
COTTONWOOD

COTTONWOOD REVIEW
Spring 1981 No. 24

Cottonwood Review welcomes contributions of fiction, poetry, translation, photography, and articles about the arts from both local and national writers and artists. Poetry submissions limited to the five best. Please include a self-addressed envelope for return of all submissions.
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CONTENTS

FICTION

POETRY

INTERVIEW

REVIEWS

PHOTOGRAPHS

GRAPHICS

TED SCHAEFER

AFTER HAPPY ENDINGS

The fairy tale ends
and I'm normal again
—a king or a princess—
but wingless,
blinded by gem mountains,
nostalgic for the
mammals who talked me
through thickets of disaster.
My empty hut in the forest
is waiting for
the children evicted
from my fairy tale marriage.
One of them, transformed,
will slay the ogre that is me
and pluck the silver
dullness from my eyes.

GASLESS LIGHT

The light
flooding the concrete cells
of closed stations

reads local maps
the surfaces of oil cans
the yellow chalk on healed tires

and sings through the night

VIRGINIA BRADY YOUNG

MEDITATING

Holding the stillness,
mind bounces back and forth,
balanced by the mantra.
Remembering the gold piazza,
the man who pinched you once.
Near The Spanish Steps, your
lips tingle with Italian verbs.
Mantra pulls you back.
Breath you held for years
exhales
into the calm.

First the darkness hinders,
mantra works its way.
The path always down,
piazza steps rising as
you descend.
You go on until sound
becomes a lost balloon.
At first the silence terrifies,
then the pattern
softens, warms like
blankets on a bed.

A kind of battle,
larger than a war.
When rescuers arrive,
they find you in the dark
staring at closed lids,
holding the stillness.

JOHN McKERNAN

ESCAPE FROM SCHOLARSHIP
For Patricia Craddock

Today the Boston Red Sox
World Series sixth game was rained
Out for the third consecutive
Day. I read Sam Johnson's Prayers
And watch a paper cup slide
Down Lindsey Street standing up
And come to a full stop filled
With rain water.
        Mostly I
Feel that I am filled with bones.
I want to thank the calcium
Atom and all the Guernseys
In Nebraska. Moo ! I love
Samuel Johnson because
He was suicidal and
Died in his Seventies.
I want this rain to keep up
Until next March by which time
All hope will have turned into
Something greater than loss
And Boston may have moved south-
Ward to Arkansas then.

JANET RUTH HELLER

LOVENOTE I

I would like to play this evening with you
Over and over again
Like one of your favorite records.

RON IKAN

MILK GLASS

set off the room
in my Grandmother's house
where the grand piano
held court,

seldom played
but often used by me
as a fortress after I'd hang
blankets.

I heard FDR from under there
once, and one of the radio orchestras
that easily could have been
Toscanini, or even Furtwangler
for all I knew.

I was *that* old then,
and *that* impressionable
As I climbed columns of dust
through the majestic bay window at my Grandmother's,
past milk glass of all colors
into a world of turbulent
organdies and lapis lazuli,
a dissonant composition
based on the chord structures
of symphonies heard by the child
that I was then in a *weltanschauung*
unbroken and safe, yet forceful
to the point of being at war.

Grandmother's house
stood strong on the block
for the duration of that war,
and the room where the piano was
was always mine to go to.

From underneath
while I was playing soldier
you could hear the iron sprinklers
on the green of the adjacent golf course
keeping a kind of tempo
to a kind of music.

I haven't heard that cadence
over these last thirty-odd years,
but as we entertained the other evening
I used the old pewter tureen
from Grandmother's house,
and for a moment while serving
I thought I heard the thud of guns
in an orchard near Bastogne.

DANIEL WOLFF

DIEBENKORN

When the trashmen come, the dog next door
jerks at his chain and can't stop barking.
Your stockings are floating on the floor.
And the gentle darkling
heat of the blankets-the moist patterns of touch-
escape in a quick gasp as the sheet
gets turned back and turned into too much
white light to bear. Its folded corner meets
the darker square of the bed.
And you groan, pulling one knee
out from underneath yourself. Have I said
that there was a dog barking, and he
was yanking at the side of the sky?
November 16th. Oakland. 6:35

WILLIAM ZANDER

THE PRAISE OF FOLLY

— for Walt and Judy

"Tell it like it was," says Walt Cummins, my artistic conscience.

He means this story. You see, I'd been browsing around for a character to fit Cotton Combs, a coat with a little padding, something to thicken him up a bit. As it is, he's a bit ghostly, lurking in white long johns, scratching his balls. Assuming there was anything much to know, I didn't know Cotton at all. So I'd been thinking about the fictional padding, motivation, internal conflicts, &c., till Walt says, "Tell it like it was," adding the hip "baby" to show he isn't serious.

Well, neither am I, so I will. I'll start at the University of Missouri, where I was a journalism student in the late fifties. Originally, I had been an art major, but reneged as soon as it became clear to me how artists were supposed to live—cold-water lofts in the Village and all that. My dreams, for some reason, centered on a Chris-Craft cabin cruiser and debauched wanderings up and down the Gulf of California. I was very romantic.

I was also in love, but that wasn't so important. All my dreams centered on that cabin cruiser. Why go to college at all, except to get a good job when you get out? Thus I reasoned to myself and others, over beers and Polish sausage at the Stein Club.

In 1908, Walter Williams founded the world's first school of journalism at M.U., and it was still considered one of the best, at least by the staff. They really laid it on the line there. I remember once when a representative from the D'arcy Advertising Agency in St. Louis appeared as a guest speaker. He showed us some ads and spoke of one, something to do with soap I think, as "schlocky but effective." A question regarding this was on the final exam.

So I was learning a lot of valuable things. Elsewhere, I was doing cartoons for *Showme*, the campus humor rag (banned twice while I was there, of which I was not a little proud), and chug-a-lugging with my fraternity brothers.

"SO HERE COMES ANOTHER VERSE THAT'S WORSE THAN THE OTHER VERSE," we sang every weekend in our basement, equipped with intercom and hollow-seated benches in case of a raid. Someone would start throwing beer cans and Mud, our Weimaraner mascot, was made to retrieve them, receiving as a reward a saucer of beer. "Ha, ha," we laughed. Then my girl and I would go into the other room, which was relatively dark, to dance and do a little public necking.

One of my best pals in the fraternity was Rick Ryan, who was majoring in art education. I still see him occasionally and kid him about his name; it's right out of a comic book, the kind we both learned to draw from when we were kids. Rick and I used to mess around with his tape recorder, doing Bob and Ray-type routines. Rick had real wit, the first I'd encountered outside of some professors. He knew how to be subtle and tried to get me to be too. "Poor," he'd say matter-of-factly, after I'd just put some Mad-magazine grotesquerie on the tape.

Unless he was doing a tape, Ryan always seemed to be sleeping. He was only vaguely involved in the fraternity. His clothing was nondescript, unlike the aggressively ivy-league outfits of others. He had medium-long brown hair, parted at the side and combed straight over like Will Rogers, and a jutting jaw with a persistent five-o'clock shadow. "Poor," he'd say in chapter meetings, if he was awake.

One winter night I returned to the house after a date and heard the tape-recorder going in his room. I walked right in; you can't expect privacy in a frat house. I was startled by an apparition in white who sat on a bottom bunk. Ryan was on top, his back against the wall, a can of beer in his hand.

"This is Cotton Combs," he announced. "He's an artist and he's going to Europe."

The apparition saluted like a soldier, without getting up. The white came from three sources:

1. a suit of long winter underwear, the likes of which I'd never seen before.

2. a whitish-blond crewcut.

3. teeth.

"Howdy," said Cotton.

I opened a beer and we listened to the end of the tape. Cotton guffawed every so often.

"You got an extra bed, don't you?" Ryan asked me. "His roommate was expelled for stealing books and selling them to the bookstore," he explained to Cotton.

"Now he's got a job with Dun & Bradstreet," I said.

"He was house manager too," said Ryan.

"Want another beer?"

"At least. And flip the tape."

Cotton just grinned and guffawed and scratched himself. I don't remember him saying another word as we sat there drinking beer and listening to tapes. Sometime or other I learned he was from Smithville, Ryan's hometown. Smithville is in Clay County, Missouri, about 17 miles from North Kansas City. It's in the same county with Kearney (where Jesse James was born) and colorful places like Roosterville and Paradise. It's a rural community, pop. maybe 1200, on the Little Platte River.

Sometimes we wonder what it's all about, what we're doing here and why. But I was unprepared for Cotton's question as he crawled, in his union suit, into the top bunk in my room and I doused the light.

"You believe in God?" he asked, as the room settled into pre-dawn dimness.

"I don't think so," I said.

"Me neither."

Pretty soon he was snoring.

Cotton had cleared out before I awoke at noon. For the rest of my days at M.U., the apparition was

out-of-sight, out-of-mind. Ryan graduated in January and moved to Kansas City. There was nothing much to do but concentrate on that diploma; I still had visions of the cabin cruiser and free-love on the gulf. The fact that I was getting married next summer didn't seem to blur it.

For next summer was associated in my mind with the cabin cruiser; it was suddenly the place to be, a horizon I looked upon with wild surmise. "I'm so excited," I wrote in a letter to Ryan, "that when I shit the turds come out in hard little balls and ricochet around the toilet bowl."

I think my marriage was the least of it. First of all, I was graduating, at long last getting away from the drabness of J School. Secondly, I was moving to K.C., where Ryan and I could continue our beer drinking and tape sessions as if nothing had happened. Thirdly, I already had a job, a better one than I could have hoped for, with Hallmark Contemporary Cards, the funny ones. My dad, who owned the biggest retail greeting-card outlet in the Midwest, had got my foot in the door. It was marvelous, consider; I had believed that the only way to get the cabin cruiser was to give up, at least to some extent, "creativity." But this could never happen at Hallmark.

The girl I was marrying was an old flame. We'd begun dating in high school in Omaha and, despite sporadic fights and breakups, she'd followed me to Missouri to enroll at Stephens College. All is vanity, saith the preacher, and "True Love" is the greatest vanity of all, the assumption that God will see to it that two people "are meant for each other." Dear girl, we based everything on that assumption. Years later and miles away we were divorced, but then we were young and in love, sure that everything could be settled by a wedding—a big one, she insisted, despite my Bohemian sneers.

So we kissed goodbye the weekend of my graduation, she to go to Omaha and help our parents set the ceremonial stage, I to go to K.C. and find an

apartment and start work. The first thing I did when I got there was call Ryan.

"Getting any?" I asked him.

Enough, he told me. We did a Bob-and-Ray routine over the phone. He had a lot of things to show me, he said, some new paintings. It's funny, I knew Ryan more as a recording than a graphic artist at school. He kept most of his paintings and drawings in his locker in the art building.

"Cotton's back and we're having a show at the Blue Springs Shopping Center next week," he said.

"Cotton?"

"Sure, you know, the guy from Smithville. He's been to Europe."

It wasn't till Ryan mentioned the long johns that I caught on.

We arranged to meet at Kelly's. Kelly's, formally known as the Westport Inn, is the best bar in town and incredibly Irish. It's in the oldest building still standing in K.C., or so says a plaque outside. Westport was once a separate town, begun by a man named McCoy, who opened a store there in 1832. For a while it thrived, what is now Kansas City being known as Westport Landing. But in 1849, an epidemic of Asiatic cholera almost ruined Westport, and before the turn of the century, the City of Kansas had absorbed it. I don't know why I mention this, except as an instance of the irony of fate.

Rick and Cotton were already tucked away in a booth near the front when I got there. It was a hot muggy day, and Kelly's isn't air-conditioned, so I sweated and put down beers like a champ while we talked. Ryan was his usual easy-going, ironic self, despite an evident enthusiasm for the glories of K.C. as opposed to M.U.; he looked comfortable in a yellow polo shirt and khakis. Cotton, for some reason, was in a blue gabardine suit and tie, wrinkled with humidity but stiff and formal in some fundamentalist way, like the country people in Walker Evans' photographs. Round shouldered, slightly pudgy, red-faced and hook-nosed

under the short crop of blondish hair, he seemed to be a kind of redneck cherub, consciously stiff on his bench while others floated around.

Ryan drawled on easily about last winter and spring, how he'd done some sort of assistant teaching at the big K.C. high school and was to take over the art classes from a little old lady, who was retiring, next fall. Poor old lady. She'd come into class with all sorts of creative projects.

"But what these kids do, it's like when we were in high school, remember?" Ryan said. "Every kid has something he draws over and over, something he likes. Like most of the girls draw horses, a couple do beauty queens in big puffy formals at the prom. Most of the guys do mechanical drawings of cars, one does wild west and civil war scenes with a croquil pen—real detailed, you know, with CSA on the belts, and a lot of cross-hatching."

"I remember," I said, blinking against the beer and humidity.

"Yeah, well the old lady brings in these projects, like 'expressing your inner emotions on paper' while she plays Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony on a record player. And what do the kids draw?"

"What?"

Horses, girls in formals at the prom"— and I joined him so we finished the sentence in chorus— "cars, and civil war scenes'

As for the summer, Ryan was taking it easy, living with his mother in North K.C., dating an airline stewardess, drawing and painting.

"Mostly gnarled trees," Cotton put in, jarring me because of the infrequency of his words. He guffawed.

"Cotton's gone cubist," Ryan explained.

I couldn't see Cotton as—well, an artist. He'd just got back from Paris, Ryan said, and had even sold some paintings there, out in the street, to American tourists apparently.

"They're whores, that's what they are, whores,"

he said.

This comment hinted at dark secrets in Cotton's life, passion and bitter loss in the city of love. Was it possible? I glanced at his pink, ingenuous face, and quickly looked away, lest he guffaw and maybe slap his knee.

"So you're really taking the big step this summer?" Ryan asked me.

"Yeah," I said. In the groggy atmosphere of Kelly's, Omaha seemed remote.

I stayed at Rick's till I found an apartment. That wasn't easy. I finally had to sublet from a bachelor college prof who was going on sabbatical; his little one-room cubicle was in a gigantic apartment complex called the Twin Oaks, right across from the University of Kansas City and near the Plaza. Small but nicely furnished, with abstract prints on the walls, bronze statuettes, Danish Modern furniture, a Japanese screen, and a collection of records and books by guys like Proust and Joyce.

"I just *know* you'll take good care of them," said the prof, causing Ryan to squint.

My only misgiving was the one-room deal, the two Danish Modern couches with removable backs so you could sleep on them. The marriage beds! But I moved in and was ready to start work. The first day I drove with great care, awed by my every movement, past the Volker fountain, past the Nelson Gallery and Art Institute, down Gillham Road to the huge, square, cream-colored building, to park on the roof beside the eighth floor where it was wedged into a hill. I sought out Bob MacIntyre, smiling, red-faced, bald-headed director of Contemporary Cards.

I had come to work without a tie; what the hell does an artist need with a tie? But Mr. MacIntyre, smiling the while, explained that Mr. Hall expected all the employees to "look sharp." He seemed apologetic. I was sent down to the company shop to buy a tie.

Let me plunge immediately into the situation. The Contemporary department, surprisingly small I

thought, was hidden behind the ad department on the ninth floor. At first I was turned on by all the media available, colored paper, lace and gold leaf, bristol board of any ply, sable brushes, all kinds of ink and paint—even old *London Illustrated Gazettes*, with busy engravings which the artists often cut out to give an antique look to a Contemporary Card. I went to work with gusto. Actually, I'd been hired as a writer, but Mr. MacIntyre had told me I could design, too— "if you want to," he'd added, without enthusiasm.

So I made scores of designs, my own originals, and neatly covered them with clear acetate, the way I'd seen the other artists doing it. You put them on racks and they were voted on by the artists, the writers, and people from "media research," whatever that is. All my designs were voted down.

The other artists and writers were nice to me, but *I* sensed a coldness. They played silly jokes on each other but I felt left out. In my heart of hearts, I was sure they'd heard how I'd been hired, a bit of nepotism. None seemed wild about my work. I still had Mad-magazine tendencies, drawing hairy and wart-nosed little figures that I thought were funny. But it wouldn't do; MacIntyre insisted on "cuteness." Morbid humor, beloved of the *Showme* staff, was out here.

There was more to greeting-card design than the drawing of grotesque little figures. You had to know how to juxtapose colors, how to use Zip-a-tone lettering, how to add decorative flourishes. MacIntyre was crazy for "cleanness." And the favorite expression of the artist who sat in the glassed-in cubicle behind me was, "That's *tacky*."

Whatever talent I had seemed to be obscured by these professionals. But I was eager to learn. I'd watch them carefully, ask questions which seemed to amuse them, but only slightly. For creators of humorous cards, they seemed somewhat devoid of humor, except when they were playing jokes on each other or satirizing MacIntyre. I became aware of rivalries, bitterness. Several were frustrated fashion designers. Most

dreamed of going to New York. They complained about drawing "neuters," those cute little Nebbish figures you see on studio cards, made sexless so either men or women can buy them.

But there *was* a certain freedom there. MacIntyre didn't watch us, and we almost never saw Mr. Hall, who hovered over the other departments. We could do a lot of what we wanted, play records, have Mexican jumping-bean races, even go off on little jaunts around town. We usually ate at the Crown Room, right in the building, but sometimes we'd go out and stay hours. One day we all went to the Mardi Gras, a jazz joint on 16th and Vine, where one of the staff artists had just completed a mural. He was very good. Drinking a martini and gazing at the brilliant mardi gras scene, I though about going back to school, to the Art Institute or somewhere, to make up for the Lost Time of Journalism School.

I'd been at Hallmark about a month when it was time to get married. I took two days off for a long weekend in Omaha and, drunk most of the time, managed to get the job done.

"We can't bring all that back with us," I told my bride, referring to the wedding gifts.

"But I *need* some good china."

"All you think about is material things," I raged.

But I loved her, she seemed new again. I brought my bride and a carload of material things back to K.C.

We were mostly together. K.C. was the big city, with lots of things to do, Mexican food at Margarita's on the Plaza, drinks at Milton's on 33rd and Main, live jazz at the Mardi Gras, Bettye Miller and Milt Abel cutting up at the Horseshoe Lounge. Sometimes Ryan and his airline stewardess were with us. They came over for dinner in our hot, sticky, but very arty apartment. We sat outside and watched the stars. Sometimes we went to art shows where Ryan's work was displayed; he was indeed specializing in gnarled trees, watercolor landscapes, bright and shimmery but somewhat tacky.

At the Red Barn playhouse, where we saw *The Importance of Being Earnest,* the walls were filled with Ryans, like a good page in a stamp album. And I sometimes took long walks, by myself, down the abandoned railroad tracks that ran south from behind the Twin Oaks.

I was also loning it at work. The others could waste time with practical jokes and jumping-bean races; I would take off in the afternoon and drive down to the Nelson Art Gallery. Sometimes I would go to just one room, as often as not the one with oriental sculpture, Chinese or Japanese, I forget which. It was very hushed in there; the irony I was tired of froze in the presence of the bodhisattvas, the Kwan Yin figures of painted wood. There was little light. The far wall was a Buddhist wall painting of some kind, huge, the original reconstructed here in rectangular blocks. In the midst of the faded reds and greens sat Buddah, serene, contemplative. Having been reading Suzuki and Kerouac, I considered myself a Buddhist. I'd stand there all solemn, worshipping God or Art or my own melancholy.

But it was fun, too, being young and in love in K.C. If the cabin cruiser was drifting away to Avalon, there was something else rising up on the horizon, something serious, sort of scary. But only when you were alone. The main thing, when you were with others, was the fun you had. I had never before been so aware of fun.

Ryan was telling me about Cotton's new adventures. Somewhere or other he'd made the acquaintance of an old lady, a dowager, a widow with money who considered herself a patroness of the arts. She had purchased several acres of dense woodland which she dreamed of making into a park. She was delighted to meet Cotton, who had been to Europe, and wondered if he'd be interested in doing some sculpture on the indigenous rock that abounded there. You know, satyrs and nymphs and other classical subjects. Eventually she would clear some trees, cultivate a sward

and flower garden, build fountains and stone benches and winding paths, where dreamers could lose themselves in the beauty of nature improved. Sure, Cotton would be interested.

So she hired him, buying his tools and paying him a small weekly wage. The tools he purchased were an ordinary ballpeen hammer and a chisel. Cotton had never done any stone sculpture, a fact he didn't bother mentioning to the dowager, but there was no time like the present to try.

One fine Saturday we set out for the old lady's park. My wife and the stewardess had prepared a picnic. The city fell behind us, Ryan was telling stories from a Lenny Bruce record, and my wife sat very close to me as I drove. We bumped over a dirt road, came to a wide space in it, and Ryan told me to stop.

"This is it," he said.

"This?"

It looked like any wooded area in Missouri, mostly scrub oak, a damp, unpleasant odor hanging over everything. It was all very rank, very prickly looking, nature unimproved, fit for squirrels and children but hardly old ladies. There were vines to swing on. I half expected to look up and see a tree house.

"Listen," said Ryan.

I thought I could hear a woodpecker tapping.

"That's Cotton," Ryan grinned.

We made our way along a path he found behind some milkweed, I with the picnic basket, dodging limbs and bramble bushes.

"Ugh," said my wife, rubbing her face.

"Whatsamatter, honey?" I asked.

"Cobwebs."

"Look," Ryan stopped and pointed.

I would have missed it. There were rocks of various sizes along the path, mostly limestone, but this one had apparently been chipped at by a human being. It looked slightly like a Coke bottle.

"What is it?" asked Ryan's girl.

"Pan playing his pipes," he said.

We went on, the tapping getting louder. We saw more rocks that had been chipped at, all of them resembling nothing so much as rocks that had been chipped at. Finally, we got to a clearing, thick with grass and purple flowers. Here there were more rocks; all of them over two feet high had been attacked with the chisel. None was very large. Several were vaguely anthropomorphic, but you could see where an arm had been accidently knocked off, where the attempt to make a crotch had split an entire rock.

"See, he doesn't know anything about the grain," said Ryan, grinning. "Just starts chipping away with the hammer and chisel. He's got a thing about satyrs. He won't give up till he makes a good one."

Poor Cotton. What would the old lady say when she saw his work, some of which— unintentionally, I'm sure— resembled phalluses?

Grasshoppers zipped out of our way as we swished through the grass to a muddy little creek, shaded by sycamores. Everyone dropped whatever he was carrying.

"Hey, let's have a beer," I said.

"Yeah," said Ryan, opening the cooler. "You guys spread the blankets and take it easy. I'm gonna take one to Cotton."

Rick set out in the direction of the tapping. Meanwhile, we spread the blankets, opened beers, and reclined in the daze of nature unimproved, except for the ruins of Cotton's sculpture, which you couldn't even see from here for the thick grass.

I lay on my back, half raised on my elbows, gazing at the woods across the creek. Ryan appeared like Apollo amidst the foliage.

"How," he said, raising his right hand. "White devil speak with forked tongue."

He sprinted across the clearing, jumped the creek, scrambled up the little embankment, and collapsed beside his stewardess, whose slacks he unzipped.

"Rick," she said, slapping his hand away.

"How's Michelangelo?" I asked.

"Not bad, but he's giving up on satyrs. He's doing a big head now, Zeus or somebody."

"Is he coming over?"

"Not just yet. Don't worry, as soon as he chips off the nose he'll give up for the day."

So we brought out the lunch, the fried chicken potato salad baked beans celery stalks and radishes. We put away beer and food, slapped at the bugs, tickled our ladies, loafed in the shade of the sycamores. Lazily, Ryan tossed stones in the creek. It was fun, it was fun being there in the shade on the blankets on the grass, the scene was for now forever, it was Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (though both girls were dressed)— or perhaps, considering the speckled patterns of leaves and their shadows, the yellow-greens and violets, something more elusive, more impressionistic, as if the girls should be in long dresses with bustles and parasols, the men in straw hats and mustaches and white shirts, as the sunlight changed continuously on the grass and, somewhere, someone was tap-tapping, just at the edge of the daydream.

SUSAN STRAYER
DEAL

UNCLE

My uncle walks up from
the main house, his boots
gone dead. They snuff
in a mat of night blue
snow. He walks in long
strides recounting losses.
Three calves dropped too
early, frozen by morning.
Their legs stiff as the
handles of shovels buried
under snow. Now the lame
dog he has to shoot and
bury. Old cattle dog,
curled in a broken comma
by the barn. Behind him
his children weep and curse
his hardness. They break
away from him faster and
faster. Close to the wrench
of the barn door his boots
eat stars. The barrel shoots
out its hard, sure fire.
His dog kicks loose, hushing
even the snarl of winter moons.

LAYLE SILBERT

ACCIDENT

her last meal
glucose
through a tube
my first meal
after
a baked apple
she left for herself
on the refrigerator shelf

I also drank the rest
of the light Gallo wine

THE ENEMY

The enemy
are imperfect men
often short
hung with large genitalia
They have aortas
too awkward
to pump their off-color blood
well to the tissues of the brain
to feed & ventilate
the neurons of language & the arts

We are not believers
in their pain

JUDY RAY

VAN GOGH'S "OLIVE GROVE"

"The rustle of an olive grove
has something very secret
in it, and immensely old.
It is too beautiful for us
to dare to paint it or be
able to imagine it,"
wrote Vincent, swept his bold
brush strokes into a path
of broad footsteps that swirl
the rush of youth through sun and shade.
Crooked trees in the vibrant grove
are grouped like peasants, weather-worn
and gnarled, who might at any minute
bend and stamp in village dance
or cackle into gossip.
Like scattered scarlet poppies
flame brief highlights of their lives.
From rooted motion flows the
sense of mundane mystery
as green leaves in the olive grove
shimmer their secrets, and swim
towards the eternal blue.
It's not yet time for wrinkled
harvest, restless winds, or
horizons of rage and despair.

MARK SANDERS

HER FIRST HUNTING TRIP

I had not wanted
to go
that day,
but since my father
had no sons,
he made me.

And I,
a spiteful kitten,
walked clumsily
through the brush,
making enough noise
to wake the dead,
my father said,
let alone
the living deer.

But when he caught me
by the arm once,
and held me firmly
like a gun stock butted
to his shoulder,
I was silent
as we crouched low
behind the hawthorn.

And when he drew
his gun up,
my eyes followed
its level bead.

And when he shot,
and the steel
was off, ripping
through the brush,

there came a sound
like crows rising
out of the trees
in mass,
and the sound
of the doe
dropping.

IRRIGATING

There will be a sleeper's comfort
in the fields tonight,
where the locusts drone
like jews' harps, spreading
that song like a blanket
across the rows.

It is a soft song,
not so much melodic
as rhythmic, moving
from the constant strain
of their legs.

And I have been here
enough to know
how the ground's a bed
for tired flesh,
the cool spray's mist
its sheeting.

NAMING THE CHILD

You are named *Heath*
for the place
where you were born.

For the old house,
its rotting wood
unpainted,
sometimes bleeding
like a festered sore;
for its spoiled shingles
and its leaky roof
in the cooler, rainy parts
of April.

You are named
for the barn,
standing on the hill
like an old man propped up
against the blowing winds.

And you are named
for the range,
this brittle stubble,
your father's homestead.

How it all seemed to burn
in August,
the month you were born.

The grass on fire
at the snapping
of a twig,
the dark blue sky
heavier than smoke.

And in the fields,
the old roan dropping
in the heat
like a ripe melon
its last shuddering breath
the sound of your first cry.

J.B. GOODENOUGH

AMULET

I don't boil toads. No,
Nor gather henbane in the first
Quarter of the moon. But this,
Now this, the knucklebone

Of a girl of thirteen years
(Died as pure as a south wind
In April, so fair she was),
I got it off her father for a price.

Carry it in your pocket and it won't
Keep you out of that earth
She lies in. But it will click
Among your pennies, and you'll dance.

I tell you, it won't keep
Hair on you head, or teeth in it.
But you'll live to be
A randy, rollicking old man.

The kind she didn't live to know.

ABOVE THE MATANUSKA: LATE OCTOBER

Stars mark the edge of cloud,
spin under. This evening
I've been walking the same
path shuffled clean of moss
and wind-bitten spruce,
with a view over fields that lie
red and earthly
in the dead sunset.

The scene must be familiar
from my months of letters.
This time I wanted to give you
more than the year's first weave of frost,
a shape
like my body inverted.
I keep coming back to the same
landscape. The news here
stares out of stones.

HOMESTEADING SUSITNA

You couldn't beat the meadows enough,
lighting all the edge
with fireweed, trampling
the headhigh grass, making everything
clearing - still
he'll find a hideout
somewhere a hollow
black enough under winter,
cumbersome and homey
even where grain gentles the ground.

Bear country remains.
You'll always suspect him,
years after you heard him break through
out of daylight.

ERIC E. MCCOLLUM

BREAD

The sweet prairie wind
out west
warm even when the earth
lies fallow and cold
wind caught
in the red winter wheat

the ache of arms
kneading
fingers dusted with flour

and then it swells
mysterious as a belly
grows

oiled crust like skin
all warm from the oven
brown and firm
it begs to move
against my touch a lover's
smooth thigh

eating
thick good bread
rich as words

BARRY GIFFORD

THE GIRDLE FACTORY

As I headed west on Irving Park Road toward the tollway that would take me out to Magic Frank's house, it began to sprinkle again, and I recalled the time my mother and I drove from Chicago to Jackson, Mississippi, in a steady rainstorm in her boyfriend Irwin's Jaguar sedan. Irwin owned a girdle factory on Clinton Street and we stopped there on our way out of Chicago. I waited in the car while my mother went into the factory to talk to Irwin, who was going to fly in an airplane down to Jackson and meet us there.

I was six years old and was playing with some toy soldiers on the backseat of the Jaguar, waiting for my mother, when a dark-faced man with a mustache stuck his head in the window on the passenger side and smiled. "Hey, muchacho," he said, "this your car?" I didn't say anything. "What do you think, we sell this car, make big money," he said, spreading his arms wide. He had a handsome Latin smile with gold teeth in it. "How about it?" he asked.

"It's not my mother's car," I said. "She'll be back in a minute from the girdle factory,"

"I was ballplayer once," said the man. "In my country. I had big car like this. I was big hero." He spread his arms wide again.

I turned my attention back to my soldiers, and when I looked up the man was gone. My mother came back to the car and I told her a man had wanted to sell it. "This is a bad neighborhood," she said. "You shouldn't talk to strange men."

"He said he was a ballplayer," I told her.

"Even so," she said.

We drove straight through to Tennessee and got a room in a hilltop motel. In the middle of the night I heard a scream and woke up. My mother was in the bathroom beating black bugs with her slipper.

"We're leaving," she said. "Get dressed."

It was about three or four o'clock in the morning, but my mother woke up the man in the motel office and told him she was going. "There are roaches in that room," she said. "Thousands of them."

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

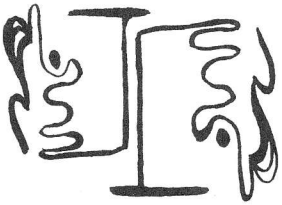
It was raining hard when we arrived in Jackson. Irwin had reserved a room for us in a hotel there and my mother and I took baths and went to bed even though it was daytime. "At least it's clean," she said.

We met Irwin that night for dinner. I was wearing my blue Cub cap with the red *C* on it. "Down here that stands for Cracker," he said.

Irwin told us he was going to build a girdle factory in Mississippi. He asked us if we wanted to drive out the next day to see where it was going to be and my mother said no, we were flying back to Chicago in the morning.

After breakfast we took a taxi to the airfield. It was still pouring when the plane took off.

"The Girdle Factory" is an excerpt from Barry Gifford's book *The Neighborhood of Baseball* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981). Used by permission of the author.



JOAN JOHNSON

FOR GRACE, WHO IS SO MUCH LIKE MY MOTHER

Grace, you are so much like my mother
that it pains me here, under my heart,
where her cancer grows. I know what

made you this way, just so, your blond
hair waxed and shining like your floors.
In fact, I have a picture of it: you

on a hill in Kansas, everything empty
behind you, you long and thin as a tow-
headed child's hungry whine. When that boy

came through who played the guitar, the one
who sang of roses and flamingos, you must
have been dying for some hot color in that

gray landscape. But you held out for what
you could touch that would last, and settled
for a man who couldn't sing. No matter: his

diamonds will glitter in your grave. I'll
tell you, Grace, watch out for those tiny
wrinkles under your eyes. My mother, toward

the end, got tougher and tougher, but nothing
was as tough as what waited underneath her
skin. The last time that I saw her, she looked

like hell. I mean, her hair had grown out
darker at the roots, and her enameled nails,
tatting on the whisky glass, were ragged.

The last thing that she told me
was that there are worse ways to die.
Now, listen, Grace: I don't believe it.

MICHAEL SMETZER

THE OLD MAN'S STORY

When I reached the finish before the others
my wife was not looking
my daughter was in the john

Suddenly the finish line was my only dimension
and I moved along that line
like a bob along a string

Runners broke through
like sparks across a tunnel
I could never leave

LOVE AND DEATH AT KROGER'S

The pastry cook watches from the deli
her eyes ripe with longing
Pastry scent is in the air

As I lift out a steak blood runs
  down my arm
and falls to the floor like gravy

JEFF WORLEY

HOMEMADE WINE

Today, on my birthday,
mother announces the appearance
of my double chin, plucks
a gray hair from my headache,
and flashes me blind with the Instamatic.

Stretch one notch further
my frowning ghost:
my exposed negativity.

Father, meanwhile, rattles
from the closet
the box of good china,
shines up the shards of bone
with his shirttail:

"Look at your reflection
in *that*, boy!"

Somebody is stumbling
through my life,
winding himself in skeins of senectitude.

Partyblowers?
Slide kazoos?
Snappers? Clappers?
Red cellophane hats?

The wine is aged
nine months today.
Drinks are on the house.

ROBERT J. RANKIN

CHOPPING VEGETABLES

working at the kitchen
table beside the stove
because the counters are too full
of dishes and pans.
you slice lettuce. i watch
the water drip into your beer
and decide it probably
doesn't matter.
you slice tomatoes. slice cauliflower
then carrots, then cucumbers,
then onions, both table
and bowl wild with garden
and your dinner party.
calm and warm. i guess
you think of the holes
in the back rows and the roots,
tilled under to rot for the coming year.
i'm anxious to be involved
but there's something about
letting you make your own salad,
something about those onions
and being able to give
us that little piece
of your summer
packed in that bowl.
even now,
your hands
slicing anything within reach,
tuck each piece into our pockets,
busfare home.

GUERILLA

while you sleep
I slide in between
the oaks and maples,
what I need

is strapped to
my thighs. While
you sleep I am
plotting lines

on your forehead
like strategic
army maps.
Destruction is

inevitable. The
firmness that was
your pride is
siphoned out.

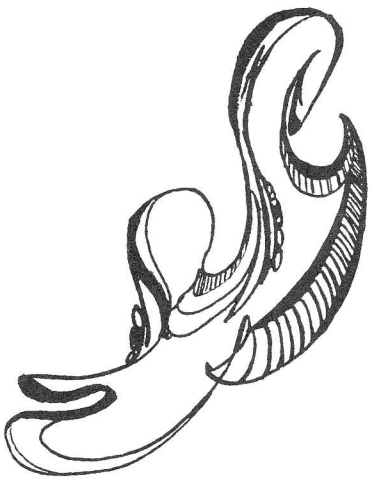
In the myth you
will end up
loving your
captor. Sniper

fire's like a
tattoo. There
are fears you
can't decode.

In your dreams
your hair is all
silver. You wake
up remembering
something gone

PHOTOGRAPH OCTOBER 55

on the steps of
the store before
the fire skirt
mid calf of
course the white
trimmed blazer
My grandfather
could be lurking
in the shadow
like he did in
movie theaters
for every date
october trees
in the store
window men's rodeo
shirts What would
happen that winter
as hard to know
as the prices
labels tucked
just out of
sight as flies
were dying in
that storefront
with just the
manikins to eat



Somewhere in the Midwest

a man can almost hear
the wind cracking
frozen cornstalks
when he lets the cat
in gold glows around
the silver fur like
those rings around the
moon that mean some
thing's happening.
He hums a blues tune
in a cold room full
of paper. This could
be Madison or may
be Red Granite he
could remember a
woman he held one
night with hair
longer and blacker
than it was. If
he decides she's just
a travelling lady
he puts down the
phone listens
to branches doesn't
write what he feels
down in a room
as cold as hers
where she hears
the frost etching
the moon out too

INSOMNIA

like a life sentence
you can only begin
to imagine a parole
from as the light hits
leaves and the wind
moves old air around
like someone shuffling
papers rearranging
what seemed endlessly
black and still

WIND BLOWS THE DEAD FLIES INTO

the room I write "more later
when we don't keep missing each
other in the house in the dark"
in the book I want you to keep
then fall asleep don't hear you
at the door Because of what didn't
happen I leave a note where you
might look put on clean clothes
The wind still blows the birds
around blows ashes in my face it
sounds like a mad train moaning
Maybe the wind is in the tritones
and bringing something hard

BILL VAN WERT

LIE STILL

"Jenny, that's just not true."

"Is so. Is so."

In the very vehemence of rebuttal, the truth. At six. If she were an adult, I wouldn't belabor the point. She's a liar and I won't talk to her ever again. With a six-year-old there's the nagging of the preacher, the little lessons for the road of life, speeches I give for the hearing them myself, words she doesn't hear, except as jibberish, Alice in the mirror seeing only grownups.

I haven't told her mother this. When her mother and my wife go out together, I actually look forward to babysitting Jenny, to the chance for confrontation.

"I love you. You can be my husband when I grow up."

"Thank you, Jenny."

Jenny knows how to kill a confrontation before it starts. I'm pleased, I glow, she giggles at my blushing. Inside I wonder if "I love you" means "I hate you" or "I use you" or something else more menacing.

Sometimes I think she deliberately contradicts herself in successive sentences to see if I'm paying attention.

"I'm forty-eight years old."

"Jenny, you're not. You're six."

"No I'm not. Not. Not. You know why?"

"Why?"

"Cuz my name's not Jenny." (She giggles.)

"That doesn't make sense. Some reason why." (She begins to pick her nose as I say this.) "And stop picking your nose. Little girls don't do that."

"Do little boys?"

"Well no, that's not what I meant. Big people shouldn't do it either."

"When they're forty-eight they can."

"Why?"

"Cuz Jimmy Devlin says his daddy does and he's fifty. Jimmy told him not to, and his daddy said he had to cuz if he didn't he'd get 'our bite us.'"

"What's that?"

"You know, tummy aches in the fingers."

"You mean arthritis?"

"Yes. That's what I said."

You're never right with a child. The first and last lines of any conversation with a six-year-old always go to the six-year-old. If you're forty-eight, you'd best shut up. I have this theory that the terrible two's are nothing compared to the severe sixes. That firmness of conviction before the age of reason.

There are two kinds of liars. Seven is the cut-off point. Before the magic "7" (itself, a bending of the truth), it's playful and encouraged. After that, it's perjury, bearing false witness, as under oath. I will not tolerate this double standard. I assume that Jenny knows the difference. She's too clever not to. I won't encourage her. A monster looms inside this midget queen. I tuck her in to sleep.

Ten minutes later in the dark of her room.

"What?"

"Know what I did when you kissed me and left the room?"

"No, what?"

"I picked my nose...(pause for invisible giggling) and wiped it on the spot where you kissed me...(more giggling) now it's all gone."

"That's nice, Jenny. Now go to sleep. Your mother will be mad if she comes home and finds out you're still awake and I didn't get you to sleep."

"What will you give me if I go to sleep?"

I could feel the flirtation on her face, even though I couldn't see it. Her eyes had to be darting at the chance to barter with a grownup.

"Another kiss?"

"No, I want a baby."

"Well, let's turn on the light and find your doll."

"No. I mean a real baby."

"You'll have plenty of chances for that when you grow up."

"When I'm forty-eight?"

"No, probably sooner than that."

"When I'm fourteen?"

"No. That's a little too soon."

"Jimmy Devlin says he can give me a real baby right now if I let him ride my bike. Is that a lie?"

When I was growing up, there were two taboos in our family of seven. You never bit anyone and you never called anyone a liar. My mother would swoop down with the same punishment for either offense. She'd crunch her teeth in our skin until we had a welt to show all the other kids in the neighborhood. The only difference was in position. If you were a biter, she'd bite you back in exactly the same spot you had bitten the brother or sister. If you had said "liar," she'd bite you wherever she could. My younger brother Don had a theory about younger brothers being better off than older brothers when it came to moms. He tested that theory repeatedly in our youth. He would suck his arm until the flush began to appear. Then he'd bite down once, quickly, jabbingly, like a snake springs. The proof in hand, he'd scream to mother that I had bitten him. Before I could open my mouth, she would have branded me with her gnawing of teeth. None of this "It hurts me more than it does you" stuff. To the skin. And chomp like corn on the cob. I would immediately go numb at the spot. My pride hurting more than my skin, I'd blurt out that Don was a liar. Whammo. Second bite. You can't win with mothers. The first and last bite always go to them.

"Now what, Jenny?"

"I am so forty-eight. I am so."

"Okay, you're forty-eight. Now go to sleep, okay?"

"See? You were lying. I was forty-eight all the time. Even you say so too."

When I remind my mother about those times

when Don played me for a double sucker and proved his theories of younger-better at the expense of my mother, she denies it. She laughs nervously and says I'm making it all up. That's her way of saying I'm under the big 7, I guess, because she's really calling me a liar. I think her memory is failing her. She's fifty-two and going through change of life.

"Jenny, I may have to spank you if you don't stop calling me in here. There's a time to play and a time to sleep. Now is time to sleep."

"Are you going to sleep with me?"

"No. But I'll be in the next room. You won't be alone."

Or maybe like Jenny I remembered more bites than there really were, more lies than there really were. When I talk to Don now, it seems clear he's revised his theories. Now it's "You got all the good clothes and I got the hand-me-downs, and the folks made the mistakes with you and then clamped down on me." For some reason, I don't even know how old Don is.

"Jimmy Devlin says his daddy had a second thought."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"He asked his daddy how come he got to be his daddy and his daddy said he was a second thought."

"He did not say that, Jenny. He couldn't have."

"Did so. Jimmy said he did."

"Well, Jimmy may be making it up."

"Boys don't make up stories. Jimmy says so. Only girls."

My earliest childhood memory is of when I was four. I had been given a three-wheeler, red and white, with ribbons hanging from the handlebars. My mother told me not to leave our block with it and not to go into the street. I agreed. One day I was riding on the other side of our block from our house. Across the street a little girl wearing taps on her shoes hollers to me that she likes my bike. She has freckles and a big hole where her front teeth should be. I think she's ugly. But I'm excited just the same. You can't touch it, I

holler back. Who needs yer ole bike anyway, she blasts back. You're a mean boy. I am not. Are so. Am not. Are so. Not. So. Please let me ride your bike. You can touch it but you can't ride it. She crosses the street. Free. Without looking. She's used to it. Suddenly I hate her because she can cross the street. I changed my mind, you can't even touch it. She's so close to be denied. Liar. You said I could. I changed my mind. Besides, you're ugly. She cries and runs home. My mother met a new neighbor that night. She was always meeting new neighbors.

"My mommy says I can have lots of babies when I grow up. And you can be my brother if you want to."

"I'd like that, Jenny. Now sleep."

"My mommy had lots of babies but they died."

"That's a lie."

"She told me so. She had big tummies lots of times. Daddy says they all went to heaven. My daddy's right. He's a boy."

If they're right, which I doubt, boys have a tougher time of it than girls. I wasn't supposed to cry when my mother bit me and Don was laughing behind her back. Sometimes he laughed harder when he saw me crying.

"This is the last time I'm coming in here. The next time you call I'm going to stay in the other room, because it's time for you to go to sleep."

"Know what?"

"What?"

"My dolly weeed on the bed."

Lights on. The changing of sheets and bliss on Jenny's face. No doubt she stuck her finger in her nose and wiped the exact spot where the no-hole doll was supposed to have sprinkled from.

"My mommy says girls have one more hole than boys. We're lucky. We can go potty and have babies too. Boys can only go potty."

We went into the bathroom, pulled down Jenny's pajamas and washed her legs and genitals. So

small, so soft, so perfect to touch. Limpid after morning rains like April afternoons. Her little vulva looked like two milk-coated spoons side by side. Someday there would be hair and many men would cry.

"Do you think I'm pretty?"

I don't answer.

"I love you. And you can be one of my babies too. When I grow up."

"Thank you, Jenny." (I can hardly wait.)

"Know why I know I'm forty-eight?"

"No. Why?" (I ask by reflex, not by curiosity.)

"Cuz long time ago I had many babies. Did too. This many. (crucifixion pose of the arms) And they had lots of names too. They called me mommy and my name wasn't Jenny. I remember it. And one day they were bad little boys and girls and I ate em all up."

"Jenny, that's the biggest lie I ever heard."

"My name is not Jenny."

"What is it, then?"

"It's..."

"Well...."

"It's... (giggling) ... it's Jimmy."

You've got too many holes to be a Jimmy, I thought. I am aware that babysitters should not have fantasies about the children in their care, fantasies in which they envision the children grown up, equals in every way. For love and hate. For sex and death. For forgetting.

"It was long ago."

"How long?"

"Maybe forty years?"

"Jenny, that's not possible. You're only six."

"I know. But I was lots older before I was a baby."

She giggles and sticks out her tongue. I want to pull her hair. Pull down her pants. Bite her tongue. I bite my own. I can't even tell her she's ugly. She's not and boys don't make up stories.

"When's mommy coming home?"

"Soon I hope."

"Can I stay up to see her?"

"No."

"Can I have some ice cream?"

"No."

"Can I break my dolly's glasses?"

"Your dolly doesn't wear glasses."

"He does so. You can't see em, cuz you're not wearing glasses."

"Go to sleep."

"Can I have a glass of water?"

"No. Your dolly might wet the bed again."

"Is my mommy prettier than Nina?"

Nina is my wife.

"They're both pretty. Very pretty, both of them. Now sleepy-poo."

"How come Nina doesn't have any babies?"

Kids come right out and ask the questions without corners. No frosting. No fudge. Straight to the skin. The questions we take years to come around to.

"She's not ready yet."

"Is she fourteen?"

"No, she's twenty-nine."

"That's almost forty-eight, isn't it?"

My mother used to say it didn't matter if you had the money or not and it didn't matter if it was a boy or girl. People should make other people. My mother went to thirteen doctors before she found out she had an acid deposit that was killing off my father's sperm. They removed the deposit and out came my brother. It became addictive, I guess. Withdraw the deposit (it came back after every birth) and out poofs another brother. Withdraw again and out I came. You think you're so smart, she used to say. If I'd waited like you're waiting, where would you be? Her logic was impeccable. I wouldn't be arguing with you, I'd answer. My answers were never as good as her questions.

"My daddy's dead."

"He is not. Jenny, I'm going to tell him what you said when he gets home. You know very well he's working."

She had told me in a gush of whispering. Sharing her secrets with me. She bit her lip and showed shower forecasts in her baby blues at the vehemence of my answer. I regretted it as soon as it was said. To children, lying isn't the great sin. Tattling is. Telling on each other. She was used to my accusations but not to my threats of telling. I had betrayed her. She hung her arms in the crucifixion pose.

"When my daddy comes home from work, he always says he's dead. That's why he can't play with me."

The nails must have come undone, because she said this with a shrug of her shoulders. They must have come undone, because I could feel them in me.

"Oh, Jenny, I'm sorry. You weren't lying. I was wrong and you were telling the truth. Come and sit on my lap and I'll sing you a song."

She was still fighting the tears.

"No. I want to go to sleep now."

"Do you want a glass of water first?"

"No."

"Then how about a kiss?"

"No."

"A touch?"

I was losing and I couldn't make myself shut up.

"No."

"Will you say a prayer for me before you go to sleep?"

"No."

"Please?"

Many men would beg to their raw skin, on their knees like no other genuflection, for a simple yes from this child-woman. Many would beg before she would turn forty-eight.

No answer. She closed her eyes on me in the dark of her bedroom. I couldn't see them close, but I know she had closed them. There was no more heat between us. Just a brush of wind. This must be what it's like to sit upon a hospital bed and watch a loved one

die. The same cold. The same numbness. Same sense of frostbite. The same tightening up in the guts, perhaps in reaction to the other one letting go in the eyes. And that feeling of how ridiculous it is to be suddenly caught talking to myself.

"Lie still now. And don't let any of your sheep stumble."

I never really knew what she meant by that. I don't remember ever dreaming about any sheep. All I remember is her telling me, many years later, that I had let this little girl ride my bike and that she had fallen and gone home crying to her mother. So I was punished, not for crossing the street after all, but for making someone cry.

RICHARD E.
MCMULLEN

THE BURNING OF APPLE LOGS

The burning of apple logs is slow, steady.
I look for secret codes
to snap, to split apart at any second,
for messages to appear.
Beneath this log's bark, the scrawl
of insects. In this one, the interrupted
flourish of a limb. In this, a nail.
In soil somewhere, the calligraphy
of apple roots. Above, the tree itself:
crossed branches; intricate
cursives of falling blossoms and apple leaves;
downward strokes of apples;
careful loops of butterflies and bees;
bold sweeps and circles of birds.
Above the tree, the slowly burning sun,
the steady flame of stars.

ELLEN KIRVIN
DUDIS

PASSING THE FUNERAL HOME IN CATONSVILLE

"The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace."-Andrew Marvell

The lawnchair foursome, bucolic
wrought iron painted white,
takes an odd place here-
maybe for quote Warm Homelike Atmosphere
unquote The Yellow Pages. It sits tight
against the mansion, close, not apostolic
in its circle. This ferrous frolic
of vines, why! light

suddenly as air, is seating
the recent ghosts-who else?
out for a breath
they are out of. They've done the dying. Death
is the business indoors with the blue smiles
of morticians.

...Remember all the eating
and drinking that lavishly fleeting
day in July

at the Funeral Directors'
and Florists' picnic?

Let
the first of us wait
on one of those lawnchairs-there's a loveseat-
make off with it (the little fete champetre
here won't miss it), choose where we'll find each other.
The metalwork grapes, the couch arbor,
a white place set.

CHUCK GUILFORD

GETTING LAUNCHED

We carried your boat down folded from the car,
Opened it up on the low north bank at a long
Slow bend in the stream. Our boots sank into mud
Above the soles, but the boat rode up on the firm
Spring grass like we wanted it to in the water.
I think it has a hole, you said and showed
Me a big jar of rubber cement and a small
Pink bicycle patch. We patched and pumped
For a little while and talked about the water.
It rolled up over the top of a rock and glazed
The jagged edges before breaking back
Over against itself like a wave in a Jap-
Anese print. Dead leaves drawn along by the last
Big rain were stacked up on living branches,
Bur oaks and elms on the cottonwood trees, hickory
Leaves stuck to locusts. I was thinking about
How some sycamores leaning out along the shore
Looked almost like little birches, their leaves
were so small still in April, their trunks as bare
As a young girl's wrist held up to the close
Grey sky, when you said it feels like it's full enough
And we set it out onto the water.

MS. T.

for 2 years
when i was in the theatre
i did anything i wanted to do
said anything i wanted to
i was free
said Ms. T.
& i said
what is free
with 4 children
on my back
& a dog
in my white uniform
dragging my neurotic mother
& my dead father
& my estranged husband
with creditors
ringing
& knocking
carrying a lease
& a bag
of unpublished
poetry
& a sink of dirty dishes
6 piles
of unwashed
laundry

i said
what do you mean
free

DAVID HILTON

FOR AN ITALIAN UNCLE

The florist made his rent. Your sisters
wouldn't take a dime unless it went
straight into a heaven of lilies,
roses, carnations, baby's breath, white
chrysanthemums—flash-frozen, odorless
but thawing fast in this small
pink chamber stoked by bodyheat.
And you hated flowers at funerals.
In those rooms where your uncles gave
their 20-hour exhibitions you couldn't stand
five minutes but spent those "viewings"
hiding out in the meditation lounges
smoking up half-cartons of
your lifelong brand, Camels.

They've hid a scratch-sheet, a poker-deck,
your watch and green-tinted glasses in
the coffin. The track's never closing,
the chips stay stacked up to your eyes.
But your rosary-wrapped right hand
is an old potato, its black crucifix
wedged in the meat of the thumb.

The Newark VFW marches in, all the living
past commanders and the present one,
brocaded caps, gold-fringed flag. No more,
they say, shall the torpedo's terror
and the cannon's fearful crashing
disturb your rest. Farewell, Nicholas,
fallen comrade in arms.

And your boss arrives with a wreath that cost
everyone in Produce at least five dollars.
The A&P will take care of Lucy. The insurance—
your biggest winner ever—pays off the new

Granada you bought to drive the last
scenic route south
into retirement, Nick,
here's true *florida.*

Last Sunday the doctor forgot
the medication order; could not
be found. The nurses recited
the rules by heart
so your final day was hell.
Your stomach blew up until
it sagged the bed, a hard
blue-black rind about to split.
Your bones bled. You died
of pain. Pain burned up
your hundred tumors—
and you were saved.

And now your sister Marie has slipped
three new pennies
in your coat pocket
so you won't have to borrow from Grandma
to pay your way into heaven.

JON HANSEN

AN OCTOBER EVENING ALMOST FORGOTTEN

I've almost forgotten how many moons
I've shared with strangers.
The trees' stillness stops me.
There's something in this night I love:
the October chill, the masked moon,
or maybe the grass
where we pieced clouds
into a blanket and wrapped
their darkness around us for warmth.

DANIEL BORN

CLAYTOWN, KANSAS

I've been living here for 27 years now,
a woman living with her mother in a small, no
in a tiny town; an elevator, some houses and a church,
and for 9 of these I have been remembering you.

We graduated together—remember—
        the most popular couple.
It didn't matter to me about that.
And then that summer we were so important,
growing up,
        "facing the world" you said.
Still I could've worn white to my wedding,
and none of my friends could've to theirs,
        the ones that did.

Why didn't we get married back then?
You've only come back once since,
in (my word! weren't we surprised)
a red MG and a new suit.
I must say your mother and Mrs. Olsen
were quite pleased at the market for programmers,
the way you told it.
You couldn't spend much time but before you left
I found some things out too.
        No one to read my poems anymore:
            No one to write them.

It's July here—harvest time.
The combines hack at the wheat
and the wheat trucks roll on by,
on the dirt roads where we used to laugh and talk,
        softly drunken,
            meandering.

JUDY'S HAIKU

When it snows your dreams
dance like snowflakes in the air:
the roads are covered.

GREGG MELVIN

FIRST DAY IN THE BUSH

First day in the bush.
Contents of my wallet mark
the path from my door.

Each spring is the same,
animals repeating, no
parents, no children.

Feather from a nest
lands on my hat; when I reach
town, I bow, it falls.

Back seat: wooden lambs.
Front seat: natives, sweating, not
knowing how to drive.

Hogs are painted on
my glasses so that others
may see what I see.

RAMONA WEEKS

DESERT QUESTIONS, DESERT ANSWERS

The mountains have many lovers
The small holes in the earth are places
where water crawled through on its way to the river.
I have lived in the dark, next to a mountain.
I know that tall, blue places
keep their own counsel.

I look at the mountains and think of treasures
buried by old Dutchmen and crazed Spaniards.
In search of something,
each of us
came here.
We are nearly invisible to one another and ask
what is in the mountains that captures
our imaginations? What glitters?

What came here to make a home among poisonous
plants,
next to daggers with green spikes,
near creosote with its warning yellow,
within earshot of rattling shells of snakes
which travel in four directions
and find twenty?

I have searched in four directions.
I have stayed in hotels in different cities.
I have come a long way
from the simple towns where I lived in Texas.
There all the Indians were evil
and all the Texans covered themselves with glory
At Goliad, at the Alamo, or at San Jacinto.
I know that truth does not live in history
as people tell it.
It is in the bone calling to itself.
It is in the eclipse that tells you it is coming

but only half arrives, or comes after
I have taken my treasure to the river and have told it
to assume the raptures of snakes and to swim home.

You who knew me in Texas inquire politely
under what moon I sleep, under what latitude I cry.
There are no answers but ones to be inferred from tall,
dark cannibals
who cross themselves passing dark churches
and smile as if they have the final secret.

They keep their own counsel wisely,
as do the mountains.

THE POLTERGEIST

Open the cabinets. You'll wake
the adolescent poltergeist
who hurls plates like frisbees.
An overlapping crystal child,
he has his own perspective
on china somersaults
as he hangs plumb-bob
from the stairs.
The wind blows like cold toads
when he sighs.
The knotholes of his bones
are young.

MARY TISERA

SOME OF US ARE SLOW LEARNERS
dedicated to Gold Hat

to market to market
flashed my pink card
to get me some moolah
for eats
& the rent man

to Singapore to Spain
wouldn't let me in
let me out
without el passporto

couldn't vote
without Voter's card
nor drink without LCB
nor be el Senor Citizen
without my SS number
no driving, fishing, camping
no living without I.D.

while dying in Emergency
I flashed my last card
"no Blue Cross, no blood, buster,"
they said too late

crossing over
I was stopped at the gate
by the big honcho himself
asking for proper I.D.
Gathering what was left of my remains,
I bellowed,
"I don't gotta show you no stinking badges"
& sashayed past him into paradise.

TESTIMONY IN THE VOICE OF NIGHT

since the call to winter
by the oak outside my window
he appears at twilight.

that black body framed in white
the world to me.
my children believe
with the surety of youth
it is grandfather owl who comes.

with the house drowsing
I keep my vigil, waiting
for the figure to move.
I think to go and greet him
afraid of speech I fall asleep.

in the clarity of dawn
the bird is always gone
has never been there
just two branches tangled
in the webbing of lamp and dark.

he will come some day
behold our sleeping forms
depart in first light.
this I know with certainty
branches never lie.

WILIAM PAGE

LEARNING TO TAKE IT

Father parks his car and goes in
through the basement door.
He crosses the concrete floor,
and setting his foot on the first stair
he passes the iron furnace,
remembers the cold winter
he'd filled it with coal
as the fire made him sweat
and he emptied each shovel with a groan.
But now it's spring and the windows
upstairs are open for all
the neighbors to hear his silence
as he makes his way to the dining table.
Mother complains of everything,
beginning with the sloppy job
he did of sweeping the walk,
with a worn out broom, and ends
recounting the brown stain on a napkin
made many years ago by one of his friends.
All the while Father's said nothing,
except pass the Spam.
At the end of the meal
he rises from the table,
coughs, puts on his glasses.
And without a word, moves
through the living room
on to the porch to read the papers,
which in spite of their words
remain silent forever.

ERLEEN J.
CHRISTENSEN

TWENTY YEARS AGO

Much older then,
no forsythia bloomed
in the veins,

everything was tomorrow-

todays did not
open slowly
like lilacs.

CLARK COKER

EVIDENCE

After three days of rain,
leaves sour in the undergrowth
-not even the form of leaves
but a brown swelling,
warm and secret with decay.

There is thunder in a close county.
Again rain builds from the south.
In some places people die
this year in such rain.
I have seen the photographs.
From the air the damage is abstract
-somehow alien:
or maybe like the caught leaves
-mottled and sinister.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MONA VAN DUYN

Mona Van Duyn, a resident of St. Louis, began publishing poetry in 1942. Since then she has distinguished herself as a poet, teacher, and editor. One of her five books, ***To See, To Take****, received the National Book Award in 1971. She continues to publish poetry in literary magazines such as* ***Poetry, The New Yorker, Ploughshares,*** *and* ***The New Republic****. Her honors include an Academy of American Poets Fellowship (1980); a Loines Prize from the National Institue of Arts and Letters (1976); a Guggenheim Fellowship (1972); the Bollingen Prize (1969-70); a grant from the National Council on the Arts (1967) and others. Mona Van Duyn has taught at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, the University of Louisville, University College, and Washington University. From 1947 to 1980 she coedited* ***Perspective: A Quarterly of Literature****. The following interview took place in the Fall of 1979, when she visited the University of Kansas for a poetry reading.*

INTERVIEWER: ROBIN TAWNEY

You've said that the themes of your poems haven't changed through the years, but maybe I should ask you first of all to label, if you can, the main themes of your poems. What items do you specifically concentrate on?

I really haven't gone through thinking about what, even to me, are my themes, but one kind of obsession does seem obvious, and that is my interest in the relationship between love and art, and *that* I actually thought of as the theme of the book *To See, To Take.* Time takes everything away from us, ultimately even our lives, and love and art seem to me the great holders and keepers of what we value. Art picks up a moment and holds it, if it's great art, eternally. And love pits itself against change, but very precariously: changes of personality, age, loss of beauty. If you have seen, for instance, as I did recently, what is called a "shelter" of tremendously old people lying there waiting to die, you see this pitiable condition in which they are, and you

think *How can you love them?*—and they must be loved. Look what time has taken from them; they're almost subhuman. It takes away a great deal. It gives a great deal, too, of course. This theme isn't one that I think about consciously. When I look at the poems that I've written over a number of years, I see that that theme is there, that I have been concerned with it.

I take it that you don't ever go looking for poems.

I always feel hopeful that a poem will come later on, but when I go out traveling, I'm so busy seeing that I become kind of a big eye, and I couldn't conceivably take time off from that receptivity that I become to put it all together and make a poem out of it at the time. But later on, I will often be able to do that, when what I have seen hooks on like a fish hook to a big complex of what I think and believe inside of me (which is all unconscious) and then a poem will come out. But I don't write the kind of poems, which are perfectly valuable poems, which are simply attempts to record and describe something seen. I enjoy reading poems of that kind, but I don't write them.

You said that it took many years to come to the third revision of "Lot's Wife." I assume there isn't any average time for this subconscious digestion.

Right, and it may never come. I just regard it as tremendously lucky when something that I have seen or experienced becomes a poem. A poet is a real amateur, I think. He can't set about doing the kind of research that will lead to a poem. I think a poet never knows where a poem may come from. It may come from going out in the back yard, or it may be going to Europe and seeing something; it may be reading a who-done-it, it may be something heard on television, it may be something read in the newspaper. A poet, it seems to me, just wanders around the world ready for something to hit and provoke a poem.

Surely there's some way one can prepare. How do you direct

your writing students? What do you tell them to read? How can they be ready when the moment comes?

Before one becomes, so to speak, a professional poet, i.e., gives one's life fairly successfully to this activity, I would say reading a tremendous number of other poems and trying one's hand at writing poems would be where I would direct people, rather than travel or whatever, because in order for a good poem to happen your technical skills have to be ready for it. You have to develop your sensitivity and judgment in order for the idea to come out as a poem rather than, say, an essay.

Do you think it necessary to be aware of a historical tradition? How far back should a contemporary poet go?

I don't think he should particulary love or take to every kind of past poetry, but I think that he should have been exposed to the entire history of poetry in his own language so that he can find out of that tradition what he can use and what he loves. I often find young poetry writers who say, "I hate to read a lot of other poetry because it might spoil my originality." And my feeling about that is: How in the world are you going to know whether something's been done before? Most of the time, it seems to me, the people who feel that way are not original at all.

Poetry is not necessarily completely personal? It is written for a knowledgeable audience?

I don't think that poetry is just the expression of one's feelings; I don't think that poetry is just therapy.

Do you get as much feedback from the audience as you'd like?

We would all like to have a wider audience and would certainly wish that there were more skilled readers of poetry or readers accustomed to reading poetry so that they would understand our poetry and enjoy it. But I've lived with this situation for a long time. I'm not a young poet, so I'm used to it; I just

accept it.

Diane Wakoski, during a recent visit here, stated that small magazines should necessarily remain regional in nature and distribution and content. Would you put on them that kind of limitation?

I don't agree with Diane that the magazine should be regional, though I think a regional magazine has a function. But I wouldn't place that kind of proscription on a literary magazine. I think a little magazine should necessarily be small in circulation—and of course it's impossible to make it large—because a little magazine, I think, performs a function that no other magazine does. That is, it publishes experimental art and what might be called high, or serious, art, and, as things are in this country, that means necessarily a small audience. If you try to make it a big circulation magazine, you're going to destroy the very function that it has set itself to perform, to keep alive a kind of art which is very important and very necessary, but which is not at the present time popular art. I don't agree with the regional opinion—I don't see that it has to be regional. I think it can be international, in fact, but still small in circulation, necessarily small in circulation.

Do you think it's possible to move towards an ideal of everyone being able to at least write a poem and be capable of a minimal amount of critical distinction?

My only hope is the Poets-in-the-Schools, in which young poets go into the grade schools and show them how they can write poems. They get very excited about it. And it seems to me this may not produce a nation of poets, but it inevitably will produce a nation with a greater number of people in it who will enjoy reading poetry, who will know what this stuff is, what it's for, and what you do with it, how you read it. They'll have some more insight into what it is, it seems to me, if they've tried to write it and had some success at it.

The traditional idea that to be free one must have constrained oneself through the forms of the old styles is one which it seems to me the Poets-in-the-Schools are working against. The children are not taught first to rhyme, then to do a ballad stanza, etc. They, in fact, are taught just the opposite; they are taught "freedom."

I just want from my point of view to redefine the terms of your question. I don't think that rhyme and form are old-fashioned. I would say that poetry has a number of resources to use, one of which is form, including rhyme as well as nonformal aspects such as imagery, emotive detail, and so on. And poetry can, at any point, cast off some of its resources and still be poetry, or it can reduce itself almost to prose. It can get closer and closer to prose and still function as poetry. But it seems to me that formal poetry is alive and well in the United States, but it is in a very definite minority position, and this is a fashion now in contemporary poetry, of casting off some of poetry's resources and working without them. I personally think that a poet should be able to use, should be skilled in using, all of poetry's resources, so he can cast off as many of them as he wants to, or utilize as many of them as he wants to. Then, I think, the reason the Poetry-in-the-Schools program is so heavily emphasizing the casting off of rhyme and starting from the other resources is that there is a popular misconception about poetry, a kind of primitive, uneducated misconception, which is that anything that rhymes is a poem. And I think they want to be sure to destroy that misconception with these children. I think they're absolutely right in doing that. I think they are wrong in not letting rhyme in as part of their program.

I chanced upon an article recently about a small group in New York who get together at a coffee house and supposedly write poetry, and examples of this were in the article. The whole tone of this article I found aggravating because it directly implied that anyone can write a poem about anything. They had taken the freedom of modern poetry to its worst

extreme; now anything that ***doesn't*** *rhyme is a poem as well.*

That is the other extreme. One extreme is that anything that rhymes is a poem and the other extreme is that anything I put down on a page and make short lines of is a poem. This is the extreme that the present fashion for free verse and personal self-expression, confession, goes through, and those are not poems either. I like to put a lot of intellectual and emotional meaning in every single poem and this is just a personal preference. I don't like these small poems, small in terms of meaning, such as—oh, a lot of people write them; Robert Bly writes a great many of them—a little moment in which you see one little detail of nature and that's the poem.

Kind of journalistic?

I don't know if it's exactly journalistic. It's just a very, very small poem. I don't mean just short; I mean there's just not very much there, not much meaning or metaphor or implication or emotion. It's just the absolute minimal poem. I like to pack mine. I'm not praising myself, because I may be making worse poems by trying to pack them so, but that is what I do, what I like to do. It's the kind of poem I like to read and it's the kind of poem I like to write.

You mentioned James Merrill as someone you read currently. Who else keeps you interested?

I love anything Elizabeth Bishop writes. Oh, I like so many, many poets.

Are there common elements?

I like them for different things. I think James Merrill has the kind of poetry I like because he has enormous technical skill. It's just dazzling. Sometimes he doesn't use it in a poem, but he can use it and can use all or part of it. He just has enormous resources to draw upon for the poem. He also has in his poems personal pain and feeling which the language pits itself against and transcends. It masters the pain. I just find

him a very, very moving poet and a very admirable one, a very good one. But then there are other poets I like for quite other reasons.

Does his subject matter direct you?

No. I think the moral impact of James Merrill's poetry is the demonstration of how the beauty of language can transcend personal pain and that's its moral teaching. No, I really don't think that poetry teaches you how to live your life in any literal and simple way through its subject matter.

It's not scripture.

That's right. It's a subtler kind of moral act.

Do you find the contemporary insistence on colloquial speech to be subtractive from the possibilities that can be expressed?

I do, yes.

Formal diction is more precise.

I think poets should be able to use colloquial speech and formal speech both. That should be part of their—what I was saying earlier—range of resources. And they should be able to use whatever is appropriate for the special effect they're trying to get. I think you would be limiting yourself, as some of the contemporary poets do limit themselves, using only colloquial speech.

Are you conscious of any particular poets from whom you learned certain aspects of your writing?

I'm not so very conscious of that. No, I would prefer some critic to find that out for me rather than inspecting myself so closely. But if I had to go back a ways for a poet whom I like so much that I must have learned from him, I would choose William Butler Yeats. But I don't know; I don't really see in my poetry anything Yeatsian. But it seems to me it must be there; I like him so much.

You do then accept critical judgments of your work?

Oh, if it's perceptive. I disagree with a lot of it and I would simply ignore that. I've had a few very, very fine critics review my books, but one thing that irritates me a little bit is what critics, both men and women, tend to say about my poetry, that it's "domestic" poetry, and even when they will take time to write an article about me, this is the major thrust of the interpretation, that I write "domestic" poetry. I read this so often about myself and I didn't feel it was true, so I went through my books of poetry and discovered that, from my point of view, I had written only 23 poems out of my whole life's work that might be called "domestic" poems. In other poems I used domestic imagery, but I was writing about some totally other subject.

Do you ascribe that to a general kind of anti-feminism?

I might have, except that very intelligent women have written that about me, too. It was, in fact, a woman's article that disturbed me enough to make me go back and look, because I thought, I can understand a man critic taking this point of view, but I'm puzzled by an intelligent woman critic doing this. So I have a feeling that some of my critics are mislead by the domestic imagery. I have a little poem, for instance, about canning peaches. I'm using that as a metaphor for something entirely different: writing poetry and art, art as a holder and keeper, preserver—as you preserve peaches and so on. I have a feeling that they simply are not reading me at the level that I am trying to write to them. They're missing a level of metaphor that I'm working with. So I don't take what every critic says as gospel about my poetry.

Would you name some critics you value?

Herbert Liebowitz editor of *Parnassus* stands out.

Do you think the position of women poets has changed significantly?

I think they're getting published in much greater numbers and publishers are out looking for women poets to publish.

Has that "reverse discrimination" that editors might be inclined to practice these days led, perhaps, to the exclusion of non-feminist, but equally as valuable, women poets? Do you think, for example, that your own work would be as readily accepted today?

Probably not, because I've noticed some books by women which were obviously published because they were angry women, were strongly feminist in position, attitudes. So I'm sure publishers are looking for books like that to hit the market, the feminist market. And I wonder if some of those books would have gotten published if it weren't for these feminist attitudes. But how many people are losing out because they aren't angry feminists in their poetry, I couldn't tell you.

I'm skeptical of the quality of Robin Morgan's work.

I was thinking of her, too. She's terrible.

I would suspect that it's this kind of feminist necessity that allows female critics to label you as domestic.

Maybe. I went to an MLA meeting in which a woman editor of a book of women's poetry was giving a lecture, and she had included me in her book, and her lecture included me. To my horror, she had pulled out of some of my poems' passages which could be made in isolation to sound feminist, whereas, actually in the context of the poem, they were in a much more complicated emotional attitude regarding the relationship between men and women. And I resented that very much, being pulled out of context and made to sound like a feminist.

Would you go so far as to say that the Movement has hurt as much as it has helped?

Oh, I think it has helped *more* than it has hurt. I once took ten contemporary poetry anthologies going

back five to seven years and I counted up how many women were there. Just a disgraceful proportion, even the newer ones. Then there is the publication of anthologies of women's poetry for women's study courses, and I don't like that either.

Are they exclusive in a way you don't think they should be?

I think women and men should be judged together. But I think that was a kind of necessity, and that later on we will all be together 50-50 in the anthologies because these women have been presented.

MONA VAN DUYN

LETTERS FROM A FATHER

1.
Ulcerated tooth keeps me awake, there is
such pain, would have to go to the hospital to have
it pulled or would bleed to death from the blood
thinners,
but can't leave Mother, she falls and forgets her salve
and her tranquilizers, her ankles swell so and her
bowels
are so bad, she almost had a stoppage and sometimes
what she passes is green as grass. There are big holes
in my thigh where my leg brace buckles the size of
dimes.
My head bounds from the high pressure. It is awful
not to be able to get out, and I fell in the bathroom
and the girl could hardly get me up at all.
Sure thought my back was broken, it will be next time.
Prostate is bad and heart has given out,
feel bloated after supper. Have made my peace
because am just plain done for and have no doubt
that the Lord will come any day with my release.

You say you enjoy your feeder, I don't see why
you want to spend good money on grain for birds
and you say you have a hundred sparrows, I'd buy
poison and get rid of their diseases and turds.

2.
We enjoyed your visit, it was nice of you to bring
the feeder but a terrible waste of your money
for that big bag of feed since we won't be living
more than a few weeks longer. We can see
them good from where we sit, big ones and little ones
but you know when I farmed I used to like to hunt
and we had many a good meal from pigeons
and quail and pheasant but these birds won't
be good for nothing and are dirty to have so near
the house. Mother likes the redbirds though.
My bad knee is so sore and I can't hardly hear
and Mother says she is hoarse from yelling but I know
it's too late for a hearing aid. I belch up all the time
and have a sour mouth and of course with my heart
it's no use to go to a doctor. Mother is the same.
Has a scab she thinks is going to turn to a wart.

3.
The birds are eating and fighting, Ha! Ha! All shapes
and colors and sizes coming out of our woods
but we don't know what they are. Your Mother hopes
you can send us a kind of book that tells about birds.
There is one the folks called snowbirds, they eat on the
ground,
we had the girl sprinkle extra there, but say,
they eat something awful. I sent the girl to town
to buy some more feed, she had to go anyway.

4.
Almost called you on the telephone
but it costs so much to call thought better write.
Say, the funniest thing is happening, one
day we had so many birds and they fight
and get excited at their feed you know

and it's really something to watch and two or three
flew right at us and crashed into our window
and bang, poor little things knocked themselves silly.
They come to after while on the ground and flew away.
And they been doing that. We felt awful
and didn't know what to do but the other day
a lady from our Church drove out to call
and a little bird knocked itself out while she sat
and she brought it in her hands right into the house,
it looked like dead. It had a kind of hat
of feathers sticking up on its head, kind of rose
or pinky color, don't know what kind it was,
and I petted it and it came to life right there
in her hands and she took it out and it flew. She says
they think the window is the sky on a fair
day, she feeds birds too but hasn't got
so many. She says to hang strips of aluminum foil
in the window so we'll do that. She raved about
our birds. P.S. The book just come in the mail.

5.
Say, that book is sure good, I study
in it every day and enjoy our birds.
Some of them I can't identify
for sure, I guess they're females, the Latin words
I just skip over. Bet you'd never guess
the sparrows I've got here, House Sparrows you wrote,
but I have Fox Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Vesper
Sparrows,
Pine Woods and Tree and Chipping and White Throat
and White Crowned Sparrows. I have six Cardinals,
three pairs, they come at early morning and night,
the males at the feeder and on the ground the females.
Juncos, maybe 25, they fight
for the ground, that's what they used to call snowbirds.
I miss
the Bluebirds since the weather warmed. Their breast
is the color of a good ripe muskmelon. Tufted
Titmouse
is sort of blue with a little tiny crest.

And I have Flicker and Red-Bellied and Red-
Headed Woodpeckers, you would die laughing
to see Red-Bellied, he hangs on with his head
flat on the board, his tail braced up under, wing
out. And Dickcissel and Ruby Crowned Ringlet
and Nuthatch stands on his head and Veery on top
the color of a bird dog and Hermit Thrush with spot
on breast, Blue Jay so funny, he will hop
right on the backs of the other birds to get the grain.
We bought some sunflower seeds just for him.
And Purple Finch I bet you never seen,
color of a watermelon, sits on the rim
of the feeder with his streaky wife, and the squirrels,
you know, they are cute too, they sit tall
and eat with their little hands, they eat bucketfuls.
I pulled my own tooth, it didn't bleed at all.

6.
It's sure a surprise how well Mother is doing,
she forgets her laxative but bowels move fine.
Now that windows are open she says our birds sing
all day. The girl took a Book of Knowledge on loan
from the library and I am reading up
on the habits of birds, did you know some males have
three
wives, some migrate some don't. I am going to keep
feeding all spring, maybe summer, you can see
they expect it. Will need thistle seed for Goldfinch and
Pine
Siskin next winter. Some folks are going to come see us
from Church, some bird watchers, pretty soon.
They have birds in town but nothing to equal this.

So the world woos its children back for an evening kiss.

Leigh Swigart (3215 99th NE, Bellevue, WA 98004) is a graduate of Smith College, presently living and photographing in the Seattle area.

Cottonwood Review / Box J, Kansas Union / Lawrence, KS 66045. Photograph by Leigh Swigart.

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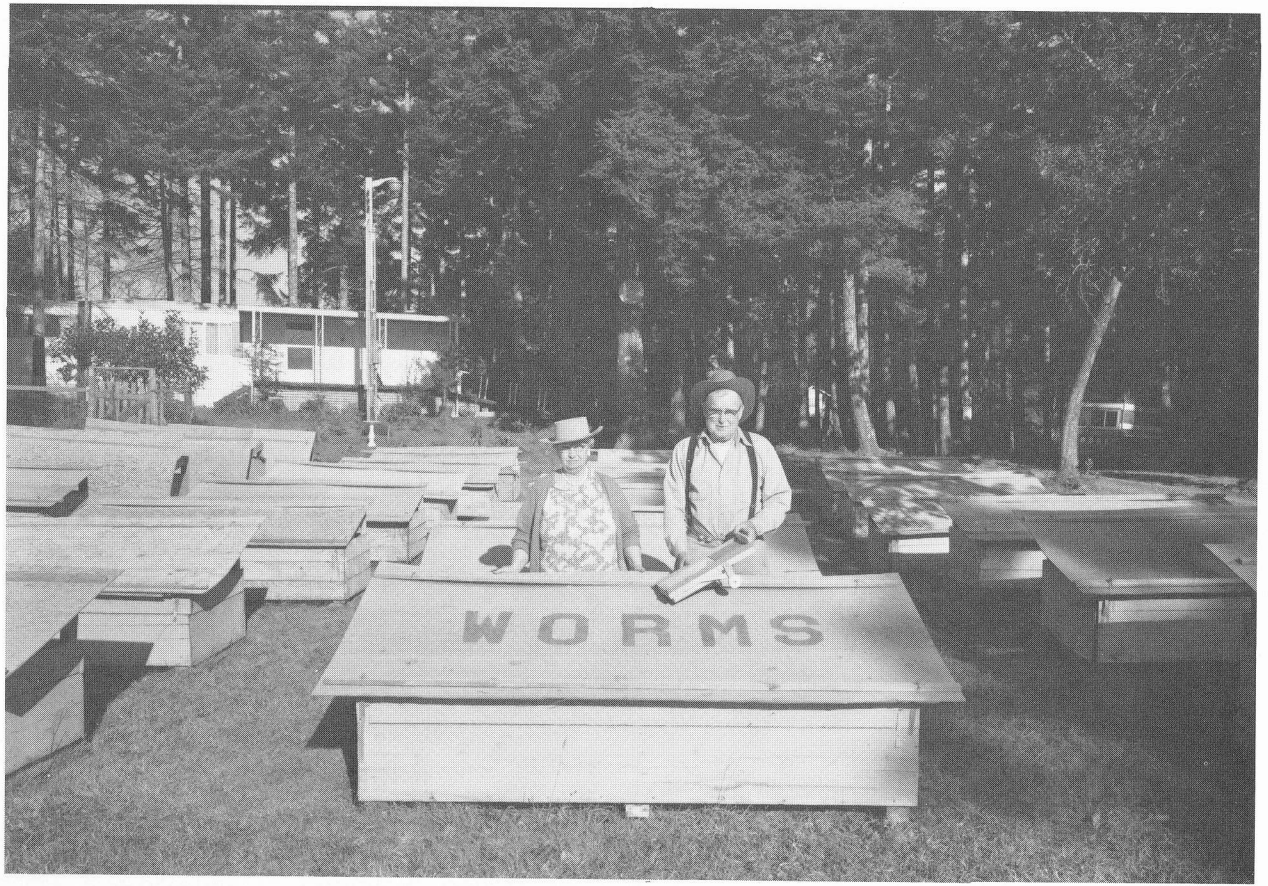
WORMS

David R. Gremp (17936 Gottschalk, Homewood IL 60430) teaches photography at Columbia College in Chicago and at Prairie State College in Chicago Heights. This photograph is from a project on "The Family Business in America Today," for which he received a Humanities Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1979.

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Rhondal McKinney (308 E. Green, Urbana, IL 61801) studies photography at the University of Illinois, and photographs the landscape with an 8 by 10 inch view camera.

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William Stafford
Things That Happen Where There Aren't Any People
Brockport, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 1980. 38 pp., $4.50

Earlier in this century Robert Frost carved out a new path for American poets: approach nature patiently and without guile, waiting for it to yield up its complexities. Out of this struggle to discover the universal in the commonplace emerged classics like "Birches" and "West-Running Brook." Somewhat later, Theodore Roethke deepened and enriched Frost's vocabulary of nature. In the meditations of the "North American Sequence" and in his many greenhouse poems, Roethke contemplated man's instinctual longing for the organic world, his felt need for the physicality of earth.

William Stafford is perhaps the most noteworthy heir to this naturalistic strain in American verse. For the past twenty years Stafford has, like Frost and Roethke, focused on ordinary, everyday occurrences—a sunrise, a rock in the woods, the sounds of birds. Writing with an apparent ease that belies the intensity of his craft, Stafford is often deceptively simple; at his best, he makes us aware of the mystery and beauty always lurking behind the most predictable events. His most recent collection, *Things That Happen Where There Aren't Any People*, is no exception to this pattern, but a renewal of his commitment to what may be termed a "methodology of natural perception."

As Stafford's title suggests, one unifying theme of these thirty poems is the ineluctable Other-ness of nature, its indifference to human contact. In "An Address to the Vacationers at Camp Lookout," for example, he observes that "All of the time, we know how uninvited / Anything pure is," and concludes that "What disregards people does people good." Nature's forthrightness always startles us, accustomed as we are to the indirectness of human communication. Similarly, note how in "Dawn on the Warm Springs Reservation"

the poet observes the juniper-laden hills at sunrise: "You can't give away, or buy, / or sell, or assign these hills— / they hold what they always held." Bleakest of all, perhaps, is the Arctic wasteland in "End of the Man Experiment." Here Stafford evokes the figure of Wallace Stevens' Snow-Man and its archetypal "mind of winter" in order to negate it with the "scouring" wind: "only the level wind / lived in that land, / the whole bowed world / one storm."

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Stafford's only interest here is in professing man's "separation" from nature. On the contrary, many of these poems mark a return to one of the poet's most persistent themes: the spontaneity of the poetic imagination at large in the natural world. In "A Place in the Woods," the poet's hand (a common Stafford symbol for the questing human spirit) "passes a certain part of becoming—/ / Wants true dawn," the dawn of imaginative refreshment. "The Dialectic of the Mountains," while ostensibly a description of Stafford's teaching experiences, diverges into a meditation on the workings of the "phantom" mind: "it plunges, dives for life into the wave it makes, and guided by everything offered it, it rests by travelling." Most moving of all, though, is "Answerers," where the single poetic voice enlarges into a symbol of the ongoing creative potential in all of us:

> . . . I am ready
> as all of us are who awake at night:
> we become rooms for whatever almost
> is. It speaks in us, trying. And even if
> only by a note like this, we answer.

Stafford's commitment remains to what is quiet and unnoticed; his is a poetics of patient waiting for the common perceptions that suddenly widen into greater significance. As he writes in "Being Still," you must have

> Patience inside your life, a drop, a drop,
> a drop: when the next moment comes you are
> ready, no matter what's already done.

Things That Happen Where There Aren't Any People is a triumph of patience, a carefully distilled vial of poetic clarity.

STEVEN KNIGHT

Judy Ray
Pebble Rings
Greenfield Review Press. 63 pp., $3.00

Judy Ray's *Pebble Rings* is a collection of forty lyric poems divided into three sections: "Searching for apple trees," poems about the poet's childhood and family in England; "A beach of stones," mainly about her adult life in America with her husband and child; and "Landmarks," chiefly poems about Mexico and Africa. Judy Ray's poetry seeks to extract significance from everyday experiences and familiar people. It often filters experience through the memory, and the voice which speaks in the poetry is, as a result, calm and reflective.

One of the first things one notices about the poems in *Pebble Rings* is their technical proficiency and sophistication. Judy Ray is conscious of voice (she experiments with a child's voice in "Child's View of Mr. Nixon"), aware of the significance of form (she experiments with the appearance of the poem on a page in "In Your Absence," where the separation of the halves of each line mimics the physical separation of the two lovers), and she executes a *tour-de-force* by writing a villanelle, one of the most difficult of poetic forms, in "As You Seek Truth." She is particularly effective with alliteration, which appears in nearly every poem, where it acts as a cohesive device within the line, and in her use of color. Pink and grey dominate these poems, but the colors of the English, Mexican, and African

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landscapes, of people's clothes, of people's bodies are all explored. In her poems which make use of paintings, Judy Ray produces some striking visual images.

"Landmarks," the book's third section, is its best. These are Judy Ray's most public poems, in contrast to the often private poems of the first two sections, and the focus on freshly discovered people and places seems to bring out of the poet much more clearly articulated themes and more satisfying closures than one finds in other poems. "El Hospicio de Ninos, Guadalajara," which is built around a striking contrast between the "steely armour" of the conquistadors in a painting by Orozco on the walls of the hospice and the "padding feet" of the orphans who live there, concludes with an ironic exhortation for the orphan to find comfort in "Orozco's / fiery men and chains" rather than in human beings. "Flamingos," another poem for which painting provides an important metaphor, contrasts the "sedate" and "pretty" watergarden at a zoo with a scene at Lake Nakuru in Kenya, where "The painting is boldly splashed, / violently horizontal." The visual effects in this stanza, with its tension between wild and captive scenery, are striking, as is the idea of the speaker running "crazily on to this canvas" at the end of the poem to warn the flamingos of imminent destruction.

In the book's first two sections, however, and sometimes in the third section as well, I found myself wishing for more intense engagement with the issues raised in the poems. In *Pebble Rings* the poet finds interesting people, places, and events to write about and approaches them from interesting angles, but she tends, especially in the first two sections, to leave the reader with an inconclusive image or a rhetorical question at the end of the poem instead of confronting the ideas, feelings, or questions it raises. The result is that just when the poems have become interesting and important, they end.

As an example of this tendency towards inconclusiveness, but also as an example of Judy Ray's

technical sophistication, I would point to a likeable poem from early in the book, "The Nun on the Train":

> Riding on the train
> through summer banks of stichwort
> and forget-me-not
> forget-me-not
> forget-me-not
> a nun nods in the heat.
> She cannot loosen her heavy black dress
> or tight white chinstrap
> so her cheeks turn pink.
> What does she think,
> behind those softly moving lips,
> of those thighs of mini-skirted girls
> flirting with the Italians across
> the aisle? What does she think
> of the woman glimpsed in a bikini
> painting window frames?
> And what
> does she think of
> *Roderick Random* in my lap,
> and even of my new red shoes?

Clearly, the writer of these lines knows what she is doing with the nuts and bolts of the poem, as is demonstrated by the cohesive alliteration in lines two, six, and twelve and the similarly cohesive assonance in line eight; the interesting transitional end-rhyme at lines nine and ten, the poem's turning point; and by the suggestive color imagery. But it is not clear that the writer has a conception of the poem as a whole, for at the end we are left asking, "What, indeed, *does* the nun think?" I certainly have no inkling, nor is there much in the poem to tell me what she does think. It is the task of the poet who raised this question in the first place to help us answer it, either by continuing the poem with an imaginative foray into the nun's mind or by restructuring it to emphasize her appearance—by a more telling play, for instance, with the tight chinstrap, suggestive of repression, and with the pink cheeks,

suggestive of arousal.

Pebble Rings, by Judy Ray, is a book of proficient and sometimes striking poems. Its verse is coherent and approachable, and what it lacks in development could be supplied if the poet would respond more to the ideas in her poems. The poems in the third section especially display her ability to treat significant subjects in an interesting and thoroughgoing way, and these poems help to give the book substance and appeal.

DAVID R. ANDERSON

Bruce Cutler
The Doctrine of Selective Depravity
Lacrosse, WI: Juniper Press. 50 pp., $3.00

When I come across Bruce Cutler's name in a magazine, I always turn to his poems with pleasurable anticipation and rarely am I disappointed. I've been looking forward to a new book of poems by him for a number of years, and *The Doctrine of Selected Depravity* is both it and not it. By this I mean, it is not a collection of poems but one poem—a surprising work that matches the quality of Cutler's best poetry but also introduces, at least to me, a new side to his work.

This long narrative poem begins with a murder—three young blacks choose an elderly man to rob and then, rather casually, kill him. The narrative follows the consequences of the killing through a complicated—but coherent—series of characters—some presented in the third person, some in the first. We see the young murderers—Innocent, Fixer and The Hit (their nicknames)—the victim, Stover, and other ghetto voices, plus those who make up the system—a policeman, a juvenile court official, a social worker, and

a politician. The city is Chicago, but obviously the situation can apply to any city.

The Doctrine draws a brutal picture of city life, its absurdities, brutalities, and ironies. The system says that because the killers aren't sixteen they can only be released, released with this kind of talk:

> Subjoined: Officer to ensure this minor
> will be kept away from others who might
> influence him. Continued counseling. Efforts
> to assess his inner state. Friendly
> overtures to family for some medication
> under Chief Surgeon's supervision.
> Alert to P.D. Precinct Five
> *re* juvenile's release. Contact with sympathetic
> media on problems of high jobless
> rate among his peers. Release
> of certain data to both HEW and LEAP
> as part of grant proposal for study. . .

Technically the poem is a marvel. It comes in ten sections, shifting places and characters, mixing street talk with bureaucratic talk, high rhetoric with sharp imagery but continually pushing the narrative forward. The twenty line stanzas employ a flexible free-verse that occasionally reminds one of a blank verse pattern. Most impressively the poem remains poem as well as narrative, balancing out what each demands.

Thematically the poem centers on the nature of evil. The title suggests, and the poem rejects, the notion that is expressed in various ways by a number of the characters—that evil lies in a select group—often for whites in the blacks, for blacks in the whites. But what troubles me somewhat about the poem is the doctrine of unselected depravity that seems to lead the poem toward a kind of bleak cynicism. The political operator, who makes the city work, ends the poem thinking back to his experiences in France during the Second World War:

> . . .And he remembers 1944.
> Omaha Beach. Normandy. And how

his Liberation Forces killed the Quislings.
You couldn't tell a Frenchman from a
Frenchman.
But then, were any of them your friends?
No. And it was then you knew. Nobody is a
friend.
Nobody, friend. Not even you.

So we are all evil, or at the very least, we are all capable of evil. The better known doctrine of evil is the one of innate depravity, and this book's point of view seems to accept that doctrine's dark truth.

MICHAEL PAUL NOVAK

David Ray
The Tramp's Cup
Kirksville, MO: Chariton Press, 1978, $3.00

It is fitting that *The Tramp's Cup* by David Ray received the 1979 "William Carlos Williams Award" from the Poetry Society of America. The reference to Williams evokes the figure of the poet as one dedicated to presenting the fullness of an image, and also as one who works in familiar surroundings, not cut off from fellow men and women, alert to social and political issues not just because they are a personal concern—as they are for Ray—but because they, too, belong to the daily work which must be lifted, in Williams' words, "to the level of the imagination [to gain] a new currency."

In *The Tramp's Cup*, Ray does not aspire to everlasting monuments but to "small and exquisite / gestures" and the wealth one might mine from "no-good / cheap words." The title poem and an epigraph from Wallace Stevens imply that Ray thinks

our words and experiences often seem poor, futile, and burned by an "old evil": "a thousand poverties come home / daily / to beg what spirit / we have." Yet Ray hopes to find what the epigraph expresses as "Some lineament or character, / Some affluence, if only half-perceived," or, to use his own metaphor, something which sweetens the tramp's cup of "cooling tea."

In part because Ray sketches so many "lineaments"—those of a Mexican barber, a woman discreetly dressing on a beach, his grandfather's hands "twisted, / knotted like that wood of his cane"—I find it difficult to have a sense of the book as a whole. But the breadth of Ray's interests suggests he needs an eclectic, open form. This is not to say the book lacks all order. The poems are divided into four sections: "In the Evening," containing several poems gleaned from Ray's travels in Mexico; "History," where the history is often that of a particular friend, place or encounter; "In the Art Department," with both casual and intense reflections on works of other artists or even on a tool of art; and the final section, "The Tramp's Cup," which includes several of the collection's best poems.

Ray's poetry is accessible though not superficially easy. The poet is not immersed and lost in obscure, agonizing introspection or in thorny metaphysical speculation about language and perception. The poetic voice, though, is at times a weakness of the book. Occasionally the poet sounds too full of himself and slightly sententious, even as he turns his attention to others:

> I am the fly,
> the dragonfly, skimming, suffering,
> I am the waterdrop.
> I am you.
>
> "The Monastery in Scotland"

However, Ray wants his poems to convincingly portray others, wants his presence to act as a medium for their being. His poems might then, like a 19th Century slide, catch the elusive soul:

suddenly a flash of light
& her soul is shared with me
looking straight
through years & wars
from 1861.
Mathew Brady lent
her to me.

"In the Art Department"

The strongest, most appealing poems are those in which Ray, like the photographers and artists he admires, creates a tableau: he observes strangers or friends, guessing at their wants, failings, and kinder thoughts, and treasures the moment's visual arrangement and texture. One such scene is in "A Christmas Tale" after a Yorkshire woman has sold her bicycle to American travelers:

She sighs.
We tie it on our car with ropes.
And now Miss England really needs
to talk, she leans her elbow in
my driver's window, she has scads
of facts to tell, especially
to a stranger, before night falls.

In another, "In the Back Yard," the poet effectively sets his personality and desires against those of three women, awkward "graces." He conveys their boredom, their sensuousness, and touches gently upon their mortality by noting the "half- / fallen breasts" and "desperate hennaed hair." In this poem, as he does more markedly in others, Ray discloses the archetypes and myths implicit in a particular moment.

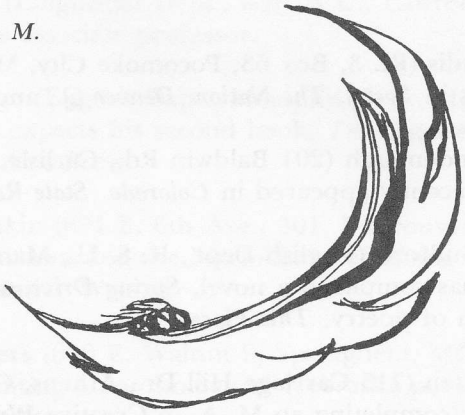
Ray frequently dwells on transience and what he once called in a talk on poetry and pictures "vanishing ways of life." In several poems his preoccupation with change is cultural and political; he juxtaposes the American past and present to discover what promises, abuses, and legends persist. Some of these do not successfully combine slang and formal language; others, like "Evening Landscape," sound too blatant in their

irony: "We're proud someone took a rifle shot / out the window, and plugged his distant cousin." But "The Centennial of Custer's Laugh," one of the book's most remarkable poems, redeems the coupling of traditional and contemporary speech and subjects. There timeless heroic images, sly understatement, and popularized slick images all serve to connect past and present and restore the integrity of a legend. From the initial gaze of Crazy Horse into the soldier's eye, a chill runs through the poem to the final enigmatic image of Custer:

> And he felt his yellow hair in the wind,
> which parted it clean, Good on one side, Evil to the other.

This volume is a gathering of varied features, scenes, and gestures. The voice that pervades is earnest; wit and effort lie behind sympathetic observation. David Ray, in "The Depths," compares his writing to coal-mining: he gets his hands "grubby" with those "cheap words," yet because of his efforts he hopes "there's / a woman reading in a bathtub / someplace who'll glow. . . She will have a new joy." *The Tramp's Cup* should be read for those fine poems which elicit that glow.

PRISCILLA M. PATON



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Books of poetry by Mona Van Duyn: *Merciful Disguises: Published and Unpublished Poems* (Atheneum, 1973), *Bedtime Stories* (The Ceres Press, 1972), *To See, To Take* (Atheneum, 1970, winner of the 1971 National Book Award), *A Time of Bees* (University of North Carolina Press, 1964), *Valentines to the Wide World* (The Cumminton Press, 1959), *Letters from a Father and Other Poems* (forthcoming).

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