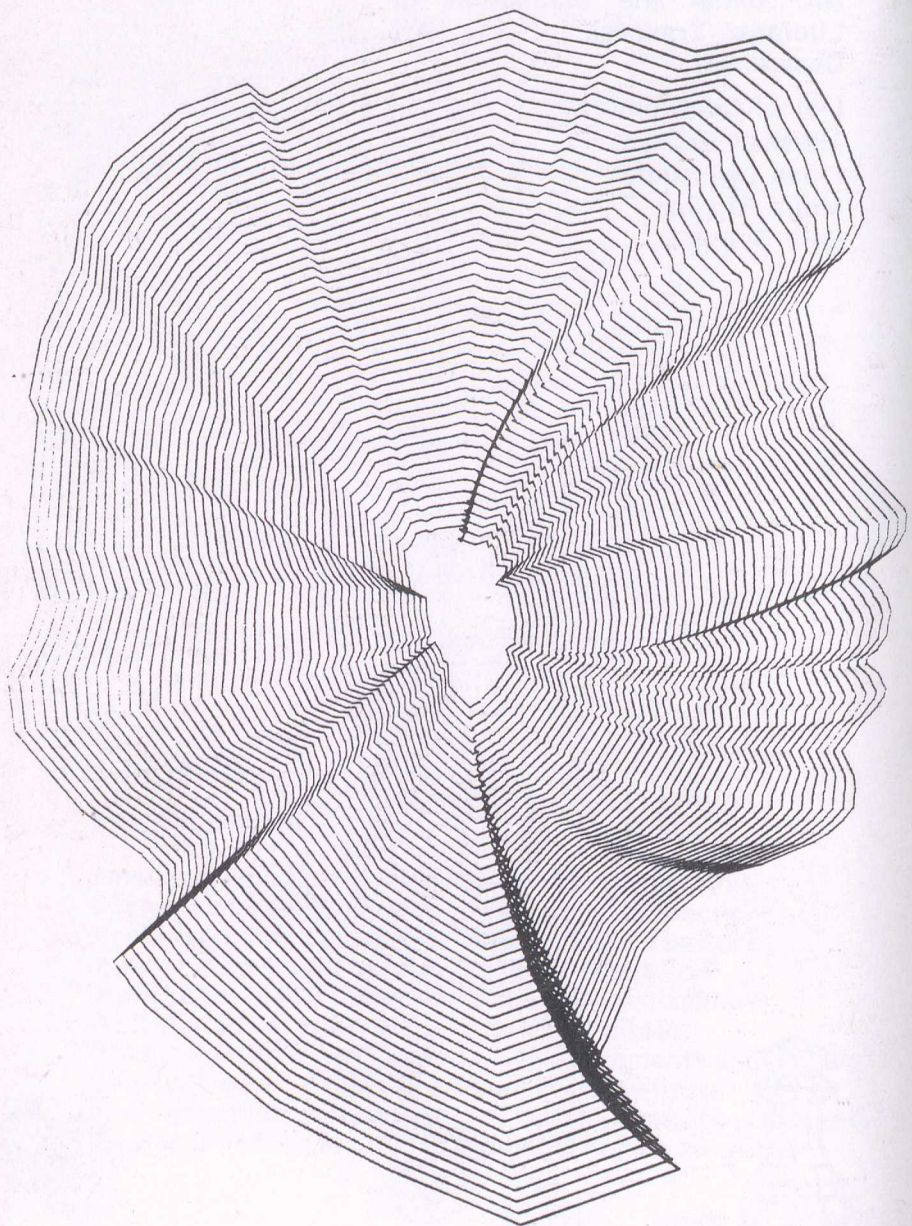
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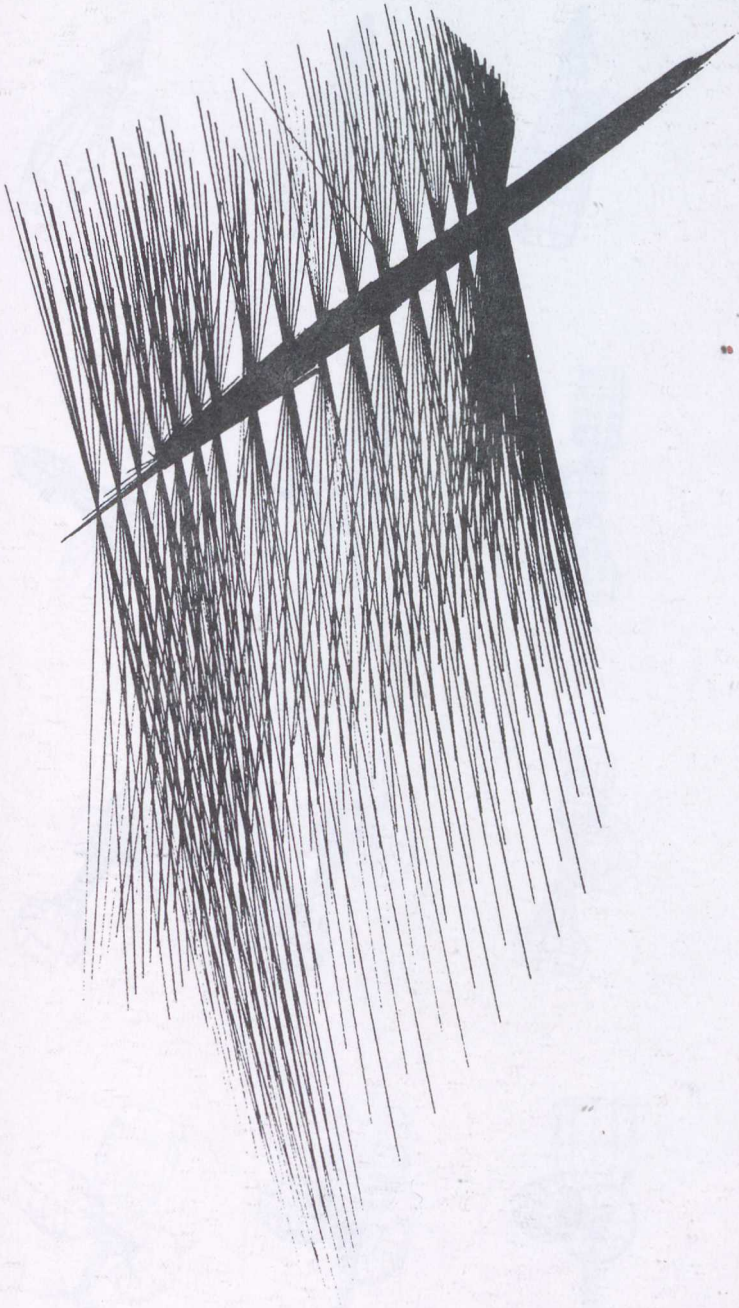
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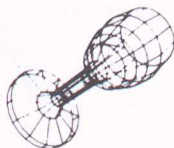
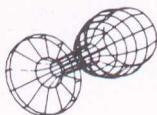
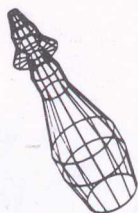
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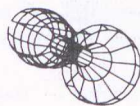
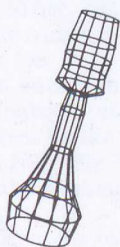
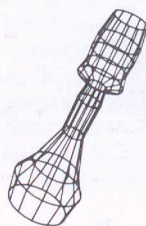
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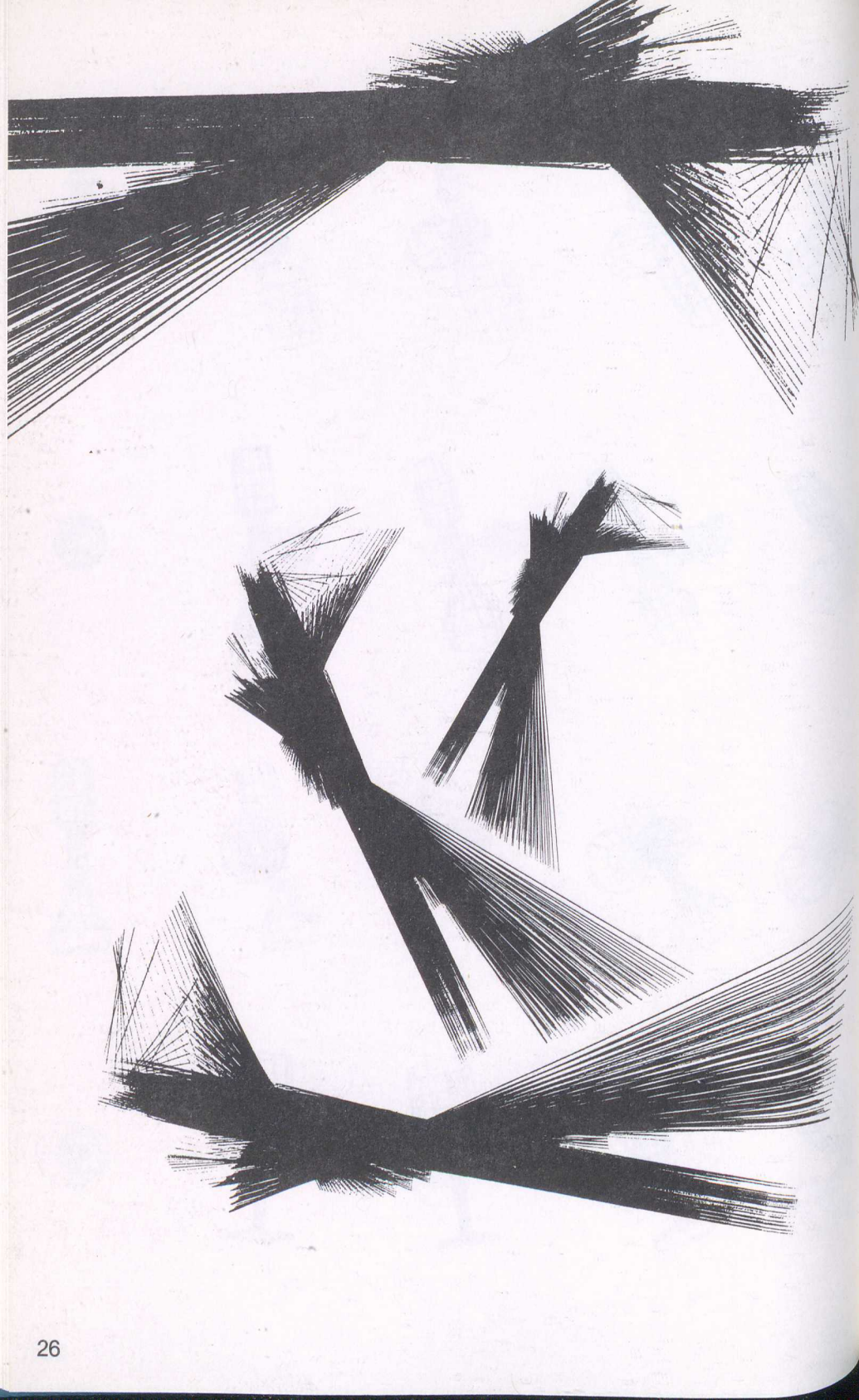












VOICE IN THE NIGHT
BY GREG JANICKE

"Quit your moaning."

All the magic was gone.

Gram's stomach was sick with flu.

The moon over the town is half-black lost in the clouds; the streetlamp is brighter but lights up only a part of the street--nothing else. None of the houses are in sight. One is, a little bit. Their apartment, the one on the third floor, flickers green, red, yellow, and blue from the tiny lights on the tree. But nothing else around to be seen.

Louise wiped dribble from her nose. The two sisters were huddled together under a blanket.

Becky scratched her yellow hair. She said it was so cold in this house.

"Go get another blanket."

"Don't wanna move," Becky told her. "It's so cold, woo! Lookit fat Vergil just sittin' there like a cow. Thinks he's so smart."

Street is empty, covered with ice.

Car drives through town, skids, bumps the side of another car; swerves back, kicking up snow passes under a streetlight. Headlight beams hardly cut the haze. Of night and snow. Yellow lights blink on the street-horses, marking a spot where the road has buckled and crumbled from the chill. An animal ran across the road but got hit by a car, there, over by the blinking yellow. Rotted, blood frozen, snow covers it.

Vergil sat on the floor looking up at the two-headed blanket lit only by the TV: one head round, covered with straw; the other head long, covered with black, eyes sunk deep.

Louise said there was a real stink in the house.

"You haven't cleaned Vergil's litter in a long time."

"Gram never told me to. It's not only the litter stink."

"Oh, Loulou, it's nice here. Just a little cold."

An old toy doll on the refrigerator. Gramzee sat by the light of the open refrigerator in the kitchen, eating bits of cheese. Her stomach growled, she was very hungry. Gramzee had spotted skin; Becky said she was a hundred years old, at least.

Every year the old lady said that family would come visiting her for the holiday. No one ever showed up, and Gram had seven kids. At first Becky and Louise thought it was kind of sad about her and her family.

Gram talked about an old man she had, Morty, but that was about 800 years ago before she learned that she didn't need Morty to help around the house. That's what she said.

Louise was a budding young girl. She'd say, if nothing, man's body can keep you warm.

Becky just shivered. She read about a man in a book once.

Mort's body was long cold--Gram buried him years and years ago. No family showed up--Gram was alone. She visited Mort every once in awhile. One day, in the cemetery on the hill where Morty was, she found Vergil and took him home. Vergil lived long. He was like a toy--Gram talked to the animal all day long, but he never answered. After a while he got shakey and ate a lot and kept getting sick. But Gram kept him.

Gramzee found the sisters like she found Vergil--out in the woods by the cemetery. The two little girls were wandering around through the trees and Gram called to them. They both had handfuls of dandelions. Going to put them on the

cemetery plots. That was their playground. They were from the orphan home not far away; Gram told them to come home with her.

So Gram had Vergil and Becky and Louise.

The woods; the cemetery is still in the nighttime.

Grey tombstones and crosses stuck in the sheets of ice; wind, bits of ice and snow stir in the chill, swirling through the black sticks of trees nearby. The moon falls behind clouds and the woodlands turn black.

Wind blows at the plastic sheets taped on their window frames. A corner rips away. Icicle cracks off the gutter from its own weight and sticks in the snow.

"What was that?" Louise wanted to know.

"Just wind."

Grey and white danced on their faces, a bishop was performing a midnight Mass on the TV. Choir of angels sang.

Gram coughed from the kitchen.

Becky reached over and turned the volume down, then sat back, stiff as stone.

Louise chewed on a fingernail.

"She interrupted the bishop," Louise said.

Becky didn't answer, she just looked at the celebration on TV. Everyone looked healthy and clean and happy. The people were orderly and probably warm, too. The bishop and priests were handsome in their church clothes and looked so holy. The church was so bright it could have lit up their whole town.

"Heaven must be bright like that," Becky said to Louise.

Gram coughed, her stomach growled. She fed Vergil some cheese, and he sat content.

"Loulou, I think I'm going to freeze and die tonight. I'm so cold, down to the bones. I'm just gonna die."

"A man could keep you warm. Good as a blanket. Better."

"We're the ugliest things on earth. Gram said we're not gorgeous. She'd have a better chance at a man than we got, and she's half-dead already. She didn't even get us any presents. We got her a snapshot of us, what did she get us? Nothing."

"Don't make your eyes wet, your face'll freeze," Louise told her. Louise curled her hair with her finger. They wrapped their arms around each other.

"Wish she'd go to sleep and quit gripin' about her stomach."

"This house stinks." The two sisters shivered under the blanket.

Not that they couldn't have ever run away from her like from the orphan home. Ugly or not, they were growing into young women who could do things for themselves. They could clean and lift things and go to the store like Gramzee, and Louise knew how to drive a car and even Gram didn't know that.

On the refrigerator was an old toy doll. Gram ran away from home with it once when she was little. One day she found her parents in the yard burning all the old toys she had outgrown--she watched the doll hair catch fire; the nose dribbled plastic, and the burning gave off an awful stink. She rescued the doll, and left for a long time.

The doll was dressed in blue-green cloth. Up close it still smelled a little. Louise didn't care for it, but Becky liked the doll.

Bits of snow and ice whip through the air, tap the plastic. Wind everywhere, it slips through the house. The light is broken, one of the street-horses fell, from a car, or from the wind. The street is darker. Someone might not see the cracks and holes in the road.

"That wasn't wind, it was something else."

"Probably some cat or dog."

"Coulda sworn I heard something else out there."

Gram bit her lip instead of the cheese, a slit of blood showed.

The choir of angels died, the bishop was mute--the sound from the TV was gone. Only wind, Gram coughing and mumbling in the kitchen.

In the street by the house, snow is crushed underfoot. A trail appears under the streetlight and vanishes in the dark.

The picture snapped into diagonal bands.

"What's happening?" Louise wanted to know. "Go fix the picture."

"You go fix it. Haven't got the energy to move." The picture shook and then went all black. Gramzee was in the bathroom taking care of her lip, the two sisters sat under the blanket near the blank TV, Vergil sat in the kitchen like some big furry rat.

"Now what? What'll we do? Beck, I hear someone outside."

Becky was near the one glass window, and since the TV was out and her legs were getting colder, she slowly got up and looked out the window. Somebody was down there in the snow, making noises like some animal and moaning. Everybody was probably asleep in the entire building. Both their faces pressed against the window, making steam ghosts on it with their fast breath. All of a sudden Gram's head was over theirs--a tissue with spots of blood was sticking out her mouth, none of her breath showed on the window.

Green, red, yellow flickered on the window from the tree. Snow spun near the ground in twisters, breath streamed from someone standing in the night chill. The moon was lost behind the clouds. Ice piled up at the curbs, on the tombstones, in the woods, nothing untouched. No dog out on a night like this, but someone was by their house.

"Sounds like an animal."

Gramzee walked back into the kitchen. She had stomach flu.

Vergil was shaking in his litter box, hunched over like a vulture.

Louise dressed in her boots and coat and was out the apartment door. She snapped on the porch light.

Becky saw more clear now. It was a man. Standing there in the snow, wearing only a T-shirt and baggy greys. No face. A white man. Becky threw on a coat, too, to help Louise bring him in.

The old woman called something from the kitchen but Becky left the room when Louise shouted for her.

"Throw your arm around 'm," Louise said. The man tensed, like he didn't want to be taken into the house. The girls pulled at him, Becky slipped and fell in the snow, Louise didn't slip. Both hugged and pulled at him.

Three breaths streamed and mixed and flew with the wind. The dead animal near the ditch was completely covered with snow. The town was set with ice. Cold stung their faces. Louise's black hair flew in her mouth and she tried to spit it out but couldn't. His skin was ice.

The two girls got him as far as the door, he swung his elbow back and hit Louise in the nose. Blood ran. Louise punched his stomach and he squealed like a pig but didn't squirm as much.

Everybody must have been sleeping or they would have heard the commotion. Gram rubbed her belly and drank stomach-settler. Vergil ran to the open door and looked around.

Becky sat on the bottom stair to rest up. The man was kind of skinny so Louise got to twist his arm behind him. Going up the stairs was like climbing a mountain, each step was careful, twisting and shoving. Louise was breathing heavy, the man grunted like an animal. They got to the second floor. Her face was wet with sweating. It was like climbing a mountain. Becky sat at the bottom stair.

"He was in the cold with no coat," Becky said. She went up the stairs to help Louise, since she was all rested up.

The bishop was almost finished with celebrating the midnight Mass. The

church was bright, the people were solemn, and warm. Becky and Louise didn't know this, the TV set was blank.

They grunted, but not as deep or loud as the man. They could lift things like Gramzee could but the man was heavy bringing up the stairs. Each step they took, one by one, not skipping every other stair, like when they would come home every day from outside.

Gram was back in the washroom with her sick stomach, she didn't hear the commotion in the stairway.

on slick ice a car skids, driving through town, hits into a pile of snow; wheels spin, the car snaps away.

Becky had to stop and rest a bit. Louise finally got the man all the way to the third floor, both were puffing and breathing deep. Louise tripped on the last stair and the man fell on top of her. Becky got up and went past them, opened the door all the way, and helped Louise bring him in.

Practically bald with some fuzzy hairs, big and skinny, a lot of teeth missing. "He's ugly," Becky said.

"Go get another blanket," Louise said.

"Hey, what's wrong with him? He ain't said anything than animal noises, now he's gurglin' and droolin' like a baby." Louise wiped the drool from his lips with a tissue. He sat under the blanket, shivering.

Gram's arm shook. She broke some icicles off the back porch and put them in a pot. The faucet was frozen, inside. She melted the ice into water, boiled it. Set a teabag in.

Becky sat picking bits of ice from the cuffs of his pants.

"Ugly and stupid. What'll we do with him, Loulou? He just sits gurlin' like a baby. Can we keep him? What should we call him? Too dumb to know he was freezing to death. Just stood out there not doing anything."

A white band on his wrist. He sat watching the tree lights blink on and off, red, green, and yellow.

Vergil ran into the front room and jumped up on the couch like a panther. The man sat back and squealed, he shook all over.

Boiling water, tea dissolving.

She drank it all, slow. Steam swirled up from the cup. Her stomach growled. Something made a squeal in the front room.

Gramzee walked into the front room with a cup of tea in her hand. She saw the man wrapped in blankets sitting like a king on her couch, Louise and Becky kneeling to either side of him. She asked them questions.

Louise saw a white wristband.

"And we're keeping him here, he's my baby," Becky said. "I'll make him some tea."

Louise went to the phone. She was talking to somebody.

All that was left in the front room was Gram, Vergil, and the man.

"He'll be all right; he can take care of himself," someone said over the phone to Louise.

"Who you callin', Loulou?" Becky wanted to know. "Don't you wanna keep him? That's your man. He can keep you warm, better than a blanket."

Water bubbled, the teabag was set in.

The man dribbled at the mouth. Gram looked close and spoke to him. He made animal noises; he did not drink Becky's offering of tea. Becky looked to Gram.

"What? You think he looks like Mort? Well then, Gram, family finally did come to visit you for the holiday. Wonder where he came from? Dumb thing."

Gram shook almost as much as the man did; she was not smiling at the visitor,

she shivered like she was very cold. Vergil hissed at the man like a snake. Gram coughed deep and loud, her stomach hurt.

Snow falls, covering the dead animal near the ditch; the grey crosses and tombstones are covered with snow. Long footprints like slits in the snow, under the streetlight, invisible at night, trailing back past the cemetery, past the woods, past the orphan home to the other home. Snow and ice fill the holes.

Gram said she did not want this devil sleeping under the same roof with her. He was the devil, she wanted to get rid of him. Gram always did everything first so they waited on her.

"This man ain't wicked, he's dumber 'n' a baby or even an animal. He's a present to me and Loulou. You can be with Vergil, we can be with him," Becky smiled.

Gramzee said she didn't want that man there. Didn't need or want a man around. She shook an empty teacup at him, bit her lip again.

Louise sat and stroked the fuzz on his head, wiped foam at the corners of his lips. His T-shirt smelled bad, he spoke long drawl sounds, his lips dripped.

An icicle cracks off their gutter, falls quietly in a snowpile. Chill slips through the house.

Vergil was shakey by the man: all of a sudden the animal jumped off the top of the couch onto him. The man squealed loud and quick jerked around; threw the blankets off and bumped Louise with his arm; his hands went at Becky's throat; Gram hunched back and threw the cup at his face; it hit.

The man fell on top of Gram, who was shaking more than him when he was cold. Her lip was bleeding, a sliver of red. He drooled on her, slapped her face with a fist and she stopped shivering.

"He killed her."

Louise was tangled in blankets. Becky looked at the man and at Gram with wide eyes, came up behind him. He turned to look at her.

Streets empty, the wind howls through the town. The moon is dead to the world, a streetlight is brighter. One house lit in the dark, a bright front room light, theirs, on the third floor. Nothing else to be seen for quite some ways.

Becky grabbed and shook him and shook him. He was skinny but he knocked her down with his arm. His pantsleg was cuffed up. She bit by the cuff. His leg twitched, kicked at her face, missed.

"He's a demon. Gram was right; he don't belong here, get him out. Don't need him here, this crazy animal." Becky got up, Louise finally untangled the blankets.

Becky was pushed into the Christmas tree, it fell under her; she shouted.

"Damn him."

The tree and Becky fell by Vergil. He ran; the man tried to kick him, Vergil ran through the front room out the door, down the stairs and outside.

Louise looked at everything, the tree and Becky and Gram. She took the man by the wrist and slapped her hand a few times at his face and then set him down on the couch. She was breathing heavy, trying to catch air, hair was wet sticking on her face, but she could lift things like Gramzee, and she almost lifted him completely in the air and put him on the couch, and threw a heap of blankets on him. The man was shivering like he was cold again, and sat moaning and groaning. Louise did not sit down but went over and helped Becky up off the tree. The lights stopped blinking red, yellow, and green, the cord had been pulled from the wall socket.

"Get rid of that rotten evil thing. I don't want to see him in this house anymore." Becky's face was very red—a man had never pushed and knocked her around like this one, not a father, or a brother, or a boyfriend, no one like this stranger they brought in from the cold. He wasn't a baby, babies just sit around and dribble. Animals don't jump around all the time: Vergil jumped but sat quiet a lot of times.

Vergil made tiny footprints in the snow, not the long slashes by the streetlight. He wandered away from the one front room light.

Becky sat on the floor, catching her breath; the man did not move off the couch; Gram sat quietly in her chair--Louise tended to her.

All were asleep in the house, and Gram, and Becky; she even tucked the man on the couch in for the night.

Picked up the tree and the teacup.

Shut the front door. She didn't see Vergil run out.

Half-black, the moon peeping out from behind the clouds; the snow slows to trickle; a car passes through town; an animal by the ditch; cold chill of winter swirling ice and snow.

Louise sighed. Everyone was tired and drained of energy. But they would rest calm, not shivering, or talking about how cold it was, or that they would never move again and would die tonight; they were all worked up and warmed by the guest.

Louise snapped off the light.

The apartment, the house, the whole block was quiet in the dark.

Day's moon, the sun, shines through the clear air--streetlight is out but the snow glitters, ice sparkles; melting icicles on the back porch drip in rhythm.

Beams flooded the apartment, the kitchen, the bedrooms, the front room--nothing untouched by light.

Rays of sun danced on her face and gently woke Louise from sleep; she parted her hair away from her eyes and squinted outside--everything was so white. She threw off the blankets with a sweep of her arm and sat up in bed.

Snow melts in the sun. Last night some animal ran across the road but got hit by a car, over by the blinking street-horses--part of the animal is visible in the melting snow. Little thing--quiet, not sick or cold or hungry. Not bothered.

Louise stood, her white nightgown rippled down her legs; she stretched her arms, her entire body, up and out. Stepped lightly on the cool floor into the front room. The room was bright and neat and orderly except for the two blankets crumpled up on the couch.

"Glad that thing is gone, that rotten ugly thing. Did you throw him out, Loulou?"

"No."

"Well, maybe his keeper fetched him home and locked him up again. He almost killed Gramzee. And me. But he learned his lesson.

"No gratitude in him for being brought in from the cold.

"Dumb and ugly. Never seen anything so pitiful ugly." Both went over to the front room window, looked through droplets of melting ice at a trail of footprints that cut the snow. Back past the streetlight, back into the fields far away, maybe back to the cemetery and farther.

"Are those footprints comin' or goin', Loulou?"

Becky was in the washroom looking at herself in the mirror. She ran her fingers through her hair; then rubbed sleep from her eyes.

"Not as ugly as him, that's for sure." No one heard her say this to herself.

"Actually, I'm cute compared to him. He was okay--why'd he have t'get toiled up all the time?" She smiled wide and looked at her teeth.

Gramzee was the last one to get up. She looked like the toy doll in her blue flannel nightgown. Tea was dissolving in the quiet water boiling; Becky wiped the teacup and poured some--for Gram, she said. She never made tea in the morning for anyone before. Louise helped the old lady into the kitchen and sat her in a chair. Gram was quiet. The three sat at the table watching the tea dissolve and turn dark in her cup.

Gram's stomach was okay--it wasn't sick with the flu this morning. Said she slept well, too, best in a long time. Except her face was sore from the pillow. Talked about some dream she had, a grizzly bear trying to beat her up, and it growled and started eating her belly away, and he ate the cheese and the flu bug, a big furry thing like a rat. Becky brought a package into the kitchen. She said Gram shouldn't be talking about bears and rats on Christmas morning.

Something wrapped neatly in newspaper with a ribbon around it. Gramzee didn't have anything for them. Becky said it was okay, it really didn't matter, she didn't mind.

Gram opened the present. It was a color snapshot of Louise and Becky standing next to each other looking at the camera. Louise wore a dark blue dress and Becky had a dark green one. One corner of the snapshot was wrinkled. Louise wanted a clean-smelling house for Christmas, she was going to clean out Vergil's litterbox.

Gramzee finally said the girls could have her old toy doll to play with, even though they were too old for that sort of thing. Becky smiled, so did Louise. They were all drinking tea.

The house would be cleaned by the girls, things moved and lifted and set in place, breakfast would be made by the girls. The litterbox would be cleaned. Gram didn't have flu anymore, even her lip was healed, she said okay. They all wanted a clean-smelling house for today.

Louise said tomorrow they'd get the TV fixed.

Gram wondered where Vergil was.

Louise dressed in her boots and coat--Becky did, too. They said they'd go looking for Vergil. The old lady sat in the kitchen eating bits of bread and sipping on tea; the two sisters stepped out of the house together into the crisp air and bright snow. They squinted their eyes.

"It's, ooh, so warm," Becky told her sister. They stepped into the snow and sunk in. Right by the trail of footprints dissolving in the sun.

Squinty-eyed they walked, their breath swirling out in streams, wind pinching their cheeks red; the sun was strong. They would walk under the streetlight, farther, even beyond the fields.

Louise rubbed her nose. The sisters walked together, they didn't say a word.

FISHING

1.

On the rock, pants rolled to knees,
Legs spinning round
In current, I have an empty face.

There is nothing to think, or do.
The line sags low,
Grows taut, and sags again.

Whatever happens, the rock wears,
River humming
Like an old woman hauling in wash.

2.

First catch, a bullhead, has gulped
The hook.
I lay him on the sun-warmed rock,

Gills opening like a rose.
I have
No pliers, no extra hooks,

Must probe his guts with fingers
Big as
Any worms he's ever mouthed.

And I am breathing hard.

3.

Speedboats roar up the river, down:
A whooping,
Waving jet-set fresh from catalogues.

I won't smile back, won't wave.
Closing eyes,
I dream a dark night, myself

A frogman drilling holes in their fun.

4.

Dead fish float by, bloated
And white,
Fins stiff as masts tacking

For the sea. Driftwood,
Tin cans,
An abandoned, sinking rowboat.

My feet grow fins, swim off.
They too
Must see what's at the end.

5.

The far shore fades and disappears,
Gulls winging
From nowhere to weave a spell.

Fishermen pull up anchors, row in,
Stars schooling
Behind them in the channel.

William Hoagland



Photograph

Dale DeBolt

CONVERSATIONS

Your hands and lips
 flow soft upon my face
Your words peel back
 the flesh and etch the bone

Sometimes the city will
 dissolve in sound
Which has no concrete need
 of time or place
Sometimes the sound will
 tremble on a hair
Split by the steel precision
 of the sense

And later, when
 the southern rains dissolve
The city's angles
 into honeyed mist
My body will relax
 into the calm,
Soft memory
 of anticipated sleep.

But winter nights
 when pale, rheumatic joints
Tease sharply through
 the scale of tightened nerves
I will remember keen,
 impassioned words
Which classify the pain
 and lure the mind
Beyond the syllogism--
 home to dream.

Karen Hamric

THE FREEZE

Glimpses climb the bare lattice quick.
Cracked, window pain frames our breath;
falling helpless like word-etched wings,
---our perches too slick for landing.

Although in Chicago, words
and stockings slide slick,
and you pawn your yawns,
---party favors.

We'll settle this now, fade to fade.
like ponies caught in barbs,
---trembling.
So far to ebb,
too close to flow,
---a clotting of the veins;
with memories,
like poet's pen,
but a cripple's melting cane.

Charles F. Fister

78

Tell me
What shall I do with
These countless 78's, black,
Scratched to sound like panthers
Panting over saxophone solos
And feeble arias? Their brevity
Is absurd; it unnerves me.
Let me hurl them to eternity,
Mosaics of the past.

Chris Okon



Photograph

Lou Krueger

FALLOUT

Look into the mirror.
How bored you look. Tell me,
What colors are caught as you blink?
Do you recognize the sparks
Flicked behind your lashes like aluminum
Dew drops? Your love
Is fallout. My skin
Already burns, shrivels, but I feel
Nothing. Amazing;
Why do I not scar?

Chris Okon

A POEM FOR THE AGES

With Daffodillies dight in Dill
and Hummingbirds in chorus,
polyphonic Pasturers
Flush in fields of Floris;

Both Hyacinths and Violets
bedeck and bloom the lands,
bright Orioles deliver them
from drive-in Fern & Myrtle stands.

Bold swains, acclaiming songfully
pure Maidens' swarthy Tresses,
undo in Verses piping hot
those shepherdesses' dresses.

A maid with Regularity
outdoes the Blacksmiths' ilk,
who'd effortize his bulging Brawn
in Pastorizing milk.

But she with nimble Finger-Tips
from making Cheese and Butter
draws forth the Milk from dairy Cows
--first one and then the udder.

These Kiney Cows and Sheepy Goats,
the Swains and Milkmaids too,
and Flowers are more fortunate
dull Friend, than I or you.

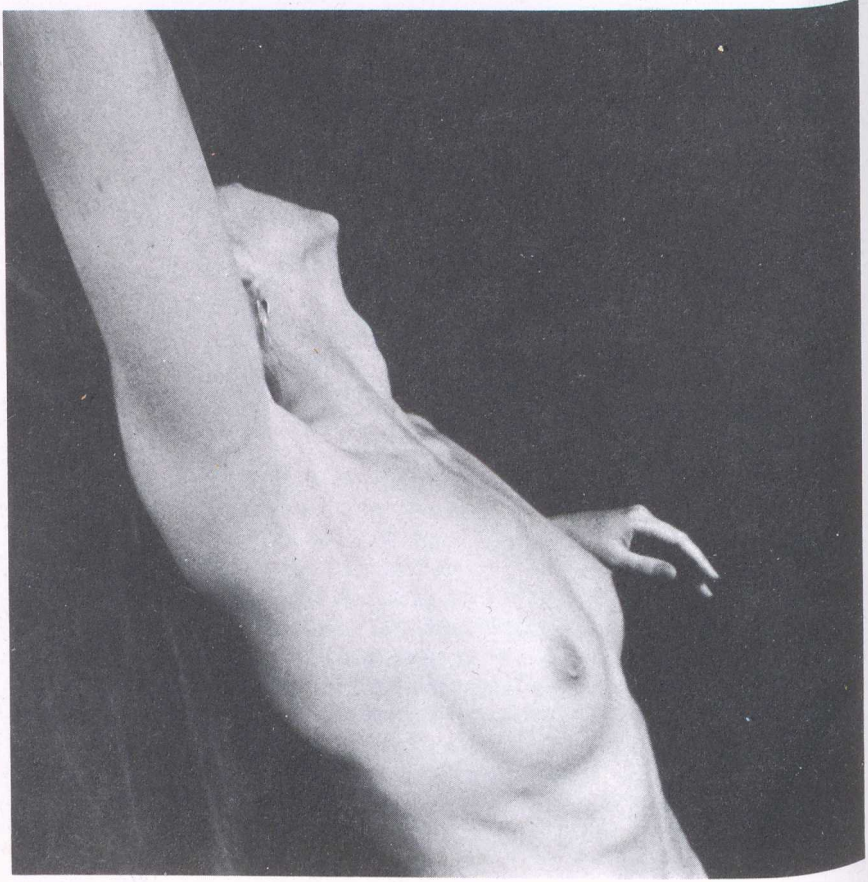
For they can Pipe their lusty Lays
'neath breezes 'round the Rill,
and Wile away their Lazy Days
with Daffodillies dight in Dill.

Thomas R. Liszka

ECHOES

Ghenghis Khan has chroniclers to soothe him.
If it can be imagined,
Place him next to a peasant with a swollen throat;
A peasant he has smeared,
Like glacial granite chips.
They find his wooden teeth in France.
The pill that wedged in his gullet
Is leaking iron tears,
Which stain and darken and grow old,
Pitiless.

Thomas E. Portegys



Photograph

Dale DeBolt

ABORTION

Like fresh earth slipping
from under your feet
on the new slope--
No pain.
The motion a slow catch in
a held breath--
A forced sigh.

She lies a white mound,
gaze set on the window pane
where a fly hits the glass
like steady hail.

Chris Michelassi

AUCTION

All Autumn the calendar
Tells the city it's autumn
And whole households arrive
Worshipping carnival glass
Shelved like rainbows
Before their itching eyes.

From a peach basket
Tinware bursts with sun
Pooling white the palms
Of farmers' wives
That know the flat
As well as the ripe.

A Sears sack and fruit jars
Brings thrity-two-fifty
From a collector in town
And blond women bow in
Coffee steam calculating
His fat rubber band.

International stitched
On an insulated jacket,
A man with a doughnut
Leans at the lunch wagon,
Nods how-do, and sucks
The glaze off his thumb.

Karl Elder

CHEKHOV'S ANGRY YOUNG MEN
BY CHRIS OKON

"A Russian is peculiarly given to exalted ideas," says Vershinin in *Three Sisters*, "but why is it he always falls to short in life? Why? In his plays *The Sea Gull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Three Sisters*, Chekhov includes characters who suffer the frustration of a youthful idealism that exceeds their human limitations. They are "angry young men," dissatisfied with the world as they see it because it is inferior to their dreams.

In *The Sea Gull*, Trepleff, an aspiring young playwright, is at odds with the demands of artistic conventions, which he believes stifle progress and creativity. "We need new forms of expression," he tells his uncle in Act I, "and if we can't have them, we had better have nothing." Trepleff is anxious not only because his art is considered nebulous, but also because it is in direct opposition to his mother, an old-school actress who does not return his love. Madame Arkadin callously criticizes her son's efforts at dreamlike playwriting, not aware of the defensive cynicism that is growing in him. Within the framework of the comedy a tragic disintegration of ideals occurs as Trepleff's aspirations outdo his capacity. His failure to meet his own standards of artistry brings him the misery of not being understood as a human being. When he first presents the dead seagull to Nina in Act I, she regards it as a symbol but admits that she is "too simple" to understand Trepleff's thinking. "What is there to understand?" Trepleff cries, "My play was not liked, you despise my inspiration, you already consider me commonplace, insignificant, like so many others." Aware of and at the same time afraid of his weakness, Trepleff responds in anger to the model of Trigorin, who has achieved not only fame but the ability to accept his own limitations. "I have more talent than all of you put together," Trepleff explodes at his mother in Act III, "You, with your hackneyed conventions, have usurped the supremacy in art and consider nothing real and legitimate but what you do yourselves; everything else you stifle and suppress...I don't believe in you or in him!"

In Act IV Trepleff fears he is falling into the very conventions he abhors. "I come more and more to the conviction that it is not a question of new and old forms, but what matters is that a man should write...because it springs freely from his soul." He realizes the anguish of his limitations when he sees Nina again, who tells him that happiness does not arise from "fame and glory," but rather from "knowing how to be patient." Trepleff, however, is lost in despair. "You have found your path, you know which way you are going," he laments to Nina, "But I am still floating in a chaos of dreams and images, not knowing what use it is to anyone. I have no faith and don't know what my vocation is." Trepleff's suicide, foreshadowed by his killing of the seagull, is sad testimony to the fragility of ideals that are often extinguished by the reality of human shortcomings.

Brooding with self-protective cynicism and contempt for convention is Trofimoff in *The Cherry Orchard*. Petya's earnest disdain for imperfection works as a foil to the folly of the other characters in the play. "To sidestep the petty and illusory, which prevent our being free and happy, that is the aim and meaning of our life. Forward!" he tells Anya, who is in awe of his wonderful eloquence. Petya laments the human condition; "We are at least two hundred years behind the times, we have as yet absolutely nothing," he philosophizes, yet he still retains a "premonition of happiness" for "all Russia." The frivolity of human emotions perturbs him, and he, "remote from all triviality," considers himself "above love." When Lyuboff chides him for evading worldly experience, especially love, she exposes his human weakness. But this revelation to us seems to stir sympathy for the irked young man who is sadly obsessed with his own ideals. Petya is sincerely zealous when he tells Lopahin in Act IV that "Humanity is moving toward the loftiest truth, toward the loftiest happiness that is possible on earth, and I am in the front ranks." Even when he admits that he may never reach his dream, he does not abandon his idealism.

"I'll show others the way to get there," he declares. Chekhov seems to listen patiently to idealists like Trofimoff while reminding them that they must learn to tolerate the mundane reality of human existence.

Another character whose ideals do not coincide with the world as she sees it is Irina in *Three Sisters*. Irina believes that work is the ideal function of man, and she is miserable because she falls short of her own expectations. "A man ought to work, to toil in the sweat of his brow," she exclaims to the doctor in Act I, and then admits that she is "a young woman who wakes at twelve o'clock, then has coffee in bed, then spends two hours dressing..." Irina's self-contempt causes her to yearn for her dream of a happy, productive life. She is sensitive to, but not above, the limitations of human beings that are caught in misery and boredom. She longs for a life richer in meaning and suffers because she is so attuned to her own entrapment. When Tusenbach tells her that her beauty makes life beautiful for him, she responds bitterly. "You say life is beautiful...yes, but what if it only seems so! Life for us three sisters has not been beautiful yet, we have been stifled by it as plants are choked by weeds...The reason we are depressed and take such a gloomy view of life is that we know nothing of work..."

Irina's obsession with work as the answer to the anguish of a boring existence produces panic. She detests her job at the telegraph office because it is "without poetry, without meaning." She does not respect her brother Andrey, who "does nothing but play his violin." The fear of inertia grips her as she realizes she is aging. "I am forgetting everything; every day I forget something more, and life is slipping away and will never come back, we shall never, never go to Moscow," she cries to her sister Olga, who tries to advise her to "marry the baron," at the end of Act III. Irina cannot pretend to love the baron, because love is something she had been "dreaming of" all her life. She realizes that her "soul is like a wonderful piano of which the key has been lost," towards the end of the play, Irina persists in her optimistic answer to the misery of boredom. "A time will come," she tells her sisters, "when everyone knows what all this is for, why there is this misery; there will be no mysteries, and meanwhile, we have got to live...we have got to work, only to work!" Irina, waiting for fulfillment of her aspirations for happiness, is thwarted by the circumstances that limit her life. Chekhov does not berate her dreams; he laments the fact that Vershinin's question is unanswerable.

Neither does Chekhov ridicule the characters Trepleff and Trofimoff because they fall short of their own ideals. Although he may sympathize with their lofty visions, he also realizes their need for the ballast of a realistic acceptance of human frailty.

