

**Towers
XLV**

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

St. Luke, chapter 18

The Publican

John Manderino

Weary of their faces,
Those eyes like broken plates,
Weary of wanting to care, and
Finally, at the last,
Ashamed, I went there . . .
And said those words.
But it did not end like that.
How could it? For I'm not
A simple man and ever stood
A certain distance from my heart.
It's true I could not lift my eyes;
And the words — I hardly knew
I spoke and that's a sign . . .
Of something, perhaps of real contrition.
But, as I say, I'm not a simple
Man and could not help
But mark how overwhelmed
I was, how true my voice;
And could not help but
Wonder (from a piece, a chink
of me that will not crack) if,
So despairing (nearly) of salvation,
I might not so be saved —
And I looked up . . .

The Show That Never Ends

Mark Guerin

"Infinity" is showing this morning
at the bathroom theatre
through the filmy frames of the mirror
staring bleary-eyed at you
and at the mirror behind you.

Time-lapse photography,
an infinite flip card show
shown backwards
starring you as Mr. Forever
grumbling the soundtrack.

Between the rails of lights
bordering this morning's mirrors
rides the train of thought, the plot:

You, the human repercussion
of all time and space, standing
toothbrush in hand on each tie
being ridden out on the rails
into the black dot horizons
of your eyes.



Donna Skupien

Carp

Christopher D. Guerin

When Jesse ran full tilt his own back yard with a can of corn in his hand, each morning from hill crest down to river bank, he'd stare straight the whole way at a low, river-eaten willow stump on the bank, but concentrate only on the merging rush of green that was like a blinder forcing him to stare at the stump. It was like changing yourself the look of things.

The can wouldn't be open yet. Down on a knee with a pocketknife attachment, he slowly linked a circle of punctures and pushed the lid through, careful not to cut himself. Having used it to strain out the juice and milky sweet water, he pried the jagged lid out of the can with the knife blade.

The kernels ticked hollowly on the blanket-like surface of the narrow river he could barely heave a stone across. His hands felt sticky and good heaving the corn which came splaying down like heavy yellow rain drops. He watched them hesitate, still yellow, then submerge, become brown pellets for the second before disappearing in the murk.

The next three hours were the only hard to get through ones in the day. He'd learned to make a game of passing time till the carp would sure be there, sucking at the corn. Between glimpses at a tiny red volume of Poe stories, or between whole stories at times, he'd jump from chair to chair in another room, then back or to another room and chair. To keep from mother's way unless she ask him to do some chore. Caught, he'd have to moan and gripe and pass the buck to his younger brother, the late sleeper, saying 'he should be up anyway.' But he didn't always like the game though he enjoyed playing it. Sometimes caught, he thought it might be worth it doing the job; they were never too big. But it was easy getting reprieved and why shouldn't Jimmy do something once in a while? And she gave in quick, but sometimes went away grumbling which made him feel like reading one of the longer stories without stopping.

The sun eased like a bright wind-forsaken balloon to a place pointed to by the white spire of his church across the river. Next the spire four bulb-clustered light poles stood like scepters from a baseball diamond obscured by trees. Jesse could take in from his bedroom window a completeness, as if designed that way for him alone, composed of river-bordered backyard with a field big as a country meadow at the base of a hill; river which he boated and fished, though didn't swim; sun above a spire telling him the carp trap was set; diamond he rowed across to three nights a week to play second base upon; and an ice-flow-battered willow stump he propped his fishing rod against. Half through the 'Murders of the Rue Morgue' he set the book down closed and ran to the basement.

Two trips got everything down to the river. With the tenderness of a priest transporting the sacrament, he took rod, reel and tackle, two slight hands full. Like a threatened slave he hauled the rest—lawn chair, fishing net, a sharp gaff for a lunger dream, radio, bugspray, and a tall glass of iced tea. The last he drank a quarter of arriving. Set up next the stump with gear about in easy reach, radio turned well up resting in the grass, he threaded a dozen kernels exactly on a treble hook and cast out to the center of the area he'd chummed. Then he propped the pole, tip up high, against the stump.

When nothing happened the first five minutes he wondered should he throw in another handful of corn. He'd never been sure. He saw them down there—green-golden oblongs with dull penny eyes and thrumming fins—wandering blind in or just above the mud, blindly following their noses. He'd heard somewhere a carp could smell food from half a mile upstream. Impossible. Maybe catfish could do that, but not a carp. Carp were just dumb scavengers that fought good, tasted terrible unless you cut away the vein of mud in their bellies, and killed off all the good gamefish in any waters they infested. He fished them because they were in his backyard. He didn't even need a license. He thought of them down there; tried to guess their mood. Sometimes they were like a herd of vacuum cleaners sucking free corn and baited hook with equal lack of suspicion. The hook would often go to their bellies and he'd have to cut them open, careful of the smell. They fought like light logs hooked that way. Other times each would seem as

implacable and wary as a submarine, worrying over the bait, nudging it, mouthing it, even slapping it with the tail (proved by his having hooked two that way), causing barely noticeable dips in the nervous tip of his fishing rod. When that happened he knew never to strike back too quickly. He'd wait till they'd sucked it good before setting the hook. Now he decided to hold off the throwing of another handful of corn. His hook might rest in the midst of fifty kernels.

Instead, he drank the rest of the tea and turned off the radio.

Upriver, halfway to a high red trestle, three small boys were trying uproariously to pole a barrel raft against the current. Jesse wondered he saw them only now. The raft looked like it might once have been part of a pier; it had a handrail on one side. The boys splashed and cursed each other, entered the water for seconds to swim to another side and get on again, laughed. Jesse hoped they wouldn't give up and allow the current to shove them over his fishing hole. In twenty minutes they'd disappeared beyond the rusted, never-used trestle and left Jesse to watch the motionless tip of his pole and a robin that crossed and re-crossed the river.

The way it was propped against the willow stump the motions of the water behind gave the illusion that the rod bent slightly. He remembered once when he was little wading to find the river flowing upstream—he'd felt silly when they told him it was just the wind pushing the surface of the water. He could tell differences now—no carp was nibbling. *Of course*, he thought, when the pole twanged sharply and went still. Bent over, fingers curved untouchingly around the cork, he waited, the sun off the river in his eyes. The line went slack, began to drift. He waited. Pushed the can of insect spray out from under the spinning reel. Like turning around the line strung taut, stiff and alive as he reared back, doubling the pole down on itself like a question mark. The reel whistled as the carp took line. By the time he'd turned its run the fish had fought the better part of its strength away. When safely scooped in the net, only its pale throat and gill flaps quivered. Jesse had never seen a fish hooked this way. The mouth drawn tight like sewn up, one hook held the lower lip, the other two the upper.

By five o'clock a row of five dull-golden bodies lay still or panting on the

bank. Jesse always left them there for the raccoons, who dragged them away by morning.

The fishing had gone dead. Not a bite in over an hour. Nothing was rejuvenated by his throwing in more corn. The line drooped into the river lifeless as a severed mooring. The appearance of things changed, was changed by expectation, then rendered something else by frustration. The river looked like a brown blanket; waves caused by the movement of hands and fingers beneath—which also scared away the fish. What had it seemed like earlier that afternoon, after the first nibble? Why, the carp had *been* the fingers and hands. Jesse smiled. He heard someone call to him and looking around saw his father wave to him from the top of the hill. He waved back; yelled for his father to come down.

"Not right now, son. I'm going to sit and relax for a while." Jesse could hardly hear him. He could see his mother sitting in a lawn chair with a glass in her hand and a red scarf around her hair. Jimmy was near them playing with the neighbor's cocker spaniel—the dog his father said had had the brains bred right out of it.

Jesse reeled in the line and found the bait untouched; decided to try one more cast, and quit. It'd be good to catch just one more, he thought. The sun which had made his hair hot all afternoon was beginning to cool. He wished it would rain. That always kept them biting. Thinking it a bird he ignored a rustling in the rushes to his left. He'd found a nest with four black-speckled white eggs there a few days ago. Grackle eggs, more scavengers. A splash close on the bank sent a ripple out. Jesse leaned forward and saw a small turtle floundering half in the water, stirring up clouds of mud and silt. Finally, a snapper, Jesse thought. The only time he and his father had fished this river together had been to catch a snapper to make soup. They'd caught bluegills with tiny hooks, knifed off the heads and tails, and stuck the bodies on thick double-barbed hooks. Each line had three hooks and a lead weight on the end. They'd left them out overnight for three weeks, but never got lucky. The closest they came was to have one of the hooks snapped in half. Jesse was not surprised to see the slow ferocious strength of the turtle as it chewed on the body of a small dead sucker. Then it left its free meal and came down toward him. He quickly reeled in. Standing

up to the edge of the low bank with a hand on the stump for support he leaned out and dangled the corn, intact on the treble hook, under the snapper's nose. It bit with all the hungry eagerness of a toy steamshovel. Jesse hauled it up on the bank, surprised at its slight weight, and yelled up to his father he'd caught a snapper. The six inches of its shell glistened green through the mud.

Anxious, he played with it. Let it walk a few inches, then, pulling up, turned it around. Watched it walk seemingly just to walk. Unlike a carp it didn't seem to know it was trapped. What a stupid thing, he thought.

His father arrived with a wood-handled hatchet. He smiled broadly and said that now they'd have a real soup. Jesse asked how to kill it.

"Just watch," said his father, and he winked. Jesse was glad he'd pleased him.

Stepping on the turtle's back, Jesse's father poked at its head with a short stick. Soon it began to snap viciously, jabbing out its head on a long and wrinkled gray neck. The snap of the jaws was like a finger-snap. Then he offered the stick. The turtle grabbed it and held tight. He pulled; the neck came out as far as it would go, and he cut it at the shell. The red shot hissing. The head still clung to the stick so that he had to force it off with the hatchet butt. Jesse marveled how quickly the death had taken place. He remembered something, and went to make sure the carp were dead.

"Jesse, come here. I want to show you something."

When he came back—he'd had to hit one with a stone—his father gave him a small lecture. He poked the turtle's head with his finger, explained where the ears were, the nose, how the neck could be extended so far. Jesse heard the snap again and saw more blood. The skin off a knuckle was gone. Jesse crushed the head with the hatchet as the father ran swearing up to the house. Trembling, he picked up the turtleshell to throw in the river when he thought of the nest. He set it on the stump and went to look. He found three crushed eggs, spattered yellow. He looked up and the sun seeped, yellowish too, into the world as through a hole in the blue sky. He frowned and took the shell up to show his mother.

EXAGGERATIONS

Michael Antman

1.

Wading in the river, I can feel
Above my head the moon damp cliff,
All the world's height, behind me, there.

2.

I float on my back, lost, and see tilt
The great black wall of the night
Over the cliff, no larger than myself.

3.

Panicked, I clamber onto the bank:
There are things at river's bottom could suck
Your eyes out, through the bottom of your feet.

4.

Later, making camp, I think of
Firefly sperm, other things I've never seen,
Brush my arm, brush the back of my neck.



Gary Nichols



Susan Moffett

The Dear

David Antos

I

She forgets gloves
So her hands chap
And bleed a little.
Everyone notices,
For last fall her hands were the color of shells
Not beets. She knows what they see.

II

A girlfriend presents her with hand lotion,
Demands to see globs
Slipping into the cracks.
"Gimme your palms . . . rub it in good . . .
Thatagirl" and she blushes to think
What it cost. It lies cool, the tube unpinched
Beneath her oldest clothes.

III

Spring seals her, but one hot night
Like a moonlighting maiden she thirsts
For a little blood on the side,
Something to wink with as she passes
Potential lovers and the old familiar tyrants;
She wipes her fist against a knife.
It didn't hurt as much as she'd feared.

IV

"What happened to your hand?"
Her mother jerks it from behind
Her back and gapes at scabs,
Demands explanation. "Did you
Do it to yourself? Did you do it
To yourself?" She blushes at that
Absurdly serious tenor. "I was climbing over
A barbed-wire fence."

V

All night she wonders at the woman's
Attitude, remembering the bone-hard lips
That made her search for a lie to throw them.
Next day, again
Eager to be desperate, she decides
It's time for a shave and thinks,
A smirk coiling out of her brain
Like a worm out of dissolving earth,
You haven't seen anything yet.

Walking out into Early Fog

Flora Foss

Walking out into Early Fog

No clear path
where I have to go from here.

Old bones of snow
drift into billowed fog.

A door slammed behind somewhere,
muffled, now lost.

The silo, an old lighthouse,
looms perilously near

the hulls of buildings;
their dreamy cargo shifts, aimless.

I, too, adrift, cloudy,
cannot reach there in time,

suddenly, turning, know the tree,
marvelous breaker cresting

(a roaring silence builds),
hurls with its icy breath

promise of air burned clear
by oracles of morning sun.



The Poetry of James Dickey and Theodore Roethke: Wallace Stevens' Rejected Extremes

Michael Antman

"wholly
Containing the mind, below which it
cannot descend,
Beyond which it has no will to rise"¹

I.

If, as D. H. Lawrence has said, the mark of the superior intellect is the ability to hold two or more completely contradictory ideas at the same time, then Wallace Stevens easily, consciously and exultantly places himself in that category through the medium of his poetry. For the entire corpus of Stevens' work, seen as a whole or poem by poem, gives us a picture of a magnificently complex, fitful and unsatisfied intellect. Even in "The Well Dressed Man With A Beard," which begins with the affirmative and serious resolution "After the final no there comes a yes/And on that yes the future world depends,"² he ends by saying, perhaps gloriously, perhaps resignedly, likely both: "It can never be satisfied, the mind, never."

Statements like that tend to support the view that Stevens' frequent self-contradictions and his unresolved questions and ironies were indeed conscious, and as well a thing to be exploited, even to be exulted in; for to do less than that would be to engage in less than the true preoccupation of poetry. The idea that poetry gains richness and resonance through the use of ambiguity, irony and unresolved tension may, of course, be open to debate; but it is a position, in this age after the Symbolists and Eliot and Empson, that is unquestionably legitimate.

But the ambiguity of the poetry must have a logical relation to the poet's perception of the world, and Steven's perception was that "The squirming facts exceed the squamous mind."³

The poet must take the world as it is, Stevens says, but since we cannot pinpoint,

except for brief moments when the world and metaphor come together, *what* the world is, we must, whether we engage in metaphor or not, participate in the process and wildness of reality, whatever its pleasing or negative aspects. And the poems, never-resting, never fully understandable, will reflect this, in statement, form and effect. As Stevens says in "The Poems of Our Climate":

There would still remain the
never-resting mind,
So that one would want to
escape, come back
To what had been so long
composed.
The imperfect is our
paradise.
Note that, in this bitterness,
delight,
Since the imperfect is so hot
in us,
Lies in flawed words and
stubborn sounds."⁴

Faithfulness to reality, then, is one reason for the unsettled ambiguity of Stevens' poetry. But another reason, paradoxical at first, is rooted precisely in Stevens' belief in the shaping power of the imagination. As Frank Lentricchia says:

The particular end toward which Stevens shapes and directs verbal effects is the "idea of order," a pleasing illusion in language which releases the poet from his barren and sometimes ominous circumstances. For the naturalistic flux can never satisfy the human hunger for permanence or coherence . . . [But] Stevens' only admonition is that we recognize an aesthetic ordering—"the gaiety of language"—as merely linguistic. Accordingly, the honest poet and the honest reader will recognize

that the poetic illusion is merely an illusion projected by artifice and not a penetration to a more deeply inter-fused ontological structure."⁵

Because Wallace Stevens, that most honest of poets, compels us to see his illusions and, at the same time, see *that* they are illusions, his poetry gains in richness and complexity while at the same time it loses in dramatic impact.

ANECDOTE OF THE JAR

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a
hill.

It made the slovenly
wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around it, no
longer wild.

The jar was round upon the
ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or
bush,
Like nothing else in
Tennessee.

Wallace Stevens has said in an essay that "the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of earth remains to be written."⁶ Clearly, with his poetic gifts, if he had attempted such an enterprise, Stevens could have established a position as one of the great poets of any language, of any time. But there was inherent in his intelligence, in his careful modulation between the powers of reality and imagination, and in his honesty, a basic limitation that made this task impossible. For Stevens, perhaps too intelligent for his own good, the jar (the poem) as a human artifice can order reality only at the expense of its own wildness, clarity and fecundity.

II.

Theodore Roethke has said that "[I have] a driving sincerity—that prime virtue of any creative worker. I write only what I believe to be the absolute truth—even if I must ruin the theme in so doing."⁷

That sincerity which Roethke mentions may have been, by the evidence of his poems, less a conscious decision than an

unavoidable fact of his existence. For Roethke might be characterized as a victimized visionary, a visionary less by the positive power of his vision than by the negative vulnerability of his sight. His is a vision of impingement, of a total lack of control or intellectual understanding: "My heart keeps open house, / My doors are widely swung . . . / I'm naked to the bone."⁸

And yet, if he is intellectually deficient in his poetry, on a purely sensory level—in his greenhouse poems, his sex poems and the terrifying sequences—Roethke is chillingly aware. The impression one gets is of a sloppy animal/child, dabbling in the mud, pulling at roots, but with the visual acuity and astonishing range of psychic joy and anguish to be expected from the man he, of course, was:

Come littlest come
tenderest,
Come whispering over the
small waters,
Reach me rose, sweet one,
still moist in the loam,
Come, come out of the
shade, the cool ways
The long alleys of string and
stem;
Bend down, small breathers,
creepers and winders;
Lean from the tiers and
benches,
Cyclamen dripping and lilies.
What fish-ways you have,
littlest flowers,
Swaying over the walks, in
the watery air,
Drowsing in soft light, petals
pulsing.

Light air! Light air! A pierce
of angels!
The leaves, the leaves
become me!
The tendrils have me!⁹

The naivete, the pure childlike joy and fear, the animal/human empathy with nature Roethke expresses in his poems may well be a conscious pose, a way of getting out of one's own mature and tortured sensibility:

Self-contemplation is a curse
That makes an old confusion
worse . . .
Long gazing at the ceiling
will
In time induce a mental ill.¹⁰

This, of course, indicates a certain conscious choice on Roethke's part, an ordering of subject matter by which he purposely avoids the self-destructive poetry of meditation or solipsism. This choice is evident in the body of his work.

And yet, there is another, less conscious choice, or evasion if you will, in Roethke's work. Because of his remarkable two-way communication with nature, there is in his poetry none of the subject/object, reality/imagination conflict that has intrigued or plagued Western man in one form or another from Plato through the Romantics and up to the modern age. The conflicts in Roethke are of an entirely different sort. Avoiding the questions because they have no relevance for him does not make Roethke any less a poet. But, except for one man, the questions themselves are made not one whit less vital.

III.

"A friendly professor, Monroe K. Spears, encouraged him to write more poetry, and when he found that Dickey felt he must only describe actual experiences, urged him to write as the poem, rather than the experience, necessitated. 'That idea was the bursting of a dam for me,' said Dickey."¹¹

The bursting of a dam indeed. At entirely the opposite pole from the approach of Theodore Roethke is that of James Dickey, though the two poets are, merely by virtue of being visionary, irrational and apocalyptic poets who have attempted to expand the range of the humanly and poetically possible, very much alike. The metaphor of a dam bursting is as appropriate for Roethke, who, by the evidence of his letters and biography, apparently wrenched himself, at terrible cost, into an attitude of constant and unblinking receptivity to poetry, his past, and the phenomena of nature. For Dickey, the release from rationality takes the form of a poetry that in its narrative and metaphorical elements, if not in its structure or images, stretches to what seems to be remarkable lengths the limits of one human imagination. Sometimes this does take the form of far-fetched, if highly enjoyable, Clevelandisms, such as:

Far away under us, they are
mowing on the green
steps
Of the valley, taking long,
unending swings

Among the ripe wheat . . .
[There] is a blue-black storm
the shape of this valley,
And includes, perhaps, in its
darkness,
Three men in the air
Taking long, limber swings,
cutting water.
Swaths start to fall . . .¹²

Or:
I leave the house, which
leaves
Its window-light on the
ground

In gold frames picturing
grass . . .
Where all is dark . . .
the lights of the house
of grass, also,
Snap off, from underground.¹³

More often, however, it is in the actual narrative elements of his poems that this imaginative artifice is manifested. True, like Stevens, there is always an admonishment buried in Dickey's poems that what is being presented should be seen only as the product of a poet's imagination, an illusion. But that is only a device Dickey, like any author who deals in fantasy of one kind, uses to keep us from laughing at him. But this device does not diminish our ultimate *believing* of the story, in the same sense that on one level of our psychology, we once did consciously and still do subconsciously believe the fairy tales and other stories we were told as children.

Dickey deals in a kind of magic realism, or "country surrealism" as he prefers to call it, that lends his poetry that quality of artifice and unbelievability, and at the same time its tremendous power. Surrealism in its original manifestation meant nothing more than a sort of super realism; the kind of heightened realism that we see in objects when we stare at them too long, and they become suddenly strange; or the psychological realism of objects in dreams or fairy tales or myths. What Dickey does is create surreal myths out of the experience of the 20th Century rural and suburban person.

An idea of the imaginative deceits Dickey is shaping may be suggested by brief summaries of some of his poems: Farm boys who commit sodomy with sheep are made aware of a legend intended to frighten them off: in a museum in Atlanta there is a half-child, half-sheep born of a

bestial union. In the second part of the poem, the sheep child, pickled in a jar, speaks, and describes how its mother was raped by a farm boy; and how it was born, lived for a few moments—enough time to have one meal of milk and see the world from both sides, human and animal—and die.

A lifeguard who has failed that afternoon to rescue a drowning boy sleeps among the lifeboats and dreams that he is walking on the water of the lake. He rescues the boy in his dreams only to have him turn to water in his arms.

A stewardess (the premise is taken from an actual news account) falls from a defective door in a jet plane. Falling to earth, she undresses calmly, and as she does, all the sleeping girls in the Midwestern towns below feel their spirits rise; the men all get erections in their sleep.

A hobo is discovered by yard bulls attempting to jump a freight in the Depression. They beat him severely, and crucify him on the door of a freight car as the train travels through the Midwest. Through the nails in his hands, the hobo can feel the vibrations of the rails and the land they pass over. From this, he gains a mystical, intuitive knowledge of America and becomes wealthy by knowing where to dig oil wells and where to build successful shoe stores.

On an even simpler level, Dickey transposes his experiences at home by pushing to metaphysical limits ordinary, mundane, and unheroic events, like a bad sunburn or a short circuit in a suburban house.¹⁴

All of James Dickey's poems rest on the principle of conscious deceit, the imaginative warping or heightening of ordinary reality towards certain mystical and highly affecting ends. In this respect, he is like a modern mythmaker, a highly affirmative embracer of a world that is ultimately coherent, meaningful and discrete from the poet's consciousness.

Once again, as in Roethke, certain aspects of the poet's vision have made the question of godlessness, absurdity, and the conflict of imagination and reality irrelevant. But, again, the fact that the questions have been rendered irrelevant within a particular poet's universe does not necessarily mean that they have been

answered for anyone else's satisfaction. There is only that possibility.

IV.

We have in Theodore Roethke and James Dickey two poets who have resolved the conflict between imagination and reality posed by Stevens by, in the former case, being unaware of the problem and accepting reality and the subsequent feelings of terror and joy at face value; and in the latter, by simply disregarding the importance of absolute faithfulness to reality and exploiting the human imagination for all its possibilities. Where Stevens is intelligent, Roethke is mindless; where Stevens is honest, Dickey is dishonest. Taking the modulated concerns of Stevens as occupying central ground, Roethke has sunk grubbily below and Dickey has risen airily above, Caliban and Ariel to Stevens' Prospero.

But this is not meant to be quite so pejorative. True, Stevens is probably Roethke's equal as a formal technician and easily Dickey's superior; he is a far greater intellect than either. Nor does Stevens possess lesser emotional depth or sensory acuity than the two. But for all this, the poetry of Theodore Roethke and James Dickey is often far more powerful, exciting and emotionally compelling than any of the poems of Wallace Stevens. Stevens' poems have a workmanlike, didactic quality only partially compensated for by the surface brilliance of their language. But it will not do to say only that this is a fault traceable to Stevens; for all his careful modulation, he could be a very affecting poet at times, in pieces such as "Dry Loaf" and "The World As Meditation." Rather, it has more to do with the evasions of the other two poets under consideration. And so we are led to say that evasion in poetry or art in general may not always be bad; we can say, at least, that it often works. But we cannot say that Stevens was incapable of apprehending the extremes; his entire poetry demonstrates his awareness of them. He was conscious of the possibility of evasion but he rejected it; however this may have caused his poetry to suffer, he was at least always faithful to the nature of his sensibilities and to the perceptions of his intellect.

NOTES

¹Wallace Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry," in *The Palm At the End of the Mind* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 174.

²*Ibid.*, p. 190.

³*Ibid.*, "Connoisseur of Chaos," p. 176.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵Frank Lentricchia, *The Gaiety of Language: An Essay on the Radical Poetics of W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p. 136.

⁶Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 142.

⁷*On the Poet and His Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke*, ed. Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965), p. 39.

⁸Theodore Roethke, "Open House," in *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1975), p. 3.

⁹*Ibid.*, "The Long Alley," p. 58.

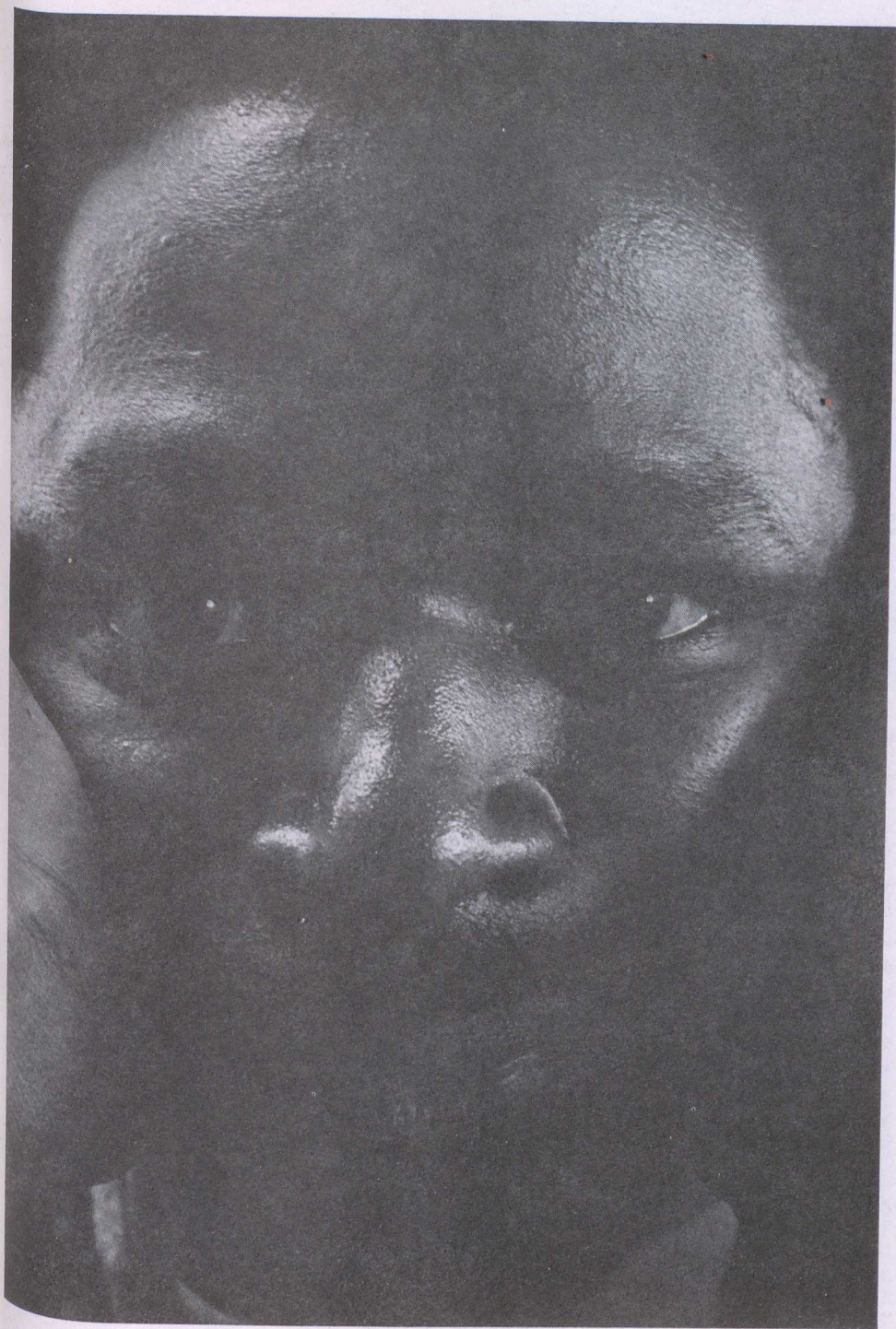
¹⁰*Ibid.*, "Lines Upon Leaving a Sanitarium," p. 249.

¹¹James Dickey, *Self-Interviews* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 65.

¹²James Dickey, "The Beholders," in *Poems: 1957-1967* (New York: Collier Books, 1967), p. 143.

¹³*Ibid.*, "The Vegetable King," p. 23.

¹⁴Norman Silverstein, "On James Dickey," in *Contemporary Poetry in America*, ed. Robert Boyers (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 304.



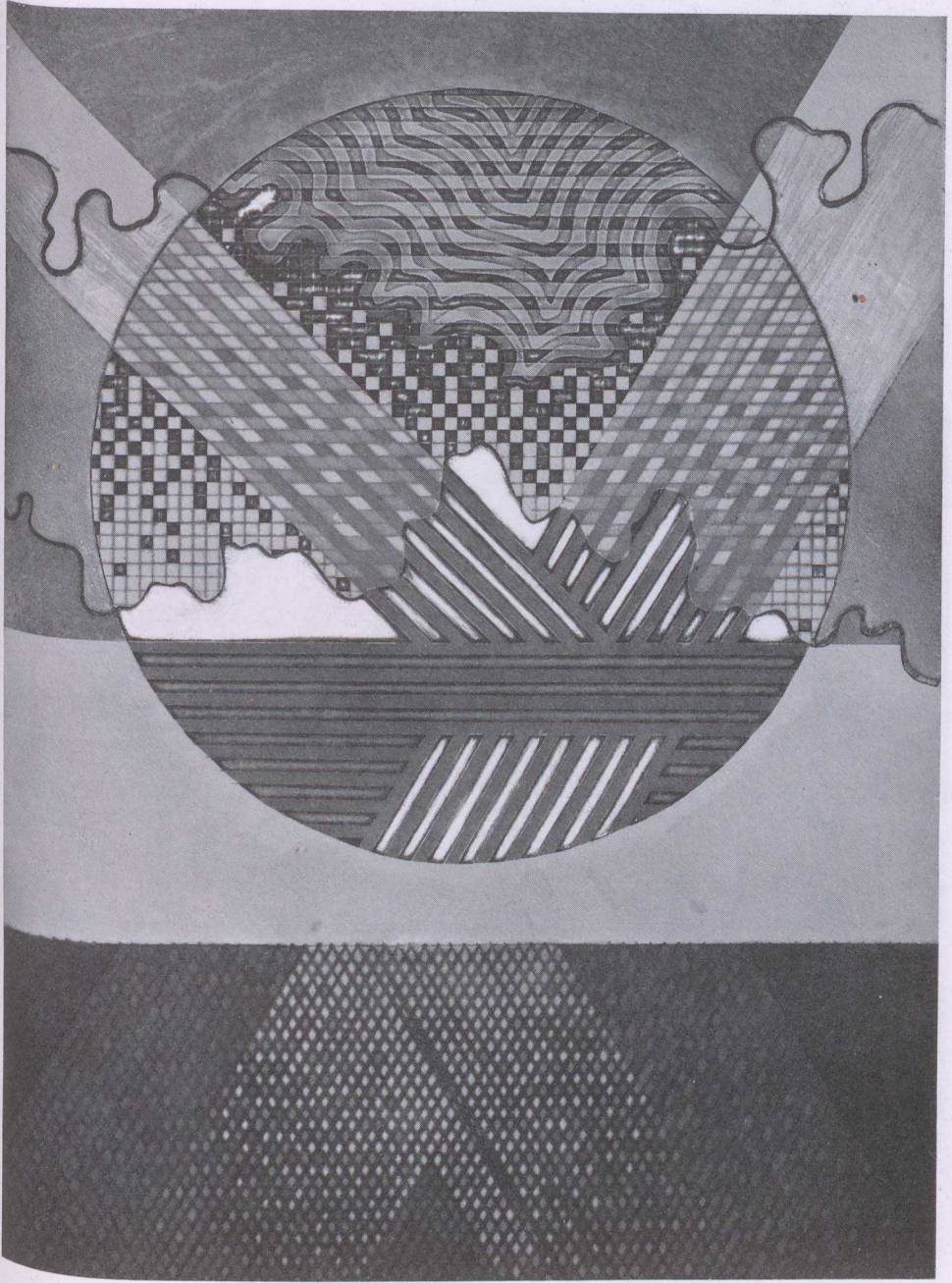
Elizabeth Silverman

Breeding Jazz

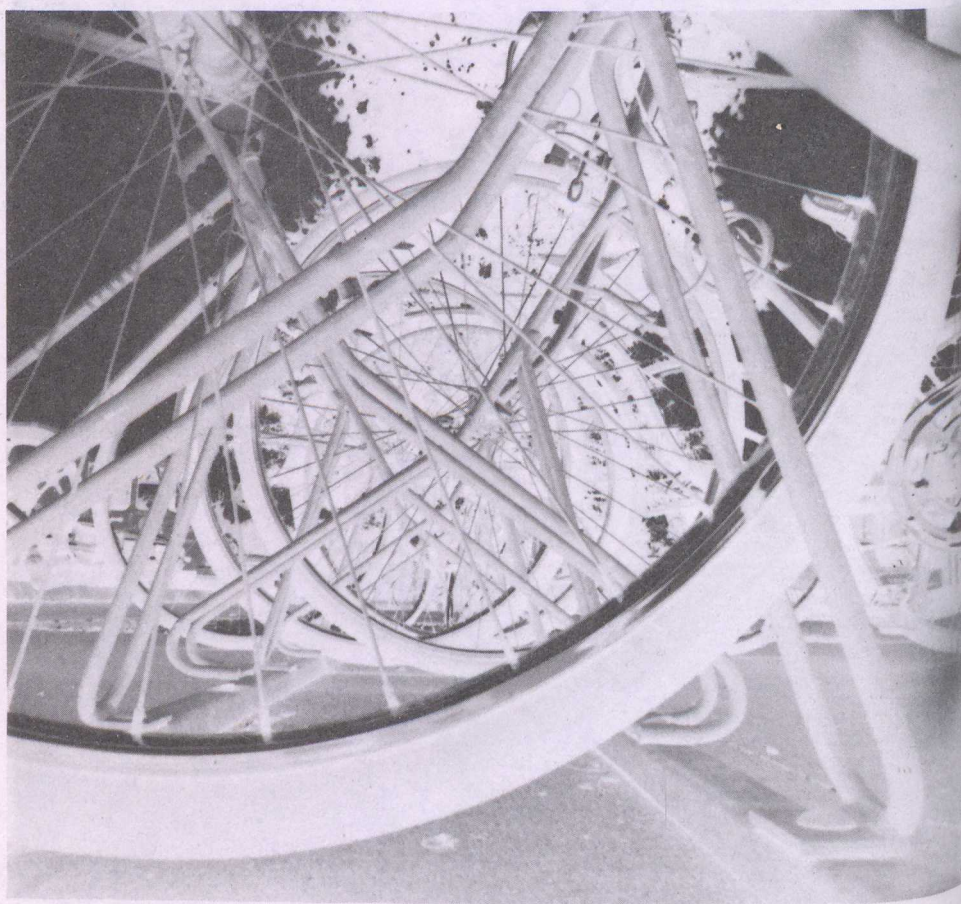
Mark Guerin

The pianist's fingers are like a seine
whose mesh of the ivory stream underlaid
is of ebony shadows, starless black holes
that whirlpool, sucking at C-scales
to flatten, fault or fold,
swirl past those timeworn webs,
finger free in trebling shallows,
spawn the consummation of a chord
under chubby flesh mounting
the slick green moss of silence.

Once those old strains of a tail-end sustained
die in suspension like a salmon upstream,
silence breeds a sharp-note given quick birth,
side-slipping, a spoonful of sun at side-glance:
those strange new scales surface
like a dorsal trills split-water-seconds,
afterbirth trailing in a wake of echoes.
Then it escapes in the rapids,
rushing to waterfall where foreign currents
carry it, instinctively,
till again that arduous accrescendo.



Peter Cohan



Terry Kiefer

Tom Miller

It drifts absently, an *eminence grise*,
Back and forth above the town. It cleaves
The aether, engines growling, haughty, ominous
Like a celestial Samuel Johnson.

The lone survivor of a great, dead race,
Restively it plies the higher, blue spaces
Like someone or another seeking Osiris
Or pacing, burning echoy, leaden hours.

A tailbone, pineal body, in time
An appendix or tonsil, use unknown or forgotten,
It alone keeps its purpose and to itself,
Maintaining distinguished views, approaching extinction.

Flora Foss

The wood in snow

making its own country
froze at our entry;

wildweed exploding hung
crystal nests of breath;

milkpod statued in flight;
wings lifted;

wood's vibrant shoulders
keeping still

though sun's iced river burns
its medals on white limbs.

Difficult, from the light grasp
of drifts, lifting one foot,

another. Hearts, too, poised
just above the flight

that shatters exile, falls
evenly, gently over all.



Stephanie Lee Ostmann



We wasters of sorrows!

How we stare away into sad endurance beyond them, trying to foresee their end! Whereas they are nothing else than our winter foliage, our sombre evergreen, one of the seasons of our interior year,—not only season—they're also place, settlement, camp, soil, dwelling.
Rainer Maria Rilke

We Wasters of Sorrows

Christopher D. Guerin

You are teeth-crushing the juicy pulp of a tart orange and the flavor goes water, tasteless, a little dry. You are walking a woodpath in deepest summer light, and even the leaves of sky among high branches and green leaves seem green, then go black and white; all goes black and white and you keep on walking.

I want to tell you a story about the time my wife died in my arms.

I was watching television—we were watching television. Tennis, I think. The player this side of the net always seemed to be winning the point. From the sharply visible stroke of his arm came the sense that proximity was strength. Margaret lay head propped on my lap, munching sunflower seeds, swallowing the shells. I was conscious of her being close in relaxation, natural, potential. In the middle of a set she turned over and hugged me, buried her face in my neck. She then stopped. Had said no word. My left hand cupping her nape felt first the limpness coming like slow approaching flame. Then both arms and lap felt the weight of her gathered in death.

I did not move, knowing her death, except to turn off the television remote control. I sat still long after my thoughts could tell me anything new. No exertion was needed to hold her there against my chest. Imagining my face to bare a patient look, as one awaiting a sleeper's rise, I would now and then grimace and frown. Once, a funny face. There was little else to do. I let her head droop back. The green eyes had closed.

I studied things about the room, but mostly Margaret's face. Not that long at a time. Behind the portable TV was the fireplace. It occurred that should the wind be blowing at all, some ruffling of ashes

would be seen. Doesn't blowing across a bottle opening arouse a motionless liquid inside? Nothing moved, but I couldn't be sure the wind wasn't blowing. On the mantle stood odd shapes and colors that in those moments I couldn't comprehend. Trying to conjure an eccentric emblem, I struck upon her having eaten the shells too. But it made me want to move and do something so I stared back at her pale quiet face. There was something there I knew and didn't care to disturb.

A subtle itch seeped into the skin at the top of my head. I carefully raised my right arm and rubbed the spot through gray-ing hair. Somehow unable to allow that hand to return to her waist, I rested it instead on the back of the couch. The phone rang—and rang unanswered. My left leg went to sleep.

In late autumn and after first frost there were no insects in the room. It seemed there should be just one to attend to for a moment. Enough, that thought—another kind of insect.

The pain was so rich I dared not acknowledge it. Quickly, turned away from her face to sight hold the first thing: my chair, black leather crinkled with my often weight; still glistening, like a new-bought black cauldron ready for the first lick of fire, from my dusting and wiping it that morning. At the aspect of the black chair eager fear, blasphemy inarticulate from fatigue, and shunting blood revolted each in its own way for the strongest hold—yet demanded no surcease of pain as that pain was beautiful. Was the ingredient of my refusal to say two words *she's dead* and lift from off me, because it was long past time, her so light body that never once lay upon my lap. And then I had to see my loving the pain and ruin it. I never used

to sit on the couch, but always in that black chair. Though she never once lay across my lap in any chair, it made me cry and reminded me again that I didn't care and this wasn't at all the way Margaret died.

The darkness obscuring corners and angles in the room had grow far too bright in its own way, so as I reached for the light chain I whispered a promise to stop playing the lampshade. A promise I promised not to keep.

Celebration Or, Mundane Home Repair

Gloria Wardin

Ten worlds explode while they sip wine. They wait
For clean, precision-gauged replacements. One
Will never have to worry if they're late:
If all else fails, one twists around the sun.

Another ten worlds pass. It's all the same,
Whether or not one saved the bolts to use,
And though the waste of planets is a shame,
One only needs a handy plastic fuse.

When thirty planets more have flamed and died,
The party guests begin to lose their calm.
The tool drawer jams, loose strings refuse to braid,
And someone thinks it might have been a bomb.

Remodeling a planet takes some sense:
Their Architect left in too many dents.

Dissertation

Cindy Smith

I know now

That the chipmunk squirrels
are not stuffed
That the ash pigeons
on the slant roofed library
will tumble down like
one hundred eighty two
slosh gray snowballs onto
the slate and mortar steps
That the young old philosopher's
beard is just
a facade to disguise a lusty innocence
That students never grow old
they just fade away
That the fortresses of
higher education are really only
filled with pudgy punchy administrators
That it is more gratifying to
be alone
than one amidst the crowd
That most crowds are
paradigmatic
of lonely people herding together
That god is only
an ontological argument
That we will all end
ultimately
tripping out in space
among
norfolk island pines;
chumming hummingbirds,
and some softened stones.



Gary Nichols



Marjorie Romine



YISRAEL

Maureen Miller

Unless entering from Jaffa Gate
you must walk
through dark alleyways
of the Old City.

Little Arab
boys, no shirts
girls, torn dresses
dirty bodies
dirty smiles
cup their hands to
you,
rubbing black eyes to bare shoulders.

You're not alone
walk to the right
Only, if you are a Hasidic Man
hatted, bearded, peyas bounce.

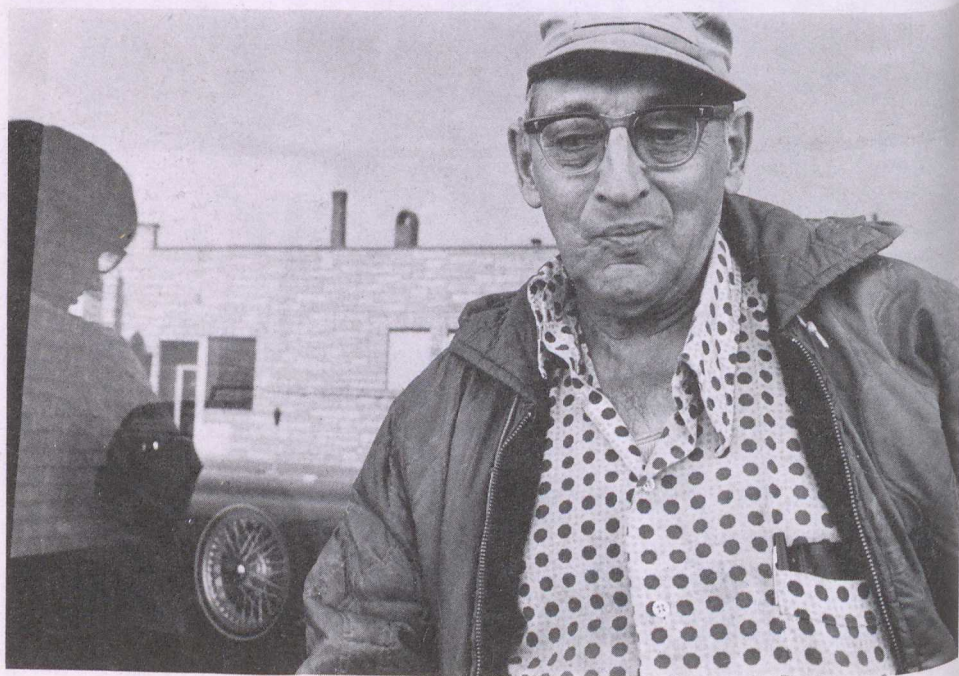
And THERE,
The WESTERN WALL, standing
(a crazed war veteran, wounds bound in innocence)
cracks filled with notes to God!

Men dance, singing
women don't dare
shawled heads
bowed to covered shoulders
cry, praying
with joy
The Sabbath is Here!
not thinking,
thinking of
always tomorrow
it will be gone.

They must live
six more days
to see it return.



Richard Hellman



Kay Eshelman

The Last Move

Dan McCarthy

Mr. McNally moved haltingly across bare floors, squeezing around the massive crates of his household goods. Wet rags slogged in a steaming bucket that he carried. His bare arms were tired; his T-shirt soaked with perspiration. The humidity made damp riglets of his thinning hair.

"In the dining room he plugged in a tall, shadeless lamp and switched it on, squinting at the sudden white glare. He set the lamp on a chair and began to soap one of the windows, rinsing and polishing each square of glass until it shone in the lamplight. From outside the black sky pressed against the panes.

Mr. McNally put down the hot, wet rag and stretched his aching shoulders. He was tired of washing windows but he still had more to do. Everything had to be done before the Labor Day weekend was over, and it was Saturday night already. Jesus, where does the time go? Beads of sweat rolled down Mr. McNally's neck. He put the lamp on the floor and sat down to smoke a cigarette.

The kitchen door swung open and Mrs. McNally looked in. She wore slacks and a faded blouse. Her hair was pinned up into tight little curls; her blue eyes were watering.

"I wanted to hang the curtains in here before it got dark," she said.

Mr. McNally flicked his cigarette ash into a cracked china saucer.

"I thought you were still ironing the curtains."

"Not the ones for this room. This is a front room. I was all ready to hang the front room curtains first." She leaned against the door, watching for him to spring back to work.

"Take it easy," Mr. McNally said. "I'll get the windows done." His wife pursed her lips primly together and backed out of the doorway. Mr. McNally heard the bang and rattle of cookware in the kitchen. Dinner was going to be pretty late.

Jim McNally's room was over the dining room. Mr. McNally could hear his son heaving furniture around, sliding dresser drawers into place. When he finished the dining room windows, Mr. McNally mopped his forehead and started upstairs. He walked heavily up the steps to an L-shaped hall, airless and dark except for the white line of light under Jim's door. Mr. McNally turned the knob but the door wouldn't open. He rapped three times.

"Open up."

Floorboards creaked as Jim approached the door, unlocked and opened it halfway. His face was flushed, eyes burning.

"What is it?"

Mr. McNally swung back and entered, looking around his son's new bedroom. The windows and floors were bare. There was little furniture—a bed, dresser, desk, and chair. The familiar pieces stood out from their surroundings, looking naked and battered against the freshly painted walls. Mr. McNally smiled to think that the room was as large as the living room of the old house. Jim stood in the doorway, arms crossed in front of him.

"What are you doing?"

"Just unpacking."

"What?"

"UNPACKING," Jim repeated. "Did you want something?"

"I could use some help with those downstairs windows," said the father.

"Your mother wants to put up her drapes right away. Now that it's dark, everybody can see in from the street." He saw the corner streetlight blink suddenly on as he spoke.

"Okay, I'll be right down." Jim crossed to the bed and removed a pile of shirts from his suitcase. His father opened the door of the closet and peered in. He wandered over to the desk and read the titles of a stack of books. Then he sat down appraisingly in the high-backed chair.

"How do you like this house?"
he asked.

Jim carefully arranged a shirt on a wire hanger.

"It's nice," he said. "Big."

"You like it?"

"Uh huh."

"What?"

"I LIKE IT," Jim shouted, adding something that his father didn't catch.

"You'll like having your own room, I bet. You'll need it, too, when you start college. For privacy. For a quiet place to study." His son went on hanging shirts and putting them away. "That old guy, Murphy, gave me one hell of a deal. This house has the biggest yard on the block; nice landscaping. The face brick goes all the way around. There's a big dinette area just off the kitchen, like your mother's always wanted."

"Yeah, that's really nice."

"The house needs work, though. The plumbing knocks. The roof hasn't been touched in years. Old Murphy couldn't keep up this big place."

"Why should he? He was old and feeble. And he was alone, his children grown up and married. He didn't need this house."

Mr. McNally watched his son put the last of the shirts on a hanger, cross the room to the closet, hang the shirt inside and return to the suitcase.

"Why do you walk all the way across the room with each shirt?" asked the father.

"You want to show me the right way to do it?"

"Well, you're all finished now."

"Then it was hardly worth mentioning, was it?" He snapped shut the suitcase and slid it under the bed.

Mr. McNally glanced around the room again. To him it looked barer than ever. "We'll have to get a couple more chairs in here," he remarked.

"What for?"

"What for? Hell, this room's twice as big as the one you used to share with Mikey, and it only has half as much furniture in it. Don't you think it looks a little empty?"

"I like it this way."

"Don't you even want a bookcase or something?"

"I'll probably take most of my books to school with me."

Mr. McNally turned around in the chair.

"You're not still thinking of going away to school, are you?" He watched Jim pick up a large brown carton and carry it into the closet.

"I'm thinking about it."

"What?"

"I SAID I'm THINKING about it."

"I thought you wanted to go to school here in the city."

"I did want to go to school in the city. But that was before we left the old neighborhood. Now I don't think I'll be able to." He lifted the carton up to the closet shelf.

"You know we couldn't stay in the old neighborhood," hissed his father. "It was getting too full of the colored. It wasn't safe any more. Your sister—"

"All right, I know, but it doesn't make any difference. I can't commute to school from here. We're too far from any campus. There isn't any public transportation."

"Yeah, but Jim, you could get yourself a car or something, couldn't you?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Let me think about it some more." He sat down on the side of the bed and reached underneath for his shoes. "It's time for me to go pick up Marge from work."

"One of her girlfriends will give her a ride," said Mr. McNally. Jim sat hunched over, tying his shoelaces.

"None of Marge's friends live out this way. I have to go get her."

Mr. McNally stood up and walked over to the door.

"I wish your sister'd quit that damn job. Thinks she's so independent." He turned to face his son. "I can give you kids everything you need. I can even get you a car, if that's what you want."

"Right now I'd settle for your car keys."

Mr. McNally detached a heavy key ring from his belt and handed it over.

"What does she do with her money? What does she need it for?"

"I don't know," said Jim. "It's none of my business." He hurried out of the bedroom and down the stairs.

"Hey, what about my windows?" his father called after him.

"Get Mikey to help you." The screen door slammed as Jim ran out.

Mr. McNally trudged back downstairs and into the kitchen. It was a large, bright room with slick walls of yellow tile. The countertops were yellow formica. Deep green curtains, neatly folded, lay on an ironing board in the middle of the work area. Saucepans bubbled on the stove. The heat of cooking and ironing hung over this end of the room. At the other end six empty chairs surrounded a table cluttered with cartons and stacks of dishes.

Mrs. McNally stood in front of the stove. With a long fork she turned pieces of chicken in a large frying pan. Dribbles of hot grease spattered on the stovetop.

"Where's Mikey?" Mr. McNally asked.

"He went out bike riding with some neighborhood boys," said his wife. "I told him to be in by six o'clock, but there's no sign of him."

Mr. McNally glanced at the kitchen clock. Eleven forty-one, it read. That couldn't be right. He realized suddenly that the clock wasn't running; wasn't plugged in.

"It's too dark for bike riding now," he said.

"I know it's too dark!"

Mr. McNally slouched into a chair at the head of the table.

"The dining room's finished," he said. "You can put up the drapes now, if you want."

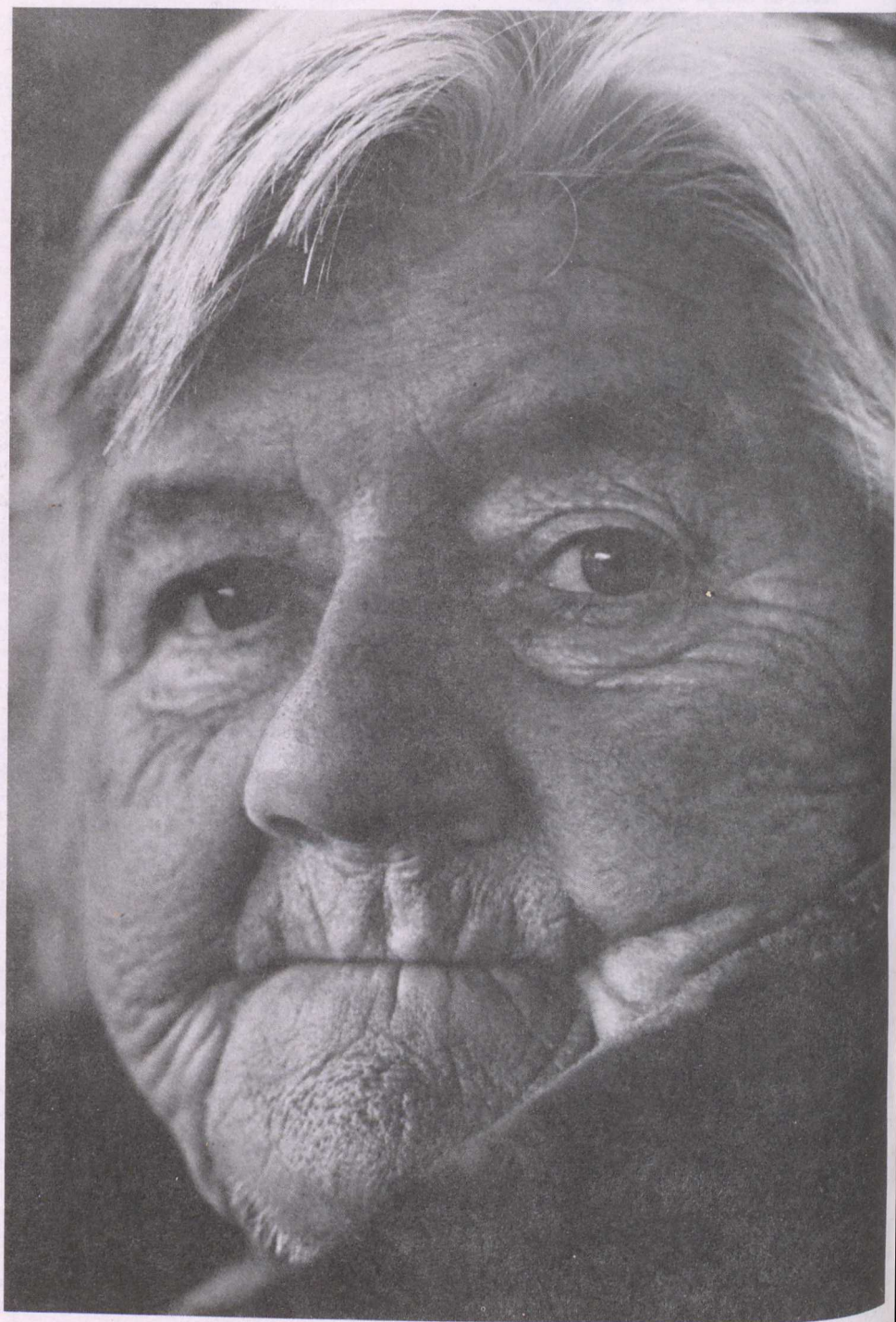
Mrs. McNally slammed the lid down on top of the frying pan.

"Oh, that's just fine. It isn't enough that I have to cook dinner for a family that isn't even here to eat it. Now I have to drop everything and go hang curtains, while you sit there!"

"Jesus, Marian, will you keep it down? Everybody on the block will hear you."

"Well, they may as well be able to hear; they can already see in!" She clamped a fistful of drapery hooks in her mouth like bobby pins and, sweeping the curtains up in her arms, pushed through the door to the dining room.

Mr. McNally reached into a carton on the kitchen table and pulled out a bottle of J&B. He found a clean glass on the counter and poured himself a drink. In the drain he found some teacups and a kettle. He turned on the tap and filled the kettle with cold water for tea. When you drink tea with your booze, you don't get so hung over.



Elizabeth Silverman

A Father Looks At His Son's Picture Book

Michael Antman

And here, spinning in the pitch cellar of a sea,
Caught in the lurid flashlight of some hack,
Is the agony of a whale been spun and stripped
By a horror-headed squid — a party-favor, ribbon-brained —
Soon, himself, to be torn in chunks, and gulped.

Drifting in the silence of the closed book, he
Remembers the last time he rode the ocean,
The night of the crying whales, their sounding lost,
In the dark streets of the sea, like children . . .
How he'd thought, when their weird pipings had passed

The stilled boat, of the city, those stifling nights
As a child, after games, by the window:
Down streets sunk to the tar in darkness,
Those calling voices, more desolate than snow.
And he on his bed, book loose in his hands, like now.

Suddenly, he wants him there, wants to grab him, hug
Him, the baffled kid, strip him of all fear!

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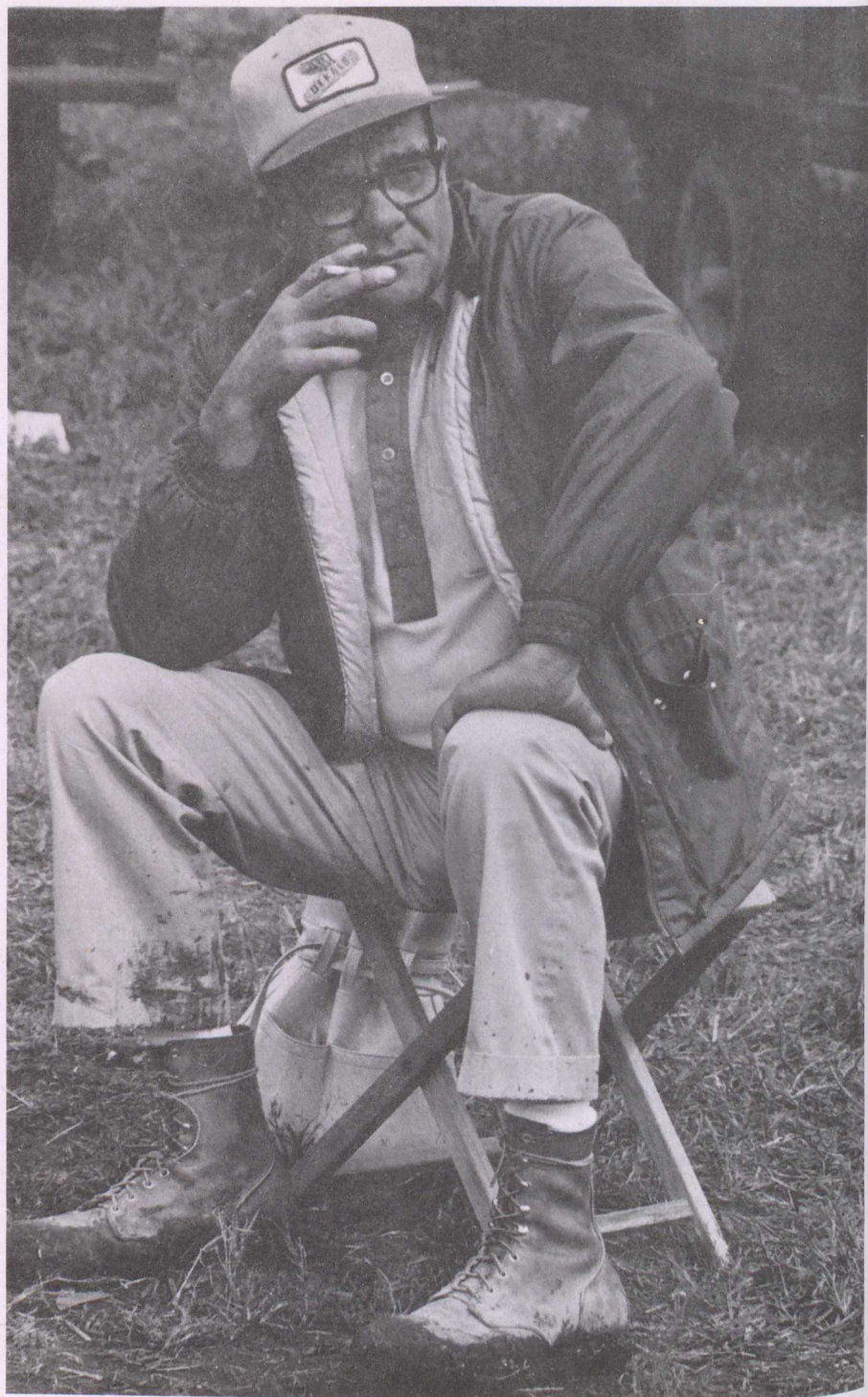
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