

**THE
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AN INTRODUCTION

This is the second edition of the Cottonwood Review. It is what might be called a free-lance magazine, because, although published at The University of Kansas, the staff will consider material from anywhere about anything and in any form imaginable. Its sole purpose is to provide an outlet for creative talent.

The play "Liberation" was last year's fiction contest winner. It was so obviously worthy of the \$50 prize that the teachers who judged the material and those of us on the staff all agreed to expand the definition of "fiction" so that it could be considered. What we now call the Cottonwood Review Prose Contest will be an annual affair open to anyone who wishes to send us a manuscript and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. And just recently we have decided to sponsor a poetry contest, as well. Further details about these can be obtained by writing to the Cottonwood Review, 118 Kansas Union, The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.

The Allen Ginsberg interview is something new. It is the first in what we hope will be a long series of interviews with the important writers of today. It was obtained when Mr. Ginsberg was visiting the University last winter. Sitting hunched over the tape recorder in the corner of a room containing a sort of welcoming party, he talked. Over guitar strings and people's voices he had, we think, some very important things to say. The interview printed here is exactly as spoken, with no rephrasing or censoring. The second, longer part of it will appear in the next issue of the Cottonwood Review, scheduled to come out some time in the middle of summer. In the issue after that will appear the second interview in the series, with the poet-prose writer Robert Creeley.

The Cottonwood Review is a rather sporadic publication; it comes out when we feel we have enough good material, and not before. In order to produce, with each successive issue, a better magazine, we need the best material obtainable. And so, we seek your help; read the magazine because the works herein deserve to be read -- and if you are of a creative frame of mind, let us consider your efforts. As Seymour Glass once said, "I want your loot!"

-- William Knief, Editor

ginsberg

Interviewer: The first thing I want to ask you is, what poets have influenced you particularly in your poetry and your poetic style?

Ginsberg: William Appolinaire, a French poet, 1910 or so; Ezra Pound; William Carlos Williams. . . . Primarily, however, above those, Jack Kerouac, who I think is the greatest poet alive, but is not well known as the greatest poet alive. William Burroughs, a prose poet. Christopher Smart, an 18th century friend of Dr. Johnson. Blake more than anyone, from spiritual points of view; an Indian poet named Kabir, another Indian poet who is called Mirabi, as well as an American poet who's called Emily Dickinson. And Whitman. A little Poe on account of the crankiness in it, and the spiritual isolation . . . a little of Vachel Lindsay . . . a little bit of Robert Creeley. Charles Olson. A lot of Shelly, and a lot of Rambo and Antonin Artaud, then Laforgue, a Frenchman, and Tuany Tzu, who is a Chinese philosopher-poet who said "I am going to speak some reckless words now and I want you to listen to them recklessly." And, um, a little bit of Mila-Repa, who is a Tibetan poet. And then a couple of other people, let's see, who else -- Gary Schneider occasionally, recently, influenced me a little, and Gregory Corso has influenced me a lot. And Orlovsky because I live with him, and listen to his conversation all the time, and his humor all the time, and his goofiness, influences my writing style a lot.

Interviewer: What is your opinion of what seems like the most widely accepted conventional poets at this time? I am thinking in particular of Sandburg and Frost --

Ginsberg: Accepted by whom? The question is, accepted by whom. Really, literally, it is a question of being accepted by whom.

Interviewer: Then you wouldn't accept them?

Ginsberg: No, I think they're fine poets. I don't think they're the best poets we've got around. Well, Frost is dead; Sandburg is a fine old man -- is he dead or alive?

Interviewer: I think he's still alive.

Ginsberg: Yeah, I think he's still alive, and he's a fine old poet, too; however, they're not necessarily the best poets that we've produced in this century. Like Pound was incomparably a better poet than, uh, Frost. William Carlos Williams was a much better poet than Frost. As far as my feelings and my uses are concerned, I can find more use for Williams and Pound than I could for Frost. And even if you stacked the work of Frost against the work of a younger poet like Gregory Corso, after one hundred years I think we'll all find a lot more use of Gregory Corso than we will have found out of Frost.

Interviewer: What fiction writers do you most admire? You mentioned poets, primarily.

Ginsberg: I'm not so much interested in fiction as I am in prose. And I do make that distinction, because fiction is a vaguer term, and prose means something. Prose means somebody interested in the composition of syntax, composition of a sequence of language that does reflect some actual process of verbal phenomena going on in the consciousness. So -- whereas fiction writers are interested in writing stories to sell for movies or something, a prose writer is interested in composition, in the sense that Gertrude Stein, who was a great prose writer, spoke of composition as creation. So the prose writers I am interested in are -- in America, you mean?

Interviewer: Well, let's start there.

Ginsberg: Kerouac, primarily, who continues into the sixties to be the most interesting composer of prose sentences, and also the most sincere and spiritual reporter of the phenomena of existence, and probably the wisest reporter, because he is one of very few who realizes that the universe doesn't exist, And second, William Burroughs, who has written a whole series of prose books that are affecting a lot of people, mainly the young, in the sense of altering their own sense of consciousness. And Hubert Selby, Jr., who wrote a book called Last Exit to Brooklyn, who has the virtue of being able to write a sentence in which three or four different people are speaking in different accents, and he doesn't use punctuation marks, but you could tell that there are three or four distinct people individually speaking. He's that wise and canny about accents and diction.

Another prose writer that I am in love with, Herbert Huncke, who is about fifty years old and never published anything except this year for the first time his journals were published by a small press in New York, and the book is called Huncke's Journal. About seventy pages of that have been published. And I think in a hundred years, we'll

look back on Huncke as the great creator of Americana, in the sense that Sherwood Anderson was. Huncke is the big ex-thief-junkie-hustler-faggot-charmer who's influenced a lot of people in New York. He's had a big influence on me and my poetry -- I left him out when I was talking about influences. He also had a big influence on Burroughs and Kerouac. But he never published anything and he never collected his writing. He just wrote little notebooks and nobody paid any attention to it until a few people began typing them up in the last few years, and now something's being published. The only place you can get that is through the City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco at 261 Columbus Avenue, or through the 8th Street Bookstore, 17 West 8th Street. If there's anybody interested in prose composition and wants to examine Huncke's Journals, they have to get ahold of them there, in those places.

Interviewer: What do you think of the --

Ginsberg: -- Other prose writers. We haven't finished with other prose writers, like Genet, and more importantly, Louis Fer de Nancy, who wrote a book called Journey to the End of the Night, and Death on the Installment Plan, and Guignol's Band, all of which were published by New Directions, as well as From One Chateau to Another, another book of his -- let's see -- who else is good in prose? Robert Creeley's prose is interesting, the book The Island -- Leroi Jones' prose is interesting. There's a novel by Michael McClure, of Wichita, which is interesting but has never been published -- all about fucking and drinking and riding around in the night mist with neon lights on the streets of Wichita when he was seventeen. And then another half of the novel is the same thing except it takes place when he is 27 and he's married.

And there's an unpublished book by a guy by the name of Kirby Doyle, Jr.: The Happiness Bastard, which is a great piece of prose also. That's a very great composition by a young kid about being a happiness bastard in America.

Henry Miller's prose is important. Sherwood Anderson's prose is important. William Carlos Williams' prose is important to me as specimens of real composition.

And going back before that, Gertrude Stein's prose is important. She's really, in a sense, the mother of prose composition. She was the first one to try to write prose without having any idea in mind as to what she was supposed to write; she wrote what was in her head at the moment of writing, where the writing itself was the primary activity, where the terms of the writing were the immediate consciousness of the moment while writing, whereas everybody else was looking into their memory -- or looking into space or looking into the future or looking into some imaginary project. She was the only one who looked into her head and the visible eternity around her while she was at the desk writing. And that was a big experiment and discovery, just like

Einstein's theory of Relativity.

Interviewer: You mentioned Sherwood Anderson. Hemingway, who was writing at about the same time and place as both Stein and Anderson, has said that he was profoundly influenced by these two. What do you think of Hemingway?

Ginsberg: Well, Hemingway was a nice guy, but he should have been sucking cocks for a while to get rid of the excessive necessity of being a man . . . because he had too formal an identity with being a masculine mammal. And that's not worthy of our species. Our species is much more variable and ample than that, which is something that Sherwood Anderson understood. Not that Anderson was a fairy, or anything like that, it's just that Anderson was a much more open soul to reflect the loneliness of the middle American scene, and the extremes of desire which grew like sunflowers in the middle of whatever state Anderson was from. Whatever lonesome earth he walked upon. See what I mean? Now Hemingway was a very, very great technician, and a good head and a real sharp mind, and basically a very sympathetic person. Especially toward his death. Especially in his prose of his last years he is much underestimated, I think. But Hemingway did have this problem of being too proud, with capitals PROUD -- like too proud! -- a desperate man. He had a nice beard --

Interviewer: Do you see any particular direction in modern American poetry today?

Ginsberg: Yeah. Toward reproduction of the actual consciousness of the poet, and communication of that, which is going to be the communication of the kind of consciousness which is just like the consciousness of the people listening. Meaning that he ain't gonna lie no more, meaning he's going to talk about the hairs around his asshole.

Interviewer: I noticed that that seemed to be a difference between your poetry and Whitman's; that you seem to have more of your own consciousness in your poems. Would you agree with that, or not?

Ginsberg: Whitman was constantly reflecting his subjective nature, and if you read Whitman aloud, it's pretty shocking. And he also had to deal with the repression of the time, and I don't. We have fought against that and beaten it down. So now we have free speech according to our American constitution, so that at this point a poet is constitutionally, legally, empowered to communicate to the public anything he wants to communicate. Whereas previously there was an isolation of constitutional rights by police, judges, publishers, district attorneys, mayors, newspapers, media of mass communication, where they all were conspiring to suppress individual expression, which

occasionally affected emotional or political life in what Whitman would call "these states." The Supreme Court has now said that you can't stop anyone from saying what he wants about persons. You see how that sentence ends. Persons -- meaning in the sense of persons, rather than objective Object. Someone can say something about feeling being the being who feels, and has imaginations and fantasies. So, anybody can say what he wants, now, about that, without being told that he's not supposed to have fantasies when they border on areas people want to repress, like sex. Or God.

Interviewer: Am I correct, then, in assuming that you consider sex and God fantasies?

Ginsberg: Everything is a fantasy; the whole universe is a fantasy. The universe doesn't exist.

Here, someone in the group of people around us asked, "Can you talk a little louder?" -- and Mr. Ginsberg replied,

I have to think while I'm talking and I can't orate. It's hard to think as it is, without having to talk louder. It alters the syntax if I have to scream. You see, it becomes abnormal if I have to talk that much louder. It's not normal any more. It would be interesting to have to satisfy the conditions of the microphone and the conditions of the ears. That's normal.

"We could ask the people to stop playing the guitars."

No, it's normal that they're playing Guitar strings in the background -- .

Interviewer: People have described your style of writing as being anything from obscenity to actual written music. How would you describe it?

Ginsberg: That's a good enough description.

It depends on who I was describing it to. As far as I'm concerned, like if I'm describing it to someone I know well and trust as a writer, like Kerouac, or Peter Orlovsky, or Corso, or Robert Creeley, or Charles Olson, I just say I'm scribbling whatever comes into my head, because that's really where the action's at. I'm not trying to write poetry. I'm not interested in poetry, I'm not interested in art. I'm interested in like reproducing the contents of my consciousness in a succinct, accurate way, trusting that the contents of my consciousness, as the contents of anybody else's consciousness, have symmetry and form and rhythm and structure and -- lack-of-logic like anybody else's. Like the whole universe, in fact.

After structure, before we got to lack of logic, there's a dash in the prose tran-

scription of this sentence. You understand? Structure and -- lack-of-logic -- to indicate a shift of thought. See, that's what I'm concerned with, the sudden shifts of thought; the sudden contradictions of mental activity, the shifts of thought which have a beautiful structure of their own, and if you try and eliminate those shifts and eliminate the rhythm of those shifts, you eliminate the music of thought and speech, and you eliminate the truthfulness of the way people communicate. So my writing, if it's going to be called writing, is actually simply a model of the consciousness which is manifest in language -- rather than a substitute or a denial of that consciousness. By substituting an artificial model. Like a model of "syllogistic" discourse.

Interviewer: Why do you write? What is the purpose of --

Ginsberg: Because I'm lonesome. I want to get laid.

Interviewer: Does the poet have a responsibility to his society, or his public, or to anyone he is writing to?

Ginsberg: If the universe doesn't exist, how could anybody have any responsibility for anything?

Interviewer: Then he writes simply out of and for himself?

Ginsberg: He isn't really writing. "The hand was not there that moved." And there's a lot of people that want the hand to be there and want responsibility and want the universe to be there, so they're going to be stuck with that on their deathbed, too, as it vanishes away from their grasp -- nobody's got no responsibility for nothin', in that sense. Not in the sense that you asked the question, so there's no responsibility at all. The only thing you might call responsibility, if you want to be high-fallutin' about it and use that kind of bullshit terminology, as "responsibilities," is that he does have the responsibility to reproduce the actual contents of his feelings and consciousness rather than the supposed contents or the contents that would please other people who have power to save him from the electric chair.

Interviewer: Technically, how do you write?

Ginsberg: I write in a little notebook like the one I have in my pocket now, called "Record," which is an 89¢ notebook I get at Walgreen's or wherever I can buy it, and it has little lines in it, and I scribble in it wherever I can. And when I retype it I follow the exact form that I wrote it in the first time, to note that the exact traces of the composition are left there in the poetry.

Interviewer: Do you ever rework a poem?

Ginsberg: Never, never.

Interviewer: Then it's absolutely spontaneous?

Ginsberg: It's not really even spontaneous; I either write it and it's there, as a record of that passage of time, a cut of time -- and that's something I learned from Kerouac, who is a genius at that, and like unalterably advanced into an area where what he has written he has written, and therefore how can he change it? In other words, if I walk down the street, how can I go back and retrace my steps and say I walked a different way? So actually, revision in his view is lying, because it's trying to cover the traces of mental activity or cover what seems to be embarrassing or too revealing. What's really important is like to reveal, not cover the revelation, so sometimes the revelation turns out dopey, or stupid, or uninteresting, so then I don't publish it, but what I do publish is whatever I have written that I don't have to change that really was there, when I was in a coherent, conscious mood while composing -- so that means you gotta write a lot. Which is the big discipline. You gotta write all the time, every day a little bit -- five minutes, at least.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to write "Howl"?

Ginsberg: Oh, a couple of hours. I wrote it in three different times; three different parts. I revised a little, not much.

Interviewer: When did you first start writing?

Ginsberg: I don't remember. I guess when I was eighteen, or something, like anybody else. Puberty, when I sprouted hairs around my pubis.

Interviewer: Do you consider your formal education to have helped you, to have been important to your writing?

Ginsberg: It blocked me from writing completely. In fact, in my formal education, I was taking a creative writing course at Columbia College, and started writing a piece of prose about my actual life and my actual existence, and the creative writing instructor who was the head of the English Department, a man named Prof. Steves, took it down to the dean of Columbia College, a man named Nicholas McKnight, and they forbade me to continue writing it. So as far as I can see, at least at that time, 1945 (we've moved things around and changed things since then), the academy was not only indifferent to writing, it was actually a venomous, vicious, vitriolic, malevolent, jealous enemy of any kind of composition from nature.

When I was hanging around in school, I was hanging around with Burroughs and

Kerouac, and they were teaching me how to write. Not the professors -- professors have changed a little bit, like they recognize their own weaknesses now, so things are a little bit better off. I don't know if that's true in the provinces, but that's true in the centers of intellect, supposedly, like Columbia, Harvard, Berkeley. At this point I'm a professor, like I go around and teach.

Interviewer: You and William Carlos Williams have both been closely associated with the town of Paterson, New Jersey, at one time or another. Is there any reason for that?

Ginsberg: I grew up in Paterson. That's my hometown. And later, when we met, we took walks there together, by the banks of the Passaic River --

Can you print all this exactly as said?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ginsberg: Including what might be considered off-color words?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ginsberg: That's nice -- if anybody questions it you've got to remember that the implications of this are ultimately political, so that any censorship of this is censorship of political expression, and that kind of censorship is prohibited in the United States Constitution. You see the exploration of consciousness and the manifestations of consciousness in language ultimately affects one's awareness of social conditions and political circumstances. And so the accurate expression of language has direct consequences on political thinking, finally. So that if a poet wishes to speak in a language that he chooses, if anybody tries to alter that language they are attempting to alter a citizen's expression of his consciousness within the society, and the citizen's reflections on the nature of that society, and that in itself is something that is a function of citizenship that is protected by the Constitution. So that anybody who tries to censor anything I say is completely un-American -- I wrap myself in the American flag and do declare my soul.

End of part one.

liberation

(A short play in three acts)

Act I -- Man's Life; The Meaning of Freedom

Act II -- Man's Hope; A Plan is Born of Desperation

Act III -- Man's Fate; Hope is Met with Despair

" . . . the individual's duty is to do what he wants
to do, to think whatever he likes, to be
accountable to no one but himself, to challenge
every idea and every person."

-- Jean-Paul Sartre, The Age of Reason

Scene: All of the action takes place in a small, bare room, with a door and a curtained window on the left. Segismundo sits in a wooden chair at a bare table, with his hands manacled to the table leg. A great pile of books stands by the chair, and a pile of bones litters the area under the table and chair. The Old Man is suspended from the ceiling, facing the chair and the front. He is attached to a pulley rope leading to Segismundo's chair along the ceiling.

Personae:

Segismundo: A young man, clean-cut, intelligent

Old Man: White robe and beard, holding a scythe

George: School-teacher type, pince-nez, derby

Dad: Portly old gentleman, rather stupid-looking

Miranda: Pretty young girl in a childish dress

Body Builder: Athletic, T-shirt, ignorant

Mrs. Emily: Stuffy society matron

Shirley: Gaudily dressed, slinky and cheap-looking

First Constable: Tall and well-built

Second Constable: Small, dark, and furtive

Messenger: Foolish-looking, in a fancy uniform

"Neither am I the means to any end others may wish to accomplish. I am not a tool for their use. I am not a servant of their needs. I am not a bandage for their wounds. I am not a sacrifice on their altars."

-- Ayn Rand, Anthem

ACT I

Man's Life; The Meaning of Freedom

Scene 1: On weekly visiting day

(Segismundo sits alone with his head on the table. The Old Man is suspended from the ceiling. Segismundo wakes up and stretches.)

seg-- Damn it, somehow being awake just can't hold a candle to being asleep. Wouldn't it be nice to simply be asleep all the time, twenty-four hours a day.

(Old Man chuckles loudly, then leers widely.)

Old Man, if you won't contribute to the conversation, I wish you'd make your presence unfelt altogether.

(Old Man reaches out and inches himself along the pulley rope toward Segismundo.)

There he goes again! (pause) Well, it must be visiting day, or at least pretty close to it. Time is so much an abstract with me that it's really quite difficult to tell exactly. But it surely can't be very long before someone comes along.

(Enter George; he turns down the gas light by the door and comes toward the table.)

geo-- Ah, Segismundo, and how are you feeling today?

seg-- Oh, I'm feeling fine, thank you, Mr. George; rather unfree, of course!

geo-- Of course, but then that is to be expected.

seg-- You mean because of the manacles.

geo-- Certainly, my boy. Of course, it isn't as if you aren't really free, you know. You do understand that.

seg-- Oh yes, Mr. George, but freedom is such an abstract. I am free, it's true, as long as I don't take off my manacles.

geo-- Precisely, my good boy. Surely freedom is enough without wanting to be up and about, too?

seg-- I don't really know, I'm confused. To tell the truth, I've done quite a good deal of reflection lately, and I've been wondering if perhaps the right thing to do might not be to get up and go my own way.

geo-- Don't do it, my boy, don't even think it! It's really quite unmentionable. Why, Segismundo, think of your responsibilities.

seg-- Ah yes, my responsibilities. I'm sorry, I'd almost forgotten.

geo-- It's quite all right, boy. We all tend to forget our responsibilities now and then.

But we must never lose sight of them, not for a moment. My God, do you realize what would happen if everyone all of a sudden dropped his responsibilities simultaneously?

seg--No, I . . .

geo--Chaos, my boy, chaos. A total dissolving of our entire rigid social structure. Oh no, you're not alone, my boy, we all have our doubts now and then. But the social structure must be adhered to at all costs.

seg--Just like my chair is.

geo--Is what?

seg--Adhered to.

geo--If you want to think of it that way. Give it no more thought, my lad, there is really no alternative to good hard labor, noble and often fruitful.

seg--By the way, I realize we've been through all this many times before, but, you see, ah . . . well . . . the old man . . . could you possibly, you know . . .

geo--Oh no, I think not. After all, he's really quite harmless, floating up there.

seg--He's not floating, he's hovering.

geo--That's viewpoint, boy, viewpoint.

seg--Well, I'm sorry, I can't help it. It's the way he's continually inching toward me up there, quietly, day and night, swinging that scythe and leering at me.

geo--Look here, lad, it's not as if you were setting a precedent here really. That old man's hovered -- I beg your pardon -- floated over many a better man than you.

seg--Yes, what you say is true, teacher. I've noticed their bones scattered beneath my chair.

geo--They're handsome bones, aren't they?

seg--Oh, yes, they certainly are!

geo--My point exactly. Besides, I can't imagine why he bothers you so; I must say he doesn't faze me in the least.

seg--But then, you see, you are quite free.

geo--Well, my boy, so are you quite free. . . .

seg--But only as long as I don't leave my chair.

geo--Precisely. Well, my boy, I imagine we've chatted long enough. I'll leave you with your assignment; chapters ten through eighteen in your ancient history and Books Six through Ten in your Iliad.

seg--I beg your pardon, but could you give me the why of it again? I don't know what's wrong with me, but I've been beginning to wonder whether it's all worth it.

geo--Well, have you gotten that assignment written down?

seg--Yes, I have it.

geo-- Good boy. Well, then; you do want to be successful, don't you? Success is not a simple goal, you see. That's all there is to it. Success is unattainable without serious and concentrated effort, with a strict observance of the rules of society.

seg-- (pouting) I know, I know. (grasping at straws) But I can't lift the books with these manacles on.

geo-- You'd best keep in practice at it, because you're a long way from being a success as yet. Well, goodbye, my boy, we'll be by again soon.

seg-- (tearfully) What's to keep me from taking them off and living my own life.

geo-- Please, my son, your responsibilities.

seg-- I'd forgotten. I'm sorry.

geo-- There's no apology necessary, my boy. Well, be good, will you, and I'll see you next week.

seg-- Goodbye.

(Exit George.)

seg-- If it weren't for my responsibilities, I know I'd just take these damn things off me.

(Thunder crashes outside.)

Scene 2: The same day.

(Door opens; enter Dad.)

dad-- Ah Segismundo, and how are you feeling today?

seg-- Pretty well, really, Daddy, considering, of course

dad-- Of course. Well, aside from that, my boy, how are we getting on?

seg-- Well, Daddy, I've got a few things on my mind, as a matter of fact.

dad-- Well, tell me, my boy; tell your father, that's why I'm here. You ought to know that by now.

seg-- Well, here it is then. I'm fearfully depressed at just sitting here as I have since my birth, and -- well, how shall I say it, Dad?

dad-- Give it a try, my boy!

(Old Man inches forward.)

seg-- Well, since noticing some ten years ago that these damn manacles are not fastened, I've been greatly bothered by the fact that I can't just take them off and go my own way in the world.

dad-- Bothered, did you say?

seg-- Very bothered, Daddy. Rather like to be free, you see!

dad-- But you are free, my boy, don't you know that?

seg-- Oh yes, I know, I know, but somehow I can't shake the feeling that it's all a semantic problem; you see, free as I know I am, I just don't feel free.

dad-- (angry) Just because you can't get up and leave every minute and a half, you don't feel free. You're a very grateful boy, you are, after all your mother and I have done for you.

seg-- (dejected) Oh, Daddy, you make me feel so guilty. But still, I've always longed for the chance to just maybe, you know, stand up, and I thought maybe

dad-- (angry) My god, boy, think of your responsibilities, if not to your dear mother and me, then to the world.

seg-- (dejected) I feel so d-dirty, Dad, I'm a no-good ingrate!

dad-- Well, you're forgiven, boy, forgiven. Always remember, just because your manacles aren't fastened doesn't take away from the fact that they are still manacles.

seg-- Yes, you're right, it's true.

dad-- Chin up, boy, some day you'll be a great success. Takes effort, you know, lots of effort. There's no substitute for work. (pause) For example, now, try and stumble through a little more biology and anatomy before my next visit. It'll do you a world of good.

seg-- I can't do it, Dad.

dad-- It'll be your hide if you don't, my boy. You can't always be shirking your duties.

seg-- I'll try, then. (pause) Oh, Dad.

dad-- Yes, my son.

seg-- Say hello to Mother for me, will you, Dad?

dad-- Of course I will, son; as a matter of fact, I was just bringing some food out to her when I stopped by to see you. Well, son, goodbye, and keep that chin up. (looks up) Good morning, Old Man.

(Old Man nods and waves scythe; Dad starts out the door, and collides with Miranda, skipping in lightly.)

dad-- Oh, excuse me. How are you, my dear?

mir--Hi. I'm fine, Dad. Just stopped by to see your brilliant son.

dad-- Fine, but be careful with him, he seems to be very restless today.

mir--(to Segismundo) What's wrong, dear?

seg--Nothing's wrong. I'm being silly.

dad-- Well, I'll be back next week, my boy. Try and get that work done now. Goodbye, my dear.

mir--Goodbye, dad. (Dad exits) Well, hello darling, how are you feeling today?

seg-- Well, it's true I'm restless. I don't know why, really. I've never felt this way before.

mir--I'm sorry to hear it, darling. I'd really hoped you'd be in a happy mood on this fine day.

seg-- It's fine, is it? I really hadn't noticed.

mir--Oh yes, it's a beautiful day.

seg--I knew it was day, though, because Mr. George, my teacher, turned down the gas when he came in.

mir--Oh, you're so deductive, my darling, and I'm so innocent and pure. What a combination!

seg-- Yes, it is, my dear; small world, isn't it?

mir--For you it is, anyway.

seg-- Well, I realize that, you know.

(Old Man inches forward; Miranda begins to climb up on the table, pauses.)

mir--See here, darling, I've brought us a picnic lunch, you see, and I'll just sit up here on this table and spread it out right under the old man here. How are you, Old Man?

om-- Closer and closer, thank you.

mir--That certainly sounds ominous.

seg-- Yes, vague as usual, but certainly ominous. But wait, my dear, something seems to be bottled up within your brilliant little head just waiting to burst out, so tell me, what is it?

mir--Okay, I'll tell you, my lover. I'm about to plant the seed, the germ of an idea within your ever-analytical mind. Have you ever thought of getting out of those horrible manacles and just leaving?

seg--Of course not; my responsibilities, you know.

mir--(tearfully) Oooh, I thought you'd trust me.

seg--I do, my love, I do.

mir--(no tears) Then don't lie to me, okay?

seg--I'm sorry.

mir--Well, have you thought about it or not?

seg--As a matter of fact, I've been giving it a great deal of thought, selfish beast that I am.

mir--You're not at all a beast; I think you are a handsome and great man.

seg--Well, as you are wonderfully innocent and pure! But tell me, am I more handsome and great than these very handsome and great bones that you see strewn

around under this chair?

mir--Oh yes, undoubtedly you are!

seg--(to Old Man) I hope you won't consider me too lightly hereafter.

(Old Man grins and pulls a little closer.)

mir--What did you say, my dear?

seg--I was saying, yes, I have thought about such a course of action. Exactly what did you have in mind?

mir--Well, to tell the truth, I kind of thought that you might divest yourself of those awful shackles, and that we might sort of run off together.

seg--Elope, you mean.

mir--Precisely.

seg--I'd love to, really, my dear, but my responsibilities, you see.

mir--Remember, I'm wonderfully innocent and pure. Doesn't that turn your head?

seg--It twists my arm. I'll do it, by God!

(Segismundo snaps off his manacles as Miranda rummages in her purse. She pulls out a small pair of handcuffs.)

What do you have there, my sweet?

mir--(sarcastic) A fourteen-ton tusk, my darling.

seg--That's not your true nature, I hope. It seems at first glance that you are holding a portable version of my recently shed bonds. Don't be ridiculous.

mir--But your responsibilities, my darling, your responsibilities. (tearfully) Don't you think you'll have any responsibilities to me?

(Segismundo snaps himself back into his original manacles.)

seg--If I'm going to have to have responsibilities, I'd might as well take them sitting down.

mir--Oh well, no hard feelings, I guess.

seg--Of course not. But I'd like to be alone now, if you don't mind. You will come back, won't you?

mir--(distant) Well of course I'll be back. I have to come back to collect your assignments.

seg--(sighs) Oh yes, I'd forgotten.

mir--Exercises A through F on pages seventy-four through eighty.

seg--You're killing me.

mir--Ready by next visiting day. (sarcastically) Good day, my sweet.

seg--(sadly) Good day, my love.

(Old Man coughs discreetly.)

mir--Beg your pardon, Old Man; good day to you, also.

(Exit Miranda; pause.)

seg-- Old Man! (pause) Here, Old Man, why won't you talk to me? (silence) You know, for the last twenty years you've been leering evilly and inching steadily closer. Exactly what is the meaning of all this?

(Old Man just shrugs, then grins.)

Well, there must be something better than this.

Scene 3: Same day.

seg-- Is it any wonder that I'm glad it's visiting day? I pick up so much culture on visiting day. Kind of keeps my mind off my troubles, too.

(Body Builder leaps through the door and scampers agilely around the room.)

bb-- Troubles? Troubles? Who's got troubles, hanh? If you do, you need more exercise. Good for the body, good for the body. And what's good for the body is good for you, my boy. Quick now, stand up and let us begin.

seg-- I can't stand up, I'm manacled.

bb-- But nevertheless free, of course.

seg-- Of course.

bb-- It's true, though, I forgot. Well then, what shall we ask your body to do today?

seg-- Don't ask my body, ask me, if you don't mind.

bb-- Your body, boy, your body! Exercise, exercise, boy! One-two, in-out, one-two, good for the body, boy. Now let's go, up and at 'em, boy, we'll develop that ole body in a hurry.

seg-- I can't get up, I tell you!

bb-- Oh, that's right. Well, okay then, arms above your head.

seg-- Hell.

bb-- Boy, now cooperate. What's the deal here? Arms up, let's go.

seg-- Hell.

bb-- Listen boy, you may not know it but you've got a responsibility to your society to remain physically fit. The President even said so.

seg-- Oh, I know, I'm sorry.

(Segismundo raises his arms up.)

bb-- It's okay, boy. Now, let's go.

(Segismundo pushes arms out and back ten times. BB counts out loud.)

Okay boy, how do you feel. Accomplishment, huh? Building up the old body

always gives a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, doesn't it, boy?

seg--No.

bb-- Of course it does, boy, that's the old spirit. Makes life worth living. Well boy, got to hit the old road -- at a full run, of course.

seg--Of course.

(Old Man inches forward.)

bb-- Listen boy, get this now. Do ten more of these every waking hour until I come back. That's your assignment, boy. It'll do you wonders.

seg--(obstinately) I won't do them.

bb-- Okay, fail us. Forget all about your responsibilities.

seg--Oh, I'll do them. Goodbye.

bb-- So long, boy, I'll see you around.

seg--You'll see me right here, is where you'll see me.

bb-- That's what I said, boy. Remember now, ten each hour.

(Enter Mrs. Emily.)

mrs- Stand when you greet a lady, you oaf.

seg--I'm terribly sorry, ma'am, I'm afraid I can't stand at the moment; manacled, you know.

mrs- But not unfree, I assume.

seg--Oh no, I didn't mean you to think I was complaining.

bb-- Well! Mrs. Emily, nice seeing you again. Take it easy, there, Segismundo, (low to Segismundo) Don't let her get to you, boy. (aloud) Goodbye.

(He exits, Mrs. Emily ignores him.)

mrs- What did that beast want here?

seg-- Oh, he wants to build me up into a pro football player or something. He's got me going all the time.

mrs- Well, don't you pay any attention to him. A boor like that could ruin what little progress you and I have accomplished.

seg-- Well, as long as he's willing to give up his time for me, I guess I have an obligation to appreciate him.

(Old Man snickers, and inches forward.)

mrs- What was that?

seg-- Just the old man; he's always doing that.

mrs- How quaint! My God, Old Man, you look ghastly pale; like death warmed over.

om-- How ironic of you to say it.

mrs- Think nothing of it.

om-- I seldom do.

seg-- May I interrupt?

mrs- My God, I'm appalled. What is this world coming to? Now he's interrupting me every time I turn around.

seg-- I'm a cad.

mrs- How many zillions of times have I told you never to interrupt? Why, that's worse than using your cake fork on your salad. You're incorrigible.

seg-- My most humble and profuse apologies.

mrs- After all, my boy, you must realize you have a certain responsibility to your society. What if everyone behaved as completely barbarically as you seem to try to do?

seg-- Unthinkable.

mrs- Of course. However, if you'll just read five more chapters in your etiquette book before next visit, I'll take my leave.

seg-- Good day, madam.

(She turns at the door.)

mrs- Oh Segismundo my boy, perhaps you'd better review the chapter on interrupting also. By the way, you always stand when a lady leaves the room.

seg-- I can't.

mrs- I know, but that doesn't mean you're exempt from knowing it.

seg-- I'm sorry; I'm just stupid, I guess.

mrs- I don't mind I knew your dear mother.

(Exit Mrs. Emily.)

Scene 4: Same day.

(Segismundo is sitting looking despondent, his head in his manacled hands. Old Man is leering, and quietly waving his scythe.)

(Shirley sticks her head in the door.)

shr-- Hello.

seg-- (looks up) Hello.

shr-- (walking over to table) Can I come in?

seg-- No, that's impossible.

shr-- But why not?

seg-- Because you already are in.

shr-- Actually that's a pretty old joke.

seg-- Funny as hell, though.

shr-- Yeah, it sure is. Say, what's your name anyway, honey? Is it by any chance

Rick, or maybe Tab?

seg--No, it's Segismundo.

shr--Oh. (pause) Oh. (pause) Well, I'm Shoiley.

seg--I'm pleased to make your acquaintance, Shirley.

shr--No, Shoiley, Shoiley; rhymes with soily.

seg--That must mean something.

shr--Yeah, I know, but what? (both think on it) Say, Sam, I'll tell ya, I was just noticin' you've got them funny things on your wrists, ya know, and I was wonder-
ing

seg--Manacles.

shr--What'd ya say?

seg--I said "manacles." You know, shackles; to keep you in one place.

shr--Oh. Are you still free, though?

seg--Oh yes, I think so; but nevertheless, they are still manacles, you see.

shr--So I noticed.

(Pause.)

seg--So how are you?

shr--Well, now that you mention it, I'm very sexy.

seg--How's that?

shr--Sexy; you know, like libidinous

seg--You've been reading the dictionary.

shr--No, I just look up that kind of words. I'm easily aroused, is what it means.

seg--What about your responsibilities?

shr--My what?

seg--Responsibilities. R-e-s-p-o-n-s-i-b-i-l-i-t-i-e-s.

shr--Oh. What responsibilities is that?

seg--Well, for one, I guess your responsibilities to society.

shr--I don't know what you're talking about. Listen, Sam honey, with them miniscules on your arms, can you move around at all?

seg--I can't stand up.

shr--But can you lie down?

seg--I suppose so, but I don't. The bones, you see.

shr--(excitedly) Well, lie down now. Lie down with me. Take me now, I need you.
Now.

seg--(puzzled) What'd you say?

shr--Please, possess me. I want you, I'm all kinds of aroused.

seg--(puzzled) I don't even know what you're talking about. But then of course, sit-

ting here all my life I've had very limited social experience.

shr--(angry) Hey, what's wrong with you, anyhow. You tryin' to humiliate me or something?

seg--No, of course not. But you see, I wouldn't want to shirk my responsibilities.

shr--Oh God!

seg--You don't even have to bring God into it.

shr--(angry) I ain't gettin' into a religious argument. Well, okay, I'm leavin'. You really hurt. Look, just read six chapters of Freud before next visitin' day, or you'll answer to me. Goodbye.

seg--Hey, you can't do that. I never even saw you until five minutes ago, and you come in and start dishing out the old assignments. Who do you think you are, anyway?

shr--I said, goodbye!

(She starts out the door.)

seg--Oh wait, Shirley. Ah Shirley, listen, before you go, could you do me one small favor.

shr--(cooing) Oh sure, honey, you just name it.

seg--Could you prod the old man up there a couple of times. He hasn't inched forward in over an hour.

(Shirley exits in a huff.)

Scene 5: Same day.

(Enter two constables.)

seg--Hello, officers, what can I do for you?

co1--Hello, my boy, we were just passing by, looking for an escaped bank robber, and we thought we'd just check in 'ere.

seg--A bank robber, eh? How original!

co1--Well, it doesn't really 'ave to be original; it's not an important point, you know. It could as easily have been a little lost sheep that led us here.

seg--It sounds like a pretext to me.

co2--Wait a minute, now. 'Ow old are you, kid?

seg--Just twenty, sir.

co2--There it is, Gaffney, I thought so. 'E's our man, let's 'ang 'im now. 'Ang 'im, Gaff.

co1--Well, 'ow'd you know it was 'im what done it, man?

co2--You just 'eard 'im, Gaff, 'e said 'e was twenty; it must 'ave been 'im. And lis-

ten to that disrespect.

col-- 'Old on now. See 'ere, boy, what's your name?

seg-- Segismundo.

col-- Oh.

(Pause.)

co2-- 'Ang 'im.

col-- I don't want to be nosy, you understand, my boy, but it seems that, judging from your wrists, you aren't particularly free. Is that true?

seg-- I'm afraid to say it, but I don't really know any more.

col-- What's that?

seg-- I said I don't know any more.

col-- Do you mean you don't know whether or not you're free?

seg-- That's right. I'm really free, you see, only I'm shackled to this table.

col-- Well, then you're not free at all, are you?

seg-- Well, it's viewpoint actually. You see, it's this way

col-- Yes, do explain. It seems to me that if you're chained to a table then you really can't move very much about.

seg-- I wish Mr. George were here, he explains it so beautifully. Don't you see, I'm free to do all my assignments and to put my head down and sleep and to eat my meals and to exercise when I'm told Gees, just look at all the stuff I'm free to do when I'm told.

(Long pause.)

col-- Actually, Sam, I think it's a semantic problem. If I were you, I'd seriously consider leaving. Assuming, of course, that the shackles aren't fastened.

seg-- Of course.

col-- Well, I'm sure you don't like sitting there, do you?

seg-- I'm restless, it's true.

col-- And understandably so. I should think twenty years were plenty long enough to go without standing up and stretching your muscles.

seg-- Well, you see, there's my responsibilities

col-- What responsibilities?

seg-- Well, you know, to George I have responsibilities, to Dad and Mom I have responsibilities, to Miranda, my wonderfully innocent girlfriend, I have responsibilities, to my physical well-being I have responsibilities, and most of all, I have infinite responsibilities to society. So you see, it's lamentably really quite impossible for me to leave.

col-- Boy, the way I see it, you've only one responsibility: to your own 'appiness.

Didn't anybody ever teach you that? 'Ow long are you going to put up with this, anyway?

(Old Man chuckles out loud, inches closer.)

What was that?

seg-- Just the old man up there.

col-- Oh! 'Ello, Old Man.

(Old Man nods and smiles.)

co2-- 'Ang 'im, too.

col-- Why?

co2-- 'E looks subversive.

col-- Well listen boy, what can I tell you? I'm just trying to be the friendly cop one always 'ears about. You know, whenever you're lost, find a cop. Well, we gotta be goin'. Look, so that you shouldn't be so ignorant about your responsibilities, read the first five books of A Social Conscience by next visiting day.

seg-- Wait, you can't do that.

col-- Whaddya mean, can't do that?

seg-- I've already got too many assignments. I can't do them all.

col-- (angry) Look, boy, you haven't got any choice. You've got a responsibility to your own knowledge of responsibilities that can't be shirked. Now, do it!

co2-- Gaffney, 'ang the bug, will you please?

col-- Don't babble so much.

(Exit both.)

seg-- Old Man, it's been quite a day. I can see some profound and radical thinking coming up. It's going to be a long week.

ACT II

Man's Hope; A Plan Is Born of Desperation

Scene 1: Four days later, same layout

(Segismundo sits asleep with his head on the table. Door flies open and a uniformed messenger bounds into the room, places one hand to his chest and thrusts head high.)

mes- (shouts as loudly as possible) New Worlds to Conquer!!!

(Segismundo throws both his arms into the air, falls off the chair onto his knees, and clasps his hands in prayer.)

What are you doing? (loud stress on "what")

seg--(recovering) I was cowering. You scared the life out of me.

mes- (stilted; pause between and stress upon each word) Oh, no, you were --praying.

seg--I was what?

mes- (normal) Well, you were.

seg--Were what?

mes- Praying.

seg--Come on now, don't be ambiguous. If you have a claim, please state it.

mes- Well, not at all. You see, when I came in, you were in the standard position which the average person assumes when he wishes to pray.

seg--Not when you came in, exactly, but very soon after. At any rate, I certainly wasn't doing this act of which you accuse me, which on the surface sounds very evil indeed. Even perverted, maybe.

mes- If it is evil, I can assure you I hadn't heard it. But if you weren't praying, what did you assume that position for?

seg--Well, I believe you frightened me as you came in.

mes- Perhaps, but why that particular position?

seg--I don't know; it just seemed the most natural one to assume when you're frightened.

(Long pause; messenger just stares.)

mes- (shouts, arms on high) It's a Miracle; I've worked a Miracle. Oh my God, I'm a saint. I knew it, a saint!!

seg--Patron of what?

mes- (stops short and thinks) Why, of messengers, I suppose.

seg--Oh, are you a messenger?

mes- No, actually I'm an actor by profession. I only pretend to be a messenger.

seg--What for?

mes- Well, to get experience . . . and to eat. You know!

seg--Yes, I see.

mes- Well, we all have to get a break to get started, you know. Are you by any chance a famous and influential producer?

seg--No, I'm sorry, I'm not. By the way, which are you at the moment?

mes- Famous or influential? Well, neither yet, actually, but I have appalling potential.

seg--Well, no, actually I meant, which are you, messenger or actor?

mes- Well, I try to combine them both whenever possible. Perhaps you noticed my awe-inspiring delivery as I entered?

seg-- Ah, yes, I did. But to pursue a significant point, which are you primarily at this instant -- actor or messenger?

mes- Well, I'm always primarily an actor, you see.

seg-- Well, then, in your relations with me, which is the predominant underlying force?

mes- I have a message for you, if that's any help.

seg-- Very little at all until you give it to me.

(Messenger runs to the door, steps out, and bounds back in just as before.)

mes- (shouts) New Worlds To Conquer!!!

(Segismundo's expression remains passive.)

How was that?

seg-- Very meaningful.

mes- No, no, the delivery.

seg-- Appalling. Excuse me, was there any more to this message.

mes- Of course, a lot more. But I extracted the meat, the essence of the part -- I beg your pardon -- message, to use as my opening line. The significant phrase, so to speak.

seg-- Could you please read me the rest of the significant phrases? (patiently)

mes- Can't I deliver them instead of just read them? I really do need the practice.

seg-- I wonder, do I by any chance have any responsibilities to your acting career?

mes- Well no, I don't really expect you do.

seg-- Ah good. In that case, read them if you don't mind.

mes- Wait a minute, you do have at that.

seg-- It's too late, read them.

mes- Damn. Well, here it is then: "To Segismundo" -- that is you, isn't it? -- "My boy, there are new worlds to conquer. We've just had it from the Encyclopedia Americana people that they've initiated a wonderful new contest that we feel is made especially to order for a boy of your free time. Go at it, boy, it's a wonderful opportunity to live up to those responsibilities that you've been dodging all these years. Signed, your friends and protectors, George, Dad, Mother, Miranda (your innocent girlfriend), Mrs. Emily, and Gaffney the cop." There you have it.

seg-- Thank you, but I'm afraid I'm still very much in the dark.

mes- Well, would you be any less so if I were to show you what came with it?

seg-- Undoubtedly.

mes- Beg your pardon.

(He steps out and brings in six large boxes one at a time, each with a

big black "R" on the side.)

Six large boxes and one instruction sheet, accounted for.

seg-- (accepts the sheet) Thank you.

mes- By the way, may I ask what you meant by appalling?

seg-- (reading) What?

mes- Well, I asked your opinion of my delivery before. I assume you meant appalling in a positive way.

seg-- Good grief.

mes- What is it? What's it say?

seg-- (sarcastically) Big contest!

mes- What do you have to do?

seg-- I have to memorize the encyclopedia.

mes- Oh. (pause) Maybe you could apply for an honorary membership in the Red-Headed League.

seg-- This is the time for jokes.

mes- How long have they given you?

seg-- (resumes reading) Three days. A to Z, thirty volumes, in three days. After all that effort, I'd better win.

mes- (long pause) All I can say is, after all that effort, you'd better win.

seg-- That's already been said.

mes- Listen, have you got any stuff around here to read? I'll deliver to you for a while.

seg-- I have a pretty good Macbeth.

mes- What's that?

seg-- Oh. (pause) How about a little O'Neill?

mes- Well, I don't

seg-- Kopit?

mes- I don't think I could, really.

seg-- Well, if you can't do Kopit, what can you do?

mes- Well, I've done a little work with As the World Turns!

seg-- (a little too quickly) Well, listen, if I'm going to get through the A's by tonight --

mes- Wait, wait, how about some Love of Life?

seg-- Say, you know, you're being obnoxious.

mes- I told you, I'm an actor.

seg-- Oh yes.

mes- Listen. (stilted; miserable) "Oh Joseph, do not go out there. I am so afraid. . ."

seg-- Hold it, hold it, that's fine.

mes- Well, what do you think?

seg-- Shall I tell you? It's terrible.

mes- Hah! You say it was terrible. That's just because you don't understand it. You envy me, don't you? That's it, you envy me. Well, it's too bad.

(Messenger storms out; long pause follows.)

seg-- I wonder what that big black "R" represents. I really should have expected a big "EA" or something.

(Looks closer.)

"See instruction sheet for what 'R' represents." Couldn't be any more explicit than that, could it?

(Reads off sheet.)

"'R' does not in this case represent Americana; nor does it represent Encyclopedia; as a matter of fact, it represents 'Responsibility.'" I should have expected that, I was wide open for it.

(Opens first volume.)

Oh well; "A-b-e-n-r-a-a, town, Denmark"

om-- That's A-a-b-e-n-r-a-a; two A's.

seg-- Thank you, you verbose old man. / "Population (1950)"

Scene 2: Three days later, visiting day; books piled up

seg-- (wails) Unending sorrow! Day and night I've been at it without a break and to what good? I no sooner learn one page than I forget another. Like a rug rolling up behind me as I walk across it, my memory extends over only a certain number of facts, and each new one cancels out the oldest. Perhaps when they come, I can talk them out of this foolish business. I'm sure I can, once they see how really inhuman the task is. I wish someone would come soon.

(A far-off voice is heard from outside.)

voi-- (shouts) You there, in the cabin!

seg-- (perks up) What's that?

voi-- (shouts) Halloo, bare room! Are you there, Segismundo?

seg-- (shouts) I'm here. Who are you? (normal) Oh, they must be brand new visitors, who else could ask if I am here?

(Enter George and Dad.)

geo&dad--(unison) Ah Segismundo, and how

seg--(disappointed) . . . are you feeling today?

dad-- Is that disrespect, boy? Did I detect disrespect for your unselfish instructor

here?

seg--No, it's not that, I just

geo--I heard you, boy. You don't appreciate all your fine father here has done' for you, do you lad?

seg--Of course I do . . .

geo--Do you, boy?

dad--Yes, do you?

seg--Well, yes, in a way. I appreciate the firm manner in which you've guided me through my life, and helped to bring me up as an integral part of our wonderfully rigid social structure.

geo--(beaming) Very good, boy; he seems to have a fairly decent grasp of the situation, doesn't he, Dad?

dad--(smiling) Well, he did leave out a few things, of course, but

geo--Tut, tut. Well, where is she, boy? Where've you got her?

seg--Got who?

geo--The girl, the girl. She said she was coming up early to help you get your recitation ready; she must be here somewhere.

seg--Oh no, she hasn't been here, I assure you. I haven't seen her at all. By the way, which girl do you mean?

geo--(shocked) Surely you remember Miranda, your wonderfully innocent and pure girlfriend.

seg--Oh, of course. No, she hasn't been here at all.

dad--(to George) You mean we hallooed for nothing?

geo--(to Dad) It appears we did.

seg--I don't understand.

geo&dad--Oh.

geo--Well, in any event, let's get ready. They'll all be here before very long.

seg--What are we getting ready for?

geo--Why, your recitation, of course. Jove, man, it's visiting day, you know. Everyone's coming up to hear you.

seg--What am I reciting and whom in particular are we expecting? Just for the record.

dad--Why, you're to recite your Encyclopedia Americana, boy, and your wonderfully pure Miranda is coming, for one.

seg--But Miranda and I seem to have fallen out a bit, you see, and besides, I have to tell you

dad--And your lovely mom will be here, of course.

seg--(joyfully) Great! But listen

geo--And your tireless physical instructor, Mr. Builder.

seg--But . . .

dad--Not to mention our very good friend, Mrs. Emily.

seg--But I'm still . . .

geo--In addition to two fine-looking law-enforcement officers who expressed a great interest in your progress.

seg-- . . . still working . . .

dad--Also a funny-talking messenger who asked if he might come along.

seg-- . . . still working on . . .

geo--And a ghastly-looking girl who insisted she knew you.

seg-- . . . working on the . . .

dad--And most important of all, Mr. Americana himself!

seg-- . . . the A's!

geo&dad--(unison) What?

seg--I'm still working on the A's; I worked as fast as I could, it was simply too much for me.

geo--Oh my God!

dad--What can I say? My own son!

geo--It's not your fault, dad, he was my pupil and I've failed you.

dad--Where did we go wrong?

seg--But it was too much; I simply couldn't do it.

geo--(to Dad) Listen, maybe we can run down to town and catch Mr. Americana's train, and keep him busy until next visiting day.

dad--Yes, of course, that's it. Our reputations are saved. Oh, George, how can I ever thank you enough?

geo--(blushes) Oh, I just try to do my best, you know.

seg--Well, listen

geo--Okay, boy, then you've got another week. Get right at it now. Shall we go, Dad?

dad--Of course! Oh, just a second; good day, Old Man.

om--I'm sure it is. Every once in a while one comes along.

dad--Don't they, though?

(Exit George and Dad, arm in arm; Miranda immediately pokes her head in.)

mir--Have they gone?

seg--Miranda?

mir--Yes, it is I, my love.

(She skips happily into the room, carrying an enormous purse.)

seg--(coldly) I'm sorry, you've made your trip for nothing. I shan't be reciting to-day after all.

mir--I know. I was outside overhearing.

seg--Eavesdropping.

mir--Overhearing, love. Anyway, that wasn't why I came, you know. I came to talk to you.

seg--(brightens) Oh, did you? Well, then what shall we talk about?

mir--Let's talk about you.

seg--Me? What is there to say about me?

mir--Well, we'll discuss your life, for example.

seg--My life? Are you crazy? Twenty years of doing precisely the same thing every day, and you want to discuss it? Discuss one day and multiply it by seven thousand. I've never done anything at all except study, sleep, listen to lectures on my obligations, and watch that old man get closer and closer.

(Old Man grins and inches closer.)

mir--That's just it. Don't you see, I want to discuss your life from now on.

seg--But why my life? The dictionary calls life a series of experiences which makes up one's history from birth to death. Judging from the number of bones down here, I'd say that this particular life-long series of experiences has made up a great many more histories than just mine.

mir--Exactly. Come away with me now; forget your chains before your bones make the pile just that much higher. Surely you can't enjoy a life like this.

seg--How could anyone enjoy a life like this?

om-- Oh, I don't know. They look like pretty happy bones to me.

seg--But bones, nevertheless.

om-- Maybe that's your answer.

seg-- Oh, you're a big help.

(Old Man grins, inches forward; Seg stares at him.)

mir--Come with me. We can be so happy, just the two of us.

seg--What will everybody think? It would break Dad's heart, especially with this encyclopedia project getting him so excited. Everyone would point at me and say "Yaah, Shirker!" and "Boo, Quitter!" and "Hiss, you big Responsibility-shirker!"

mir--Let them. Who cares what they say when we have each other? Just you and me, and our own little house in the suburbs, and our own little cars, and lots of nice kids, and a nice washer, and a big dryer, and lots of nice kids, and a wonderful big

television, and a fine dishwasher, and lots of colonial furniture, and wall to wall carpeting, and a landscaped lawn, and lots of nice kids

seg-- Wait! Are you kidding? I'll bet I know what's in your purse this time.

mir-- Well, it's pretty obvious, really.

(Pulls out a gigantic pair of manacles, twice as big as the ones he already has on.)

seg-- Yes, well, that's really a big improvement. What do you think I should do, Old Man?

om-- Call me when you need me.

seg-- Take your time; there's got to be some other answer.

mir-- Am I to understand that you are refusing me for the second time?

seg-- Of course not, my lovely Miranda, only a fool would refuse you. It's your peculiar jewelry that turns me away.

mir-- Peculiar or not, it's been good enough for mankind down through the centuries.

seg-- Perhaps I just have particularly tender wrists.

mir-- Then I'm not worth a little inconvenience.

seg-- It's just that I don't seem to be worth a little freedom.

mir-- But I'd been given to understand that you were free.

seg-- I admire your phrasing. Evidently freedom is a flexible concept.

mir-- You seem to be becoming very discontented. I hope I haven't upset you at all.

seg-- No, it's not you, exactly. I guess every man goes through this period at some time or other.

mir-- Well, what do they do?

seg-- (gestures toward bones) It's pretty obvious, isn't it? After all, what sort of society would we have if everyone just up and ignored his responsibilities.

mir-- I wish there were something I could do for you.

seg-- Oh, there's nothing anyone can do, really. It's all sort of an individual matter.

mir-- Yes, I suppose it is. (pause) Well, I'd better be off. Please, Segismundo, whether we have a future together or not, don't do anything rash. Please don't try to live up to your name.

seg-- Don't worry, Miranda. Goodbye.

mir-- Goodbye.

(Exit Miranda; Segismundo sits and stares at the door for at least ten seconds.)

seg-- (thoughtfully) Yes, it's an individual matter.

(Old Man goes into peals of laughter.)

ACT III

Man's Fate; Hope Is Met with Despair

Scene 1: One week later, visiting day

(The encyclopediae are thrown across the room into a big pile.)

seg-- Old Man. Listen to me, Old Man. Is it my imagination or are you really inching faster and faster toward me?

(Old Man stares at him, then suddenly grins.)

Come on, Old Man. You were talking to me the other day, why won't you talk to me now? I've got a right to know the answers to a few questions at least, after all the time we've spent together.

om-- We'll always be together, my son.

seg-- Well, are you inching forward faster than you used to do?

om-- Life always seems to gather momentum as it progresses, doesn't it?

seg-- I wouldn't know; this is my first time around. Why are you answering me now, when you never have through the last twenty years?

om-- Until the present you've asked out of your emotions, which anyone can do. You didn't deserve an answer. Now your intellect is asking.

seg-- All right, I'm asking. What does all this mean? Why am I here; and why are you here?

om-- Do you really have to ask that?

seg-- I'd hoped I was wrong. And all of my visitors, why aren't they in the same fix that I am? Why aren't they going through the same inhuman treatment?

om-- Because, my son, they are not human, and you are. Almost solipsisistically, so to speak.

seg-- And how about you?

om-- Oh, I'm the most inhuman of them all. (Chuckles.)

seg-- Will I always be here, sitting at this table?

om-- You will not always be anywhere. But your bones will always be here.

seg-- Isn't there any escape? Why must I sit here all my life? There must be more to life than this, or why would there be such a thing as life at all?

om-- Whether you must or not is immaterial. The important factor is that you will sit there all your life.

seg-- (angry) Why? How can you be so sure that I will? Nothing can prevent me from simply getting up from this chair and walking out that door except a single ambiguous term: responsibilities.

om-- You will sit there all your life.

seg-- Well, we'll certainly see whether or not you're right before very long.

om-- Yes, perhaps we shall.

(Enter George.)

geo-- Oh, am I the first to arrive? Segismundo, and how are you today?

seg-- The blood is still coursing through my veins.

geo-- Then all is well, I trust. And you, Old Man, how has the week treated you?

om-- I have withstood the ravages of eons, sir, and I very much doubt that one week more or less will shake my little world down about me. Come to think of it, in a way I am the ravages of eons.

geo-- I'm sorry to hear it. Well, my boy, today's the big day. A to Z, boy, you're really on your own this time. How can you ever doubt all we've done for you after this? What an opportunity to excel we've given you.

seg-- So everyone is coming to hear me?

geo-- Everyone, my boy, the whole cast will be here.

seg-- Fine.

geo-- (misinterpreting him) Now listen boy, a few last minute instructions. Remember to project now; enunciate. Speak clearly and succinctly. Remember, we're all counting on you to come through for us.

seg-- Just out of curiosity, what sort of reward do I get if I win?

geo-- Well, you get the enormous satisfaction of a job well done, an obligation fulfilled.

seg-- Fine! And how about you? What reward do you get?

geo-- Ah, well, we your friends and protectors will split some minor monetary considerations, but nothing to really mention.

seg-- And why don't I get cut in?

geo-- My God, you selfish little wretch. How many times do we have to explain to you about your responsibilities? Why do you always think only of yourself? You do have certain obligations to your society, you know.

seg-- I was only asking.

geo-- I haven't heard your apology yet.

seg-- I know.

geo-- What's wrong with you today, anyway? I hope it's only that you're excited about your recital, or I can see some pretty big assignments coming up. What disrespect! You had better not fail us in this because this may be the biggest opportunity for an important accomplishment in your entire life. Remember, you're not getting any younger!

(Old Man laughs out loud.)

Listen, Old Man, this is between the lad and myself, and I'll thank you to butt out.

(Old Man inches closer; enter Dad.)

dad-- What's going on here?

geo-- This boy of yours, he's got something up his sleeve. He's been asking some very irreverent questions this morning.

dad-- Oh he has, has he? What kind of questions?

geo-- Well, that's not important. (coughs) All I can say is that he'd better not let us down.

dad-- Indeed not. He's been very lax about his responsibilities all these years and if he fails us this time, I guess we'll just have to get tough with him. We haven't been strict enough, that's the trouble. We'll have to start taking away some of his freedoms until he gets on the ball.

seg-- Where's mother? I thought mother was coming.

dad-- My God, what impudence! Who asked you to speak?

seg-- I don't have to be asked to speak. Who's bare little room is this, anyway?

dad-- It so happens that this is not your room at all. It belongs to society, and society is very kindly allowing you to live in it for the duration.

seg-- The duration, eh? That's a very good choice of words, isn't it?

(Enter Miranda.)

mir-- Hello, all, I'm here.

geo-- Hello, my dear.

mir-- Hi, Segismundo dear, I hope you've given lots of thought to what we were talking about.

(Miranda gives Segismundo a great big wink; George has gradually maneuvered around to the wall opposite the door.)

seg-- I've given a lot of thought to a lot of things, my beloved.

(Enter Mrs. Emily.)

mrs- Everyone rise, please, a lady is entering the room.

(Old Man gives a raspberry; Mrs. Emily glares around the room, skipping Old Man.)

geo&dad--(unison) Good day, Mrs. Emily. How are you?

mrs- (cautiously) I'm fine, thank you.

everyone-- Good. Great. Glad to hear it. Great.

mrs- (pleased) Well, how's our boy today? I'm going to be so proud when he goes through those great big books from cover to cover. That brilliant lad is a true product of our society.

(Dad has drifted over next to George.)

Are you all ready for your task, my boy?

seg-- I'm all ready, ma'am!

mrs- Good! You know, I've always said that

(Body Builder bounds in.)

bb-- Eayahoo! What a great day to be alive. Makes you want to breathe deep and drop right down for fifty or sixty pushups.

geo-- Good morning, Mr. Builder. All ready for our little exhibition?

bb-- Oh I am, I am. He's my boy, this one is. Taught him everything worthwhile he knows. I only wish this little show were a little more in the line of gymnastics or something, you know? But nevertheless, he's my boy.

geo-- Well, I guess we've all had a hand in his little success here.

(Miranda has drifted over next to dad; Segismundo is watching everyone with amused interest.)

mrs- Some day that boy will be a valuable tool to his society.

seg-- Oh, great!

mrs- You will, my boy, you mark my words.

(Enter the messenger and the two cops as Mrs. Emily and Body Builder drift over to the others.)

col-- 'Ello there, everyone. We're not too late, I trust.

geo-- Oh, not at all, friends, come right in. We're only awaiting the arrival of Mr. Americana himself and we expect him momentarily.

dad-- Yes, he's a very important man and not to be rushed at all.

(Enter Shirley, slinking in.)

shr-- Hi all! Watcha doin'?

geo-- Oh, I'd almost forgotten about you. But you seem to have remembered so come on in and join the party. What was that name again?

shr-- I don't tell it to just anybody.

geo-- I didn't ask your occupation, just your name.

shr-- I don't care! I'll only tell it to Sam here.

dad-- Okay, tell it to Sam then.

shr-- He already knows it.

geo-- Segismundo, tell her you'd like to know what her name is.

seg-- I already know it.

geo-- Well, ask her anyway, so she'll say it and we'll all know it.

col-- Look 'ere, missy . . .

dad-- Ask her, son.

seg-- Oh, all right. Shirley, listen, I don't know what your name is and would you please tell it to me?

shr-- No. You're pretending.

co2-- 'Ang 'er. She looks perverse.

co1-- You mean subversive.

co2-- I get them confused.

mrs- See here, I can't imagine why there is all this fuss about the name of a creature with such an obviously soily character.

geo-- Somehow it just came to me. Her name is Shoiley. I can't imagine what brought it to mind.

(By now all are side by side against the wall in two ranks.)

seg-- Listen, everybody. The time has come. I have an announcement to make.

(Mumbling arises, then dies down.)

First, I don't know one single minute fact from the Encyclopedia Americana.

(Mumblings of outrage.)

Please. You see, it suddenly occurred to me that all of this talk for the last twenty years about my vast freedom and my responsibilities has been peculiarly one-sided. I mean, I've accepted everything you've ever told me as utter gospel, and I've been so effectively brainwashed that I've even felt terribly guilty about questioning it. I feel I've been intimidated by your assignments, and I'm about to end it right now.

(More quiet mumbling.)

Quiet, please. Every direction in which I turn I see nothing but my four walls, my manacles, and this old man.

(Old Man nods and waves scythe in acknowledgment.)

What do you suppose will happen when the old man runs out of inching room and arrives here directly over me. We all know. Well, I've finally decided that I don't intend to wait shackled to this chair for his arrival so that I can join his great pile of bones.

om-- Good boy. Stand up for your basic human rights!

seg-- Thank you, I will.

(Group has been gradually stiffening to attention in ranks, staring straight ahead unseeing.)

I've decided that there is much more to this life than four walls, chains, and assignments. I'm going out into the glorious world and really live. The world of the hum-drum routine is over for me, and I am entering the joyful world of real individuality, where I will be completely free from your disgusting inhibi-

tions. I will find happiness on my own, totally divorced from all of you and your petty responsibilities. I have finally found the courage to break away. I will no longer sit here and be a pawn to your misdirected society. I no longer need your rights and wrongs to guide me.

(Segismundo snaps off his shackles, and drops them onto the table. He rises and steps toward the immobile group.)

You see, I'm free. Not semantically free, but really free. I can go anywhere I want to and do anything I want to. I'm free and I'm happy.

om-- Go at it, boy! A good old-fashioned social protest.

seg-- Thank you, Old Man. I wish we could have been better friends.

(Runs to the door; group still stares frozen.)

I was even afraid that I wouldn't know how to walk, but as you see I can. That proves that a man is born with the knowledge of how to be free. All he needs is the chance. Goodbye, my friends and protectors. I hope you can dupe someone else into becoming a pawn to your responsibilities, but as for me, I'm gone forever. Hello to the new world, and goodbye to all of you.

(Segismundo throws open the door, and stands looking out aghast.)

(shock) Oh my God!

(He stares, then closes the door slowly; his shoulders suddenly slump.)

There's nothing out there?

(He turns and faces the group.)

(in disbelief) Nothing out there at all!

(He stumbles to the table, head bowed.)

Nothing at all!

(He sits down heavily, snaps on his manacles, staring at them as if in shock.) (Pause.) (Old Man breaks out into peals of maniacal laughter. Then the group also breaks out into laughing and shouting. They rush over and mill around Segismundo, clapping him and each other on the back and laughing and shouting. Old Man is in such convulsions that he almost drops his scythe.)

om-- (shouts above tumult) Segismundo, Triumphant Conqueror!!

The End

EPILOGUE

(The stage is darkened, as if twilight outside. Almost everyone has left. Segismundo is sitting with his head in his arms, occasionally rocking back and forth. Old Man appears to be asleep, and Mr. George is straightening up the room.)

geo-- It's all right, my boy, don't worry too much about it. We'll just forget that this contest ever happened. Try and get your work done for next week now, and we'll all see you then. Goodbye, my boy.

(He walks over and turns up the gas light, thereby illuminating the room, and then exits.)

D. C. Peck

his wet clay

The garbage man came down the alley once a week, usually in the afternoon when Keith had finished eating and was in the back yard climbing the lattice near the garage or wrestling with the dog. Whenever he heard the chugging or saw the tilted form of the ancient black pickup coming down the way, the boy retreated to the house and stood at the corner or inside the summer screen door. From there he watched while the grey-skinned figure lifted the galvanized pail to the tailgate of the truck and dumped gallons of egg shells, coffee grounds, and rotten fruit peels on top of the smelly heap.

Always when the boy stood there he recalled a closer view when the garbage man had come to the back door one day earlier that summer looking for a job. He recalled standing by his father's side and looking up at the shrunken frame and fleshless face specked with whiskers and bits of matter. He recalled the yellow whites of the eyes and the mouth with only half of its tobacco coated teeth and the irregular patch of adhesive tape on the left upper lip that covered something rotten like a cancer. He recalled the bargaining, his father's voice and the watery lisp of the stranger. He recalled the shabby figure treading sod-footed toward the truck and crawling under the wheel. All of this the boy recalled until the garbage man had finished, placed the pail beside the garage, and driven away, leaving the yard and the summer air for another seven days.

One day late that summer the boy went walking to the neighborhood corner store. It had been hot that morning and it grew worse towards the afternoon so that by now as the boy sauntered along in his grass-stained T shirt, staring at patterns in the toasted brick, he thought of something cool and icy, and of a shady tree.

The store was quiet in the afternoon. The boy wandered among the narrow aisles, gliding his hand along the metal rims of the smoothly painted shelves, stacked

with canned food, soap boxes, paper goods, and bread. He sniffed at the vegetable bins filled with plump tomatoes, celery, green peppers, onions, and dusty Irish potatoes. He ran his fingers along the glass front of the meat cooler and wondered about the Spanish-white signs painted on the windows, the stacks of brown tobacco plugs, and the special mixture of smells and humming sounds that made it a corner store. Finally he took an ice cream bar from a deep freeze chest, paid the clerk and settled himself near a large fan in front of a comic book rack. When the story and the ice cream were finished he gnawed the remaining chocolate from the middle of the stick and started for the door.

A light wind blew the summer heat into his face as the glass door rattled behind him. He rubbed his eyes to adjust them to the light and started up the walk.

"Hi there, fella," he heard someone call. He turned to see who it was. There was an old black pickup parked by the curb and the garbage man leaning against the door. From inside the cab a fat, bushy headed woman grinned, red-faced and toothless, at the boy.

"Hi," he answered.

"Hey com'ere a minute," said the garbage man with a lisp.

The boy watched and didn't move.

"Come here, honey," said the red-faced woman waving a flabby arm.

The boy approached them slowly holding his breath and wondering if they would smell like garbage.

"How are ya, fella?" asked the garbage man, reaching for the boy's shoulder and pulling him closer.

"This is Mr. Wilson's boy," he said to his wife.

"What's your name?" asked the red-faced woman.

"Keith," said the boy, taking a breath and tasting a foul smell.

"Your daddy's my friend, you know that?" lisped the garbage man.

"Uh huh," said the boy. "You work for him."

"That's right. What do I do for your daddy?" asked the man, squinting a yellow eye at the bushy headed woman.

"You pick up our garbage," said the boy.

"Then what do I do with it?"

The boy looked down at the running board and pawed the dry grass at the edge of the curb. "I don't know," he said.

"Aw," said the toothless woman. "You're kinda cute. I'd like to have a little boy like you."

The boy winced.

"You want to come home with me and live on our farm?" she asked.

"No, I have to stay at home," said the boy, tasting something bad in his throat. The woman laughed.

"Do you like farms?" asked the garbage man.

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

"Would you like to see our farm sometime?"

"Maybe, sometime," said the boy.

"Why don't you come home with us right now?" asked the man, clutching the boy by the nape of the neck.

"I ought to go on home," said the boy, feeling the touch of rough dead skin.

"You want a ride home?" asked the man.

"Okay," the boy nodded.

The woman opened the door and dragged her heavy buttocks across the seat. The boy climbed in beside her and the man went around to take the wheel. The motor groaned and wheezed and the garbage man cursed until it started.

"Do you like pigs?" asked the garbage man as they pulled away from the curb.

"I guess so," said the boy.

"We've got a pig. Why don't you come on with us and see him?"

"I ought to get on home," said the boy, trying to scratch his head without rubbing the woman's body.

"Oh, your folks won't mind. Your daddy's my friend," sputtered the garbage man. The boy looked up at the windshield and saw amber droplets of juice spotting the inside of the glass.

"I don't know," he said.

"Oh, it's okay," said the woman. "We'll bring you back in a little while."

The boy didn't answer. He tried to stare at his lap and thought of being home.

The truck rattled down to an intersection with the highway. They took the highway south for several miles, then turned off onto a gravel road. All the while the boy sat silent, trying not to breathe or listen to the toothless woman who talked incessantly about the pig. Finally the truck slowed and they pulled off onto a pair of dirt ruts that led across a weedy field. In the middle of the field, an ancient house with a crumbled chimney and paintless siding sat steaming in the sun.

"Here we are," said the garbage man, pulling on the door handle and shoving with his shoulder.

The boy jumped out and the woman followed, climbing backwards from the seat to the running board to the ground. She led the boy through the brush to the door while the garbage man went to the side of the house and probed at a hole in the foundation

with a crooked stick.

The first room in the house was the kitchen. It contained an ice chest, a rusty sink with a warped linoleum drain board, a tilted cupboard, a stove, a table, two straight chairs, and an evil smell. The boy took a seat and watched while the woman scraped a pile of chicken bones and black potato peels from the drain board and dumped them into a paper sack. A shadeless bulb dangled from a cord that dropped from a hole in the ceiling. The plaster was cracked and missing in large patches, exposing the crusty slats beneath it, and dripping grit that dusted the cobwebs in the corners and settled on the floor. The floor was concrete and sloped inward from the corners so that anything spilled would run off through a drain in the middle of the room.

Presently the garbage man came to the door, cursing under his breath.

"You want to see the pig?" he asked, coming toward the boy.

"Okay," said the boy.

He followed the man around the house to a hedgerail pen in the back. The pen was small and overgrown with brush. On the side near the boy was a dry pig wallow with a single thin brown sow.

"She's kinda sleepy in the afternoon," said the man.

"Uh huh," said the boy, staring at the bony lump of brown.

The garbage man picked up a stone and threw it.

"Hey, you bitch," he shouted. "Hey, wake up, Goddammit."

The pig grunted and moved its left hind foot.

"You can stay and watch her," said the man. "I'm going in the house."

The boy leaned against the rail and scratched his oily brow. Something growled inside his stomach.

"Pig," he said.

The sow gave out a sickly grunt that whistled through its snout.

The boy walked to the corner of the house and leaned against the flaking paint. A hot wind whipped at his hair and filled the air with dust and ragweed pollen. Finally he turned away, picked the paint from his forearm, and started around the house.

"There he is. There's Keithie," said the garbage man, clutching the neck of the bottle and pouring with it flat against the table.

The boy let the door close easy and leaned against the wall. The garbage man mopped a trickle from his mouth and poured another shot.

"You want some lemonade, Keithie?" he asked.

"No, thanks," said the boy, looking at his shoe.

"Oh come on," said the man. "Let Lidda fix you some lemonade."

"We ain't got none," said the woman, turning from the sink.

"Oh," said the man, looking at his glass. "We ain't got none."

The woman took the other chair and sat beside the sink.

"What does your daddy do?" she asked the boy.

"He wears a collar," said the man. "A big white collar."

"What's he do, honey?" asked the woman.

"He's an engineer," said the boy, wondering what the man meant.

"That's nice," she said. "Did you like the pig?"

The boy paused to shift his weight. "Uh huh," he lied.

The woman looked down at a paper in her lap and the man refilled his glass.

After a while the woman sighed, scratched at her lisle hose, and put away her paper.

"I guess I'll start something for supper," she said. "It's after four o'clock."

"Start supper?" muttered the man.

The woman went to the icebox and stuck her head inside. The boy watched her putter around the sink peeling potatoes in broad thick peels with a dull paring knife, and thought of being home. He thought of his mother ironing in the kitchen, the crisp smell of the iron, the thump and the steam when it met the board, and the silver pots bubbling softly on the stove. He thought of clean papered cabinets filled with spotless plates and silverware, and everything arranged and family-clean. He thought of the bathroom at home, with firm bars of soap, fresh towels, and a spotless toilet bowl.

"You want to eat with us, Keithie?" asked the man, leaning over his glass.

The boy felt a wave that passed toward his bowels.

"No," he said. "I have to eat at home."

The man stared hazily at the boy, his eyes half covered with silky tight-skinned lids, his mouth hung open dribbling cloudy drops.

"You want some lemonade?"

"No, thanks," said the boy.

"Lidda," said the man, turning toward the sink. "We got any lemonade? Keithie wants some lemonade."

The boy looked quickly at the woman, then back at the man.

"We ain't got none," said the woman. "We ain't got lemonade."

The garbage man grinned and turned to the boy.

"We ain't got none, Keithie."

The boy closed his eyes and thought of pea green lemonade with the flaky pulp of lemons from someone's garbage pail, and felt a chill between his shoulders. The garbage man ran his finger through a puddle on the table.

"You know somethin', Keithie?" he said, spreading the liquid with his hand. The boy watched while he poured another drink.

"You know somethin'?" he said, then tilted his head back to drain the mottled glass.

"Huh?" said the boy.

"You know you don't ever want to get married. You know that?"

The boy looked down and tried to think of home.

"You don't ever want to get married, Keithie, cuz," the man paused to lean toward the sink, "cuz, you see what happened to me," he slurred.

"That's enough," said the woman, waving at the man.

"That's enough, ha," he sputtered. "You Goddamned bitch, that's not enough."

"Listen, Keithie," he said, aiming a finger at the boy, "now listen, Goddammit."

The boy looked up.

"She's --." He stopped to find the woman with his finger. "She's -- ah -- she's a . . ."

"That's enough," said the woman, coming toward the man.

"Oh, Goddammit," slurred the man, swinging his bony arm, "you shut up and get Keithie some lemonade."

The woman stepped back to the sink.

"Awright now, dammit," said the man. "Now listen, now I know you're just a boy," he paused, "you want a little drink, huh? You want to be a man," he grinned, stretching the tape above his lip.

"No thanks," said the boy, trying to watch the woman.

"Now, now I know you're a kid but, now I'm not gonna swear at you, but it just ain't no good, it ain't no Goddamned good," he said, jabbing his arm toward the sink.

"You want to go home?" said the woman to the boy.

"Uh huh," he answered softly.

"Now, dammit, shut up," said the man. "I'm gonna take him home. Now shut up or I'm gonna get my gun. Now," he muttered, then took his bottle and pulled a drink with his lips. "Now, did you like my pig?"

"Uh huh," said the boy.

"Did you really like my pig? Do you know what kind of a pig that is?"

The boy tried to think of the pig. He tried very hard to think of the pig.

"I bet you don't even know what kind of a pig that is. That's not a pig, it's a Hamshur, a Hamshur sow. I bet your daddy don't know a damn thing about pigs." He made a gurgling chuckle and leaned back in his chair.

The boy studied the tilted head, gray hair hanging from the wide nostrils below

the bony nose, the tape on the lip loose along the edges, the drawn cheeks tapering to the stubbled chin, and the neck, a string of tendons circled with necklaces of dirt and hot with perspiration.

"You want to see the pig?" asked the man, leaning toward the boy again.

"I saw him," said the boy.

"You saw him," said the man.

"He's got to go home now, honey," said the woman.

"Go home, hell," said the garbage man. "He hasn't even eaten yet. He hasn't even seen the pig."

"He saw the pig a while ago," she said.

"Hell, he just saw a pig. He didn't see a Hamshur. He doesn't know a damn thing about Hamshurs. His dad's a Goddamned engineer. I'm gonna show you my pig." he said, rising from the table. "You wait right here and I'll go get my pig." He wobbled to the door and leaned against the jamb. "You wait right here," he said, swinging the door open and stumbling into the yard.

"Come on, honey," said the woman when the man was out of sight. "Come on, I'll take you home."

The boy went out to the truck and the woman came behind him. He slipped in on the right side and she climbed up the running board to the seat and squeezed behind the wheel. She fumbled with the keys, then pressed her foot to the starter. The motor coughed, kicked, then died in a wheezing moan. The woman pushed again, and the motor only whined. She pushed again and the truck jerked and groaned, and the engine began to rattle.

She twisted the wheel and let out on the clutch. The truck turned, fell back into the ruts, and rattled out of the yard. The boy was tossed against the door, and when he gained his balance and looked through the rear window he saw the garbage man kneeling between the ruts, urinating on the road.

On the way back the boy watched the woman, afraid that she would speak. She was silent on the gravel road and didn't look up until they reached the highway. There she turned to him, red faced and frowning with her mouth pulled down tight at the corners.

"I'm sorry, honey," she said. "I'm sorry, I'm awful sorry."

The boy wanted to stop her but he couldn't speak. He wanted more to be home.

The truck stopped in front of the house and the boy jumped out without speaking. He ran up the walk to the door, aware of the chugging sound dying away.

Inside he went to his room and found his tooth brush and pajamas. He brushed his teeth, undressed, washed, and put on his bed clothes. Hurrying back to his room

he pulled the roller shades and climbed into bed.

He lay there for a minute, between clean sheets, vaguely aware of a quiet breathing sound near his head, then slowly drifted off into the stream of orange light that filtered through the shades and the quiet lids of his eyes.

Michael Dixon

Each day as I pass down by the pond, I see the same haggard-looking young man sitting there staring blankly at the rippling water. The brisk wind swirls dry leaves about his lanky frame and wisps his thick hair in front of deep, blue, sorry eyes; all the while, he does not move or shift his gaze, but retains the same fixed, lifeless pose. Some day, I'm going to try to talk to him . . . even though I know there's really no one there.

Ronald Tellesen

inscape

If lilies from the field can sway in fragile majesty
without the least intention to be beautiful or free,
as if they live because they found themselves alive
and die when living goes too far for lilies to survive;
if flowers fare like this,
would it be far from wrong
to ask if lilies live at all
unless it be in lily songs
of men who wander through the world
on bombs and bridges
piccolos and poems
with soil of their own
more fertile still than
nature's fallow lily-loam?

Franklin Augustin Heaberg

come to you softly ?

Come to me with a clattering
Of hammers and saws and songs.
Put the sharp taste of fruit
In my mouth and make me want
To grip stones.
Rub me with odors burning and wet,
Open my eyes to their quicks
And prick them with smooth locust thorns.
Show me snow falling through
Clouded nets of elms,
And make the fine leaved
Coffee tree ripple like
Its own reflection in the pond.
Then I will come to you softly.

Michael Dixon

They say some insane people
do things in threes
(tap, tap, tap their finger on a desk)
and make noises
 (sigh, or something)
and walk around in dazes
or laugh at things that aren't funny

or sing even

Some night birds
do things in threes
(chirp, tweep, bleep their sad song in night trees)

Lee Chapman

When four walls are a world
And all that lies beyond is but a distant dream
And only a dream of a man lies within . . .

Here lies but a man
Buried under his own mistakes,
Gasping for the Breath of life
That only Someone else can give . . . or take.

Ronald Tellessen

the don quijote of my frame

On my desk stands Don Quijote
Carved in wood and nothing more,
With my books sits Don Quijote
By Cervantes -- paper bound.
On my wall, hangs Don Quijote
Gustaf Doré framed in black.

In my heart stand noble visions
Carved in fancy, nothing more.
In my head sit shades of honor
By existence -- vapor bound.
In my soul hang tragic vistas
Comic cleavage framed in black.

The bites of true encounter maim
The Don Quijote of my frame.

Franklin Augustin Heaberg

an explanation of loss

An old man
Hurrying piles
To a cushioned wicker chair,
Has no time
To stop and stare
At a wet-nosed
Cinnamon bear.

Dale Reeves



**THE
cotton
wood
REVIEW
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