COTTONWOOD REVIEW

NO. 21

COTTONWOOD REVIEW

NO. 21

Fall 1979

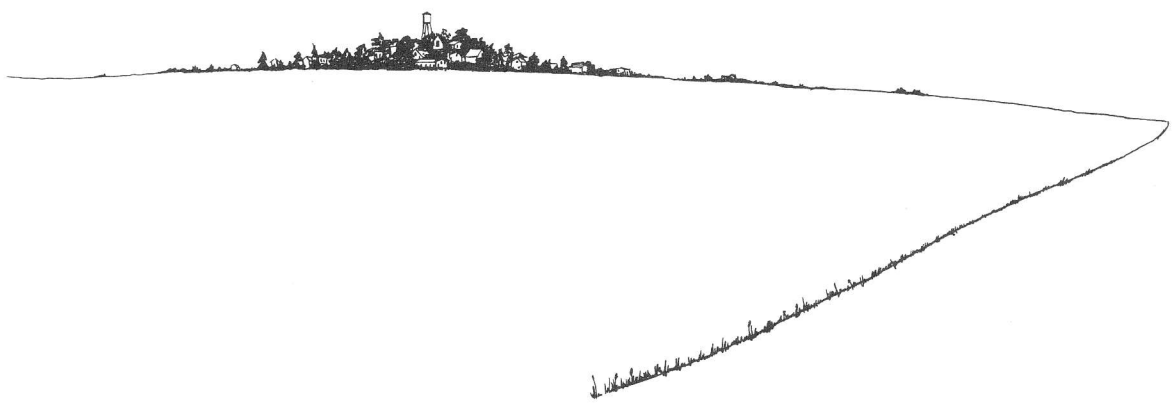
Drawings for this issue are by Ted Kooser

Cottonwood Review welcomes submissions of poetry, fiction, graphics, and photography, both from local and national writers and artists. Poetry submissions should generally be limited to the five best. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return. Our address is:

Cottonwood Review
Box J, Kansas Union
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS 66045

Since Cottonwood Review has no regular source of funding, we depend heavily on the interest and support of our subscribers. Issues generally appear twice yearly. Subscriptions are $4.25 for two issues of the magazine plus the chapbooks published during the period. Subscriptions are available through the address above.

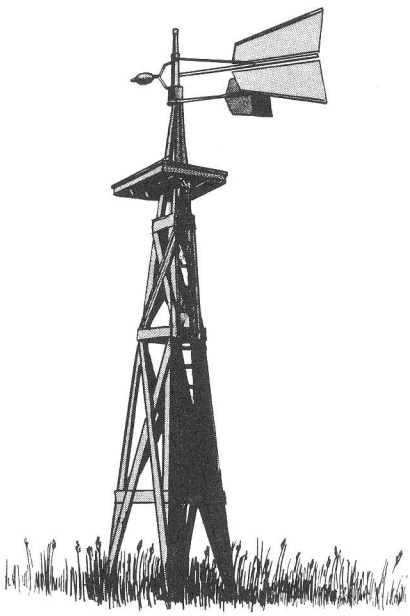
This project is presented in part by an allocation from the Graduate Student Council of the University of Kansas.



POETRY

FICTION

PHOTOGRAPHY



Richard Behm

MOVING

The stove drags grudging feet
across the hardwood floor, its scar
of protest unravels like a mountain road.

Books and curtains must be closely watched,
cajoled back into boxes.
They would seep out,
crawl across the rug
and with one great leap of faith
regain the bookshelf
or hang again in dusty windows.

Mattresses pulled from springs part
like lovers torn from a last embrace.
They slump in the hallway like drunks.
Buttons glisten like bullet holes.

Spoons rattle their displeasure,
threaten some drastic measure.
The code is deciphered:
They plan to destroy themselves.

A shoe, a pencil, a brush
conceal themselves in closet or corner.
They wait, dreaming they can rise
to use in other hands.

Chairs and couches swell
like two fat men trying to escape
through the door at the same time.
We swear they came in this way,
think of stuffing elephants through keyholes.

Even the suitcases,
practiced at this thrust from place to place,
rebel, snap open like giant clams
or the white mouths of hippos.

At last, the house, unburdened,
rests as it always longed to do,
skull-empty, sagging beneath
the unaccustomed silence.

HOMECOMING

We sit, drink, talk little until
he slurs toward sleep, mumbles off to bed.
I put on his sweater, sit in his chair,
and the room whirls with mother's treasures:

Blue geisha, brass dragon bell,
gray, dried baby's breath, impossible portraits
of women in shining gowns, the family bible,
solemn on the rosewood bookstand.

In the morning father will rise
take his juice and tranquillizers,
search a moment for his sweater.
A trail of aftershave will linger in the house.

For a lifetime I have been running
from this, wanting to be anywhere but here.

Fog crawls through the township,
makes purple fists around barnyard lights.
Out on SR 18, occasional cars snail by.
It will snow tomorrow.

Wrapped in my father's sweater,
in the worn, uncertain arms of his chair,
I close my eyes, feel my breathing tune to his,
fall into our common sleep.

All these years of running
and I have never left this house.

Shirley Buettner

DISCOVERED

While clearing the west
quarter for more cropland,
the Cat quarried
a porcelain doorknob

oystered in earth,
grained and crazed
like an historic egg,
with a screwless stem

of rusted and pitted iron.
I turn its cold white roundness
with my palm and
open the oak door

fitted with oval glass,
fretted with wood ivy,
and call my frontier neighbor.
Her voice comes distant but

clear, scolding children
in overalls
and highbutton shoes.
A bucket of fresh eggs and

a clutch of rhubarb rest
on her daisied oil-cloth.
She knew I would knock someday,
wanting in.

OUTSIDE EVERY WINDOW IS A FLOWERING THING

This February in Berkeley
we slope down the pebbled sidewalk
in the morning fog, speak reverently
of the Victorian houses, wind through
students, small strands of vigorous
trees and formal buildings to the Women's
Faculty Club, appropriately, we discover
later, designed by a woman. By the steps,
a tulip tree works white and pink
slivers into the bright grass, explodes
against the sky, and as we move
inside, dark heavy beams
beg for the rhythm of hands, fingers
to trace the pulse of the wood,
contrast with the reticent
eggshell of the walls,
and the tall windows with dozens
of small squares
ask in the light.

Outside every window is a flowering thing,
a woman blooming in every yard
of this American landscape (behind the white
picket fences in Mississippi, the black iron
gates of Brooklyn, the rock walls
of the hill country), flourishing
in the costume of her territory, sharing
the secret language of women,
an Aunt Jemima, a Georgia O'Keefe.
We narrate the shapes, the places,
the routes of their stories;
we become the portraits
of many regions: the north, the south,
the self, the frontiers
of our intimacies, the definitions
of our lifestyles. We are not ornament,
intended to adorn, to freshen
the room, to add glory
to the age. We think
with our bodies as well as
our minds. Our words
are our photographs: learn what
is important, search for
what is left out.

Come sit with me on the floral
cushions of the big chair, wicker
or rocker. Look out over the lights
around the bay, the seeds of the great
city. Since we may never
meet again, let us say
how our lives have changed.

WHITE CREEK

Last night, this creek, traveling
hurriedly behind the cabin, woke me
like a wild summer storm, tossing
hail against the small panes
in the window, herding
cattle across the roof. But this
morning, at sunrise, it was simply
a Colorado creek again, threading
through tall weeds and dead, bleached
tangles haphazardly collecting
above the smooth rocks.
Others say they have heard it
pretending to be a swarm of bees,
the monotonous regularity of the tide,
or the endless Kansas wind. It is skillful
with disguises, always back in the exact spot,
wearing the same small rapids and still pools,
before light spoons into the valley. Dogs
drink at its banks, unsuspecting, in the cool
evening, and as they lope on up the narrow path,
it shuffles the deck for the next hand.

Alan Basting

CLOSED TULIPS

Already I see they
know what
to do. Tropism:
knowledge sure
as blind
bricks, rooted
deep there near
the brain's
bottom...
O the flowers.
Their petals
colored shutters
they must be hearing
thunder, not yet rain.

Ernst Niemann

BLACK GLAND

Inside the burnt fur
up in the fat
under the back of the white skull
reeking with memories
the black gland
burns like winter

Short bent crow of a gland
perfect dream-answering gland

Rush inside on broken wings
Soar out singing like birches
dreaming of snow

William Thomas

THE DEVIL'S APPRENTICE

A working day for a fellow like Reagan means he's up in the morning and he takes a sandwich which his wife, Aggie, has bagged from the refrig, and after a quick gulp of coffee, it's off to work he goes. And if his car starts, and if he doesn't get caught in a traffic jam, he appears at the factory and punches a time card in the clock by the side of which Mr. O'Hara is always standing.

Reagan acts like a civil fellow. He says, "Good morning," to O'Hara, and he manages a two finger victory salute to Farber. Both being working men, Farber signals back. This is not to be taken as a sign of friendship on Farber's part. O'Hara likes Farber because he's always a half-hour early for work. Farber has friends of his own.

But Reagan has a thing going for him that he's happy about. It's mid-July, and O'Hara confirms his happiness by telling him that next Friday will start his two week vacation. "Which I hope you'll enjoy," says O'Hara, in a kidding mood.

"He actually smiled," says Reagan to Aggie, when he mentions his coming vacation. "Two weeks to loaf around!" Agnes looks at Reagan and says, "You're not hanging around this apartment for two weeks. Bad enough I've got neighbors who bother me!"

"What should I do?" asks Reagan.

"Do? Al, take a few days for yourself and go fishing. Go up to Bridgeville. You always liked that place when you were a boy."

Following Aggie's advice, Reagan packs his gear and away he goes, leaving the Bronx behind. He drives over the Tappan Zee bridge and travels west on route 17 until he comes to a likely trout hole. There he stops. And it is not that he doesn't catch some trout. It's not that he was driving fast. It was not his fault at all, but the fact remains that coming home: while he was driving up Bridgeville's hill, Reagan was stopped by a cop. "Shannon, his name is," he tells Aggie.

"You got a ticket for speeding?" asks Aggie.

"Speeding," confesses Reagan, who never did a shameful thing in his life. Hurt, and near tears, he continues, "Speeding! Can you imagine?"

Aggie has enough imagination, as a child she didn't play doctor and nurse for nothing.

"You go and see your brother," she says, "down in City Hall."

"For what?" asks Reagan.

"For what?" says Aggie. "So you can get that ticket fixed. That's for what!"

And it is because of this gentle persuasion that Reagan finds himself,

next morning, looking for his brother who works as a building inspector down near City Hall.

"Is it on Worth street? Is it on Canal?" he asks, in the subway.

"Is what?" answers the fellow he has directed his question to. The swarthy P. R. interrupts his reading of a Spanish paper and glares at Reagan: "Is what?"

"City Hall," says Reagan, knowing that a fellow reading a Spanish paper can't be very smart when it comes to knowing New York.

Reagan figures this way: if this fellow doesn't know where City Hall is, then Reagan will not know. He'll go home and tell Aggie that he tried to find his brother but couldn't. The blunt truth being that Reagan doesn't want to find him. If it was up to Reagan he would pay the fine and forget it. But, alas!, not many in this world are on Reagan's side. Aggie is against him. So is O'Hara. So is the swarthy P. R.: "One stop past Canal is City Hall," he says while he lets his eyes drift back to the paper he was reading.

Foiled, Reagan gets out of the subway and finally finds himself in the department where building inspectors are gathered.

He gets there whipped: lashed by Aggie's tongue. He's been shouldered, cursed at and cursed out and beg-your-pardoned by hurried men forcing their way in and out of the packed office he was trying to sandwich into. But he makes it.

He keeps a grim look on his face and thinks, "Damn, Aggie!" until his brother sees him and his frown, and says, "Al!", and, "How come you came to see me?" With that said, he leads Reagan away from the hustle of the place and they land, asses down, seated in a tiny office which is certainly quieter and a lot more private than the large room they had vacated.

"What can I do for you?" says Reagan's older brother.

Reagan stares at his brother with disbelief in his eyes: same disbelief that appears in Reagan's and Farber's eyes while they stare at the oversized breasts that are featured in PLAYBOY each month.

"Up in Bridgeville, New York," says Reagan in his best business-like manner, "I got a ticket for speeding and Agnes thinks that you can get it fixed."

"You got a ticket for what?" laughs Reagan's brother. "Oh, Al!", and helpless from laughter, he gropes out a pillbox from a cluttered drawer, finds a white pill he expects will relieve the hiccoughs that he has suddenly contracted.

"It's not funny," says Reagan. "I got caught in a speed trap by a cop named Shannon who flagged me going up the Bridgeville hill. A damned shame, that ticket. I wasn't going fast."

This is the truth and Reagan's brother knows it: "You never drove fast in your life," he says, nodding his head in agreement. "But the fact remains that you were pinned with a ticket. Right, wrong, or indifferent, it's you who was sinned against. It is you who is being punished. I ask you—where

is the justice in that?"

"Ain't none," says Reagan.

"There certainly isn't," smiles his brother. "That's why we must take justice into our own hands. We must right a wrong!" And to make his statement perfectly clear to Reagan he pounds his fist on his desk. Palms down, he supports himself while he leans into Reagan's face. "What was the cop's name who did this injustice to you? Name him, and we'll put a bother on one of his name."

"But Agnes thinks you can get the ticket fixed!"

"Fixed?" roars Reagan's brother. "That's an out-of-town deal. I doubt that there's a boy around who could get that fixed. In Bridgeville? New York? Forget it. Now do yourself a favor and tell me that cop's name!"

"Shannon," says Reagan.

"Shannon," smiles Reagan's brother. "It's our duty to extract some punishment from a Shannon. A skinny Shannon. A fat Shannon. Any Shannon will do."

Having declared war on all the Shannons on earth, Reagan's brother heads for the Gent's room and reappears in Reagan's eyes wearing a loin cloth and carrying a club on his shoulder, the stunted fellow peering into corner and corner.

Reagan swears that he saw him thus: in re-telling his adventure to Aggie, he says, "He looked to me like a cave man. When he said to me, 'Let's go up to the Bureau of Records and Deeds. Let's look up a Shannon,' I asked him, 'Can you read?'"

It was only when Shannon's brother lit a cigar, a vile one that trailed blue smoke in the wake of his hurried walk, that Reagan followed him.

"If you find a Shannon," says Reagan, to his brother, "How can you tell if he's related to the cop up in Bridgeville?"

Reagan's brother looks at Reagan like he thinks his brother has gone soft in the head. "Related?" he says while punching the elevator button for the eighth floor, the both of them standing on the fourth floor and neither of them inclined to walk up. "What is the difference," he continues, as they exit on the eighth and step through a door that leads to their quarry, "as long as his name is Shannon? All Shannons are related. All Goldbergs are. All the Murphys. Years back there were only a few of each, and they knew each other, but now they are scattered all over the earth and confusion has set in concerning who is related to who." Reagan's brother shakes his finger into Reagan's face as he continues, "But," he says, "no matter how many Goldbergs or Murphys there are, it should be noted that only the Goldbergs are related to the Goldbergs. And it's the same when it comes to the Murphys." Seeing the confusion that is mounting on Reagan's face, he tries to clarify his statement: "You still go to Church? You believe?" When he gets a yes nod from Reagan he sarcastically asks him if he has ever heard of Jesus Christ.

"Everybody has," flatly states Reagan.

"No one has," says Reagan's brother. "Mention names of persons who consider the man standing next to them their brother."

"I don't think that O'Hara, the guy I work for, considers me his brother," understates Reagan.

"There you have it!" says Reagan's brother. "You're talking about a Catholic, an Irishman, who can't recognize a brother. Christ said all men are brothers. His brothers! He bet his robe on that and lost. Silly! If Jesus Christ had an answer there ain't a person living today who remembers what the question was! Just consider! One Goldberg thinks of the next Goldberg as his brother and one O'Hara thinks the same. But no O'Hara ever put his arm around a Goldberg and kissed him as a brother. Never! I say that there is a war going on, clan against clan, name against name, and what we do nullifies Christ's hope of brotherhood. I say that if a Smith does an injustice to you, what does it matter which one you settle your score with, be he Alfred, Robert, or John, just as long as his name is not the name you were born with?"

Thoroughly confused, Reagan follows his brother and the two of them seat themselves in the Bureau of Records and Deeds, Reagan's brother leafing through a volume of records that contains most of the 'S's. "Here's a Schoen," he says. "Here's a Shane." And next he leafs to a Shannon. His laughter booms so that it shatters the silence in this musty library room. Sure enough, he has found a Shannon. His finger traces the location, the lot numbers assigned to Wilbur B. Shannon. Indeed he has found a Shannon, not a cop writing tickets on top of Bridgeville's hill, but as Reagan's brother contends, any Shannon will do. "See him?" says this mischief of a fellow, to Reagan, "He owns a wholesale warehouse over in Washington Heights." And in a very short time the both of them find themselves snugly trapped in the traffic's flow: Reagan's brother with a smile on his face while he drives a car along with a million New Yorkers, all trying to reach someplace. Their pace is so slowed that Reagan is ready to leave the car and go home in the subway, and he would have, but they reached Washington Heights before he had figured out the pros and the cons of his situation.

Getting there was no pleasure to him. He recalls this to Aggie, "Washington Heights is no place to visit," he says.

This is true. Reagan's brother inches between bumper to bumper crammed curbs while he checks for a parking space. In this neighborhood, a person dies and is buried in a space provided for him, but his car rusts, ticketed, double-parked, until a finance company gets a re-possess and makes arrangements to have the thing towed away.

Under these conditions, Reagan's brother figures the odds. "We'll double park," he says, and decided, he turns the key so that his car's ignition stops and he and his brother are allowed to step into July's hot sunshine in the effort to seek Shannon. And between Reagan checking out house numbers and Reagan's brother admiring the graffiti on the walls along the way, the both of them finally discover that they have stepped into an office.

Just like Poppa Bear said to Momma Bear, "Who has been sitting in my chair?" so the two of them glance at each other. Surprised, they look at a girl.

She rises from her desk showing them both a curve at a glance. She relishes the boys getting a look. She wears a mini that shows so much of her legs Reagan's ready to cry, "She's not real!" Reagan's brother has turned to stone: he spits out words and watches them bounce on the concrete floor he stands on. With marvelous control he manages to say, "We are building inspectors. We have come to see Shannon. We have come to inspect his building." But now his voice quivers: he has held out long enough. "We'd like to see what is holding what up," he says with a giggle.

"Mister Shannon is not here this moment. He has gone to the john," says this charmer, without a blush on her face. Then she sighs, "He should be back in a second or so if everything goes all right."

Waiting is no problem for the two gentlemen. They sit, asses down, and they see W. B. Shannon come from a door marked PRIVATE. "That's him!" nudges Reagan's brother, forcing Reagan to ear-mark a magazine's page, hoping he'll get to it later. He sighs. That's him? The man he sees buttons a faded jacket, runs his hand down his fly, concerned that he's properly clad. Reagan shakes his head in doubt: That's not him. That's not Shannon, the young cop who stopped him up on Bridgeville's hill.

But the fellow proclaims himself a Shannon: he says, "I'm W. B. Shannon. What can I do for you?", and then he says, when Reagan's brother shows his badge, "Oh, no! Not another day wasted on an inspection tour? This place was inspected only a few weeks ago! I guess you fellows have little to do."

"We are very busy," says Reagan's brother, "but regulations are regulations."

"Regulations be damned!" says Shannon, his eyes sharpened like a caged rat's while it sniffs for a way to escape.

Reagan's brother gives Reagan an elbow in his ribs, what shall we settle for?

"I've got bunches of goods here that I sell," suggests Shannon, ignoring Reagan's smug go-for-it-all look. "I've got radios and TV's." He gestures: "Look around you. Pick out something you need."

Reagan's brother takes a complaint pad and a ball point from his briefcase. "That's a violation," he tells Shannon. "Bribing us City inspectors. A man could get arrested. Imprisoned. Get his name in the papers. Bad for business, bribery. You got a family at home to worry about? You got a wife? Kids?"

A smile tries to start on Shannon's face and Reagan sees it while his brother checks some overhead pipes. He swallows back a lump in his throat and says, "My wife is dying of cancer," but only Reagan hears him. In the warehouse the stackings of filled cartons seem to sense their doom in the presence of Reagan's brother. All is quiet. Fans hum monotonously from overhead hangers. From a distant street a squad car screams as if in agony and an ambulance wails in sorrow, both sounds filtering into the room

through cracks in neglected window frames. Reagan watches Shannon shiver while his own flesh and blood checks for violations: the man peeking into shadowy places in this dimly lit place and saying: "Aha! You see that, Shannon?"

Shannon sees nothing.

Reagan's brother speaks: "There's a violation." His eyes notice flaws in some pipe arrangement. "I see a few others," he says.

"This place was inspected a few weeks back!" protests Shannon.

"Never by me," swears Reagan's brother.

"The devil damn you!" screams Shannon.

"I have already put into my recommendation," says Reagan's brother ever so softly, "that it would be better to tear this whole warehouse down."

"You wouldn't?" says Shannon, with sorrow in his eyes.

By this time twilight has settled into Shannon's warehouse. The day has worn as thin as Shannon's nerves, the sun ready to set in the west. "Don't you think that you've bothered this man enough?" whispers Reagan to his brother, but his brother continues, "I see a violation."

Into Shannon's troubled day comes Miss Charmer with a batch of messages in her hand. She recites those she has gathered: "A Mr. Guad—an income tax guy was here to check your books. And Georgie Q. called, claiming you owe him some money. Abrams, down the street, says he'll be late with his rent and a fellow with murder written all over him is waiting outside with a radio on his lap and a I've-been-took-look on his face."

"Tell that guy who's waiting," says Shannon, not believing what is happening, "that I can't get to see him today. Tell him I'm busy. Make up something."

W. B. sits on top of a large wooden box and shuffles violations the way a Saturday night loser does cards at a poker game. He awaits his next draw, knowing that Reagan's brother is doing the dealing.

"There's a violation," says this villain. He chuckles while he writes down another.

Reagan sees the violator. In this warehouse Reagan smells the hunted smell of sweated leather. Officer Shannon's smell, his leg angled and used as a writing place, pen in hand. "You did wrong, Reagan," he writes with one hand while his other mops away the wet that keeps dripping from his nose.

Reagan's brother's mouth constantly chaws, "I see a violation!" He is Shannon, the cop on top of Bridgeville's hill, and he lets spit dribble down the side of his mouth for his pleasure, "I see a violation!"

Sure, he's Shannon! Reagan's brother stands the same as officer Shannon. He has a pad. He has a pen. The man, being older, has a bigger gut. There are pistols where pistols should hang.

Reagan's brother, noticing W. B.'s slim waist line says, "I see another violation," but W. B. sees nothing. He dreams.

He says: "I think my brother's boy is a cop. Last time I saw him was just before he moved his whole family into the Catskill mountains. A place called Bridgeville." He stares at Reagan, "You happen to know that spot?"

Before Reagan's ears can perk up, Reagan's brother says, "That is another violation."

"This place was inspected only a few weeks ago!" moans W. B. Shannon, overworking some information that has long lost its usefulness.

"Never by me," says Reagan's brother.

Being one of the dumb ones in Ernie Kovac's well remembered NAIROBI TRIO, Reagan turns his head and stares at Shannon: "Never by me!" he informs W. B., "because I'm not a building inspector." Reagan's brother turns his head in bewilderment at this sudden turn of events. He looks at Reagan: the cat now out of the bag.

"You're not?" questions Shannon. "Your name is Reagan?" he mutters while his mind flips through the indexed file of all the friends he'd known in his life but, try as he might, when his brain comes to 'R' his mind draws a blank. "Reagan?" He shakes his head, the name not ringing a bell.

But the name 'Shannon' splinters into a headache in Reagan's mind. Shannon is a cop waiting on top of Bridgeville's hill. Shannon is a hurt to Reagan. So is Reagan's brother. He feels sympathetic. He understands the hurt of W. B. Shannon, and acting in the man's interest, he says to his brother, "Don't you think that you've played cat and mouse with this fellow long enough?"

"Cat and mouse?" answers Reagan's brother, the thought never having entered his head. "God, man!, can't you understand that we are in a war? We are here to slaughter Shannon!"

"That is a shame," declares Reagan, "because as far as I'm concerned you are Shannon."

"Shannon?" inquires Reagan's brother. "How do you figure that?"

"Never you mind," says Reagan.

Conversation ended, Reagan approaches his brother, and it's a sight to see—Reagan standing two inches taller than his brother and that much wider at the shoulders, the firmer of the two staring down at the squirmer of the two, Reagan saying: "You want to step outside, or shall we settle this right here?"

Reagan's brother understands. He has respect for authority, particularly when he sees the size of the fist Reagan is threatening him with.

"What do you want me to do?" says Reagan's brother.

"I want you," says Reagan, "to tear up all those complaints you've written and tell Mr. Shannon that you are sorry about ruining his day."

"That doesn't sound reasonable to me," says Reagan's brother, "considering that I went to all this trouble for you."

"What sounds reasonable to you, and what is reasonable to me," says Reagan, "are two entirely different views of a situation."

"He don't have to say he's sorry," interrupts W. B. Shannon. "Get him to tear up these violations and I'll be more than grateful to you."

"He will," promises Reagan.

And promise kept: Reagan's brother tears up the violations. With a sweep of his hand he grabs those W. B. has collected, and tearing them, "I hope you two boys are happy," he says.

"I couldn't be happier," smiles W. B. Shannon, and, "I thank you," he says to Reagan, shaking the fellow's hand.

"I'm happy," confesses Reagan, to his brother.

"I'm not," says Reagan to the both of them.

"What will make you happy?" asks Shannon, putting his foot into his mouth.

"A color TV," says Reagan's brother.

"I would gladly give you one," says W. B., "but that would be bribery and I could land in jail for that."

"You could give my brother two sets," suggests Reagan's brother, "as a gift. Then he will give one to me."

"You can't hang me now," says W. B. "You tore up all those violations you wrote."

"I can stop back tomorrow," grimly says Reagan's brother. "It is all the same to me."

On the top of Bridgeville's hill a Reagan pays tribute to a Shannon, but in a warehouse below a Shannon is obligated to a Reagan. "It doesn't make sense to me," says Reagan to his brother.

"It does," says Reagan's brother, both watching the conquered Shannon wheel two cartoned TV's their way. "Like war makes sense. Like a football—a baseball game makes sense." He turns to Reagan: "It is not the hurt. It is in the box score. This time it reads, Shannon, twenty-five dollars for a speeding ticket but the other side reads eight hundred dollars for us Reagans. A clear cut victory for our clan, I'd say."

"He left me there," says Reagan to Aggie, his fingers tuning to the six o'clock news. "It doesn't seem right," he sighs, "but this color picture sure is lovely!"

Aggie, who didn't play doctor and nurse for nothing—while she watches the robbing of a bank in Queens, "and they got away with the loot," wryly says Walter Cronkite, says, "More and more I believe your brother's thinking is right. Every man for himself, and the devil take the others."

"That's against our teaching!" protests Reagan.

"It might be," agrees Aggie. "But it is the way of living today."

Reagan mulls through this thought while he watches a football game and a violent crime show before he goes to bed. What he dreams about is certainly nobody's business, but it must be said that next morning Reagan shows up at work with a chip on his shoulder. He growls at Mr. O'Hara and he doesn't bother with Farber, even though Farber signals him. It is written in his company's records that shortly after this occurrence Reagan was promoted to foreman. Later he replaced Mr. O'Hara. Going up the ladder seemed to be easy for him.

Warren Woessner

STRIPER LURE

I pick what's left
off a wave's last edge:
blue wood bullet,
two white eyes
and brass rings.
Hook's gone.

Pop, it's one
you could have used
and lost
like we lost you.
Something in deep
grabbed hold
would not let go—
then the thin line snapped
and you were gone.

Donald Levering

BINDWEED

Sprouted from a devil's hair
This vine climbs like a serpent
And strangles sleeping fruit
Its roots wind into cables
Along walls
Branching out into the gardener's
Nervous breakdown
When he hoes them their
White veins multiply

It has been known to bring
Scarecrows to their knees

4

Bumped my head
On the iron ladle
Hanging in the kitchen
After the swelling rose
The lesbian spoons stacked
In the silverware drawer
Called me brother

5

Above the racket of the
Washboard band
The redhead's vest of spoons
Rang laughter

Michael Rensner

WALKING NIGHT IN LAWRENCE, KANSAS

the front door
of a house opens
and all the air outside
breaks and collapses
in splintered white
on the ground

long footsteps rasp
on sand tossed over
snowy streets trails
of footprints wait
quietly for feet
to fill them

white moon and red tailights
lit matches scattering
stars on the ground
in front of one foot
following the other

Steven Hind

BALING AFTER THE FLOOD

We catch the cottonmouth
sliding under August
for water and shade.
We fling the hatchet
at his tense aim
and kill him.

The stubble whispers
with his writhing.
We insist our fingers
touch the dead vigor.
We twist open the white
jaws, clutching revulsion
by the throat. These
thin teeth, we say.
All day our hands tremble
in the hot grip of work.

Laurie Blauner

FOSSILS

The room to wake up in is the color of earth.
All night I dreamt of the human body,
even the hands had a past of their own.
I have heard you say that your fingers
replaced the darkness in the room
of a woman. I want her to tell me
how it feels: outside, in black hills
rocks press my flesh with their emptiness.
After light rises up
I trace the lines of a skeleton,
stones holding the curves of bones
like a first lover. When night fills
my house again I want to awaken
to your fingerprints left on my flesh like a stone.

John Works

CAREER GOALS AND THINGS

At about nine-thirty this morning I was sitting on the front steps waiting for the mailman. I had the morning paper, a cup of coffee, and a red pen; I was reading through the want ads and circling the jobs that sounded good. Most of the good ones these days are at fast food joints and drive-in grocery stores, places where you can make seven or eight hundred a month working inside, air-conditioned. Of course, when you start they probably put you over in the bad part of town in the middle of the night. I don't know.

Anyway, I'm really not too serious about finding a job. At least not right now. First I need to get my unemployment checks coming: there's been some mix-up about an interview and my checks haven't come. I keep the red pen out so that the mailman won't get the wrong idea when he sees those envelopes with TEXAS EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION across the top. He'll see that I'm looking for work, that I'm just down on my luck, that I'm no free-loader. But, so far, it hasn't worked. Every time he sees one of those envelopes he starts whistling; last time he brought one he was whistling "On the Sunny Side of the Street." He has skinny legs—in the summer he wears shorts—he carries two cans of dog repellent, and he's always smiling. Probably thinking about retirement: I hear they get good benefits.

I really wanted my check, and I was hoping for a letter from Sally. Sally's my wife. She's in jail.

She's been in jail for three weeks now and she hasn't even been to court yet. They had a hearing but the judge set her bail so high I can't get her out. He said she was a bad risk and it was a crime of violence and she had been in trouble before. That's what the lawyer tells me, anyway. I don't know. Sally won't talk to me. I've been to jail to visit but she won't see me, and she won't answer my letters. She hasn't spoken to me since the day she lost her job. That was the day she got in trouble.

We had been in Texas for three months. Both of us had jobs and for the first time we didn't owe any money. I worked with computers at the welfare department. I'd push a button and a bunch of names came on the screen and I'd write them down on a piece of paper. About a hundred of us worked in the same room. The guy next to me wore headphones and listened to rock music all day. He also wore a leather belt with LARRY stitched across the back, but his name was Harmon. At lunch-time we smoked pot in the parking lot. It was all right.

They made jewelry at the place where Sally worked. She answered the phone, typed a little, and read movie magazines. Only eight people worked there, and none of them worked very hard. The owner, a millionaire from

Fort Worth named Cecil Creek, ran the company as a tax write-off, I think. He didn't spend much time at the office; his only regular duty was to go to Fort Worth once a month to get money from his trust fund. He was big and fat and when he did show up at work he usually brought enough donuts for everyone.

After six weeks at the jewelry company, Sally heard that the state was hiring accountants at nine hundred a month. She started taking accounting classes at the community college at night. She studied at work, and no one seemed to care.

With Sally going to college at night, we didn't see much of one another. She was never home to cook, so I spent a lot of time at fast food places and out shooting pool. Sally changed around that time. It was that college that did it: they were always having talks about job-hunting and career goals and things. She wanted a better job, she said. She wanted more money, wanted to buy a house. She even talked about having kids. It all sort of made me nervous. She's a strong person and I guess I like that. When she makes up her mind about something, that's it. But I just like drinking beer with her and skinny-dipping at the lake and looking at the butterfly tattoo on her hip. I don't know.

Then I got laid off. The supervisor caught me smoking dope in Harmon's car. Harmon was across the street getting hamburgers when it happened. The supervisor walked up from behind me and said, "Good afternoon, Myers." He didn't say anything else and for a while I thought everything was okay. But during the three o'clock break he handed me my check. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "We won't be needing you any longer, Myers."

I went downtown and filed for unemployment.

My check didn't come the first week. When Sally came home that night—the checks are supposed to come each Thursday—I was lying on the bed drinking a beer and watching the late movie, "The Fountainhead." She yelled at the dogs when she came in. Then I heard her cussing when she found only one beer in the refrigerator.

"I thought you were going to get more beer today," she said as she came into the bedroom.

"No money. My check didn't come."

"Why not?"

"I don't know." The dogs began to bark and I went to the back door to quiet them. I didn't want to talk about the unemployment check, so I stayed in the kitchen and fixed a sandwich.

Sally came in brushing her teeth. "Did you call to find out why the check didn't come?"

"Yes," I lied. "They said something about not filling out a form all the way. I don't know."

"God! You've been fired! Where's the money? Why are they so stupid? They owe it to you!"

"Well, I don't know. I did sort of screw up, I guess," I said. "Did that guy give you a hard time today?" Mr. Creek's son, Danny, had moved back to Texas from Aspen and now worked for the jewelry company. He didn't like Sally studying at work, that's what she told me. Actually, I think he just didn't like Sally. That sometimes happens.

"Yeah," she said. "He told me that if my attitude doesn't improve he'll have to let me go. Jerk. Who's he think he is?"

"What's he like?"

"He's got skinny hips...he drives a Mercedes, and he walks around all day with his sunglasses on top of his head."

The dogs began to bark again. "We've got to do something about the dogs," I said.

"Like what?"

"I don't know, but the neighbors..."

"Don't worry." Sally took off her blouse. "You're sweating. Why don't you turn on the fan?"

"Too much trouble. The noise makes me nervous, anyway."

"Did you look for a job today?"

"I have to get this unemployment thing figured out first."

Sally got into bed. That is when the guy banged on our bedroom window and Sally screamed and grabbed me and all I could see were two eyeballs pressed close to the glass and the fist beating against the window pane. I couldn't move. Sally looked up, saw the face, and screamed again. Then he yelled something and was gone.

"He's gone," I said.

"Do something," Sally pleaded.

"What?" I didn't want to get out of bed, but I didn't want to stay in it.

"Go look out the front window."

I went to the front door and opened it. A man stood on our steps. He squinted and had a long beard. He was wearing bermuda shorts, sandals, and brown socks. He stepped toward me, hand extended.

"Your name?"

I didn't know what to say.

"Your name?" he repeated.

I looked at his hand. His fingers bore yellow tobacco stains. "What do you want?"

"And your name? The dogs, they are yours?"

"Yes. What's your name?"

"My name is Nick Kastlegas. And yours?"

"Billy."

"Billy what?"

"Just Billy."

"I want you to do something about those dogs. They have kept me up for three nights now!" He spoke with a heavy accent. Europe somewhere. "And I am not like you! In the morning I must get up early. I must work! I will speak up for my rights! These dogs they are a nuisance! Something must be done!" This wasn't so bad. I relaxed a little.

"Yeah. They bother me, too."

Sally walked up behind me in a green bathrobe. "What do you mean banging on our window in the middle of the night! You scared us to death! Who do you think you are?"

"The dogs..."

"Our dogs aren't bothering anyone." Sally interrupted. "No one else has complained. What's wrong with you?"

I put my hand on Sally's shoulder and said, "I'm sorry. I'll keep them in the kitchen from now on."

But Sally was still mad. "Who do you think you are, scaring us like that? Nobody else has complained!"

"Now Sally," I said. Then I turned to the man. "I'm sorry."

"It is a good thing! If this happens again, I call the police!"

He walked away and Sally reached for the open door. I grabbed it just as she tried to slam it shut.

"Why won't you let me slam the door?"

"I don't know. Wouldn't do any good."

Neither of us got much sleep that night; the next day Sally overslept and was two hours late for work and Danny fired her. I was reading the newspaper and drinking a cup of coffee when she came home. She walked right by me and didn't start crying until she saw the mess the dogs had made in the kitchen. They had turned over the garbage can. Sally stood in the middle of the room with her hands by her side, looking at a chicken bone on the floor and crying.

"I got fired," she sobbed. "Danny said he couldn't take it any longer and I would have to go." Tears came down her cheeks and she gasped for breath.

"Why did he fire you?"

Sally looked up at me and stopped crying. She dried her face with a paper towel and blew her nose. "I was late for work."

"Didn't you tell him about that guy last night and not getting any sleep?"

"He didn't care."

"You want a cup of coffee?" I asked. Sally didn't answer, but just stared out the window. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm not going on unemployment, I'll tell you that. And I'm not going to quit school."

"You want to go swimming this afternoon?" I asked. "Why don't we take the day off, get a six-pack and go to the lake?"

"No. Why don't you go look for a job?"

"I will. I have to get this problem with unemployment fixed first, though."

Sally turned and mumbled something that I couldn't hear.

"What?"

"Nothing. I'm taking the car. I'll be back in a while." She walked out the door.

"Where are you going?" I shouted, but she didn't answer.

That was when she did it. She hasn't spoken to me since then and I only know what I hear from the lawyer. She went right back to the jewelry company and parked down the street. Danny didn't come out for two hours. Sally was waiting, out in the heat. When he left, she followed him for twenty minutes before she hit him. She must have been getting madder all the time. I'm surprised he didn't notice her in his mirror. But she waited and when she hit him she did it just right: rammed into the Mercedes at a stoplight and knocked it into the path of a cattle truck. It broke his arm and cut him up a little, but nothing really serious. Sally drove off, but someone took down the license number. The police got here about the same time she did, and driving up with a flat tire and the front end all crumpled didn't look too good.

They took her to jail that day. I haven't seen her since. The lawyer says she's doing okay, but I wouldn't know: I didn't get a letter from her today. When the mailman came—he was whistling "Someone to Watch Over Me"—he brought the gas bill and a notice from the unemployment people. They say I'm eligible for benefits. There wasn't a check, though. I guess my checks will start coming next week. I don't know.

Valorie A. Breyfogle

ALL CONSUMING

This was after we'd all stopped going
to and from and just lived in the parking
lot. I had just pleaded for permission
to stand in line to buy a NEW, IMPROVED
AUTOMATIC TOAST BUTTERER when the ceiling
of the mall
fell in.

Lyn Lifshin

ATLANTIC CITY 1958

i've taken too many
clothes with me
lugging them with
locks exploding
breaking packing
and unpacking in
different rooms
with my mother say
ing yes or no like
she will much too
long when it comes
to men this is
before i kick the
person i hate most
on paper when i
still fight with
whoever i'm with
and then put on the
green and blue
dress thats like
a sarong and makes
me feel exotic
i feel the space
between me and the
cloth skinny at
112 and then walk
6 hours on the board
walk teaching with
my hips and eyes
tho my mother will
never let me high
anyway on what
i have gotten
rid of the one
part of me i knew
i was better off
without

WANTED

the man born in 49
the man with a sweet
smile glasses

devil upper right arm
tattoo reportedly
has an interest
in camping gardening
the most exotic
animals

Morris Lynn Johnson
probably called Lynnie

alias Lyn Johnson
slick hair tattoo
of a small girl sitting

Jill on his shoulder
Gail on the left one

vowed not to
be taken alive

Beverly M. Matherne

CIMETIÈRE

Old, old death
In Louisiane is like
Disembowelled pecan shells
Whose meats dried black
Float in mud puddles
After a hurricane.

Jim Bogan

"THE DISCRIMINATIONS: VIRTUOUS AMUSEMENTS AND WICKED DEMONS"

by Ch'ên Chi-ju
Resident Fellow Confucian Institute of Correspondence
Ming (i.e. luminous) Dynasty
from his greatest work: the Shu Hua Chin T'ang
assembled by Jim Bogan

I.

Of Virtuous Amusements, i.e. good conditions, are numbered the following:

a party of articulate lovers
a clean table
the season of tea, of bamboo shoots, of watermelon
a host who is not bold and severe
reading a great book slowly
sitting in the midst of landscape paintings
burning incense and cultivating fine manners
examining old masters
no need to close the window
a great monk in the snow (i.e., philosophical discussions)
to be surrounded by rare stones, wild flowers, hand-made vessels
recovering from illness
awakening from sleep
walking to the River
dry shoes
snowed in with friends
plenty of time to roll and unroll the pictures
strong men and sublime music
a clear sky with a beautiful moon—
or as the translator of Bojang put it:
"On top of Cold Mountain the lone round moon
Lights the whole clear cloudless sky—
Honor this priceless natural treasure
Concealed in five shadows; sunk deep in the flesh."

II.

Of Wicked Demons, i.e. bad conditions, are numbered the following:

the unwilling horse
the season of yellow prunes
after drinking
inscriptions written in a confused way
a hurried visitor at one's side
too busy to watch the sun set
a room where water is dripping in
cares of the world
sneezing rats
to ask the price
pictures used for cushions
eaten by bookworms
caught by Mr. Inbetween
sad dreams in a fitful night's sleep
a handle that does not fit the socket
aching ears (i.e., idle talk)
broken shoe-laces
a hundred degrees in the trailer

III.

[Ch'ên Chi-ju goes on to distinguish the good and bad fates that may befall a picture]

Here follow assorted bad fates which may befall a picture:

to be scorched in a fire
to fall into the hands of a jerk
to be pawned
to be buried in a tomb
to be covered by glass
to be cut up for roof patches

Here follow assorted good fates which may befall a picture:

to be hung near a window at eye-level
to belong to a literary courtesan
to be placed in a sturdy frame
to be named well
to be admired by opened eyes
to be painted by Fan K'uan, Raphael, Ray Morgan

IV.

Ch'ên Chi-ju's last words:

From the grapples
of Wicked Demons
into the hands
of Virtuous Amusements,
Kuan-yin
Deliver us.

Patrick Worth Gray

EVENING
for Deborah

You are sad today, and yet
You are still so young
Hummingbirds drink from your hair.

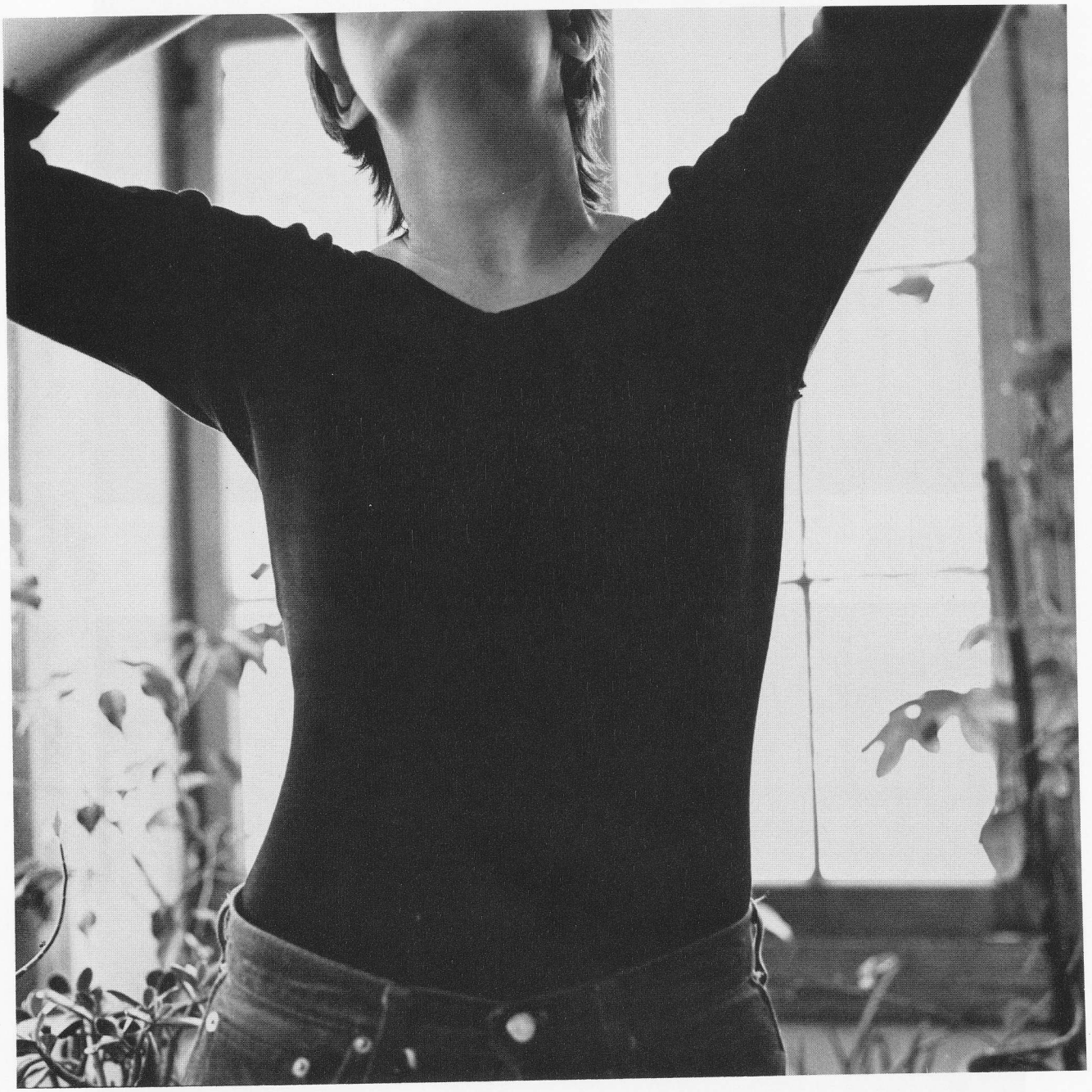
I speak to you
But you cannot hear me over the humming.

You walk down to the river and in.

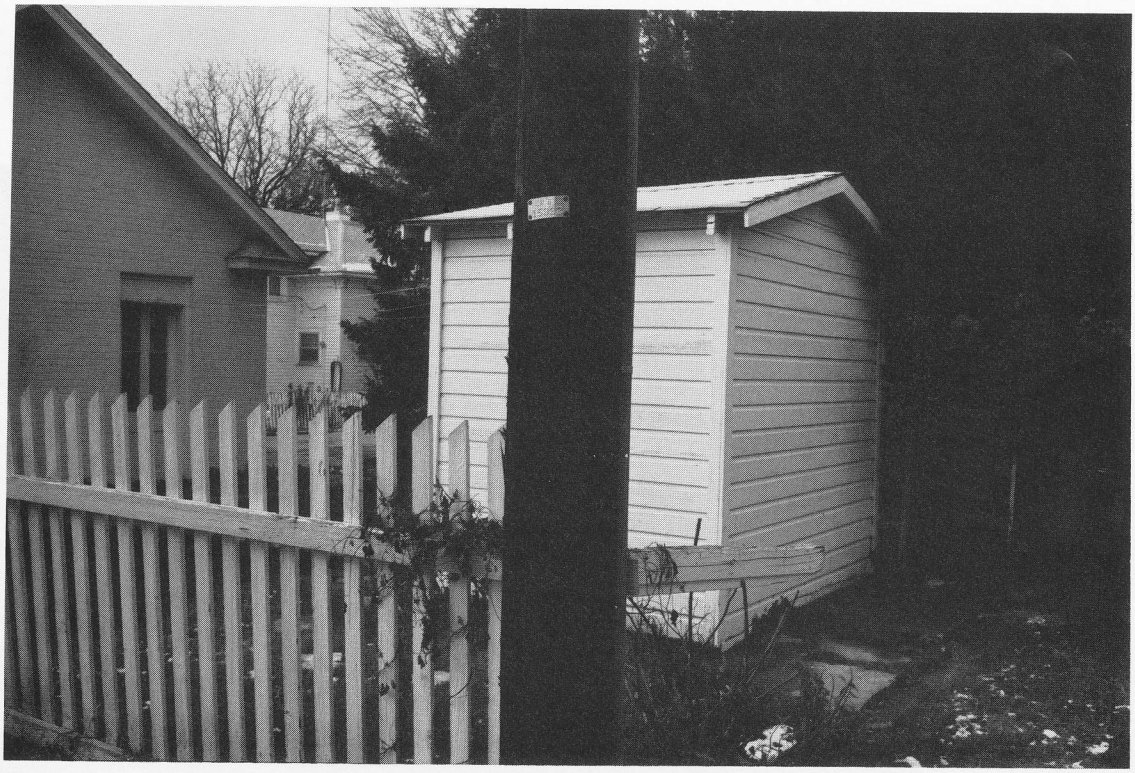
The words I spoke follow you
Into the river, the hummingbirds
Fly with you underwater,
I stand on the bank
And wring my hands, wanting you,
Wanting my words to return.

I find my way back to the city
And watch lovers find each other.

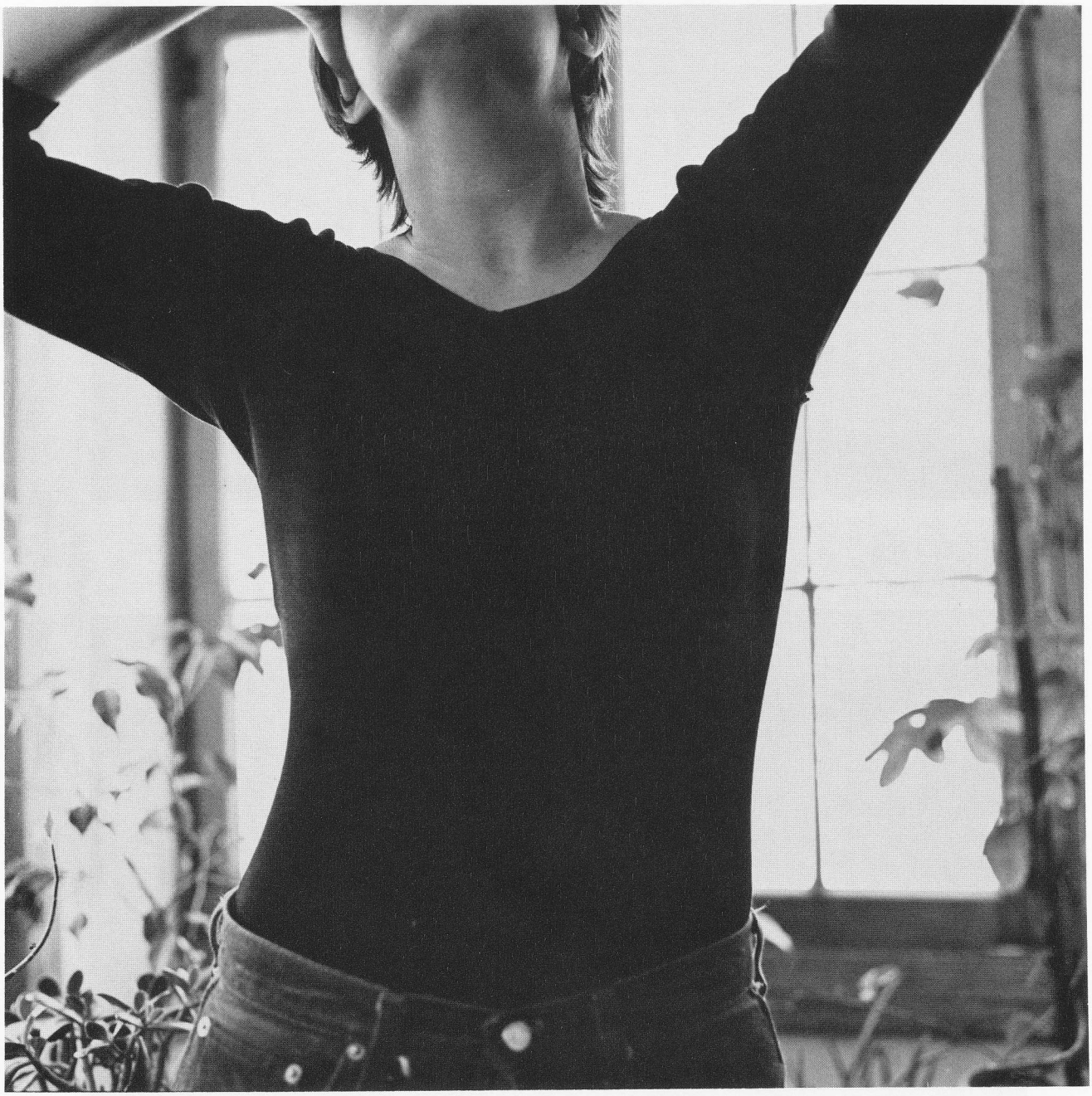
I touch my notebook and it falls to dust.
I stare out the window at the vanishing city
As the lights go out and the long breathing begins.



Kathryn Clark

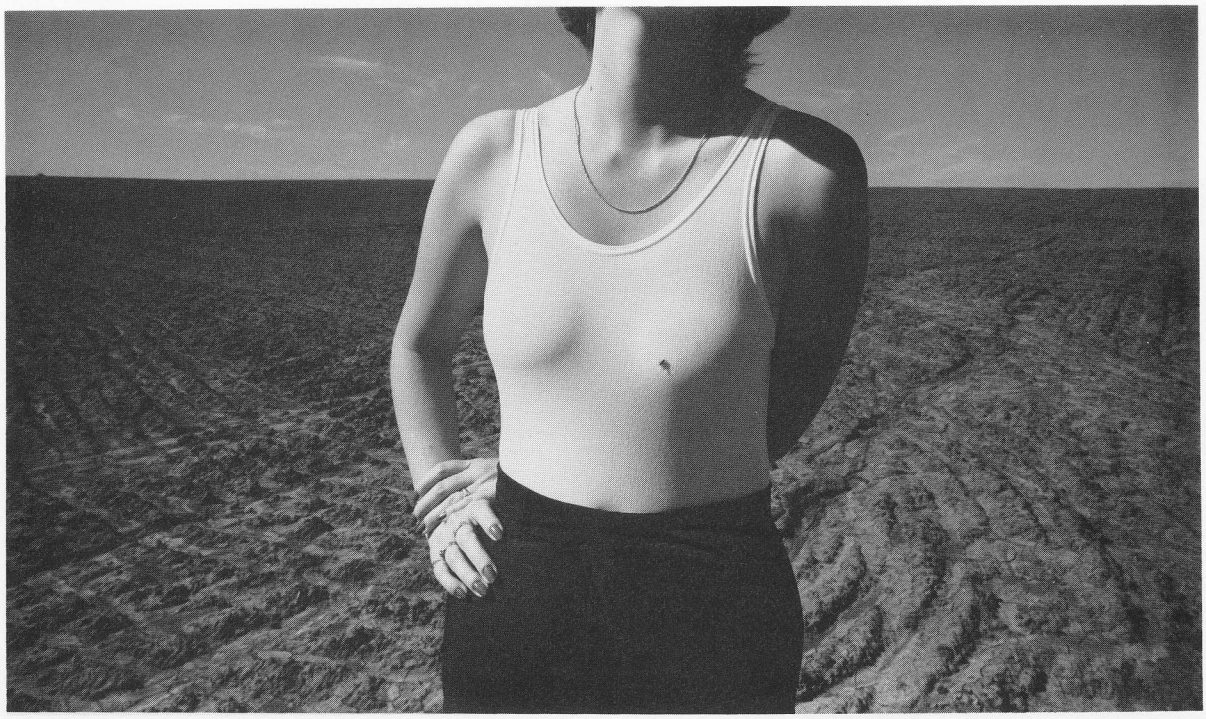


Keith Jacobshagen



Kathryn Clark

Kathryn Clark



14-31-9

14-82-10

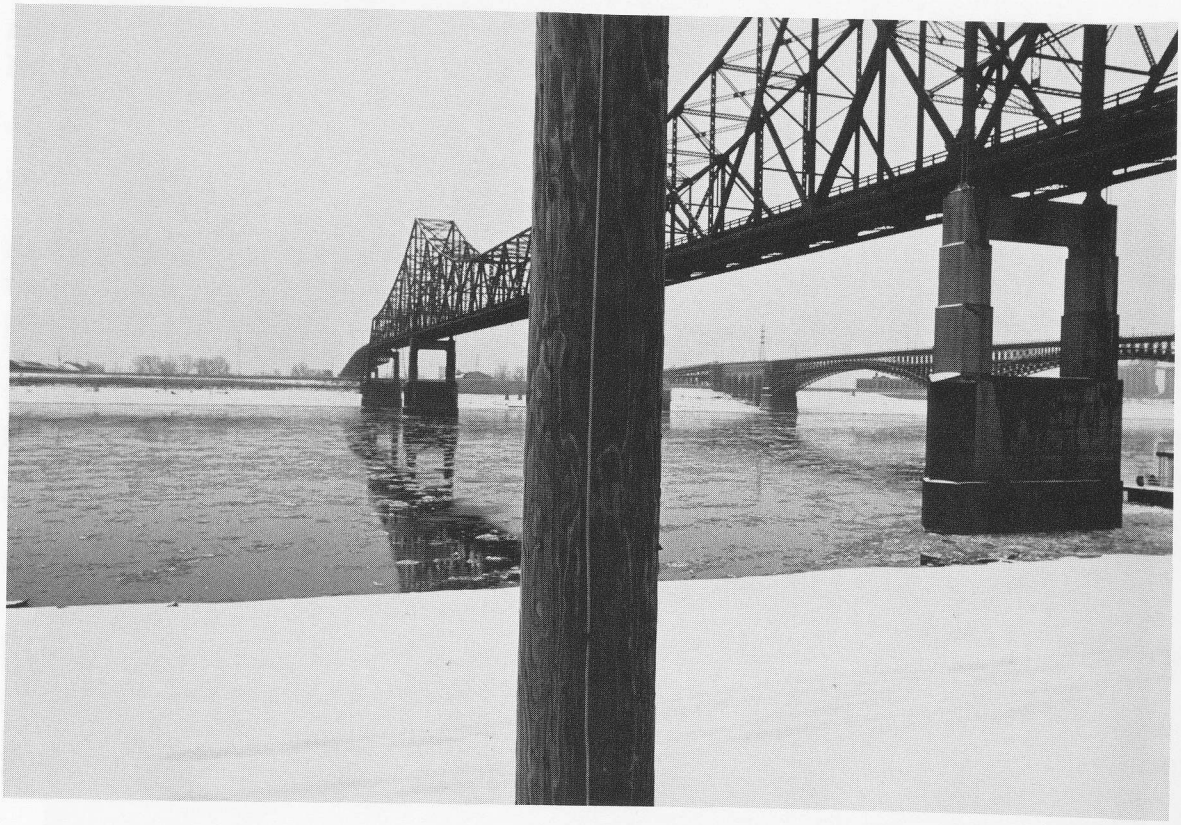
Larry S. Ferguson

13-77-12

15-64-6

Larry S. Ferguson

John Spence



Mitch Deck

Oz Wille

Mary Baumann

Robin Tawney

AN INTERVIEW WITH TED KOOSER

TAWNEY: First of all, what motivated you to write? When did you start?

KOOSER: I guess I started when I was in grade school. I remember that in fourth grade we wrote some poems; we had a very good teacher. Then when I was in high school I had a girl friend and wrote a lot of poems for her, ballads. I guess I probably wrote one every day in study hall. But I didn't get interested in writing seriously until I was at Iowa State in 1959. I took creative writing there from a fellow named Will Jumper, who really got me going on it, and I've been serious about it ever since.

TAWNEY: Did you read anyone in particular when you were younger?

KOOSER: The first literature that I took seriously was Jack Kerouac's On the Road and some of those beat things. I really wanted to be an intellectual. I remember buying a copy of a book called Outlines of the History of Dogma by a guy by the name of Adolf Harnack. God, it was impenetrable. I carried it around with me because it looked so good. I can't remember who I was reading when I started to write poetry. I remember being very interested in Edward Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost. I read some e.e. cummings early; I guess every young person reads him at some time. And I did some poems that aped cummings; then I got away from that.

TAWNEY: Do you remember what particular things you got from Robinson and Frost?

KOOSER: I think it was probably the ability to use metrical verse with a rather informal language, an idiomatic language. I can't think of specific poems that were of particular interest to me. I was also very interested in John Crowe Ransom's poems. Actually, his selection of poems makes a very slim volume, but I think there are some excellent pieces. I still go back and read Randall Jarrell. He was a tremendous poet. He has been criticized for being on the edge of sentimentality. I don't see it; I guess that's because I'm that way myself.

TAWNEY: Was the only class you took the one from Will Jumper?

KOOSER: We had a quarter system at Iowa State. I must have taken over the years two or three quarters from Jumper. We also had a group at Iowa State called Writers' Round Table. There were sixteen people and you submitted work, and if you were accepted then you became a member.

We met each week. Of the sixteen people, four of them were due to have something on schedule each week so we rotated that way. That was probably the best learning experience I've had. Most of the people were about my age and we would really attack each other. It was very good. The first couple of experiences, we just walked away in tears. It was very productive.

TAWNEY: That's pretty unusual. Most writing classes turn out to be mutual admiration societies.

KOOSER: This was run by a man on the staff, and he didn't put up with any bullshit from us. Either you had something critical to say or you didn't say anything at all. There was no false praise going on. When I have taught creative writing, I have tried to do the same thing. I don't see much sense in lavishing praise on somebody's work. It's much better to tell him what's wrong with it.

TAWNEY: What about the Master of Arts itself as far as academic background or support for your poetry? Did you think that was worthwhile?

KOOSER: Not really. I did it because I had started it. I started out as an undergraduate in architecture and then I decided I couldn't handle the math and physics at Iowa State for the architecture degree. It is tremendously heavy with engineering, theoretical and applied mathematics. I just couldn't get into it all. So I dropped out of architecture and I got into a program which was then called distributed studies, which was Iowa State's attempt to get into the liberal arts without letting Iowa U. know what they were doing. I graduated with a secondary teaching degree with an emphasis in English. Then I went off and I taught high school a year in a little town—Madrid, Iowa. It was just a nightmare—a real tough school: kids fighting teachers, teachers fighting kids—just an awful experience. I didn't know what I was going to do with my life then, and I didn't want to continue in high school teaching. I had no other skills other than that I could paint signs. I did a lot of sign painting for a time. So that summer I went out and painted signs all summer long and tried to decide what I was going to do. I had received an offer for a readership at Nebraska. Karl Shapiro was teaching there and I had read a lot of his poetry and so I was was interested in going there. And so I went out to Nebraska and entered the MA program. I was in that for the first year, but I took too many courses from Karl Shapiro and they would not renew my readership because I wasn't playing the academic game. My advisor called me in at the end of the year and said, "We would like to have kept you on and given you an instructorship next year, but you've taken too much creative work and not enough of the other stuff." I didn't take bibliography; I didn't take Chaucer. So they said, "You're out." I didn't know what the hell I was going to do. I was married to my first wife then and she had a high school teaching job.

But it wasn't enough for us to live on. I looked around and looked around and drank a lot, trying to decide what I was going to do. I found a management trainee job in the paper for this insurance company. I thought, "What the hell, I'll go out for a few months and make some money and then I'll go back and enroll myself in graduate school, finish my MA and pay my own tuition." I got out there and right away it began to feel sort of comfortable, working eight hours a day and making pretty good money. I just never got away from it. But I felt like I ought to finish my MA since I started it, and whenever they would offer a night seminar I would go down and take it. Finally, I got it done. Just barely, though. At that time you had to take the Princeton Language Exam and I took the German exam. I flunked it once and just barely squeaked by the second time. I got my MA, but I've never used it. I did teach creative writing—a night session at Nebraska—for about five years, one night a week. The MA probably qualified me somewhat, but mainly it was just the department chairman that let me do that kind of thing. He was a really nice guy and it was important to me at that time to have that kind of an identity and that I could feel like I was doing something with the poetry while I was working at the insurance company. Now it doesn't make any difference to me.

TAWNEY: I'm curious about your job and your relationship with it. If you had your druthers would you continue to work there or would you rather just stay home and write poetry all the time?

KOOSER: I'd rather stay home. If Kathy was making the kind of money that we could live on, I'd like to be a housewife and stay home and write and read and paint.

TAWNEY: What kind of painting do you do?

KOOSER: I do a little bit of drawing—that little pamphlet, "Grass County," shows some examples of my drawings—and I do acrylic painting. I've done a couple that are a sort of mock-primitive—distorted perspectives of some of those small towns with lots of little buildings and houses. Now I'm starting a series of old store fronts, sort of photo-realist painting, but not done with that tremendous meticulous sense. I don't take quite so long on them. But they come off as being extremely realistic.

TAWNEY: The ones in "Grass County" didn't seem as if they were actual places. They were just generated?

KOOSER: Right, just imagined. These other paintings of the small towns and the little houses are all imaginary, too. The store fronts, though, are actual store fronts that I'm working up from photographs.

TAWNEY: So you go out and look for material?

KOOSER: Yeah, in that sense. I've also taken a lot of pictures over the years of old farmhouses and things like that probably, although I would not copy one for a drawing, have given me some sense of what kind of detail each of these should have, what kinds of window frames old houses have—that sort of thing. I don't really do an awful lot of drawing and painting because I really don't want to take the time to do it. I don't consider myself seriously as a visual artist. Although I enjoy doing it, I feel like when I have some time I ought to be writing or at least trying to write. It makes you kind of a dilettante when you can paint and write; you don't give your full energy to either of them.

TAWNEY: You feel it detracts instead of adds a dimension?

KOOSER: I have always thought you could say to somebody, "Oh, I write when I really feel like writing and then when I don't feel like writing I fill it in with painting." But all the time you're thinking, "Well, I could be writing, not just sitting here at this easel." I used to believe that you really ought to wait until you felt like writing, until something came to you and you could go to the typewriter and just get it all down. Well, I just realized—and I've been at this for twenty years—that you can, by just writing random stuff, just making lists of things, get right into a poem, somehow unearth something in you just by the exercise of actually writing. And I notice I've been doing that at work lately. I feel under some pressure because I have to finish a number of poems for this book Bill Kloefkorn and I are doing together. So I take a piece of paper and I just start scribbling on it random words and things and before too long something from my unconscious begins to surface and there's some kind of poem. Now it may be an insignificant poem, but at least it's something along those lines.

TAWNEY: So you don't really go looking for poems? Many of your poems talk about driving around the country, about places. You don't do that specifically to look for poems?

KOOSER: No, I don't think I have ever really looked for a poem. I'm extremely suspicious of that kind of poem. If I happen to be walking to work and I see a pigeon that's been run over by a car in the street and it's arrayed in the street in a certain way that it's symbolic of flight—the destruction of flight—it would be such an obvious poem that I would turn from that and try to do something else. There are things that happen. I read a poem last night about walking to work and somebody had kicked a piece of snow down the sidewalk and left a little trail like a comet. Now, that kind of thing is a poem I think you would come upon, but you certainly would not go out and

look for. Also most of the things are done in reflection, some experiences here and then several a year or two later. Your unconscious has been working on this all this time and plying it with some kind of metaphor in your head, and you can come back to it.

TAWNEY: You're preparing a collection of poems. Do you see yourself as having gone through certain periods of writing?

KOOSER: I think there are emotional periods that I've gone through, but I can't see them in the poems. It's not a "collected" poems, it's a "selected" poems, but I can see a certain technical achievement going on throughout—that I've simply gotten better at writing. I never pay too much attention to what I'm writing about, what it means that I should happen to write a poem about such and such. I don't look back in that way.

TAWNEY: What kinds of stylistic things were you talking about? Is it just in general that you're getting keener?

KOOSER: I think it was because of this fellow at Iowa State. He believed in a very strict, almost German, prosody. We began with exercises in which we were to write thirty lines of closed heroic couplets of natural description. Then we wrote ballads and rondels and villanelles and all those things and achieved a lot of technical mastery of all those forms. (At least we thought we were masters of them. We weren't really. They were very awkward, some of them.) And because of that I had so much iambic motion drilled into me during that time that it was very hard for me to escape from iambic verse and a lot of my earlier poems are pretty strongly iambic and unvaried—varied only within the frame of the traditional variance. Jumper would say, for instance, that in the iambic pentameter line you can substitute in the first or the third foot but never in both in the same line and never in the second and fourth and that's just the way it was. So there was that kind of predictability of what the line ought to be. And then about six or seven years ago I began to loosen that up. I began to try and get my voice to be a little bit more idiomatic. The idiom is just not iambic. Now I'm writing in a kind of—sometimes—syllabic verse, sometimes accentual verse. I still feel the necessity to have some kind of form like that. I'm uncomfortable if I write a line that has too heavy accents in it. There's no reason to be upset by that; it should be organic. But it still bothers me. I've still got enough of that training in me that I feel that all of the lines should be somewhat equal.

TAWNEY: I notice you still use rhyme occasionally.

KOOSER: I use it when it happens. If the rhyme happens to fall into the

poem, I just leave it there. I'm very interested in assonance and alliteration and things like that, but I do not set out to employ them; they just happen. They just fall into the language.

TAWNEY: Do you do a lot of revision on your work?

KOOSER: Quite a bit. I usually begin a poem in longhand and write half a dozen lines and then I go to the typewriter and type that up, see how it looks and then I take it out of the typewriter and make a longhand addition to it, then go back and retype the whole thing all the way down. I'm continually adding on lines and throwing out ones. So I might, in a poem of twenty lines, have typed it ten or fifteen times by the time that I've gotten it where I want it. But I always write from the top down. I keep proceeding through the poem from the top down. Mainly I'm interested in the poem flowing from the top and so that's why I have to keep reading it again from the top so that it all moves together.

TAWNEY: Do you see yourself later perhaps working on longer poems?

KOOSER: I'd like to write longer poems, but I never seem to be able to. I don't ever have that big of an idea apparently or that big of a thing to bring. I have one long poem in mind that I've been thinking about for ten years that some day I'm going to do. When I was still living in Iowa, there was a young Amish farmer who was killed on the highway over by Iowa State. He'd come out at dusk with his buggie and was run down by a carload of coeds from Iowa U. who came over the hill and hit the buggie. I've always thought that there was something about that juxtaposition of people and ideologies that would make a fascinating longer poem.

TAWNEY: Another question about revision. When do you know a poem is finished? Who do you accept as critics?

KOOSER: I feel that I'm a pretty good critic of my own stuff, but Kathy reads all my things and makes comments. I also have a good friend, Roy Scheele, who's a very good poet who lives up in Lincoln. He and I exchange a lot of poems. In the last year we've begun doing this to the point that as soon as I finish a draft that I think is somewhat satisfactory, I'll stick it in an envelope and send it across town to him and at the same time I probably will have received one from him. Then we go over them very carefully and criticize each other's work; it's very helpful. I don't feel at all sensitive about doing that kind of thing. There's a poem in A Local Habitation & A Name about my grandfather dying. That poem I thought was finished; whoever I'd showed it to when I wrote it said that they'd liked it. And I happened to be having some correspondence with Robert Bly and I stuck it into the letter that I sent

to him and he landed all over it and sent it back. He'd written all over the thing and recommended a lot of suggestions. After I made the corrections according to his ideas, the poem really was improved tremendously. I still feel like it's my poem, but it's the poem—it's the end product—that counts. I don't care how you get to it. I wouldn't care if fifty people helped me with a poem if I came out with a poem that was really strong.

TAWNEY: There isn't any sense of loss of identity or control over the material?

KOOSER: I don't have any real sense of identity with the poem anyway. People are peculiar about that. There was a guy that I knew—a poet—who had a poem in which the line said "The cans of pop I got her." The poem was about a housemaid that they'd had when they lived in Philadelphia. He and his wife bought cans of pop and left them for this maid. And I said, "You're really missing something. Why don't you change that to 'the bottles of pop I got her'? You've got a wonderful explosion of the "o" sounds." He said, "I can't do that." I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because we never bought her bottles of pop; we only bought her cans!" He said he would not change it for that reason and well, hell, I think that's crazy. I wouldn't hesitate at all to improve, to embellish, on life. Poetry is a lot like fiction: There's a lot of lying that goes on.

I wrote one here a few weeks ago about seeing some katydids on the sidewalk in front of the bank. I wanted the speaker in the poem to be so attentive to the experience that he would actually count the katydids and I also had a gingko tree there for contrast. When I got home I showed the poem to Kathy and she said, "I forgot the gingko tree was there" and I said, "Hell, there's no gingko tree in front of the bank and I didn't count the katydids." But I wanted all those. There is some truth in the poem. The poem wouldn't work if it didn't have truth in it. But the truth I have arrived at by some kind of fabrication.

TAWNEY: Do you wince when you're called a regionalist poet?

KOOSER: Not particularly.

TAWNEY: Do you try deliberately to maintain that identity?

KOOSER: Oh, no. But I do write about things. I don't write about ideas; I write about things. And the only things that I know are the things of my own experience and I have never lived anywhere but Nebraska and Iowa. So it's natural that somebody would say, "This guy writes about Nebraska and Iowa." I can't write about Ohio or California.

TAWNEY: Your personality, do you think that's midwestern as well? You

said earlier that you tend to be sentimental and that you tend to be very orderly because of Jumper's training. Are those things that you think enhance your regionality?

KOOSER: I don't know about that. There are probably things in my speech that are Iowan or Nebraskan that shape in some way the way the line runs in the poem or the sound of the line. I read a poem last night that has [lī-lŏks] in it. Now, I've used that word with that pronunciation because that's the pronunciation that I'm familiar with, that I grew up with. And there's sort of another sound like the [ŏks] or the [ŏ] sound in the poem that is echoed. I read that up to Blair and someone said afterwards, "How come you say 'lilocks' instead of lilacs?" And I said, "If I said lilacs I wouldn't use it in the poem." We always said in my family [tə-wôrd′]. He's going toward the town as opposed to [tōrd]. Back when I was writing iambic lines, I would say, "toward the town the man was going." And finally some instructor said to me, "Jesus, that isn't an iambic word; it's a single syllable. It's [tōrd], not [tə-wôrd′]. And it never occurred to me, but that kind of thing, I think, gets some regionality into it that way. And there are probably things about my personality that might be regional.

TAWNEY: But those are things you don't particularly investigate?

KOOSER: I don't know that I want to know those things.

TAWNEY: Would they interfere? Would they make you self-conscious?

KOOSER: I think so.

TAWNEY: Do you have any sense of what you're moving towards in your writing?

KOOSER: No, I don't. I think I'm moving toward writing a better poem all the time or a more technically masterful poem. I never know what I'm going to write about. I suppose that I have written all the poems that I ought to write about certain objects. I've probably written too many empty house poems, a couple too many empty barn poems. Those objects I've probably done as well as I should do, unless I want to write a better one and then go back and somehow or other erase all the ones I did before. And how do you do that?

I guess I'm looking for different sorts of signs. Did you see the last Harvest Book that they did at Book Mark Press? It has a long essay on me by George Von Glahn called "Searching for Signs." He talks about me looking for signs for things, objects that signify things. I thought it was a very good essay. It told me a lot about myself that I didn't know. I really do feel now that I'm starting to look for other things to write about.

TAWNEY: You've chosen to remain in the same place most of your life. What is it about Nebraska and Iowa that you find most enjoyable, most inspirational?

KOOSER: Well, I doubt if that is why I stayed there—because I found it inspirational or that it was a place where ideas would evolve or anything like that. I think I stayed there because, for one thing, I've been afraid to go anywhere else in my life. I'm very root-bound in the Midwest. I don't like to get too far away; I don't like to travel much. I'm frightened of places I've never been. I've stayed where it's comfortable. I like the Midwest; I like Nebraska. I think it's a pretty place. Lincoln's a wonderful town. It's nice and clean, not too much crime.

TAWNEY: A theme I continue to get from your poems is that of the open spaces and having to move long distances from one place to another. I find it interesting that you don't like to move, to go to new places, because I get the feeling of movement with the house and field poems.

KOOSER: I suppose that is there. That's an interesting observation. Coming to Wichita or Lawrence is a big trip for me. There are all sorts of things to look at along the way. Coming down here I noticed a couple of things that I could probably write about, that in several months may come up again and I may be able to deal with them. There's an empty air hangar up there on highway 99 coming down and god, it's something. It's a gray corrugated building and it opens on the road. It's nothing but a black hollow space in there and across the thing in red letters it says YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN. That's just a wonderful thing—over this gaping hole.

When I go out for Sunday drives I can go 35 miles from Lincoln and really feel fulfilled, that I'd really seen some country. I don't need to go to the ends of the earth to travel. I guess I'm a little more interested in going places now than I used to be—feeling more confident. I could very well have been a person that would stay in his home town all his life. Get a job there, raise a family there and die there, and never feel I'd ever missed anything.

TAWNEY: What kinds of things do you do for research? Do you read a lot?

KOOSER: My reading is eclectic. I just let my reading lead me wherever I happen to be going, whatever happens to come up.

TAWNEY: Do you read much medical stuff for your job?

KOOSER: I read a lot of medical stuff at work. That probably has some effect on me. I might have gone to medical school if I'd been more astute. I just didn't work hard enough in school.

But I don't do much researching. Most of my poems don't require any work like that and I guess that's one of the reasons I avoid doing something longer. It would require some researching. I did several years ago start a thing that I didn't finish. I wanted to do something for the Bicentennial—lord knows why. I found the record of a woman by the name of Deborah Samson Gannett, who went to war in the Revolution disguised as a man and fought in a number of campaigns. A young woman in a small town fell in love with her—really from afar. I don't think there was any sexual congress, as they say, but that fascinated me and I did a lot of research about her—as much as I could find out—and I was going to do a long narrative poem, sort of like Bob Peters has done with that Shaker woman, Ann Lee. But I really didn't get very far with it. I kept polishing and polishing and wound up with about half a dozen stanzas and I had intended to write a book about it. I believe somebody has come out with a book about her since.

*

Ted Kooser received an education degree from Iowa State University and an M. A. from the University of Nebraska. He taught high school for a year, and he has taught creative writing at Nebraska. Currently he is an insurance underwriter in Lincoln. As the editor of Windflower press he published The New Salt Creek Reader and a number of books. He is beginning a new periodical, Blue Hotel, and collecting material for a poetry almanac, due out in 1980. His poetry has been widely anthologized in such collections as Heartland and A Geography of Poets. This interview took place in Lawrence after his reading at the University of Kansas in November, 1979.

Bibliography

Grass County. Lincoln, Neb.: Windflower Press, 1971.

Hatcher. Lincoln, Neb.: Windflower Press, 1978.

A Local Habitation and a Name. San Luis Obispo, Cal.: Solo Press, 1974.

Not Coming To Be Barked At. Milwaukee: Pentagram Press, 1976.

Old Marriage and New. Austin, Texas: Cold Mountain Press, 1978.

Shooting a Farmhouse; So This Is Nebraska. Denver, Col.: The Ally Press, 1975.

Twenty Poems. Crete, Neb.: Best Cellar Press, 1973.

OSAGE

Imagine a wood
that's really
as tough as nails;
you've got it.

If a man
can hammer
a fencing staple
into a post
of osage orange,
you can bet
that every cow
in forty miles
will know about it
sooner or later.

The Indians
said that it made
good bow-wood,
yellow and strong,
the best
east of the Rockies.

Before barbed wire,
the settlers
planted these trees
for hedges.
Thorny and thick,
they still stand there
putting an edge
to the corn.

In the fall,
when their leaves lie
leathery, dead
in the furrows,
the old limbs call
with fruit,
green globes as big
as cantaloupes,
easy to reach,
not good for much
but wonder.

AUNT MINNIE

Her picket fence
still counts those chickens:
one white slat
for each thin hen,
one rusty nail
for every time
her one-eyed rooster
ran one down.

Lining the path
to the henhouse,
stones painted white.
Go pick them eggs now,
Teddy, 'fore
them bullsnakes do;
and don't go
shakin' 'em up.
There's nothin'
in there yet
but yella.

WITHIN THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY

Within the realm of possibility,
where we had expected so much to happen
for better or worse, things seem the same.
The streetlamp down at the corner comes on
in the watery dusk, its thin vibrato
of light like the heart of a moth. Who said
that things would be different by and by?
On the stove, a good soup bubbles and puffs
like a baby; it's your mother's recipe.

SOLAR ECLIPSE

The moon wants to see
what it is that the sun sees.

She stands where the sun stands,
and the world goes dark.

Things look the same to her
as they always look.

Shrugging her shoulders,
she walks away.

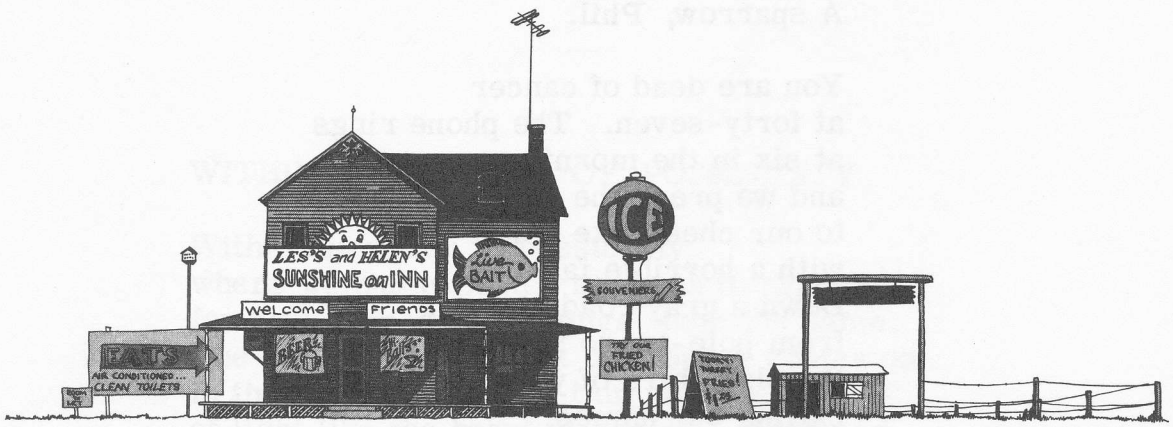
PHIL

I remembered today
that you were afraid of birds.
Once, as we walked along,
you stepped out of your way
to avoid meeting a sparrow.
A sparrow, Phil.

You are dead of cancer
at forty-seven. The phone rings
at six in the morning,
and we press the cold news
to our cheek like a doll
with a horrible face.
Down a gray road at dawn,
from pole-top to pole-top,
the black bird of your death flaps,
calling our names.

THE LEAKY FAUCET

All through the night, the leaky faucet
searches the stillness of the house
with its radar blip: Who is awake?
Who lies out there as full of worry
as a pan in the sink? Cheer up,
cheer up, the little faucet calls,
someone will help you through your life.



Ted Kooser

MATINEE

What was his name? I have forgotten it over the years. I think it was one of the town names, one of those names that were so common there, like Erickson or Peters or Muller. I don't think, though, that it was one of the better names, like Dunning or Martin or DeWeese. It seems to me as if it were one of those odd names that were found among the big families who lived in their trailers down by the river, in that place we all called Little Hollywood. It must have been a name like Polter or Hurley or Sipp.

The Crown Theatre, on Center Street, was said by our parents to be infested with lice. Its seats were of a burgundy velvet, rubbed thin to a black shine on the arms and the tops of the backs. We sat forward, trying to keep from falling back against the seats, where the smell of age and sweat would embrace us like an old woman who liked to hold little boys on her lap. But after the curtains had parted and the lights had gone down and the Warner-Pathe newsreel had come on with its worldly admonishments, we would fall back into the waiting arms of the seats, the cool flicker of knowledge playing over our small, open faces.

There were always a few adults in the audience at those Saturday matinees. They looked like giants among us, and they slouched in their seats as if to appear less obvious. A few were the parents of children too young to go to the movies alone, but the others were odd, older men who would occasionally turn and search the faces of the children behind them, fixed with that familiar, lonely look that one so often sees in crowds and in the faces of hitch-hikers waiting at crossroads at night. One of these men was the man called Polter or Hurley or Sipp.

At that time, when I was eight or nine, he must have been thirty. The war was over, and because he carried two guns in shoulder-holsters, we thought he was a veteran. They were .45 automatics, nickel-plated, with pearl grips. He wore a loose sportcoat that hid them, but the belt showed, a cracked, brown belt that crossed his white shirt and passed under his necktie. He was thin, of medium height, and he had an enormous head, with a bulging brow and loose, dark hair. He reminded me of the portrait of Edgar Allen Poe in our deck of Authors cards.

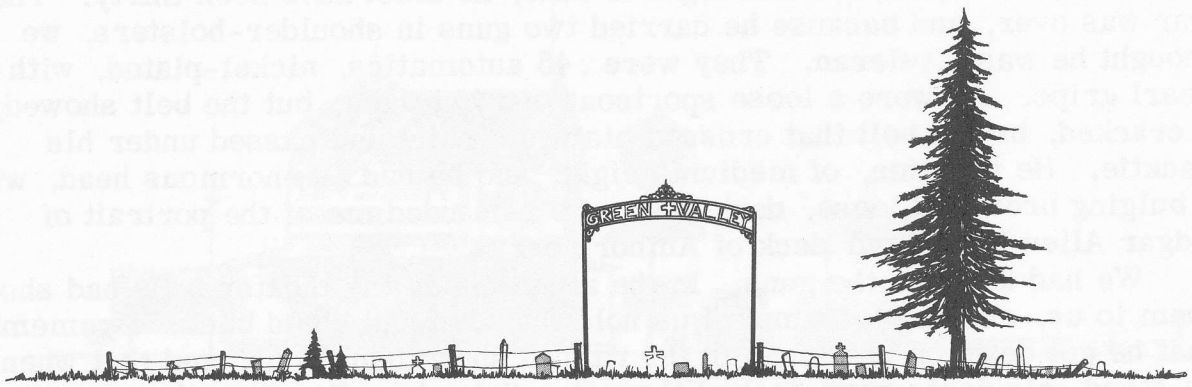
We had all seen the guns. In the alley behind the theater. He had shown them to us, and had let some of us hold them. I had stood back. I remember that he got down on his knees in the rain to show them to us, and that when he stood, his pants were soaked through. Saturday after Saturday, he stood there in line with us, the guns under his coat, waiting for the glass doors to open.

On the day that I want to tell you about, I had not noticed him. Perhaps

it had become so common to see him there that we no longer did. If he spoke to any of us, none would remember it later.

The feature had started. A western. A scene in which the horses pulling a stagecoach had been frightened by a rattlesnake and had gone berserk, dragging the stage on its side across the rocks, a young woman screaming inside. A shot rang out and then another. They were as loud as cannon-fire. Someone was standing up in the middle of the theater, the light of the screen splashing upon him. The children behind him were yelling for him to sit down. From the aisle where I sat, I could see that it was the man called Polter or Hurley or Sipp. He was holding both of his guns before him and firing them into the screen. His bulging forehead glowed in the flickering light. Blam! Blam! Blam! Blam! He squeezed off the shots, aiming at the figures on the screen, the stagecoach driver, the man named Will who rode shotgun, Tom Mix on his horse riding up, and the pretty young woman. Some of the children had begun to scream. I could see small black holes in the screen.

When his guns were empty, he put them away in their holsters and jerkily made his way across the row of seats to the aisle, which he entered a few rows in front of me. He walked rapidly up the aisle and out of the theatre, and as he came past me I could see that his great white face was streaked with tears. We never saw him again.



Linda Hyde

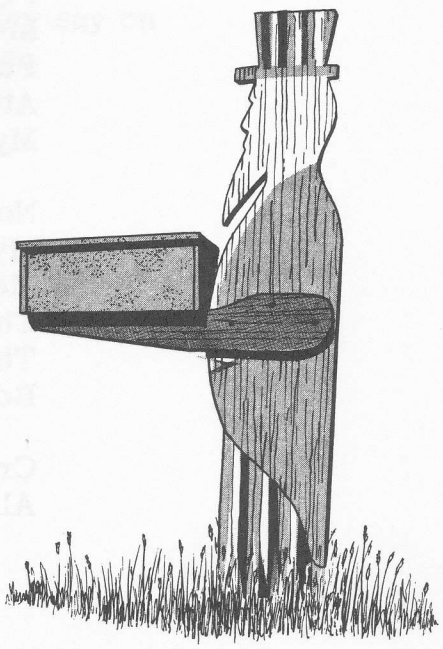
SPELLING TIME IN MISS TWILLIGER'S FOURTH GRADE

Sour kraut and weenie smell
still simmers in the 85-degree air.
Lunch has been over for an hour.

George Washington hangs
in clouds above the door.
Three times he follows Cherie Bodinet
to the pencil sharpener
with his Mona Lisa eyes.

Lyonne Malinsky pumps an armpit solo
under his damp tee shirt.
John Foss stomps a rhythm
with manure streaked boots
and flaps a severed cow teat
over his head. Miss Twilliger aims.

Chalk whistles and shatters
against John's desk.
Spines straighten with a jerk
rocking the desk rows
like the Great Northern Empire Builder
lurching through Goldbar at midnight,
and we're riding the floor rails
two more hours into June.



GRANDMOTHER

I dreamed of a small china doll
locked in a wooden box
with a glass lid.

At the funeral white roses
and gladiolus smothered
her coffin.
Lugging it over smooth
graveyard lawn
a pall bearer tripped
and yanked away my breath
for I thought she would tumble her way
out before us.

She left me the cedar chest
brought out from Chippewa in 1924.
Sometimes, when I dust it,
I close my eyes,
stroke the lid
and listen.

George H. Gurley, Jr.

MEDICINE MAN

I outlived the night
In a buffalo's belly,
Pulled a wolf's head over my brain,
Ate the hearts of enemies,
My tongue tasted burning coals.

Now I light fires with my words,
My enemies stalk themselves.
Meat goes hunting for my knife.
These eyes raise up the sun,
These ears give the wind its voice.
Both these hands are right.

Crow, dream your feathers white.
All my lies are true.

Robert Hershon

THE LAUGH WHO WORKED

The Laugh, who worked as an Apprentice Scream, had every other Sunday off. Every other Sunday, he took the bus to Queens to visit his ancient grandmother, who worked in a sweat shop, wrestling the great barrels of sweat from one end of the warehouse to the other and then back again and at her age too, tsk tsk. The grandmother also had every other Sunday off, but it was never the same Sunday that the Laugh had off, so when he got to Queens, she was never there and after many visits, he began to wonder whether he really had a grandmother at all.

So the Laugh would go back and just hang around the shop and watch the Master Scream, who never took a day off, tightening a screw here and pulling out some nails there and always chipping away at something or other. Once, by an incredible coincidence, the old woman called to complain of her lot, which was filled with rats and horrible boys, but the Master explained that he didn't make service calls on Sundays even though he couldn't remember why not. He never guessed she was the grandmother of his own apprentice, the very stuff of fiction.

Many years passed. The Laugh went into business for himself and had children of his own. He invited his grandmother to come and live with him and Peg, but she got lost on the subway and no one would help her because she was such a sweaty, bad-smelling old woman. Luckily, he found a photograph of someone else's grandmother and put it on the grand piano where it usually behaved itself, although they say on Saturday nights you could hear the screaming for blocks.

DOUBLE RAINBOW

We stop the car
to look at the
double rainbow

Rainbow
Re-rainbow

Which are not index fingers
swizzle sticks or
quotation marks

As the car is not a cup
of coffee
or a pig jumping
the fence

Which may be banderillas
or stilts to cross the road

Which is not a tongue
or a dish towel or the way
to grandma's house

The courage of pure color
Driving past the story
and through the life

White road black
in the rain
There they go

MIRROR IN THE SNOW

on the coldest day
of this hardest winter
on a street where no one walks
but i walk there
a broken mirror in the snow

a small mirror
in six scattered pieces
all face up
suddenly my own urgent boot
coming back up at me
color and movement
where there were none
six boots
flashing toward me

in spring
the grey snow disappears
and no signs of the mirror
did someone pick up the pieces
are they hiding in the empty lots
all through summer
those quick flashes

if winter comes again
and i still walk that street
if the mirror reappears
as it certainly must
i want to catch the boot on the rise
and soar into the earth

Thomas Hawkins

THE SPARROW

In a backyard a man is pitching a baseball to his son. The cowhide pockets of the mitts crack back and forth.

The boy is wearing a catcher's mitt the color of grass. The father's mitt is a Whitey Ford Deluxe with six inch fingers.

The baseball is gray and stained, the threads beginning to fray. The mitts are talking back and forth to each other. The catcher's mitt is saying, "C'mon baby, put'er right here, right across the plate." The pitcher's mitt is saying (in a voice like Whitey Ford's), "Low and inside, keep'er low and inside."

The pitcher's hand holds the baseball like a sparrow.

Like a sparrow, the ball smokes across the yard, snaps into the pocket and disappears.

Carl Adler

MARLINSKY'S PIT

"Up Bart, up boy, look!" His whisper was conspiratorial; he knew that, and it amused him. Everything he now did in companionship with Bart amused him; if his colleagues or students could see him romping with the dog he knew they would be amused too. But he had never been so happy.

The squirrel skittered through the branches and that moment Bart did notice him. He barked furiously, with one startling leap seized the tree trunk five feet above the ground, then slipped, his nails striking fiercely along the bark. Marlinsky seized the leash. "C'mon boy, there he goes!" Man and dog crashed through the underbrush. Bart was baying, dragging Marlinsky after him. He could feel his forearm tauten, the strength and vitality of the dog working in his own muscles. Over the grass they sped, scrambled through bushes, above them the squirrel racing and leaping from branch to branch. Then the creature vanished. Bart paused, tongue lolling. He gazed up at Marlinsky, his face seemingly more wrinkled than usual, within his pale golden eyes a look of perplexity and embarassment. Marlinsky couldn't help but drop to one knee, take Bart's head roughly in his arms. The dog made a soft sound deep within his chest, as if he understood the meaning of the sudden embrace.

Then he unleashed him and let him wander. He was an obedient companion and would go only so far, occasionally turning his head to look back. He moved like a huge cat, and Marlinsky loved to watch him, loved the way the light was glinted back by his russet coat, so sleek it seemed oiled and displayed constantly the weaving of the muscles beneath it. But despite his strength and look of ferocity, this pit bull was a clown and gentle as a baby, wouldn't hurt a baby, and Marlinsky resented the air of apprehension which was noticeable in anyone who happened to wander near the dog. However, in this island of forest preserve on a summer morning, strollers were few. Each day, after driving Sarah to work, he would bring Bart here for their romp. The grass was high, there were no benches or picnic tables, and the groves of trees blotted out any sense of the surrounding city. Yet kids had discovered the spot too, for occasionally he would come across a mess of beer cans and cigarette butts, find the tall grass smashed down in a wide circle. Once he had even seen a motor cyclist, roaring and bumping along the winding dirt path. These sights infuriated him. The first time he had come across such a mess he felt the anger rise so abruptly a haze had enveloped him—momentarily he seemed to be staring at the glinting brassy beer cans through a mist. There was no place at all safe from the young hoodlums. The thought burned in him half the morning—he kept imagining

their smirky faces and long, uncombed hair, their haunches humping the young girls sprawled on this grass. Snot-nose slobs! His favorite phrase, sometimes repeated thrice to himself, like an incantation.

Now the sun stood tall, at the top of the sky. A soft breeze from the south swayed the foliage. Bart was digging, in a passion over something. Marlinsky saw, about a hundred yards away, a woman moving slowly down the dirt path. She had on sunglasses, was wearing a bright yellow halter and slacks. She looked, from that distance, tall and slim, with a youthful swing to her walk. He guessed she had a dog with her. Sometimes he saw women walking their dogs, and occasionally an elderly man, looking gray and pathetic against the brimming green of the fields. He whistled for Bart. The dog gazed up from whatever he had been worrying, gazed back at him with an inquisitive tilt to his head, as if he were mildly astonished that he should be whistled at—obviously it was too early to go home! He beckoned, called, "C'mon boy, c'mon now!" How did the sound of that voice reach him—a magical projection, materialization of the master's power and authority suddenly within his head? He would never know, but Bart loped toward him, the queerest look of perplexity on his face. At that moment he wished (as often he did) that the two of them could sit down together in the long, warm grass and calmly discuss such matters.

"Let's be on the safe side—okay?" He leashed the dog and then allowed himself to be taken along. Bart had discovered some sparrows, hopping and pecking in an open space all green with sunlight, a heart-warming radiance of green, and as they moved toward the birds he watched the woman. Yes, she did have a dog, a tiny burr of a white poodle, its red collar shining. With a flutter the sparrows whirled up, scrambled through the air toward a nearby cottonwood. Their movement excited Bart—he started to bark and dance on his hind legs, but a tug on the leash brought him back to earth. The poodle called to them, a shrill cry. Marlinsky stood there, rooted, statuesque, feeling, through the leash, through the dog's movement against the earth, his body strangely extended, as if his arm were ten feet long. The woman had scooped up the poodle and now, as she came nearer, was carrying it.

"It's all right," he called. "He wouldn't hurt a baby!" and then the thought came that his voice, rippling the bright air, was washing in slow waves upon her. Perhaps she was older than he first thought—her sunglasses hid the eyes. He remembered how soon Sarah's had begun to show her age, the flesh around them delicately crumpling, like tissue paper. Each time he shaved he noticed that the skin around his eyes, though, was still firm. And as he stood there, his muscles restraining Bart from running to greet the poodle, his head tilted slightly back, watching her approach, he wondered if an emanation of the youthfulness he felt touched the woman. Despite his assurance, she still carried the poodle.

"I'm sorry, but we had a dreadful experience with a dog like that a

few days ago. I thought at first it was the same dog, 'til I saw you."

"Bart likes to play—he won't hurt her." And then Bart, shrewd old thing, as if to corroborate this assurance, crooned and performed a sliding, sideways dance. They both laughed, and she set down the poodle, keeping hold of the leash. Bart nosed her; she was tiny, and like tiny dogs, full of nervous noise. "He may try to mount her, but it's all in fun."

"It always is, isn't it?" She was smiling at the dogs, but from behind the secretive panes of the glasses could well have been appraising him. Her hair, a glowing auburn, was fastened close to her head by an array of long, decorative pins, each tipped with a glassy head which winked back the light. Curiously plump above her slimness, her face shone with a gentle sunburn—a sunburn, not a blush, Marlinsky finally decided. The poodle yiped and scrambled around Bart, in constant mischievous motion, and occasionally Bart would glance up at him, wrinkle his forehead as if to suggest that this playmate was a bit too much.

"I'm surprised you ran into another pit bull. You don't see that many of them."

"They're fighting dogs, aren't they?"

"Used to be. I guess in certain places they still do fight them. But I don't think Bart's a fighter."

"It's in the blood, isn't it? Instinct, or something like that? He is beautiful, though."

"Who had him?"

"Who?"

"The dog—who was he with?"

"Oh, some young guy. The smart aleck type. You know the kind."

Marlinsky nodded and felt the anger rising again. He was tempted to begin complaining about the mess the kids left, but he held back. He didn't want to be immediately typed as one of those old fogies always whining about the young generation.

"Maybe he couldn't control it."

"Maybe—but I think he let it come after Buttons on purpose, to scare us. I told him something!" Her voice roughened so suddenly that Marlinsky winced. "All right, Buttons, come on now!" She lifted the poodle, squeezed it so against her that the red collar, which seemed a little too large, slipped absurdly up under the dog's jaw. He reached out—tentatively—"The collar," he said, and she, without moving, let him tug it down. He swore to himself that behind the black glasses he could feel the woman's eyes pondering him, measuring him, and could feel too the adolescent giddiness and trembling in his hand dawdling so near her breasts. Suddenly Bart reared, barking. "Down boy! down!" The severity of his voice surprised even him, and Bart collapsed submissively. "He wants to say goodbye—don't be too hard on him—we'll see you around!" and then she was swinging away—self-consciously swinging her ass, Marlinsky thought, yes,

for him decorating the air with its movement.

That evening he felt uneasy. He wondered if Sarah noticed his mood; but she seemed very tired, willing merely to eat and listen to the children. He suspected that being in the insurance office, back behind a desk after all these years, was difficult, and he felt slightly guilty over her returning to work, though he had pledged to take care of the apartment during the summer. But he hadn't been in the mood to dust when he had returned with Bart, and he imagined the dust that day had descended with provoking speed. In fact, since Sarah had gone to work and the responsibilities of housekeeping had devolved upon him and the children, he noticed a general disorder, an alarming shabbiness, invading their home. He sipped at the wine—a bright, mellow sauterne that he especially liked, but it did no good. Bart, in a corner of the dining room, lying wrinkled and crumpled and looking strangely forlorn, seemed to be thinking the same thoughts, so dolorous was his expression.

"Dick—you look awfully gloomy."

"Do I?" He twirled the glass slowly between his fingers. "I was just thinking of something—of a reaction, or the lack of a reaction. One of my favorite stories—only the kids don't respond the way they used to."

"Are you still brooding about school? You're on vacation—remember!"

He nodded. Of course he hadn't been thinking of that—but in a sense he must have, in some corner of his mind, been toying with that memory, else it would not have risen so easily.

"What story was it, Dad?" Dwight sounded severely and dutifully curious. The boy had lifted his face, the overhead light glinting so on his broad glasses that his eyes had vanished, yet Marlinsky knew they were scrutinizing him now with that quiet, almost sad look he had.

"Well—not really much of a story—sort of a joke, an insider's joke I suppose. It's an anecdote Cassirer used to be fond of telling—how once he and an old teacher of his were discussing what happened to a mutual acquaintance, and the old teacher—I don't remember his name now—said, 'Oh, he gave up the study of mathematics and entered another field, where he's been quite successful. You know, he didn't have enough imagination to be a mathematician, but he's doing very well as a poet!'"

"That's good," Dwight said, nodding. "Yes, that's—"

He was searching for the right word, the precise, meticulous word, and Marlinsky felt irritated. Suddenly he wished that the boy had responded the way most of his students did—giving him merely a stupid, perplexed look.

"Why do you think it's good?" He snapped the question, and all four of them glanced at him and then away, as if wondering what was wrong. "The dolts at school don't think it's good—and you know why? Because they've intuited that anybody who gives his life to mathematics must already be dead from the neck down!"

"Oh Dick, that's silly! what happened to you today?"

"Happened?—what ever happens? Well, yes, something did happen, come to think of it—" and he began telling them how he had learned from some people in the forest preserve that another pit bull had been wandering around there, an especially huge and vicious dog. Then Susie had let out a playful shriek and rushed to embrace Bart. "Ooooh," she trebled, "he'll eat you, Bart!"

"We'll see about that. Bart can hold his own with anything if he has to!"

"I don't know—" Dwight began.

"You'd better stay away from there—I'd hate to see Bart get hurt."

"He won't get hurt—what do you take him for, a poodle? You should see how he goes after the squirrels..."

Then he noticed Dwight smiling at him, and he felt foolish and somewhat embarrassed, did not finish the sentence, instead began helping Sarah clear the table. But later in the evening, while Sarah and he sat on the couch in the living room, holding hands as they always did at this time, listening to Miriam play them the latest piece she was learning, he allowed himself to drift dreamily back into that greenness and radiance, Bart at his side, the sunlight lolling along his beautifully weaving muscles. He had the musculature of a killer, no doubt about it, and beneath his clownishness and docility an ancient heat smouldered. Then he saw, in the distance, the youth and his dog approaching—saw the ferocious tightening of Bart's great shoulder muscles as he tensed, catching the scent of the strange hound...

"Yes, she is good, isn't she?" Sarah turned, responding, and he nodded, loosened the suddenly tightened grip of his hand around hers, and tried to focus on the notes, the chords falling away into space and time so cleanly, as purely as the light of his summer suns vanishing, vanishing, and unaccountably he felt the surge within him of a feeling inexplicable and terrifying which brought tears to his eyes.

"She deserves the best teacher we can find," he whispered, and noticed what seemed to him a desolate expression touch his wife's face and then quickly fade. I'm letting them down, he thought, I was a fool not to work this summer. Never again. Leisure is a luxury you can't afford—summers free are for kids. He regretted opening that door because then the music receded, became a background, bright and tenuous as the air which shone upon those circles of smashed down grass, and he saw again the woman whose eyes were masked by the black glasses.

Abruptly Sarah broke her hand from his and he started guiltily, then realized she was clapping, smiling. He clapped too, rose swiftly to kiss the top of Miriam's hair as she still sat at the piano, fussing, folding the music. "That was good, honey, really good!"

"Do you think I did the cadenza okay?"

"Well—what do you think dear? You're more objective than I am..."

Hypocrite! Daydreamer! What wasn't he capable of?

That question lingered with him throughout the evening, and in the days that followed nagged at him even during his most harmless pleasures. And certainly he counted as harmless the pleasure he derived from running again and again into the woman and Buttons. Nelson was her name; curiously enough, she gave him only her surname. Perhaps, he thought, this was wisdom on her part, specifying the nature of their relationship—a sexless intimacy, built upon a mutual fondness for dogs and shared delight in the sunlit solitudes of these fields and woods. And yet, it seemed now that she was always there with Buttons, while before that day in July when they had first met, he couldn't remember ever seeing her. Why did she suddenly enjoy taking the poodle there now—especially since she feared and resented that other pit bull? It didn't make sense, unless another element were added, and Marlinsky hemmed and hawed to himself, was reluctant to add that element. It was an old story, one that he was very familiar with, but usually the female was much younger than this one, although Nelson certainly wasn't old—perhaps thirty, at most.

He was a trial to Sarah—he realized that—but it wasn't his fault. He certainly never encouraged that kind of thing. He confessed to the gallant gesture, smile, a warmth and kindness directed especially toward the young ladies who were doomed to struggle with the intricacies of mathematics; but in a sense this was an aspect of his pedagogy. That, in the past, some had responded, taken it personally, was regrettable, but ultimately harmless. It did add a touch of spice to an otherwise drybones existence, and he was certain that Sarah, once she had gotten over her initial uneasiness, found it amusing. At least he tried to present it—each time it occurred—as something of a joke.

And he made it a point to bring such matters out into the open immediately, and in public, as it were, to diminish their significance, to let each member of the family, not simply Sarah, understand that this all was, in his opinion, utter nonsense, and if young ladies happened occasionally to fall head over heels in love with him—well, that was too bad. Wie schade! So, between requesting the salt and pepper and actually sprinkling his boiled potato, he would remark, "Well, here we go again."

"Oh?" Sarah's fork would suddenly be suspended above her plate.

"Barbara Terlecki—I believe she's smitten. The usual symptoms—much stammering and blushing when called on, the hypnotic gaze while I'm lecturing, questions after class, tagging after me down the hallway—I expect next will come the plea for special tutoring. That's usually how the disease runs its course."

"Don't give her your phone number."

"Don't worry, I certainly won't."

"Boy, I'm never going to ask one of my teachers for help!" Susie cried, and Dwight and Miriam both laughed, while an enigmatic expression had closed Sarah's face.

He nodded wisely. "All right, young lady, there's asking for help and there's asking for help," and invariably then he would glance at Sarah—a glance of assurance, his pledge.

One morning, as he strolled with Nelson, the thought came that perhaps the reason Sarah seemed happy to see him taking the summer off was that she was being spared the distress of thinking of him at school, the siren song perpetually in his ears. He glanced at Nelson. Certainly she wasn't young, could scarcely compete with the shaggy-haired adolescents who usually surrounded him. But there was a danger—an emotional naivete—in their youth, and he suspected that Nelson was worldly enough to handle the emotions that came her way. In a sense he envied her that because he felt it was just this worldliness that was lacking in him—he responded too passionately to experience. Even now, seeing the sunlight pouring upon fields misty with the haziness of early September, darting and glancing among the foliage, flashing and fading out of a source that, compared to him, could be thought of as immortal, and yet still flashing, fading, a brightness constantly trickling through his fingers, he felt a poignancy which he defined as extremely youthful.

He had let Bart loose; he was romping in some tall grass, chasing butterflies perhaps—Marlinsky was not watching too closely because he was listening to Nelson's soft complaints about her work as a waitress on the night shift at a nearby restaurant, and he was sensing the widening ripple of those complaints and vaguely wondering whether she would begin talking about more intimate aspects of her experience. He found himself half-hoping, half-dreading, that she would. A strange cry in the distance broke off her talk; he glanced toward Bart and then saw the other dog. It was a mirror image of Bart—not any larger or heavier. The two dogs were facing each other. He thought he heard, almost felt, the air tremble with a deep growling coming from one or the other, or both, but it may have been his imagination. "Oh Christ!" Nelson said, and took in the leash until Buttons was in her arms. "Here Bart!" he called. But this one time Bart ignored him, or perhaps was so intent on the strange dog that he did not hear the call. Marlinsky ran over the field toward him, conscious of the leash in his hand, wondering if it could serve in any way as a weapon. He doubted it would do any good.

The other dog was growling deep in his chest and sidling slowly toward Bart. There was in its expression a stony, blind look of such ferocity it seemed not to belong to the creature at all, but to be some mask suddenly fastened upon it. Then the bushes parted and a thin young man stepped out. For some reason, what struck Marlinsky was the look of neatness and cleanliness about him and how short and precisely his hair was cut. He too was carrying a leash. For a moment he stood watching. Then he seemed to notice Marlinsky, who had paused, not wanting to put himself between the two dogs, and had begun to circle behind Bart.

"Better call off your dog. He'll get hurt."

"He's not the one who started it!"

He approached behind Bart, who didn't seem himself at all, crouched and tense and trembling. What if he turned on him? He did not want to startle him, so he called his name softly, though a growl was the only answer he got. But the young man strode quickly, seized his dog's collar and momentarily stood stooped over him, both he and his dog tense, crouched, staring at Bart with a peculiar fixity. Marlinsky got the leash on and pulled it short. Bart whined and moved against his legs.

Nelson was approaching. Perhaps she thought it safe now, though she was carrying the little poodle. "He should be on a leash!" Marlinsky said. The kid wasn't much older than his students—maybe in his early twenties.

"Yours wasn't."

"That's different. Bart wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Then he's no pit bull. Hurt's the name of the game for these boys." He scratched his dog under the ear, then slowly scratched his own behind, all the while smiling (derisively, Marlinsky decided) at Bart. "What's wrong with him? He looks normal, 'cept he's got an overbite. You fight him?"

"Fight him?" Marlinsky wished he could take back the words, repeat them without the absurd naivete he heard in them.

"Well, what'd you get him for if you ain't going to fight him? That's what they're bred for."

"It's illegal."

The young man smirked. "That's half the fun of it. Just look at this dog—he's a killer. You'd be surprised how much I've won on him. How 'bout that, Digger?" A gaze which Marlinsky felt he at least half-understood passed between the kid and his dog. "He's got a cute trick—digs down into the throat and tears the tongue out." The kid glanced up, noticed the poodle in Nelson's arms. "How's the little button?" She was standing some distance from them, but close enough to hear their talk. She didn't answer, but continued to stare sullenly at him and Digger. He sucked in his cheeks, no doubt trying to look amused at her silence, and snapped at Marlinsky, "If you don't want him hurt, you keep him leashed when we're around!" Then he turned and swung off with the dog. They stood closer now, watching the kid disappearing down the dirt path.

"Do you think he'd have hurt Bart?"

At first he didn't answer. He felt his rage threaten to shake him to pieces. His jaws were clamped so tightly that it took an act of will to relax them before he was able to speak. And even as he spoke, his voice had almost to bark out the words, so tensed were his throat muscles.

"That's all talk."

"What if he challenges you to fight Bart?"

"He won't—I know that kind. And if he did, Bart'd kill him."

But the day was spoiled, unutterably spoiled. He felt ashamed. He found it difficult to talk to her, to even look into her eyes. Perhaps she understood: her usual rough manner seemed softened, and Marlinsky found this sudden softness appealing. Still, he was glad when she left, left them alone with the wind and the sunlight. But it was a mistake to want to be alone. For no sooner had she gone than the whole scene materialized again, infected his vision like a sickness. He felt obsessed by his need now to take Bart back to the scene of that encounter. Bart whined and became uneasy. He wondered if the dog's scent still clung to the grass. He tried to remember the exact words the kid had said to him, but he could not—all he could remember was that he had been taunted, threatened, by someone half his age, and in front of Nelson, and such an anger shook him that he felt physically weakened. Now he wanted to sit in the warm grass, let Bart loose for awhile, but he found himself hesitating—hadn't he been warned to keep Bart on the leash?—and then that memory and the thought that he could actually hesitate because of it drove him to unleash Bart at once—rather try at once to unleash him, because his fingers were out of control: like an old man's, they fumbled and slipped around the catch, trembled shamefully. But at last Bart was loose, and Marlinsky straightened, gazed fiercely around the fields, hoping the dog was still there. But now Bart seemed reluctant to go wandering, stuck close by him and did not even seem himself, seemed diminished, folded down into his own wrinkles. It was totally disgusting.

That evening at the supper table he could not concentrate on their talk. Nor could he compel himself to relate what had happened. In fact, he withheld his gaze from Bart, sprawled in his usual corner. He had such an abject, lugubrious look that Marlinsky preferred not to see it. He wondered that the rest hadn't noticed. And this was the descendent of killers? It was absurd.

"I think it's marvelous, don't you, Dick?"

"What's that?"

"The stew—you know Dwight made it all by himself—all right, all right Susie, yes, you chopped the carrots and potatoes!"

"It is good. You keep this up, Dwight, and I'm going to buy you an apron."

"It might come in handy," Dwight said, smiling, obviously pleased with himself.

"And a lace cap."

"All right, Dick—well, listen to him. I appreciate somebody having dinner ready when I come home!"

"Oh, I'm only joking," he said feebly, disconcerted by the irritation in Sarah's voice, by the quick look—resentful, he decided—that she had given him. They should know what he had been through that day. And then

Dwight glorying in his role as substitute mother.

"Well, in a couple weeks I'll be working again, and then you can quit if you want. September's here."

She said she didn't mean that, and why was he so sensitive, but he shrugged and said little more, instead found himself now staring at Bart, whose pale golden eyes returned his stare. Then the voices of his family became a far, dimly heard babble, and he saw himself bringing Bart to some clandestine arena, some abandoned barn God knows where, to a pit knocked together out of two by sixes, with a sprinkling of sawdust on its floor, like on the floors of butcher shops he remembered as a child. He himself would be driving Bart before him, toward the savage dog already crouched, waiting, its fangs bared. Like a sheep to the slaughter, that's what it would be. And in a suddenly imagined circle of faces he saw Nelson's, staring with scarcely concealed contempt at his pathetic excuse for a dog as it drooped trembling before him.

He rose abruptly and left the table. "I'm going out," he said.

"Isn't it too early for Bart's walk?"

"Let Susie take him. I may drop in at a movie."

He didn't kiss Sarah good-bye. He felt incapable of that gesture, and knew she would interpret this omission as a sign of his resentment, as merely another example of his morbid sensitivity. Better that she read his act in that light than know that if he had kissed her, it would have seemed a Judas kiss, unworthy of them both.

He parked the car around the block from the restaurant where Nelson worked. It was beginning to get dark. The street lamps already were burning, and he sat in the car without moving, staring at the people hurrying down the sidewalk or crossing the street, wondering if there were anyone there who might recognize him. It would get dark much sooner now—the first day of Autumn wasn't too far. Now by eight o'clock it would be dark, and then he would leave the car and walk to the restaurant. By that time the dinner rush should be over. Perhaps he'd have a chance to talk to her. Simply to talk through the whole experience, have someone to soothe the anger he still felt.

Marlinsky slipped from the car and walked slowly toward the intersection. He noticed that the old people who had been visible half an hour ago when it was still light had vanished, as if with the dropping of darkness they had scurried into their holes. He swung around the corner and saw down the block the winking red neon sign of The Merry Gardens Restaurant. He slowed his pace. Certainly she would be surprised to see him. Well, they had become friendly enough these past two months so that at least his appearance wouldn't seem exceptionally startling—in fact, after today's experience, it would seem strange if he didn't want to talk about it further. "Hello Nelson," he would say as she came to wait on him. Perhaps tonight she would give him her first name.

He paused outside the restaurant. It was very dimly lit, with only a small window through which the interior could be viewed. He realized, as he gazed through this window, that the place was also a bar. At first he couldn't find her, then he glimpsed a tall woman with a tray of drinks moving among the tables. It took several glances before he was certain that it was Nelson. In the dim light she seemed changed, much younger, though he realized that it wasn't merely the dimness which gave her the illusion of youth. Her hair was down and fell past her shoulders. The room's lights shimmered and moved in it, and as she leaned close to some customers it swung over her cheeks, shadowing her face. She stooped, placing a tall glass of beer before a young man, and laughed at something he said, her laughter trembling the softness of her breasts visible above the low cut of her bodice. Then she swirled away, a black mini-skirt revealing the nakedness of her thighs, the way the muscles of her legs, tautened by high heels, quivered as she swayed between the tables, smiling and evidently joking with the young men sprawled about.

Marlinsky turned away. Crowded as it was, busy as she seemed, he'd never get a chance to talk to her. Some other time, he thought, and began to walk rapidly, glad that she had not seen him peering through the window. When he got back to the car and tried to turn on the ignition, he discovered that his hands were trembling. He had to sit there for several minutes, staring at the street, down which dead leaves already were scurrying, before he felt calm enough to drive. Well, it had been a hectic day, so no wonder he was nervous. What he needed now was a peaceful stroll. If he hurried he'd be home in time to take Bart for his evening walk, and he had to smile as he thought how Bart would probably mistake the blowing leaves for birds or squirrels, and go clowning after them.

Robert Gross

OH! GRANDFATHER

My first simple protector,
with you I had no fearful dreams.
In the darkness we had fun,
staring at street light creating
dancing shadows, fissure pictures
on the ceiling of the old apartment.
First life prophesy, in bed together,
watching the abstract movie those
shadows exploding made.
Light still on my ceiling,
guide me now.

Patrick Bizzaro

WISHING FOR A BED

I'm lying on the floor
in this spot where
there should be a bed.

I'm lying here alone
because this is the floor.
There should be a bed here.

I'm performing angel wings
on the floor, wishing for
a bed of snow. I'm lifting

my arms in the air and over
my head, hoping someone
will notice and pull me up.

Instead, I'm sinking slowly into
the rug, a fine shag rug, and my hair
stands on end. I'm passing through

the ceiling to the apartment below.
I'm lying on the ceiling,
a chandelier of arms and legs.

Someone is pulling on my legs,
pulling me through to the other side,
pulling me into her bed.

Karl Elder

AN IDEA OF HAPPINESS

"Clear horizon; no clouds; no shadows; nothing."
Alfred Hitchcock

It starts off innocent as hell.

You're in a mall shopping for a razor
when in the bottom right corner
of a plate glass window
the transparent reflection
of a distant profile
steps into the picture.

The protruding abdomen and lower lip
are reminiscent maybe
of a Picasso line drawing
which causes you to turn
to find the man has disappeared.

You turn back and find
the phantom has disappeared.

Wind chimes across the way
play a melodramatic theme.

Now you are nervous and handle your pipe
the way you might wield a revolver.

There is the little girl who saw it all,
the one you've got by the collar
while her mother mumbles
"For goodness sake let her go."

You don't know what's come over you;
you're truly sorry, you didn't mean it,
it wasn't entirely your idea,
and you tell her so.

Next thing you know you're running;
your lungs are tattered sponges;
your heart is hitting its head against a wall.

From the beginning
you've been looking over your shoulder.

. . .

You take steps two at a time
weaving among these zombies
on an endless escalator.

Once you pass, their arms rise like a somnambulist's,
their forefingers point in your direction.

You scent is on the air.

The hordes are gathering at the bottom stair
and coming up.

They want satisfaction.

You turn on them.

They're taken aback
and growl and scrap among themselves
for shreds of your leather jacket
you have shed in a brilliant diversionary tactic.

You mind is a lens
which slowly ascends above it all,
through the skylight, past the low
overhanging clouds, while the scene
recedes, the city shrinks,
the continent grows small—
all contracts into a blue
and slightly oblong ball
falling into a wallless well.

It is the inaudible plop
of the little girl's penny in water
which parallels
your idea of happiness.

Matthew McKay

SLEEPING DOGS

One bulb lit the dock and the moon.
The fishing boats kissed, were married
In long swells between the mooring posts.
The weathered arms of sailors lay
Between the coils of rope and slender
Women posed over months and years.

No one imagined anything stronger
Than the sea, knowing the vague lights
In midnight water to be love,
And currents as the source of warmth.
The small deaths of fish were in the air,
Lovers never strolled there after dark.

Always the dogs lay in long chains
Like memories, stitched wounds ready
To leap open—a footstep or a whisper
Would wake the cambered night. Always
The heart sank at the first rattle of chain,
His moon-white teeth, just before the bark.

Tom Hansen

HE

he can't read the map any more
the names of the cities keep falling into the rivers
and drowning
years later they wash ashore speaking Spanish
their eyes open like flowers

he looks for love under every rock
snowman the darkness says you are down to your bones
keep going
the great roots of his fingers reach out
his deathbed wish is an ocean

he is the man who is going nowhere
and every evening he gets there just in time
to find himself gone
goodbye he says to no one
and no one replies

Daniel J. Langton

DEAR POEMS,

I've been reading a lot of Ezra Pound,
he writes poems to his poems a lot,
he says things like, Go, dumb born book
and how nobody will like them
and he doesn't care
and it sticks out all over him
how he cares.

I've had this thing with you, you know?
I mean, alone at night, yelling,
Why ain't I a truck driver?
and you saying, I'd follow you there.
I've done everything but cheat on you,
I'd cheat on you
but you have made me dance
like a woman would dance
right after having a baby.

I'd like to finish this
but I'll never finish a poem
to you.

Miriam Sagan

THE BOOK OF SAINTS AND BEASTS

Grind down lapis for the sky and sea
Crush beetles for their emerald wings
Press bloodroot, powder ivory,
Paint a border to contain the world:
Use primrose, strawberries, wasps, spiders,
Bluets, mallow, dead nettle, speedwell.
Keep still. It is time to keep still.
Place a saint in the center of the garden,
St. Ursula, St. Teresa, St. Mary of Egypt,
"To live alone is to a god or a beast."
Add a jewel eyed lizard to contemplate the saint.

REVIEW

Edward Field, editor. A Geography of Poets: An Anthology of the New Poetry. New York: Bantam Books, 1979. 560 pages. $2.95.

Edward Field's anthology from a major publishing house opens by emphasizing the volume of poetry being written now: "Today there are about 2500 poets listed in the Directory of American Poets--and that includes only the widely published ones. . . ." He sifted out about a tenth of that number for the anthology, which still makes a sizable collection. Commendable besides his perseverance is Field's commitment to a geographically balanced representation of poets; he divides the book into nine regions, from "Southern California" to "Northeast." The book illustrates new trends in contemporary poetry in its introduction and in its selection of poets.

The introduction is one of the most provocative parts of the book. Not only does Field attempt to bring system and order to numbers of poets, but also he summarizes the history and development of American poetry during the twentieth century, personalizing it by drawing parallels between it and his own 35-year career. At its best this provides a useful if brief overview of the art, including summaries of the various "schools" and major poets; at worst, his self-deprecatory remarks are irrelevant and confessional.

> Those authorities [New Critics] did not accept poets like me who had the misfortune to be clumsy and and stupid, ashamed of themselves, from humble, immigrant parents, and obviously Jewish.

Another section of the introduction identifies some new characteristics of verse. No longer is there a strict division between the serious and the humorous. Humor has become "a major element in many poets' bag of tricks. . . ." Other changes include the relaxation of language towards the vernacular, the less formal choice of subject matter, and the wider range of minority voices, all combining for more variety in poetry today.

Field defines his method of selection clearly. He chose living poets only, and their poems are, for the most part, less than ten years old. He chose poems he liked. Expanding on his standards, Field notes that the traits he looked for were heart, wit, mystery and magic. And he consciously looked beyond the New York publishing establishment:

> Where ever I go now I come across an indigenous poetry scene with its own small presses, magazines,

and poetry readings. The complaint I hear
from poets everywhere is that New York publishers, editors and critics refuse to recognize
what is happening.

This anthology attempts to rectify Eastern chauvinism.

Field represents all regions of the country as well as any mortal could, especially the areas he has visited. For example, in the Bay Area, where he resided several months while collecting material, he conscientiously includes all the "beats" and all the established poets like Duncan, Creeley, Levine, Dickey, Shapiro and Miles. He includes strong women poets like Susan Griffin and Gerda Penfold (women are a definite presence in the book); Black poets Al Young and Eugene Redmond; Simon Ortiz; George Hitchcock of Kayak; gay poets Harold Norse and Alta. He includes fine but less well known poets like Leonard Nathan:

I was watching the great God dance
In the stony dusk of a cave
At Ellora, when all the beggars
I had ever refused marched in . . . .

But even with such a broad cross section of people, there is at least one serious omission: Ishmael Reed.

Closer to home, important gaps occur in the Great Plains and Midwest sections (Kansas is considered "Great Plains," Missouri "Midwest"). Victor Contoski seems to be the only poet of the entire lower plains area of Kansas and Oklahoma and of the Kansas City area. Minnesota poets comprise more than one half of the plains section. Apparently Field's travels take him north most often, and he has not looked at the Heartland I and II anthologies, edited by Lucien Stryk of Northern Illinois University, that cover the territory more representatively.

But of the Kansas poets, Field chooses an important one and does a responsible job of representing him. Of Contoski's work he includes "Dream 1971," previously not anthologized. Field's choice shows his avowed taste for "mystery."

At 5:10 a.m. Uncle Henry
came back from the dead
still partially bald
his face a round red sun
his fists full of cards.

I thought he had answers
shoving his hands toward me.
He had just one question:

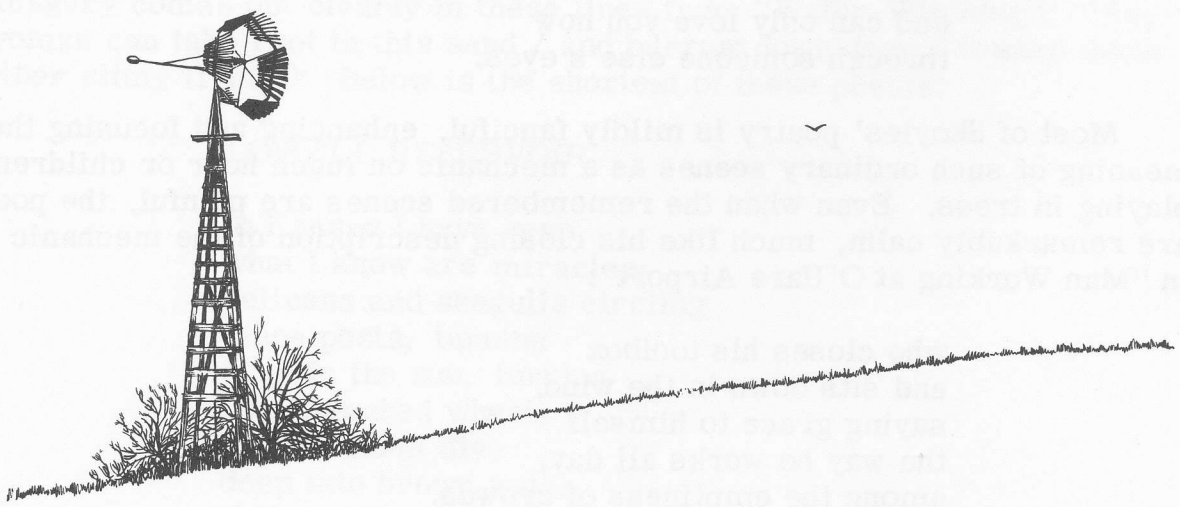
what do you do
with cards like this?

The other selections likewise choose the darker side of Contoski's work, such as "Teeth" and "The Mailman" ("For years he has / burned my mail in secret"). But noticeably missing are Contoski's poems set firmly in Kansas terra. Field's range does include regional subjects elsewhere, as he freely chooses typical works of Kooser, Kloefkorn and others.

Without a doubt there is a special place in the underworld where anthologizers must contemplate their sins of omission, and Field will pass some time there. Nonetheless, this book's appearance is important. It updates poetry for a larger audience. And a New York establishment press concedes that life does exist west of the Hudson and even in noncommercial presses. This is an important response to the small press revolution.

The useful appendices of the book include poetry distributors, poetry centers, an annotated list of poetry collections (including the New American Poetry Collection of the Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas), and independent poetry libraries.

Denise Low



Mike Smetzer

BOOKS OF INTEREST

(Selected from Review and Exchange Copies Received by Cottonwood Review)

Ark River Review (A Special Three Poet Issue), 4, No. 2 (1978). 52 pages.

John Skoyles, Leslie Ullman, and Nance Van Winckel are each represented in this issue of Ark River Review by a selection of poems equivalent to a small chapbook. All three poets are interesting, though Skoyles' style contrasts sharply with the styles of Ullman and Van Winckel.

John Skoyles' poems are informal meditations on the possible meanings of scenes from his experience. Typical of his work is the very casual tone and language of the opening lines of "Dear John," where the scene is a meeting with an old friend:

> It's wonderful to see you here again.
> I heard you were half-dead from loving
> someone back in Chicago,
> but the part that's living seems twice as alive.

The poem goes on to consider elements from Skoyles' boyhood memories of John and then to return to the opening scene for a statement about his relationship with John that could be true of many human relationships:

> We've come so far to be near
> each other today,
> I'd like to say I love you,
> but forgive me, I'm too shy,
> and can only love you now
> through someone else's eyes.

Most of Skoyles' poetry is mildly fanciful, enhancing and focusing the meaning of such ordinary scenes as a mechanic on lunch hour or children playing in trees. Even when the remembered scenes are painful, the poems are remarkably calm, much like his closing description of the mechanic in "Man Working at O'Hare Airport":

> who closes his toolbox
> and sits down in the wind,
> saying grace to himself
> the way he works all day,
> among the emptiness of crowds,
>
> silent when the world seems twice as loud.

Leslie Ullman describes her poetry in her introduction as an access to elements of mystery, ambiguity, sensuality, and danger, as a process of filling in the gaps in what she sees as a limited experience of life. She comments, "I am inspired initially by things outside myself: experiences I hear about, images in paintings, and speculations about strangers. I often start off at a considerable distance from what I think I know and then work closer, draft by draft, to a treatment that feels true."

The result of her approach is a poetry that is remote, psychologically interior (like a dream), and formed entirely of ambiguously symbolic figures, perceptions, and actions. It is the sort of thing literary people like to read because of the variety of possible interpretations; it is the sort of thing that leaves nonliterary people puzzled and unmoved. Although some of the later poems are more open and personal, the opening verse paragraph of the first poem, "The Immaculate Stairs," is a good example of the symbolic approach she prefers:

> Her bedroom smelled of trees.
> A grey woman who was not her mother
> waited with the gown and warm milk.
> While she slept, a stranger
> let himself into the white rooms below
> and touched everything
> silver. The full moon pulled
> at the woman inside her
> skin. It whitened.

Many of Nance Van Winckel's poems involve a darkness that gives the reader a subterranean feeling of solidified enclosure, even when the poems do not lead us underground or underwater. The negative character of this imagery comes out clearly in these lines from "Water-Witching": "Any woman can take root in this sand / and burrow down deep / toward some other slimy living." Below is the shortest of these poems:

> LOWELL RESERVOIR
>
> In Kansas I have seen
> what I know are miracles:
> pelicans and seagulls circling
> fence posts, turning
> over in the sun, turning
> like bleached wheat.
> I watch them dive
> deep into brown water.
> their slick eyes dipping
> below sea level.

Roxie Powell. Kansas Collateral. Box 303, Cherry Valley, NY 13320: Cherry Valley Editions, 1978. 63 pages. $2.50 paperback.

Most of the poems in Kansas Collateral deal either with scenes set in Kansas or with scenes in which a Kansas connection appears somewhere else. About the first half of the book presents individual scenes, real or imaginary, some of which are hard to date and some of which go back to about 1949. They include interesting and amusing pictures of family members and teenage experience.

However, as one reads the poems a certain monotonous repetition begins to develop because the poems in the first half of the book are so alike in form. Each describes a brief, significant scene from the past. That is all right in itself: the details are well chosen and the development of the scene is concise. What bothers one is that each scene remains isolated, without any larger development of idea or perception. Each page is like a new parallel beginning. In a book that deals with a personal past, the reader is frustrated that the past is never really interpreted. He has to settle for brief, though tangible, glimpses that seem to lack a context.

The poems of the second half are written in good spirits but remind me of a party I once went to. About 1:00 someone said, "Let's sing 'Red River Valley,'" and I heard the next day a joyous few sang cowboy songs till dawn. It is the kind of thing that could be fun to do, but you would feel a little put upon if asked to listen to a recording. Below is the ending of one such poem from this section that amounts to a recording of Powell having fun, a poem called "Winebottleblues":

> I can see strange angels
> at the foot of my bed and
> see them lift the sheet
> but all they'll find is an
> empty mind and a bottle
> in bed with me, 'cause I
> got the Winebottle Blues.

The poems of this volume project a likeable personality with some good touches of irony, humor, and characterization. What the book lacks is a serious conception to keep its parts from seeming offhand and random.

Margaret Randall, trans. These Living Songs: Fifteen New Cuban Poets. Fort Collins, CO 80523: Colorado State Review (4, No. 1), 1978. 143 pages. $5.00 paperback.

This special book-issue of Colorado State Review presents the poetry of fifteen mostly young and all eager poets who live in Cuba. Their poetry is surprizingly free of dogmatism and theory. They are all communists dedicated to the further development of the Cuban revolution, but they are also dedicated to their poetry as social and personal expression. The

result is a poetry that expresses their personal passions and experiences within the context of a developing national history. As genuine poets, they see communism in the details of their lives rather than in its abstraction.

Not all of the poems Randall has selected have an aspect of the revolution as their subject, but, even when the subject is love or the loss of family, the revolution often permeates the experience. Although none of these writers may ever become great, their work appeals to me because of its directness and its clear communication of the poets' experiences.

Ted Schaefer. The Summer People. P. O. Box 1426, Columbia, MO 65205: Singing Wind, 1978. 55 pages. $4.00 paperback.

The Summer People by Ted Schaefer is a carefully assembled collection that is impressive both in its variety and in its concern for detail. Schaefer's poetry is intelligent, self-deprecating when he pictures himself, and sympathetic but ironic when he pictures others. The first of the four sections of the book presents facets of his personal life and is characterized by strong accumulations of realistic imagery. The poems of the second section are brief and generalized, like fables. In the third section Schaefer tries to catch the fundamental reality behind individual lives, beginning with his own. Finally the longer poems of the last section present more panoramic views of life in our culture. Below is a poem from section three:

SENTENCED TO 120 YEARS,
THE PRISONER ESCAPES
63 YEARS EARLY

Home,
the brick gone,
my puppy's dogs' dogs
howl as though they'd kill me.
Mama! I brought
you a gift
I made for Christmas,
a wooden Jesus.
Your stone sorrow
juts from a
lot. Roaming
the neighborhood
I grow younger and younger.
The cop who finds me
says, to the press,
"He was waiting to be captured.
He did not fire."

Fred Whitehead. Steel Destiny. Box 697, Cambridge, MA 02139: West

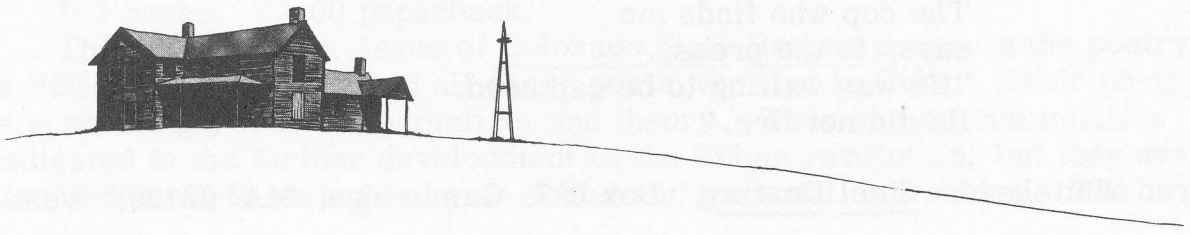
End Press, 1979. 31 pages. $1.50 paperback.

The poems in Steel Destiny deal with the particular conditions of workers or picture moments from the lives of individuals who have become committed to revolutionary ideals, including the author. Some of the poems deal with Whitehead's personal life but most provide tight, reportorial descriptions, informed by a seasoned Marxism that happily remains in the background. In those poems where the writer makes a directly editorial comment, the comment is restrained and carefully eloquent, as in the end of "Rock Culture": "Looking on sadly I can do nothing to alter / the ion phases of their occult passage inward / so write this simple annal of a plasticene epoch / this canticle of pain waiting silently on a shelf."

Whitehead enjoys the great advantage of having a well-defined and concrete place to stand when he looks out at the world—unlike those of us who must wade from tussock to tussock for our momentary perspectives, only to have each one squish down into mud under our feet. In the best poems, Whitehead's Marxist perspective allows him to see concisely without calling attention to itself:

REMEMBERING STU

Remember when Stu the old boilermaker
told how they got laborers for the oil rigs
in the Gulf: They'd take a pick-up,
get some gallons of cheap wine and drive in to
skid row in New Orleans, holding them out the window.
The winos would come running out of the alleys,
get drunk in the back. When they passed out,
down at Morgan City they'd be flown to the rig.
When they woke up on the deck you could hear
their screams and yells in the hot sun.
It was good though: worked their asses off
but got fed and dried out. They stayed 90 days.



NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CARL ADLER writes poetry and fiction for Prairie Schooner, December, and other magazines.

ALAN BASTING edits Penny Dreadful magazine and Raincrow Press. He is finishing an M. F. A. at Bowling Green State University. His first book is Singing from the Abdomen (Stonemarrow Press).

MARY BAUMANN majors in photography at Southern Illinois University.

RICHARD BEHM lives in Stevens Point, Wisconsin and has two books of poetry.

PATRICK BIZZARO teaches creative writing at Northern Virginia Community College where he edits Manassas Review. His three books of poetry include Ohio Seduction, The Taste of Rope, and Undressing the Mannequin.

LAURIE BLAUMER, a student in the M. F. A. program at the University of Montana, publishes in Gargoyle, Kudzu, The Greenfield Review.

JIM BOGAN teaches at the University of Missouri at Rolla. He read from his first book, Trees in the Forest, and more recent works at a K. U. poetry reading last fall.

SHIRLEY BUETTNER, a farm wife, is working on a creative M. A. at Kearney State College in Nebraska.

KATHRYN CLARK is a photographer from Lawrence.

MITCH DECK teaches video art at the Kansas City Art Institute.

KARL ELDER recently accepted a position as Assistant Professor of English/Reading at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He will continue to edit Seems from his new location.

LARRY S. FERGUSON is presently artist-in-residence in Omaha.

PATRICK WORTH GRAY teaches part-time at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

ROBERT GROSS, a student at Washburn University in Topeka, edits the Headwaters publication, Inscape.

GEORGE GURLEY is a poet, playwright, and real estate broker who resides in Lawrence. Park College produced his plays Cures in 1978 and Indian Givers in 1979. His book of poetry, Home Movies, is from Raindust Press.

TOM HANSEN teaches literature and writing courses at Northern State College in Aberdeen, South Dakota. His poems appear in Poetry Northwest, Paris Review, and Kansas Quarterly.

TOM HAWKINS is a lecturer in the English Department at Wichita State University, where he received his M. F. A. in creative writing.

ROBERT HERSHON co-edits Hanging Loose Press, which will publish his book, A Blue Shovel. Lousiana State University Press will publish another book, The Public Hug: New and Selected Poems, in 1980.

STEVEN HIND teaches at Hutchinson Junior College and edits Young

Kansas Writers, the annual collection of writing by Kansas high school students. He has published recently in Tellus and Kansas Quarterly.
LINDA HYDE is a poet from Bainbridge Island, Washington.
KEITH JACOBSHAGEN is an associate professor at the University of Nebraska.
DANIEL LANGTON's poetry has appeared in Saturday Review, Paris Review, and the Atlantic. He resides in San Francisco.
LYN LIFSHIN has published widely in small presses. Her books include Collected Poems (Crossing Press), Shaker House Poems (Sagarin Press), Plymouth Women and Glass (both from Morgan Press).
DONALD LEVERING's first book, Jack of Spring, is forthcoming from Swamp Press. He works on the Kansas City Star.
BEVERLY MATHERNE teaches drama courses at Kansas State University, where she also studies French.
MATTHEW MCKAY works for the California State Department of Health. His chapbook, Letters to J, is from Emerald City Press.
JOHN D. MERCER is a photographer from Sonoma, California who has appeared in Cottonwood Review before.
ERNST NIEMANN, a senior at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Writer's Workshop, has publications in New Collage and Ball State Forum.
MICHAEL RENSNER, a 1979 graduate of the University of Kansas, is living with friends at a vineyard in France.
ANITA SKEEN teaches in the Creative Writing program at Wichita State University. Her poems appear in Prairie Schooner, MS., Nimrod, New Letters and 30 Kansas Poets.
JOHN SPENCE is a photographer and cinematographer from Lincoln, Neb.
MIKE SMETZER edited Cottonwood Review for five years, ending with issue #20. His poetry appears in Hanging Loose, West Branch, Poetry Now and Connecticut Fireside.
WILLIAM THOMAS, a New York resident, has another story appearing in the Winter-Spring 1979 issue of Kansas Quarterly. Other stories have been published in Colorado Quarterly, Quarterly West, and Mississippi Review.
OZ WILLE will have a show of his photographs at the Lawrence Arts Center in the fall of this year.
WARREN WOESSNER publishes Abraxas, a magazine of reviews. His book of poetry, Landing, was published by Ithaca House.
JOHN WORKS is a fiction writer from Austin, Texas.

$2.50
COTTONWOOD REVIEW
ISSN 0147-149X