
COTTONWOOD

COTTONWOOD REVIEW welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, graphics, photography, translations, reviews of small press literature, and articles on the arts from both local and national writers and artists. Poetry submissions should be limited to the five best. We cannot return submissions which do not include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Since COTTONWOOD REVIEW has no regular source of funding, we depend heavily on the interest and support of our subscribers. Issues appear tri-quarterly at $3.50 per issue or $9.00 for a three-issue subscription. Although issues are sometimes irregular, three issues are guaranteed per subscription. Subscriptions and submissions should be directed to:

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Donald Levering

WAITING FOR HIS EARS TO RING

Pain the horizon/Remains
--W. S. Merwin

In grey light, the old man's
arthritic barometer is
falling. He rolls over
and waits for the cold rain
to trickle down the gutter
of his spine.
He gazes on the Dali painting
a figure propped on crutches
with drawers for vertebrae
and flaming vocal cords.

After aspirin, he is
impaled on a table
eyes fixed on the diagram
of spinal misalignments
on the chiropractor's wall.
The doctor's hands hike up
his backbone, spurring avalanches
The specimen becomes the fossil
of a man in a glacier of pain.

Unfolding his umbrella
he taps his cane home
swallows a handful of aspirin
and sits in his chair
like an oblation buried
in a whale's rib cage
waiting for his ears to ring.

Donald Levering

LETTER TO PORTLAND
(for Chip Goodrich)

Friend, you write that the rain of ash
Has settled your city's spirits
That people fear they will die
In a new Pompeii, drawing crosses
In the ash of their faces
That silica-dust causes nose-bleeds
Makes your carburetors cough
That the roses' blooms are masked
By a film of cremation
That citizens shuffle through ashes
Downcast, distrusting
The mountains who had always
Huddled nearby like big brothers
Holding storms at bay
Somehow the sky that had always
Brought gentle rain
Has betrayed you
The floating snow-cone volcano
Has become a dervish of lava
The earth itself is somehow
Deeper than a bed for roses
Higher than the clouds

Before you curse your fate
To be living in a place
Where the earth spills into the sky
Think of us on the flatlands
Any moment the sky could reach down
A black finger and twist a town
Into splinters, even turning
Graveyards topsy-turvy
No more random fate exists
And this same black earth
That nurtures horizons of corn
Is breeding clouds of grasshoppers
That will blacken the sun
And eat every trace of green
So that the rain of wheat

From elevators will cease
And the dust from the flour-mills
Will finally settle
And bakers in seven states
Will fold their hands and pray

Climb above your canopy
of doom. Remember the sky
continues to shield your roof
from a steady rain of meteorites.
The earth is as firm as ever.
No war threatens to incinerate
your city; it is just this
mountain reminding you
of the levels of things.

J. W. Rivers

WITCH BURNING IN HAMILTON PARK
(from THE CHICAGO NOTEBOOK)

The straw witch burns
like a real witch at the stake,
snaps like fingers in the fireplace.
I sit on Daddy's shoulders,
watch the witch go up in flames.
I've heard they make it rain and storm,
turn men to pigs,
little boys to frogs.
Daddy and I don't believe that of course,
but we're using false names just in case:
Daddy's Mr. Smith
and my name is Jones tonight.
The witch turns orange and red,
I feel some drops light as hair clippings
on my head, and--it's never rained
or stormed in Hamilton Park
on Halloween Night before.

Joel Cox

PEOPLE AND DUST

When she called Pa, "Pa! you're gonna have
to beat them rugs before you take the young
ones fishin," he quietly bowed his shoulders, set
out back, and beat the rugs. Dust flew this way
that, at first settling in the yard like cowbirds
flocking in the cornfields, then gathering round
Pa's knees like chickens at a feeder. Then
like a marsh hawk it sailed off--woosh!--and swept
across the land, or like a sparrow hawk
it stood in air, beating its wings, dipping
away and circling back, crisscrossing, stitching
the plain with its needle gaze.
Pa'd holler,
we'd hear a whack! and dust'd roil up taller
than our house, yellowing the sky, uncoloring
the sun. A day, two days, Pa whacked all night.
Three days, a week, the dust, like vultures, loomed.

After three days, Ma kept us inside.
We had to stuff newspapers, rags, old bones,
around the windows, underneath the doors,
to keep the dust from sifting in--still
we'd wake up in the morning with a sheet
of dust upon the whole household. Our faces,
our arms paled from lack of sunlight--and yet
it was a dirty sort of pale, our skin
turned dust.
Dust flavored everything we ate
or drank or dreamed of eating. We began
to think and move like dust: puffing from bed,
drifting into the kitchen, settling round
the table, sopping dust up with our dusty
biscuits; our eyes filling with dust asleep,
awake, no matter.
We thought we'd seen dust--
we never saw dust. Three years were we clouds,
dustclouds drifting trackless in our skins.

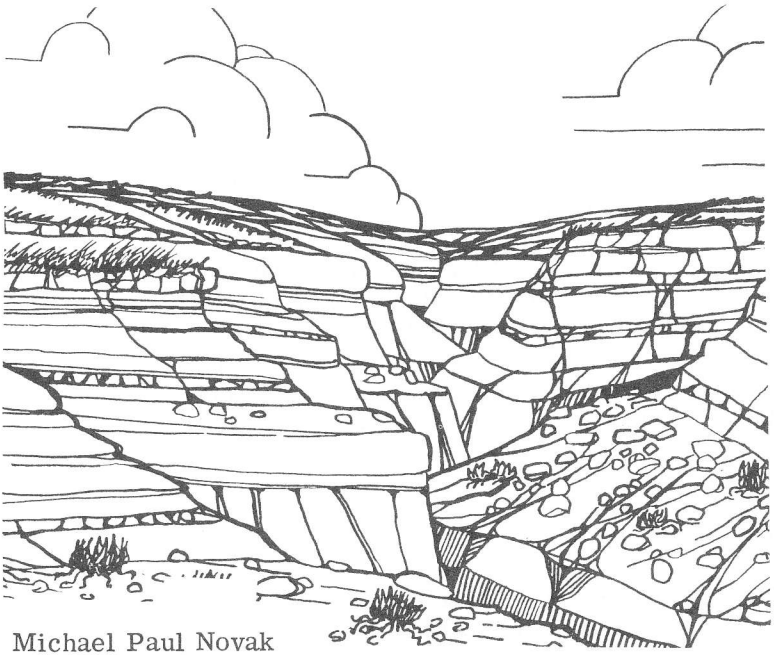
Three years had passed, Pa's whoops and whacks grown
dim,
his efforts hampered by his own success,
when Ma at last groped out, a hankerchief
bound round her mouth and nose, remembering
the way across the stoop, the yard, the sounds
too muffled now for homing in.
She gripped
Pa's arm in upswing. "Pa," we heard her wee
voice through the buried light, "Oh, Pa,
you'd beat em threadbare if I let you."
Done,
Pa slapped his hat against his knee and said,
"That's that," and took us fishin.

THE CENTER

combines winter on stubble cornfields
in the rounded corners of which winter
wheat greens

this is the center-pivot irrigation
rainbow of the high prairies
radius of pipe-linked fountains

dry now
riding shotgun
against too much blue sky



Michael Paul Novak

A PLACE TO LIVE

Kansas is the state you cross
Fast, the place you go through
When you're going someplace.
California's ahead, so
You don't stop to see blankness.
If you remember it at all,
You remember highway, sun,
Stuckey's, view of flatness,
The bright, abandoned sky.
You are the only person
Who pauses to witness
The world's largest groundhog
And you don't even smile.

We wouldn't visit it either
But on days we're smiling
The earth feels firm enough
To put our feet on, the sky
Covers us with some warmth.

Steve Hahn

CATTLE SLEEPING IN DECEMBER

Tonight even stars
seem to breathe deeply, fading
from sight with each breath,
their light returning like frost
from the nostrils of heifers.

Low sounds of sleeping
fill the valley, spread out
over hillsides like sighs
from deep within the ground,
from all inhabitants resting
on the curving belly of earth.

Over the land, farmsteads
are scattered in darkened herds
sleeping, the single eye
of a yardlight keeping watch.

Kathleen Wooldridge

TWO RAINBOWS

After a gray drizzle day
the sky glowed brilliant yellow.
Two rainbows arched in the east.
One was small and close to the earth
the other reached toward the zenith.
All the neighbors came out to see.
The rainbows grew thin and airy.
A last few drops caught the light
then night closed over us like a lid.

Steven Hind

NEW RIVER

From his tractor Harry watched
the archeologist and his college kids
digging in the Osage campsite by the river,
their grid of red string
mapping a past. That night
the old man came by their camp to learn
what they had discovered. His sons
came later and sat by the fire. They
stopped hunting coyotes on Saturdays
and started farming the deep slopes
near the river. By fall
they had readied the harvest for parties.
The dust rose over the river road
at evening. The barn sweetened with smoke
and laughter rolled in the air.
Neighbors found reasons to ride by
those Saturday nights.
Harry sat on the porch
staring off toward the river site
(the boys in the barn with the gang).
Had they stopped, his neighbors still
would not have heard what he heard,
the owl's prayer for night.

Sandy Hume

Kathryn Paulsen

TRAVELERS IN A DRY STATE

"Hello, angel," said the voice on the end of the line. "Do you know who this is? It's your aunt Kate."

I told my mother to come quick, it was long distance.

"No, not long distance," said my aunt, "at least not very long."

"Kate! Gee it's good--" The progress of my mother's expression seemed not quite right for what she was saying: surprise, giving way to alarm. "--What? You are? Now you're not pulling my leg, are you? Well, that's wonderful. Sure we are. We were just on our way in to pick up the tree, so--"

Yes, the tree. And about time. We'd been waiting all week, my brother and I, and here it was four-thirty already, nearly dark, and the nineteenth of December, and a Saturday, and if we missed getting it today and had to wait till Monday it would be as if the holiday were over before it had begun.

My brother stomped to the front door, opened it, and stood at the threshold looking back in. "Aren't we going now?" I said loudly, but my father put a finger on his lips and my mother turned away as she nodded and said yes after yes to whatever Aunt Kate was saying.

Here on the great, gray-brown plains of Oklahoma, with better chance of a tornado than some droppings of snow this time of year, the tree was the most important part of Christmas, to us kids the only familiar part. But my parents didn't understand how important. They didn't know where they were, I might have spent half of what I could remember of my life in Lakokee, but they had left their hearts in Denver. But even back in Denver they'd never let us get a tree as big as we wanted, tall enough to touch the ceiling, to bend against it.

"Well, hurry up, we can't wait," Mom finished, but when she hung up she frowned at Dad till he said, "Well?"

"They say--" she paused to suggest doubt about what was to come, "they just started going for a drive a couple of days ago and they were having such a good time they ended up staying on the road, and then they thought, well why not make a detour and visit us in Lakokee?"

Dad pursed his mouth in contemplation. "Why not?"

"But we haven't seen them in years, and Kate never visited us in Denver. I'm surprised she even remembered where we are."

"Let's go," my brother wailed, and Mom told him hush, then continued: "But anyway, they're back together again, I gather Matt's been in the hospital again, that's probably why. Maybe a trip is Kate's idea of a convalescence."

"You talk to Matt?" Dad asked. "How'd he sound?"

"Oh, you know Matt, he can be falling down drunk and sound sober as the grave. I guess if you've got to be an alcoholic it's better to be that way--" She shook her head vigorously. "Oh, you and your family."

"I'm not related to Matt," Dad said, but smiling.

"I didn't mean Matt."

"We've got to go get the tree right now before the stores close," I said, looking at my father.

"No, we're going to wait for Aunt Kate."

"Can't Mom wait?"

"No, we'll all wait. They'll be here in ten minutes."

We waited an hour. My brother and I sulked, mourning the lost tree. Mom had just said that maybe she or Dad should go out and look for them, when the doorbell rang.

Aunt Kate was bigger than I'd remembered. Her arms squeezed me more powerfully than Dad's. A man smaller than she, whom I hadn't seen before, even in family pictures, stood behind and beside her.

"This is your Uncle Matt, kiddies," Kate said as, linking arms with him, she passed through the hall. In the living room Matt stopped, bowed formally, and shook my hand and my brother's.

Then Kate pressed against him. "Honey, we're here! Isn't it wonderful!"

"Sure is." She was an armful for him, but he held it manfully and gave her a long kiss on the mouth while we kids stared and my parents smiled at them the way they'd do at us.

"All right, you lovebirds, would you like a drink?" said my father when they'd sat down, Kate and Matt close together, knees touching, on the couch.

"Is the Pope Catholic?" said Aunt Kate. "Bourbon,

Brub, if you've got any. And just a little bit of ice."

"Can we get the tree now?" I asked.

"We brought you a tree, sweetheart," said Aunt Kate. "We'll bring it in in a min." Her voice rose when she spoke to us, sweetened, promised something like candy. And I believed it.

"Boy, this sure hits the spot," Aunt Kate said after she swallowed some of the golden liquid in the glass Dad handed her. Uncle Matt's was pale yellow. "And after what we've just been through--"

"What'd you go through?" asked Dad.

"Oh, just trying to get a drink in this town, that's all." Kate shook her head and made a noise through her nose. "We called you from the Hotel Lakokee, right? So I got a postcard for Mama, it said Tornado and Prairie Dog Capitol of the Southwest--"

Dad smiled. "I know the one," he said.

"Yeah? Well, I'm gonna send it to her when we leave. So anyway we went into the hotel restaurant to have a quick one and unwind. Matt was pretty keyed up from driving seven hours or more--You know how I drive, Davey--"

"I sure do," said Dad, making a face.

Kate laughed. " --so even on these straight roads you got out here, he just wouldn't give me the wheel for a minute."

Matt smiled tenderly at Kate and stroked her hair, perhaps to apologize, and she put a hand on his knee. Little silver hairs wound through Kate's short dark curls, decoration they seemed, not decay, and seemed to rise out of the dark hair and cling to Matt's fingertips like electricity. What remained of his own thin hair was dull putty gray.

"So you were waiting in the restaurant--" said Dad, leaning forward, smiling, eager.

"Okay, so we got a real smirk from the waitress when we asked, and she said 'How 'bout a nice cup of tea?' Maybe it's one of these places that caters to little old ladies. But outside on the other side of the square we saw this bar and grill place, so we tried there. This time we got a real dirty look when we ordered. I asked why they called it a bar and grill. The waiter looked at me like I was bananas and said that was just a name."

"I would have felt funny walking out," Matt said,

"so we had coffee instead."

"Couldn't drink the stuff," said Kate, making a face. "So by this time we were just curious about finding a real bar in this town. Wanted to see what a genuine Okie bar looks like. We drove around a few blocks and found one, pretty seedy looking, on the corner, red place, used to be red anyway."

"Ma's," Dad said. "Seedy is right."

"It sure looked like a bar, but when we asked for a drink, the barkeep said, 'How 'bout a nice coca-cola.' I said I had in mind a nice old-fashioned, and he said we'd come to the wrong place. I said I didn't get it, you could smell the booze in there, and he said maybe we'd better get out. Then Matt almost got into a fight. He said that was no way to talk to a lady. I guess he scared the guy, because he just turned his back on us and started rinsing glasses, and we walked out and gave up and drove here."

Matt was blushing. While Aunt Kate took large swallows of her drink, Matt sipped his, swirling it around from cheek to cheek like mouthwash.

Dad smiled widely, and Mom put a hand over her mouth, covering a laugh.

"So what gives in this town anyhow?" said Kate. "Don't they like strangers? Or 've they got some rule against having a drink before dinnertime?"

"They do," said Dad, "but not just then. Remember Prohibition?"

"Do I!" said Kate. "I had my first drink in a speakeasy."

"Well, you were in one this afternoon, only I guess you didn't say the magic words, or have the right accent. They still have it here, Prohibition. I believe that this is the state that made dry states famous. It's dry as the Red River, except for periodic floods from across the borders."

"Well, I'll be--" Aunt Kate shook her head in amazement. "Why that's terrible, Davey. They ought to at least warn folks. They should have a sign or something, when you cross the state line. You know, like before the desert. We could've refilled the glove compartment if we'd known." She stopped, then added quickly, "Of course, Matt never drinks on the road, so we didn't--"

"Oh, of course not," my father said with a perfectly straight face, while Mom's hand went back over her

mouth. Then Kate and Dad at the same moment began laughing loudly and in a few seconds doubled over with laughter, clutching stomachs, chests, faces, and stretching hands toward each other.

"My Lord, Davey--" gasped Kate through her tears, "can you imagine -- if Mama could only have seen us -- she'd say -- she'd say -- serves 'em right. They've gone and got right where they deserved."

Finally the laughter died down, and Kate took another swallow. "Hey, is this bootleg stuff?" she asked. "Tastes pretty damned good to me."

Matt nodded and looked down at his glass.

"No, some of my air force friends get us liquor from the officers' club. Unless we need a lot, if we're having a party, and then--" Dad winked at her.

But Kate stared back at him, very seriously now, and shook her head slowly. "Davey, dear Davey, how in the world did you ever end up in a place like this?"

Dad sat up straighter but said as good humoredly as before: "Well, in my line of work, believe it or not, there are a hell of a lot worse places than this, places in the middle of nowhere--" Aunt Kate looked aroung the room, as if for somewhere. "--And anyway, I haven't really ended up."

"Oh, yeah?" said Kate. "How long've you been here?"

"Two and two-thirds years," said Dad.

"Going on ten," said Mom.

He shook his head impatiently. "It's true it has been a long time for something that's supposedly just a one-time thing. They needed extra people up for the installation, ordinarily it's only a couple of months, then the air force takes over, when I do it in the future that's what it'll be. But somehow I got sent here too early, then a lot of things went wrong; then they ordered some more missiles; then they established another site nearby."

"But if you leave here," said Kate, "will you just be following other missiles around to places like this?"

Dad shook his head no. "Actually my base is Denver," he said. "We'll be going back there. At least we hope so. And assuming I don't lose --job security's not so great in this company. I should probably try the competitors, but even that's a risk. Anyhow, it's a nice town, Denver."

"Good beer, I hear," Kate said.

Matt said he thought Lakokee was a nice place.

"That's right," said Kate immediately. "It does look like a nice little town, except for a certain peculiar custom." Her droll delivery of the last words got to Dad, and they cracked up again together, while Mom and Matt looked on benignly. When they'd calmed down, Mom said, well, we were sure glad they'd got here.

My brother said that he'd sure be glad when we put up the tree, he didn't want to wait for Christmas Eve.

Dad said, all right, we'd bring it in now, just he and us kids, Matt and Kate should sit and relax.

All we saw of the tree at first from the front of Kate's old jalopy was a pale green tip sticking up only an inch or two from behind the front seat. It turned out to be balanced diagonally, rather than standing, with trunk against the fold of the backseat, but it wasn't tall or full. My brother opened his mouth to howl when he saw it, till he caught Dad's look. I suggested that there might still be time to go into town for another one.

"Why?" asked Dad, as if he really didn't know. "This is a fine tree. See what a nice shape?" He carried it inside with one hand easy. I could have carried it. Needles were brown at the ends of the branches. "Don't forget to say thank you," Dad whispered.

We didn't, but we didn't say anything more. Aunt Kate didn't seem to mind, though; maybe she thought we were just shy.

"I'm so glad you kids like it," she said softly, her eyes moistening as she looked at the tree. If we didn't, obviously she did. "That tree came all the way from California."

"Sure looks like it," my brother said in my ear.

"What in the name of --" Dad laughed, "did you do that for?"

"We figured we'd probably be on the road at Christmas," Aunt Kate said. "And the tree might keep us from being lonesome. And it did, too. Right, Matt?"

Matt just smiled and squeezed her heavy shoulder.

"We took it into the motel with us the first night."

"When they weren't looking," Matt said.

"But not after that?" said Mom.

"After that we slept in the car. We thought we should save our money."

My mother's eyes opened a little further at the same time that her lips pressed closer together. Maybe they've just come to stay a while and save money, the look meant, but it left in the next second, not to return.

"You mean you weren't planning to spend Christmas with us?"said my father. "You were going to drive right by without stopping?"

"No," said Matt, then stopped a minute as if to think over what to say next. "That is, we didn't realize till we got on the wrong road, and realized that it wouldn't be so far out of our way."

But my father still didn't get it. On their way to where? And what was so urgent? Why couldn't they have waited? Spent Christmas at home, or at Mama's?

Aunt Kate said they'd just had it up to there. They had to get away. He knew how it was.

Dad nodded quickly, agreeing without agreeing, then said, "Well, we're sure glad you made that wrong turn." And looked around the room, summoning our chorus of Sure Ares.

"You'll stay for Christmas?" Mom said politely.

I said pretty please.

At dinner we were on good behavior, we offered every dish first to Kate and Matt. Matt said everything was delicious but ate almost nothing. Kate did more talking and eating than anyone else. We didn't let her help with the dishes.

Over the noise of dishes and water, as I was drying I listened for her voice.

"My little brother," I heard, and she repeated, "My little brother." And when Dad didn't say anything: "Not only graduated--and who'd have ever thought it back around thirty-three--but a master, a master! Remember what you used to say, 'I'll never learn the multiplication tables in a hundred billion years!'?"

"I'll never forget it," Dad said softly.

"How I used to drill you!" said Kate, and there was another pause. "And now here you are, an astrophysicist." She said it as if the triumph were as much hers for pronouncing such a word as his for being described by it.

"Not quite," Dad said, "just an aerospace engineer."

"Well, as far as I'm concerned, Davey, that's just as good, every bit as good, and a lot to be proud of. Right, Matt?"

I couldn't hear what, if anything, Matt said.

"We are all so proud of you, you know, you and your lovely family," Kate said. I looked at my mother, but she didn't stop moving her hands in the sink and gave no sign she'd heard.

"Now what's the name of your company again, Davey?" Kate asked.

"Con-Rad."

"Con-Rad," she repeated. "I should be able to remember that, shouldn't I? Tell me, Davey, is it fun building missiles?"

"Well, I don't really build them, and I wouldn't call it fun."

"Oh, I get it," Kate laughed. "The Russians really got you over a barrel, don't they?"

After a pause, my father said louder, more dramatically: "Things are not always as they seem."

"Well, listen to that!" Kate said slowly, and then: "Life is real, life is earnest."

Then we heard them declaiming together:

"And the grave is not its goal! Dust thou art, to dust returneth, was not spoken of the soul!"

"Lives of great men, all remind us, we can make our lives sublime! And departing--leave behind us--footprints--on the sands of time!"

Dead silence in the living room. Then whooping laughter, Dad's. I peeked around the corner of the kitchen and saw Aunt Kate taking giant steps on her tiptoes, shoulders hunched, in a circle around the living room. Even Matt was laughing.

"I think," said my mother behind me, wiping her hands, "it's time to decorate the tree."

While she made coffee, I gathered together the strings of lights and the packages of used tinsel and the net-and-pipe-cleaner angel in the hall closet, and my brother carried in two boxes of bulbs, the most we could possibly need, we figured, to cover the tree.

Aunt Kate, the perfect audience, exclaimed over us and our small baggage, as if we were ourselves the bringers of glad tidings. Below Matt's heavy lids his eyes looked wet and bright. Dad moved the tree out of its corner, stood it on the stand, and wound the lights around it, Matt set the angel on top, Kate hung a couple of bulbs and draped a little tinsel, and my brother and I did what

was left. It took less than ten minutes. The tree didn't look too bad when we were done. It looked like an over-dressed child.

Dad started humming "Deck the Halls," but no one took up the song. Mom poured coffee and said to Kate that she still didn't know exactly where they'd been on their way to.

"Neither do we," Matt said.

"Yes we do," said Kate, patting his hand. "New York or Florida."

"That's a big difference."

"Depending on the roads and the weather. We've never driven these roads before, we don't know how they are."

"I guess not," said Dad.

Mom still wanted to know what they were going for.

"To start a new life," Kate said.

Mom said oh. Dad said nothing, just looked politely interested.

"Oh, sure, I know you've heard that before," Kate said, waving her coffee cup from Matt toward Mom and miraculously not spilling anything.

"I didn't--" Mom started, and Kate said, "Well, Davey sure has. But this time we're really going to do it. It may be a bit of a gamble--"

"What will you do?" Dad asked.

"Oh, the usual--you know--at first, anyway. You've got to start somewhere. And we can always get sales jobs. There's always room for a good cashier, and you know after all my experience I sure am that."

Matt laughed gently, and alone. Kate gave him a broad wink. Mom offered more coffee; only Matt accepted.

Dad cleared his throat to give his considered opinion, but Kate started in again, fast: "I don't mean that we're just going to keep doing any old thing, we know better than that, we'll do things to get ahead. I'll admit it, Davey, there are things I have done that I will never do again. I promise you, I give you my solemn vow, that I won't work in a liquor store anywhere, even if it's the only place in town, and I won't be a barmaid either, Matt wouldn't let me." Again she winked, and Matt crinkled his eyes as if trying unsuccessfully to wink back.

"And I won't work in Woolworth's ever again, that's where I draw the line--now Kresge's maybe--" Kate

paused and finally got a laugh out of my mother. "--I remember a kinda nice one out in Arizona once, that wasn't bad for a while. But I sure won't try to sell used cars again--"

"Hey, did you really?" Dad broke in.

"Well, only for a few weeks, and it wasn't anything I exactly went around bragging about--" Kate shook her head. "Boy, if there's anything worse than selling encyclopedias it's selling used cars, you can have no fear at all, Davey, no fear--"

Matt, looking paler now, turned to her and whispered something that sounded like "My girl."

"You know what Matt might do? Well, he makes a mean malted and he did it a while in Arizona, and if he hadn't got sick-- anyway, that'd be something if we went to Florida. I was thinking maybe we'd live in a house-boat, I hear it's cheap, if Matt's stomach don't mind, that is--"

"I'd get used to it," he said.

Dad frowned in spite of himself. "But what'll be different?" he said softly.

Kate feigned surprise. "Why, you know. Mama. What else?"

"But you've gone away before. What about Arizona, Oregon, Christ, even Sacramento's --"

Slowly, patiently, as if explaining things to a child, Kate said, "They weren't far enough, now there'll be the whole country--and then we weren't really thinking about where, we just wanted to get away. Now we know the important thing is for us to find the right place where we can be happy, and then worry about work and things, not just settle down any old place."

Dad didn't answer.

"If you see what I mean?" Now Kate didn't sound so sure herself.

"I guess so," Dad said. "Well, anyone like anything else, coffee, soda--" his voice trailed off as he looked at Matt.

"Maybe a drop of brandy?" said Kate. "Or a little cream de minthe?"

"Sure." Dad nodded and went into the kitchen for a bottle, while Mom got little glasses out of the corner cabinet in the dining room, letting the glass door bang shut behind her.

While Dad poured, Kate put her hands on her knees and leaned forward across the coffee table, as if to put her face into his.

"Davey," she said, "do you know what she wants now?"

"Beats me."

"They're going to the old country in the spring, and she wants me to come with them."

"Would she pay?"

"Up to a point, I guess. She'd say so."

"Why not do it then?"

"You're kidding of course?" Kate finished off the little glass.

"I wouldn't mind a free trip to somewhere besides the deserts of the Southwest."

"Oh, swell. Shall I call Mama and tell her that? Or maybe you should."

Dad said he just meant that since they were heading out for parts unknown at least partly because of Mama, why not get some fun out of it? They'd be going by boat, wouldn't they? That would mean Mama and Papa'd appear in New York at the end of the trip and Kate, if she were there and not in Florida, would have to confront them anyway. How much better to step off the boat coming back from Germany and say, No, I'm not going back home with you, I'm staying here to check out the Big Apple?"

"Sure, fine," said Kate. "Could you do that, Davey?"

Dad shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Honestly, you just don't know how lucky you are," she said, shaking her head and holding out her glass for more, "to have got good and away from there."

"So you keep telling me."

Matt looked up from one to the other and opened his mouth as if to speak but instead took another sip of his brandy.

Mom said it was bedtime for us but let me follow her into the kitchen while she made more coffee. She talked to herself there about Kate and Matt, but addressing me, as if I were an adult. "Kate should know better," she said, "than drinking that way in front of an alcoholic. And your father just keeps on encouraging her."

Since then I have thought of Uncle Matt whenever I hear the word alcoholic, and see his crumpled hands, one with raised index finger to indicate, yes, he would like a

drink, and collar and face. But then he seemed too soft for such a hard word, which better suited free-drinking, free-talking Kate.

For the rest of their visit I stared at him whenever he was drinking anything, even water, and never saw him take more than a few sips of anything any stronger, though Kate drank a lot of beer while watching tv in the evening or playing gin rummy with my brother and me in the afternoon.

If he was trying to prove he could handle it, he proved it to me Christmas Eve by taking no more than a couple of swallows of the champagne Dad had insisted we drink then since Matt and Kate weren't going to be with us for New Year's. With a little luck and no break-downs, maybe we'd see them among the revelers at Times Square on our television.

Kate drank several glasses of champagne, over half the bottle probably, but that was only to be expected, according to my mother, since Kate had talked with Grandma. She didn't have to talk to Grandma then, she could have waited till Christmas Day when we usually called after dinner, or stayed mute. But she'd insisted that she couldn't enjoy Christmas Eve or Day if she had to worry about what she was going to say to the folks--better to get it over with early.

When Dad finally got through to California it was at a very inconvenient time, for me and brother at least, the middle of Babes in Toyland. We volunteered to say hello to Grandma early. It was harder than usual to talk to her because we didn't yet know what we had to thank her for.

"Mama?" Dad said at last, "I've got a surprise for you. Guess who's spending Christmas with us--Kate and Matt. They just decided on the spur of the moment, they were going to pass right on by us. Anyway, Kate wants to talk to you now, here she is."

Kate's voice nearly disappeared when she started to speak, traveled back decades to even younger than I.

"Merry Christmas, Mama," she started, cheerful sounding.

"Yes, we're having a good time. It's wonderful seeing Davey and the kiddies. They've really grown. I hardly recognized--"

"We're leaving day after tomorrow."

"No, not for a while. We're going to New York."

We just thought we needed a change.

I didn't want to argue about it.

It's not like that. Haven't you ever wanted to --

Please Mama, don't say that.

Later, after we'd opened the champagne and wished each other happy nineteen-fifty-eight-in-advance, Kate told Dad that the war had been his lucky break, he'd gotten so far away then, the whole world away, that it made staying away easier.

He said that was true.

"If only I'd joined the WACs," said Kate.

No one responded, although Matt, sitting across the room from Kate for a change, looked troubled.

"Do you think they'd have had me?"

"How could they have resisted?" Dad said, patting her on the back.

"You know, Davey," she said, "it's sort of a coincidence, don't you think? --what you're doing now, it's like what I did in the war, isn't it--a little?"

Dad said he guessed so.

" 'Course you're not building missiles yourself the way I was, you're just doing whatever you do to them, but it's the same, all the same."

Aunt Kate told us her own war story, for the first time.

There wasn't much to tell, she said. A lot of women did what she did, but she did it without any previous experience. She needed a job badly, and away from home for the first of many times, so she answered this ad. It was to work in an airplane factory. The man who interviewed her was pretty stupid. When he asked where she'd been to school, she said U. S. Grant, and he thought that was the name of a steel company--well, who knows, maybe it was--and he gave her a job rivetting.

Did she like it?

"Sure, I loved it. I got a little burned and bruised sometimes, but that was the only bad part. It felt wonderful. I would have done it after the war if I could."

"Why couldn't you?" Mom asked.

"The union didn't let women in, and I'd only had a year's experience."

"At the end of the war?"

"No, I got fired, but not because I wasn't good."

"Why?"

"Because I was born in Germany."

Mom said she supposed that was understandable. But why had they hired her in the first place?

"They didn't know. I didn't know. I don't know how they found out. Maybe they were supposed to have investigated me to begin with and were just in such a hurry that they put it off till they had time, or maybe that dummy personnel guy hadn't done his job and they had to check everyone all over. Mama and Papa claimed they'd told me, but they hadn't. All those years I'd filled out forms saying birthplace San Francisco."

"Maybe they just assumed you remembered Germany."

"I remember lying on some soft grass when I was real little, but it could have been anywhere. I only remember learning German over here."

The people at the plant had been suspicious of Kate's claim not to have known her birthplace, but had no other grounds for suspicion, lucky for her. All the neighbors said the Johnsons were sterling citizens. Mama was a notoriously good housekeeper, so even if Kate had been a little wild as a girl--

Afterwards she got a job in a university library. She'd had in mind taking some courses, maybe getting her degree, but no such luck.

"Then I met her," said Matt.

"Lucky me," said Kate. She didn't seem to be kidding. "But it really made me feel terrible," she said after a pause, "that they thought I might be a spy, or what did they say, a risk? I wanted to tell them I had a Jewish boyfriend. He knew I was okay."

Yes, she had, Mom told me later, and he should have married her but he didn't. Or she didn't. A woman as-- imposing-- as Kate might have to make the first move sometimes; she'd learned that by the time she met Matt, but too late for Stoller, that was his name, Mom and Dad had met him, he and Kate used to play such beautiful duets on the piano, Chopin and Liszt, bringing tears to your eyes, he on bass, Kate on treble, in his boarding house. Both were self-taught, but Stoller was very, very good. Together with Grandpa, they'd sung "Love's Old Sweet Song" in three-part harmony. Once over Christmas Kate sang it all alone, though Matt, tone-deaf, hummed along a note that at least gave her failing

alto a little more body.

I asked Matt if he'd had to go to fight after he married Kate; that was what had happened to my mother and father.

No, he said, he didn't meet Kate till near the end of the war, after he was back from it. They didn't get married for a couple of years after that.

"How come so long?"

"It takes her a while to make up her mind."

"Where did you fight?" I asked.

"I didn't, I was in the hospital."

"What did you do there."

"I was sick."

Kate interrupted to keep me from pursuing this line of questioning: "Say, you haven't even shown us around, Davey, the local sights and all."

"Well, you saw it all, the hotel, the square, even the gin joint, not much there on Christmas. I could drive you out to the site, but all there is to see is a fence. And the base, well, a few barracks, that's all."

Matt said it was all in the imagination anyway.

Kate was a good sport about being wakened before the sun on Christmas morning. She prodded Matt awake and led him to a chair while she made up the hide-a-bed, then started coffee and put on the Christmas record. Politely we opened her presents first, which had arrived in boxes from San Francisco department stores.

When I tried on the sweater, she said it didn't fit, she always judged other people's sizes by her own. But I said I loved it anyway. But it couldn't compete with the fake diamond heart on a chain from Grandma.

Matt and Kate had given my parents candy pink satin sheets.

"Do you think they're sexy?" Kate asked.

"Guess we'll have to try them and see," Dad said. Mom in the kitchen didn't seem to have heard.

Before the first side of the record was finished the tree was stripped of everything but its felt skirt, which had been made for one much larger.

"Do you kiddies know what they put on the Christmas trees in Germany?" Kate asked, staring at the dry, bare tree.

"What?"

"Candles, lighted candles. Come to think of it--" she wrinkled her forehead, "--maybe I even remember--"

"But not any more," Dad said. "They're a fire hazard."

"Aw, Brub, what do you know?"

"Could we try it?" I asked. "Just one--"

"No, angel," Aunt Kate shook her head sadly. "Your Dad's right--as usual."

Aunt Kate wore a lace blouse, in which big as she was she looked almost delicate, to Christmas dinner. She and Matt went to bed in my parents' room on the Christmas sheets at nine; they said they wanted to get an early start. We all got up at four to see them off.

"Call us on New Year's," Mom said.

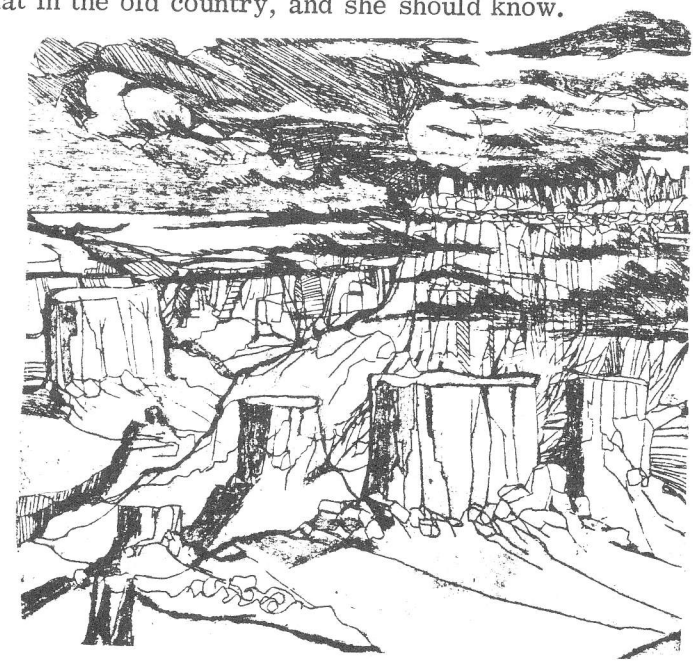
"Or earlier," added Dad.

They did call us on New Year's, but not from New York. Or rather, Grandma called us, and they talked, too.

"Hey, guess where we're going in the spring?" Kate asked. We didn't try.

"Germany. I'll see the place where I was born. Isn't that exciting?"

Kate said that Grandma had been very impressed with the postcards of the oil wells and things they'd sent her from Tulsa. She'd said they didn't have anything like that in the old country, and she should know.



M. L. Hester

PORNO POEM

"Let me have it!" the typewriter groaned
after an hour of massage
by experienced fingers.
"Beg for it!" the poet said. He reached
for a sheet of paper and began slowly to slip it in.

"OOOOOh, more, more, please more. Give me
all of it!" yelled the typewriter. "Bang me
like I've never been banged before!"

The poet whispered unusual adverbs
into the typewriter's ear
and began to type--20, 40, 60 words,
then 80 words, 100 words per minute.
The pungent smell of hot oil rose from the table.
"Double space me! Triple space me!" the machine
shrieked.

The RETURN button slapped and clanged repeatedly.
Then it was over.

The typewriter slipped on its cover.
"You're the best," it said admiringly. But the poet
smiled bitterly. He'd heard that line before.

Dave Etter

EDWINA'S TALE

Dear old Daddy was always very precise:
"The shovel is out by the Cyclone chain-link fence."
"We've run out of Glad plastic garbage bags."
"Buy Tabasco pepper sauce and Kodachrome film."
"I'm going to need more of that Sheetrock gypsum wall-
board."
"Get your feet off my Naugahyde vinyl-coated chair."
Daddy has been gone close to eight weeks now.
He's up there in that all-American trademark heaven,
telling the boys all about Prestone anti-freeze,
Univac computers, Neolite soles and heels,
and the pure wisdom of using Scotchgard stain
repeller.
But Mom is still here, bless her vague little heart:
"Edwina, honey, put away those kitchen dooddads."
"Try on that new pink whatchamacallit I bought for
you."
"I can't have your thingamajigs laying around."
"Where's that doohickey I left on the hall table?"
"We must look nice for my friend Miss whozis."
Daddy, Daddy, she's driving me crazy.
I just have to straighten out this nameless wife of
yours.
She doesn't know it and she'll never know it,
but she's gotten out the Q-Tips cotton swabs,
Niblets corn, and the Electrikbroom vacuum cleaner.

Richard Ardinger

ANOTHER CLAYTON, IDAHO DREAM

the stove shrinks from its mirrored image.
the cabin wall quivers behind
the stovepipe's cellophane heat.

a cigarette consumes itself.
a brittle copy of sons & lovers
yawns with age.

the surrounding chairs are mum.

a pair of gloves applaud the silence.
coffee mugs toast the absence of men.
a loaf of bread pretends it is stone.

is it the wind or breath of flame we hear?

WEATHER REPORT

it is a hot day.
the cat is sprawled across the floor
like a sleeping human being.
the air is thick with the absence
of barking dogs. hardly a car has passed by,
even the trains aren't coupling...
only the refrigerator
drones an alaskan mantra.

Patrick Stanhope

HER RESPONSE WHEN THE AUTHORITIES DISCOVERED HER BONES

It's been thirteen years
since he drove the hammer into my skull,
laying my body like a broken doll,
into his hand carved pit in the back yard

From the moment I died,
I knew he would be uncovered
I saw them coming long ago, with shovels,
scratching at my grave to rattle my bones

And who could suspect him?
He was always so pleasant
Even as he raised the hammer,
his face was a gentle smile
It hardly matters after all these years,
but it hurt in the beginning
I lingered in the back yard like bitter fog,
until the earth had eaten my flesh,
and my children no longer cried
I passed then, to another side,
where tears were forgotten

He remarried a few years back,
and one would think my death might have taught him
His undoing, and the discovery of my bones,
started with a rose bush
She (his second wife) chose my grave to plant the bush,
and when she insisted on the location,
his lips quivered, he trembled, and confessed

Excuse my laughter
Surely you see the humor,
but what a shame
You see, roses would have been lovely over my grave,
and bones make such wonderful fertilizer

Sandy Hume

AN INTERVIEW WITH TERRY SOUTHERN

Terry Southern, novelist and screen writer, was born in Alvarado, Texas, a locale that provides the setting for his novel-in-progress, Youngblood, and for the related story, "Red-Dirt Marijuana." Southern is the author of Flash and Filigree (1958), the Magic Christian (1959), Candy (with Mason Hoffenberg, 1959), and Blue Movie (1970). Short pieces that he contributed to Playboy, Esquire, and The Realist are collected in Red-Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes (1967). Southern also contributed to the screenplays for Dr. Strangelove or; How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb, The Loved One, Barbarella, Easy Rider, The End of the Road, and The Magic Christian. As writer-in-residence at the University of Kansas from March 25 to March 27, 1981, Southern spoke in conjunction with a showing of Dr. Strangelove and read from Youngblood. Mary Davidson interviewed him on March 26, before his reading.

Davidson: Tell us about the title of your first novel, Flash and Filigree.

Southern: The whole book was inspired by Henry Green. It was written very deliberately, as a sort of tribute to his style. He, as you know, does a thing about the difference between poetry and prose where he describes how poetry is very quick, and prose is insinuating. He has a sensuous description of it that sounds like a filigree thing, a gathering web for prose, flashes for poetry . . . that was the meaning of the title.

Davidson: Yes, in Pack My Bag, Green says that prose is a "gathering web of insinuations." Green reviewed Flash and Filigree very favorably for The Observer in 1958. He hadn't written anything himself since Doting in 1952. The review opens with a wistful image of a group of race horses rushing up to the finish line--that's Terry Southern and other writers who are publishing--and then there is a tired old horse coming along behind, evidently Green. When you interviewed him for The Paris Review, did he talk about why he stopped writing in 1952?

Southern: Well, he actually started writing a book about his experiences as a firefighter in the London blitz, which he had written about in Caught, a novel. But he wrote that in such a poetic way that is didn't really cover the autobiographical aspect of his experience in the Fire Service. I don't know. He just slacked and lost motivation because he wasn't really getting the recognition that he should have. T.S. Eliot, and Auden, and V.S. Pritchett, people like that, loved his work but for some reason it was too esoteric for general readership. And, of course, he wouldn't go along with any publicity plan. He was pretty retiring . . . I never could figure it out because it seemed to me that he was possessed with genius. He took to his room and stayed there.

Davidson: Before he retired, Green did a lot of his writing at his desk in his factory on his lunch hour. Where do you write? What time of day? How long? How often?

Southern: I think the act of writing is important in the sense that it seems to have a regenerative effect--almost a biochemical thing--that once you begin writing, just physically, doing it, then the ideas come in a way that they wouldn't have come if you just sat there waiting and trying to think of things. Or talking to someone about it. I think that it is important to actually sit down at a desk, or wherever, and force yourself to be there a couple of hours. Because otherwise you'll never know whether or not you can really write because I don't think you can wait for the inspiration.

Davidson: Do you have a lot of trouble with rewriting or plotting? --Anything that particularly bothers you?

Southern: Well, I love to rewrite. I really like that. That is why I get involved in a lot of rewriting of filmscripts, because it seems to be very easy to do, you know. The person whose work it is always finds it much improved. I like to do it and I rewrite four or five times.

Davidson: You did the filmscript, that is you and Christopher Isherwood rewrote Evelyn Waugh's novel, The Loved One. Did he have anything to do with that?

Did he see how you did it or collaborate in any way?

Southern: I think he did see it eventually and was outraged. That wasn't my fault, because Tony Richardson said, "Well, we are going to update this." You see, what happened was that when Waugh wrote that book, there was a huge British contingent of expatriate writers: Aldous Huxley, Waugh, Isherwood and a bunch of actors, enough that they could field two cricket teams in Hollywood. But when the movie was being written, Christopher Isherwood was the only permanent resident. It was no longer the same situation so we had to concentrate more on the funeral business--the Forest Lawn aspect of the book--and less on the British side. So it was bound to be a rough departure.

Davidson: You revised your own novel when you did the filmscript for The Magic Christian. In the movie, the hero is Sir Guy Grand. In the book he's a rich American with no title . . .

Southern: That's right, and he doesn't have an adopted son. Those were ideas that came in the financing package.

Davidson: It was made in England?

Southern: Yes, it was Peter Sellers' idea to do it because is was his favorite book and he bought 300 copies of it when it came out, and gave them to Stanley Kubrick and people like that. Well, they said, "Let's get Ringo Starr." It seemed like a good idea getting a Youngman Grand. That didn't bother me. The weaknesses of the movie were some of the things that were just sort of vicious, like his destroying the stuff at the auction at Sotheby's. You know, he tore up the art objects.

Well, here is what happened. I wrote the original screenplay and then I was still working on the movie End of the Road which was shooting here, I mean in Massachusetts, while The Magic Christian had begun in England. Peter, despite his genius, would get very anxious about certain things and was always trying to change things. I mean, if he sat still long enough for something, he would begin to change it. So while I was absent, he got a couple

of guys that he used to work with on "The Goon Show," you know, that sort of thing. They started rewriting, not rewriting, but adding some sequences including that sequence where they had him destroying precious art objects, which is something Guy Grand would not do. Simply, his practical jokes always had very strong morality.

Davidson: I remember his putting the money in the heated vat of manure, urine, and blood from the Chicago stockyards. That's strongly moral?

Southern: Yes, it shows people would do anything for money. We wanted to shoot that under the Statue of Liberty, but we couldn't get permission.

Davidson: Guy Grand is like a cynical Daddy Warbucks. All I really remember about Candy is the ending when she recognizes her partner. She sounds like Little Orphan Annie when she says, "Good Grief, it's Daddy!" You collaborated with someone on that, Mason Hoffenberg. Whatever happened to him?

Southern: Well, he mostly writes poems, but he has private means. --What had happened was that I knew this girl in Greenwich Village who I had seen actually doing this thing that Candy does with the hunchback. I mean, picking him up. She was a social worker, a very compassionate girl, and so she picked up stray dogs and stray things. So she got involved with this hunchback, not to the extent that Candy did, but it gave rise to this little vignette. It was in the form of a short story, so I showed it to Mason. And he said, "Oh, well, that would be an interesting novel. She should have more adventures." So I said, "Well, why don't you write one?" So sure enough, he came back with one. And then when I went to Spain, he went someplace to the south of France or somewhere, so we would do it by mail. It was my original thing so I was able to impose the overall style. Then we decided, we thought, "Oh well, this is getting pretty erotic. Maybe we can get some money from Maurice Girodias." He had this Olympia Press, that specialized in this and porn, although he had Lolita and The Gingerman by Donleavy and he had published Henry Miller and some

Ionesco and some Beckett. So it wasn't entirely disreputable.

Davidson: Some of your satirical pieces seem to reinforce popular prejudices. For instance, in Red-Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes, one piece is called "Terry Southern Interviews a Faggot Male Nurse." Do you get much negative comment on pieces like that? Are you satirizing liberal "tolerance" or "faggot male nurses," or what?

Southern: Well, it certainly isn't against faggot male nurses.

Davidson: It made me laugh at faggot male nurses, but I felt guilty--maybe that's the point. How do you come up with names for your characters, names like Guy Grand and Felix Treevly?

Southern: They kind of emerge. It's like having a pet; so you think, "Ah, this would be a good clever name." But it really doesn't fit and you call it Kittycat. Eventually, somehow, a name will emerge. It should fit the character.

Davidson: Guy Grand certainly fits.

Southern: Felix Treevly sounds kind of creepy.

Davidson: The quality that I think is most striking in your writing is that you invent such wild situations. In Flash and Filigree, Felix tells the dermatologist how he got a lesion on his leg. His explanation gets wilder and wilder until the doctor hits him on the head and tries to kill him. I never understood why he did that . . .

Southern: Well, I think that he was so outraged--he was a specialist, you know, in the epidermis, a very delicate business--and to have someone do something so blatant as to put cancer culture into a lesion and tamp it down and put a bandaid over it--it's so outrageous that it stressed him out. I find that amusing. It reminds me of one time when I was living in Switzerland in one of these very modern apartments. They had the latest in everything, including a garbage disposal. There was a tremendous swish, and with great precision it could just handle

anything. I went down to the basement to listen to one, and it was whirring and I could imagine thousands of razor sharp blades. And I was replacing my good old Underwood typewriter, which was a pre-war model, very heavy, and it just occurred to me--wow, wouldn't it be weird to drop this down in there. Would the Swiss machine be able to handle this American iron thing?

I lowered the typewriter very slowly, and I was afraid it would make too much noise and they would be able to figure out where it came from. Finally I could hear something as though it were just touching the click-click-click and I dropped it. It made an incredible sound and just stopped. The next day--they had a bulletin board in the lobby at this place--it said on the bulletin board in that understated way: "Persons will please refrain from dropping heavy objects in the incinerator." And that's all that was ever heard. It was running the next day.

I told Henry Green about this. He thought it was fantastic, beautiful, something out of Dada. But it's the same psychology as outraging a specialist.

Davidson: So that was like Felix Treevly outraging the power figure, Dr. Eichner. Had you lived in Los Angeles when you wrote Flash and Filigree?

Southern: No, I had visited Los Angeles. I have always thought that Los Angeles was a cauldron for weirdness, the barometer of decadence.

Davidson: Is Los Angeles the wave of the future?

Southern: No, I think now something else is happening. When they cut out these food stamps, and welfare, and drug rehabilitation, and people get hungry, they are going to hit the streets in a way that is unimagined. It will take more than a city police force. I think that that is the basis for a terrific kind of plot but I can't figure out how to treat it because I don't think it is funny. You can treat nuclear war in a sort of humorous way because it's so far-fetched. Grotesquely absurd. Ludicrous. But this is something else, too imediate, you know.

Davidson: In the film, Dr. Strangelove, you did take nuclear war and turn it into grotesque comedy. Do you

think that pulls the teeth from the protest?

Southern: Well, it depends. It seems very hard for people to imagine it. You have to make them think that you are not taking it as seriously as it is. But it's the idea of opening their minds to it, so that it will register. I think that there are some things in Apocalypse Now that are quite effective in that way. . . the horror when they stop that sampan at the boat and blow all those people away--and he shoots the girl. You know those things are; now that is approaching, that's getting at the real horror of war. But in Dr. Strangelove, we had Sterling Hayden. If you can't trust Sterling Hayden, who can you trust? And he unexpectedly just freaked out. He had passed all the human reliability tests and everything. So that people can realize that somehow we've got to get rid of the system, the notion of using nuclear weapons. Disastrous.

Michael Smetzer

BILL ACRES EXPLAINS HIS LIFE

You have to be drunk or happy
If you're not you don't see those early summer leaves
You don't see that off-white warmth of concrete in the
sun

You don't see nothing when you're down
You just see your own dirty toes
You don't see that loose Kansas dirt
You don't see those concrete slabs lined out like
fallen dominoes
all the way to the park

Hey! Those black and white bird droppings are
a clue to life
They say you look up you'll see what's coming down
But it won't kill you
You got to wipe it off and laugh

I'M NOT SLEEPING IN THE SNOW

It's time to blow out the nose
and breathe about the yard
It's October and the air draws in cold

My fingers untangle my hair
Two hairy arms roll sleep from my eyes

It's time to rise up from the weeds
Squirrels have poked walnuts up my ass
Wasps crawled under me for the winter
Sow bugs are settled in my ears

It is time for a cold bath
My beard is as ragged as the trees

Sandy Hume

Wayne Pounds

YAYOI

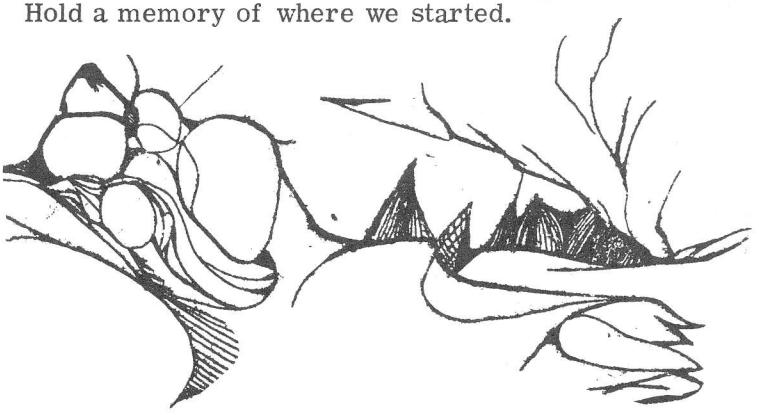
I must go back to a place
I can't tell you, there, on my map
Like Highway 66 east out of Tulsa
Or the blue chipped rims of Albuquerque.

The specific fails on lonely islands
These skewed eastern countries
Where a stove has not even
The bones of a stove and
The match heads are alien.

Great dimnesses spread here;
A point widens without dimension.
A brown slime which is no time dissolves
Thin plaster in a dingy room
Where a man without legs watches color TV.

In the years he's not heard the language
The hypnotist's syntax has cracked.
Louis, my spasmed, my stumped friend,
Our fathers were soldiers in different wars
And neither of us can cipher

The simplest lintel of the slumped circles
In the mountains back of your house.
Only the homely thumb marks of their pots
Hold a memory of where we started.



Wayne Pounds

LAYOLA EXERCISES IN THE ORIENTAL BATH

The 8 a. m. bath is morning's reformation,
The song the cedar sings recalling

The mountain's slope, its sun and large blue mists.
Of 3 things the sinner's guilt is compounded.

Of idiot will that eyeless gluts and knows
Not prudence. Of remorse that savage saws

The reins, bloodying the horses' mouth.
Of double-mindedness whose steady hiss

Mixes with the hot smell of cedar
A warning sound above the steam.

Virginia Bensheimer

CRAZY QUILT DREAM

Wheat fields
poured with sun
so heavy I can't move;
fire spreading
waves of orangegold
I skip ahead of it
like a piece of paper,
alight,
scattering charred bits
'til,
three quilts lighter
in the night,
the embers barely
keep me warm.

Kathi Owen Miller

THE SAINT

At her funeral
the minister proclaimed her
A saint
A great lady of the church.
Devoted. Self-sacrificing
beyond the call of duty.
I heard my father in the pew behind me
let out a cry,
for he had treated his mother,
not as a saint,
but as a human.
The guilt would haunt him
for the rest of his days.

To a child's mind, the visits of
this saintlike Christian woman
were events to be dreaded.
She invaded our home from time to time
smelling of Jungle Gardenia,
wearing starched linens and stiff lace,
and a hairnet studded with tiny colored dots.
We were to be on our best behavior,
which meant no giggling
during the prayers
we reserved for her arrivals.

She brought with her
bible story books
telling of the forgiveness of Jesus.

They included colored picture stamps
of bible scenes
to lick and stick on proper pages.
I loved the taste of them,
but stopped reading the stories,
after learning that
the forgiveness of Jesus
was not there for me
when I broke her crystal butter dish
at Sunday dinner.

Once, instead of bible books
she brought me
a plastic model of a cardinal
to glue together piece by piece.
"Birds are God's creatures, "
she let me know.
When the model was complete,
I painted the eye on carefully,
stroke by stroke
with colored paints.
Child that I was,
I imagined that the bird's eye
so real and lifelike,
was God's eye,
sent to watch me,
keeping track of white lies
and broken butter dishes
for my grandmother,
the saint.

Charles Wagner

NOVEMBER

All over Kansas
people are trying
to read
old love letters
but the dry
shriveled words
tumble from
the pages
carpeting
lawns and sidewalks.

When the wind blows
they scrape
along the pavement
sounding
like rain.

Sandy Hume

Clyde Moneyhun

MOEURS

When Madame saw that I was an American, she offered to take a hundred francs off the rent if I would give her twelve-year-old great-niece English lessons for an hour or so three days a week. Twenty dollars doesn't seem like much to me now, but at the time, and in the soup kitchens where I ate, it fed me for a week. I let my chambre de bonne from her, a tiny room under the sloped top-floor roof of a building in the rue de Talleyrand. Mme. de Sugny and doddering old Monsieur were of the fading but still glorious middle class, and lived on the third floor of the same building. They could no longer afford to have their maid live in, I suppose, and rented the room upstairs to foreign students.

The maid answered the door and took the three hundred francs for April from me, and arranged the bouquet in the fat bone-colored vase she had waiting for it. After I'd brought them the first month, the flowers had become a permanent part of the ritual. Madame never touched the money. I took a perverse pleasure in bringing the stuff in cash and introducing it into that long, clean hallway. The first few times Monique took it from me she blushed, but I suppose she decided that if Americans weren't embarrassed by such displays of mauvais goût, she wouldn't let it bother her either.

"The flowers are lovely, as usual," said Mme. de Sugny. "Thank you very much."

She received me on these Fridays, the first of each month, in a big sitting room furnished with uncomfortable-looking chairs, no couches, and a dozen impractical little tables. The room existed to provide a place for an enormous Oriental rug that I was afraid to walk on. She never gave me coffee, but insisted on a stiff five-minute conversation once a month. I thought it was because of the flowers. I confused her. Americans were a social anomaly: how did one behave toward a person from a classless society? She wanted her great-niece to learn English, but she couldn't speak a word herself, and we struggled along in French. That is, I struggled to avoid addressing her with the familiar "tu" and to keep

from using the street slang I'd picked up from my French friends.

"The season has really started now," I said. "The streets are full of flowers. It reminds me of a certain market in Greenwich Village." The French were always telling me how exotic they thought America was, and I referred to it as often as I could.

"Yes," she said, and stared at the rug. "What will you do with Isabel today?"

"I thought we'd go to the Jardin de Luxembourg. I can use the Palais to teach her the basic vocabulary of architecture."

"An excellent idea." She absent-mindedly smoothed the collar of her crisp white blouse. She was always immaculate, and held herself very straight and tall. She looked to be in her early sixties, but might have been older. That's how the rich are different from you and me: they age well. "Isabel enjoys these walks very much, you know," she said. "Perhaps too much. Some days, I can't get her to do anything until after you bring her home."

"I think she's learning a lot. She can converse very well now." We both cleared our throats and avoided looking at each other.

In a minute the old man wandered in, muttered, "O, pardon," and turned to leave. She called him back and introduced us as if we'd never met. They called each other Madame and Monsieur. "You remember Monsieur Prentice? Isabel's tutor?" she said. I wondered if he knew that I was paying rent on his maid's room. Maybe she never told him. He wore some sort of tiny official colored ribbon in his lapel.

He looked me up and down with one eye squinted. "Of course, of course," he lied. "How do you do."

"Very well, thank you. And you?"

His squint unwrinkled in surprise. Was it impertinent for me to ask? French politesse frustrated me. As he wandered back out again his wife said, "Monsieur, would you be kind enough to tell Isabel that the tutor is here?" He didn't answer.

In another minute the child bounced in and gave her great-aunt a rough hug. The old lady endured it and then straightened her hair and sleeves with two elegant gestures. We stood there fidgeting until Isabel grabbed my

hand and started dragging me to the door.

"I wonder if you learn anything at all, except how to get out of doing school work while you wait for Monsieur," said Madame.

"Sure she does," I said in English. "Do you speak English?"

"Sure thing, you betcha," she said, leaning back, pulling my fingers with both hands. I thought she'd stretch them out of the sockets. It was a good thing Mme. de Sugny spoke no English, or she would have known that this was practically all the English Isabel had learned in four months.

"Speak English, now, so your aunt can see how well you're doing. Anything, for God's sake."

"Sure thing, you betcha."

Or maybe the old lady didn't care; I was the cheapest babysitter in Paris. I could understand the urge to get rid of the child for a few hours a week. She was a noisy, demanding brat. If she hadn't been bright, I would have hated her.

Once out of the house, we never spoke English any more. "Where are we going?" She asked in the elevator.

"To the Jardin de Luxembourg."

"O, la barbe. I'm bored already. What do you want to do, watch the urchins sail their stupid sailboats? You're much too romantic, you know."

I didn't deign to answer.

"I know," she said. "You want to watch the girls. It's spring, and they're all walking around without brassieres."

"Well, I must say, they're more interesting to look at than you."

"Oh, now I'm not interesting, is that it?" She inspected her starched round-collared blouse, pleated skirt, and knee socks. One of her bony knees had a band-aid on it; she crossed her legs to hide it. "At least I'm not dumb," she said, walking out of the elevator ahead of me. This was her allusion to the two or three girls she knew I went out with.

"Who told you that?"

She blinked over her shoulder at me theatrically, from under mousy brown bangs. "You did, chéri, with your adoring eyes."

I had to laugh. She thought that everybody I knew,

especially an American of any race or sex, was stupid. I was excepted by virtue of a French education. Like all good French bourgeois, she was a chauvinist.

We took the metro to the Boulevard Saint Germain. She hated to walk and thought the only excuse for it was to show oneself off. We could never take the back streets. We had to take the "Boul' Mich" down to the Jardin and then stroll the widest, busiest paths. I wanted to lurk around one of the more obscure side entrances, where I had an idea I might run into a student at the Beaux Arts I'd met a few weeks earlier. She set up her easel there on weekday afternoons.

Isabel had other ideas. "Come on. This is idiotic. Let's go out to the boulevard. I want a crêpe. There's a stand right on the corner."

"Do you think I have money to waste on you? I'm supposed to be making it on you, not spending it on you."

"I wouldn't let you pay for me if you begged." She rummaged around in the waistband of her skirt and came up with a ten-franc note. "Women who let men pay for them are prostitutes. Here."

"So now we're men and women? If you're so grown up, I guess you won't mind crossing the street by yourself."

"Cut it out, Jimmy. Give me your hand." This was something she took every opportunity to do.

"Don't call me Jimmy. Or Jim, either. It's James."

"I adore the name Jimmy. It's so perfectly American. Cagney. Durante. You have to call me Lizzie."

"Oh, God."

"Please, please do it. Speak English to me. I'll just nod as though I understand. I want everybody to see."

We stopped at the stand. "You want chocolate or sugar on your crêpe?" I said.

"Your're not even listening! It's true what Malraux said: you Americans have a charming culture, but it's wasted on you."

"Malraux said that?"

"I don't know. I want Grand Marnier."

"Oh, yes, that'd be fine, coming home smelling of liqueur. Your aunt thinks badly enough of me as it is."

"She doesn't care. And anyway, she doesn't know

the half of it." She arched her eyebrows mysteriously.

"Half of what?"

"Of what I know. I could burn her ears off!"

"Here's your crêpe. You can have one bite of my Grand Marnier."

She took an enormous bite.

"And then I'm taking you home."

"I don't want to go home!" she wailed with her mouth full.

"You think I have all day to waste, like you? I've got things to do. Here, take your change."

"Let's spend it at the Cinémateque. 'Public Enemy' and 'Little Caesar' are showing."

"No. In the first place, you've seen both of them a dozen times. And in the second place, just no."

"Well, let's do something." She crossed her arms. "What're you getting paid for anyway?"

"Not to listen to you whine." I gave her my last bite.

She chewed. "You're not very nice to me. I should tell my aunt."

I didn't answer.

She leaned toward me. "I should tell her about Paupau."

That was her name for Christine, the maid who lived in the chambre next to mine, though I don't know where she got it. I stopped to look in the window of an antique store to show how thoroughly I was ignoring her.

"I bet she'd love to hear about that," she said nonchalantly, looking seriously into the window too, as though very interested in something there. "You two make an awful lot of noise, you know. Especially Paupau. You should get her a muzzle. Or at least have the decency to go to a hotel."

"You hear a lot from the third floor." She looked at me. Now I studied the window carefully. I liked to outmaneuver her. "Your aunt would also love to hear about your wandering around nights on the maids' floor, listening at doors." I walked away and stretched luxuriously, as if I couldn't have cared less. "She'd know just what to do. I'd be fired, of course. And you'd be grounded until you were old and gray. Come on, let's hurry home and tell her."

We had reached the metro station at Cluny and I headed down the stairs. She ran up behind me and put

her sticky hand in mine. "Wait for me, damn it." We didn't talk on the ride home. She scrunched lower and lower in her seat, kicking her legs, knocking her knees together, glaring at the other passengers.

The next afternoon, Saturday, just at dusk, there was a knock on my door.

"Good God, who is that?" said Christine.

I hushed her and called out, "Who is it? Qui est là?"

"It's me, Monsieur. Mme. de Sugny. I have brought you the little hot plate I told you about. Monique found it on a high shelf in the pantry."

"What in the hell is she doing here?" whispered Christine, clutching a sheet around her.

I covered my face and tried to think. There was nothing to do. I'd try something anyway, but I had a feeling nothing would work.

"Thank you very much, Madame. If you don't mind, I'm not really dressed just now. I'm changing to go out. Can you just leave it by the door?"

"Well, you see, I have to show you how to use it. I have a little sauce pan for you also."

Just as I'd thought. I yanked Christine out of bed and threw her a robe. She pulled up a chair at my desk and lit a cigarette while I threw the covers over the bed and jerked on pants and a shirt. My furious activity sent her into a giggling fit. I let her get a grip on herself before I turned on the lamp and opened the door.

Mme. de Sugny passed her calm, blue, strangely young-looking eyes over the room in half a second. She didn't pause at the sight of Christine sitting in my robe, hair mussed, chin in hand, blowing smoke rings at the window. When she looked at me, my face flushed redder, and I tried to keep from breathing hard.

"Here you are," she said. "Just turn this button to the right, you see? Don't use the highest temperature, and don't ever leave it plugged in. Here's the pan, and here's some powdered milk Monique bought to use in coffee. I really can't drink it, but perhaps you can."

"Thank you. Thank you very much." I inspected the on/off switch minutely while she lingered in the doorway.

"Is everything all right with your room? You know, I never have come up to see that you had gotten properly settled. You have arranged it nicely." She looked at

the postcards and pictures from magazines I had taped up beside the bed and over the sink in the corner, at the neat rows of books on the shelves above the desk, where she could see the lights just coming on at Montmartre, and at the serape I had draped across the armoire. "Is that American?" she said.

"In a way. It's Mexican. My mother bought it in New Mexico, a state in the southwest United States."

"Yes," she said, nodding and looking at it as though she were trying to remember what else she wanted to say. "Well, I'll leave you. Good night."

"Good night, Madame." I shut the door and leaned against it, feeling a little ticklish around the knees.

Christine was giggling again. "I couldn't have stood it much longer."

"What the hell are you laughing at? We'll both be thrown out of here. Wait until your boss hears about this!"

"What? Forget it. Madame won't say anything. Why should she?"

"Why shouldn't she? You don't care if you're fired?"

"Turn out the light," she said, throwing the robe at my head.

When I went to the door at three o'clock on Monday, Monique told me to wait in the sitting room. In a few minutes she came in with Isabel. "Madame says that Mlle. Isabel must stay in the house today. She is going to the opera with Madame and needs to get her bath early. Can you conduct the lesson here today?"

Isabel was huffing with her arms folded on her chest, and twisted out of the grip of Monique's hand on her shoulder to go and sit on the wide window sill. "Certainly," I said. "We'll memorize some Shakespeare, all right, Isabel?" She scratched her ankle and gave me a blank look. When Monique turned to leave, Isabel stuck out a fat pink tongue at her.

I made her bring me some paper and wrote out pieces of a couple of soliloquies as accurately as I could remember them. I thought Mme. de Sugny might be listening to see just how much she was getting for her money. It was no use trying to do much except work on pronunciation. Isabel decided she wanted to play, and made faces, poked me in the ribs, and sang little songs with the words she liked, such as "frets" and "idiots."

I got a little silly myself, but I didn't want to be caught like that if Madame came in, and kept trying to stay on the lesson.

"Signifying nothing," I pronounced carefully.

"Seeg-nee-fy-eeng no-seeng," she repeated, making a word of each syllable.

"No, not no-seeng. Nothing. Like this: nothing."

"No-seeng."

"No, like this: thing."

"Seeng."

"No, damn it! Thing! Thing! Thing, thing, thing!" I was laughing.

"Seeng, seeng, seeng! Sing Sing! Ze preeson! You'll never take me alive, coppers!" She machine-gunned me with her fingers, spraying me with saliva.

I flipped over backwards in the chair and thumped onto the thick rug, grabbing my chest and sneering in defiance. "You dirty rat," I said, shaking my head.

"You dirty rat! You dirty rat!" she screamed, dancing around me, machine-gunning. She jumped on my chest with her knees and I held her back by the shoulders while she filled me with lead.

At that moment we both saw Mme. de Sugny standing in the doorway. "Isabel," she said, "please go tell Monique to give you your bath."

I stood up and pulled Isabel to her feet, trying to protect myself from the pummeling she was delivering to my ribs and stomach. I grinned at Madame.

"Isabel," she said sternly.

"You dirty rat! You dirty rat!" Isabel shrieked at her, and ran down the hall.

"We did Shakespeare today," I said to her great-aunt, straightening my shirt and combing my hair with my fingers.

"Yes," she said. "Shakespeare. The English Molière."

I laughed, but she didn't. "Good night," she said. I was left to find the door myself.

The next morning I was washing my hair in the sink when Mme. de Sugny knocked on the door.

"I seem always to find you indisposed," she said without apparent malice.

"Please sit down," I said, offering the only chair.

"I'd rather not, thank you. I'll only take a minute

of your time." She unfolded a corner of the throw rug with her toe. "I don't quite know how to say this. I'm afraid I'll have to be very impolite. I don't think you should tutor Isabel any more, Monsieur." She coughed a nervous little cough and reached into the pocket of her dress for a handkerchief. I thought how odd it was that she had such difficulty saying it. I envisioned her steeling herself to climb the five flights to the maids' floor and confront this vulgar American paysan. She couldn't send Monique; this was her own responsibility. It was doubtless one of the most distasteful moments of her life.

Before I could stop myself I said, "All right." It was admitting guilt. I regretted it immediately. Why should I be made to feel guilty? But what else could I say? I tried to think of something.

"And I think, in fact," she said, not looking at me, "it would be best for you to move out altogether. I will return the rent for this month; you needn't pay for these few days. I'll send Monique to the bank tomorrow."

I nodded dumbly. Our eyes met for an instant and she moved to the open door. "I want you to understand, Monsieur, that, well, this is not pleasant for me. I rather like you myself, but I hope you will try to understand my point of view in the matter."

I had to say something. "Is it because of what Isabel knows?"

"Yes, that's it, partly."

"She did tell you then?"

She nodded. "Yes, she told me . . . something of it."

"So you came up here the other night to eavesdrop, just as she'd done. To have a look around."

She looked confused, and then pretended she hadn't heard. "You may take a few days, if you need to. I know it will take time for you to find another room."

"I'll move tomorrow. Don't trouble yourself about me."

She folded her handkerchief carefully, straightening the lace border at the corners. "Don't be too hard on me, Monsieur," she said quietly. "Isabel is all I've got, to use the cliché. I love her very much. And she depends on me, more than you imagine. After her parents died . . . her life has not been . . . well, she

is a strange child, isn't she?" She turned away from me. "Try to understand." She closed the door.

I did understand, I told myself. I did see her "point of view in the matter." One didn't leave one's ward in the unchaperoned company of a libertine. But the more I thought about it, the less I understood, and the angrier I became. That night, Christine and I went to a cafe with some friends. I told them the story and they agreed with me that Madame was a meddlesome old fool. I drank too much and Christine and I had a fight; when I came out of the toilet, she was gone. By the time the other men and I had commiserated about the fickleness of women, I'd missed the last metro. I walked the two miles home, relieving myself in alleys on the way, and collapsed into bed with my clothes on.

When I woke up around nine the next morning, my teeth felt soft and fuzzy and my head too sore to leave touching the pillow. After I threw up I felt a little better, and packed while the feeling lasted. I started down the stairs with two suitcases and a backpack full of books but no idea of where I was going.

On the third floor landing the door jerked open and Isabel came out in a night shirt.

"You took long enough to get up," she said. "I've been waiting for hours."

"Go to hell," I said in English.

"What?"

"What do you want, Isabel?"

"I don't want anything. I just want to talk to you. If you don't think that's asking too much."

I started down the steps.

"Wait!" she said, coming after me.

"What the hell are you doing? Get back in the house. Your aunt will kill you, and me too, if she sees me out here."

"Well then, come back up here."

I set everything down and sank into a slouch on one of the steps. "This really isn't the time, Isabel. I'll come back and visit you, all right? I promise. Just go back in and leave me alone. Please." I felt nauseous.

She folded her hands behind her back like a lawyer, "You're moving out, aren't you?"

"Hell, yes, I'm moving out!" I lost what little patience I might have had. "What did you expect, after

you reported your spying back to the old lady? What did you want?"

She looked surprised. I'd never really yelled at her before. It was the first time I'd ever seen her cry. Good, I thought, I'm glad somebody else is suffering around here.

"Don't go," she whispered in a shaky little squeak. "Stay. Please." She hugged her shoulders and shivered. "Je t'en supplie." I barely heard her breath.

"Leave me alone," I said, picking up my bundles.

"Stay!" she screamed, startling herself. It echoed up and down the stairwell. I balanced the suitcases and started down again, one step at a time. She leaned over the rail and I thought she might spit on me. "If you don't come back . . . you'll be sorry. You will. I'll tell my aunt everything. All about your filthy whore. She'll call the police. I'll tell her, I will!"

I looked up from the next landing. "You already have, you little bitch!" She flinched as if I'd slapped her. "Did you forget? You already played that card, pal."

Her face disappeared and the door slammed magnificently. "Call the police," I muttered, and laughed. I staggered down the stairs and to the metro. When I got to the Gare du Nord I put everything into lockers. I had breakfast and hung around all day in the Jardin de Luxembourg, trying to get friends on the telephone every half hour or so and watching the girls stroll by in their designer T-shirts. I found my artist friend around lunch time painting an obscure fountain. Of course, she said, there was room for me in her apartment. I asked if there was room in her bed, too. She said there was only one, and guessed we'd have to share it. I began to feel better.

I spent the next day alone in her two-room apartment in the rue des Ursulines, eating bread fresh from the boulangerie on the corner and looking through her prints and water colors. I felt vaguely abused. I told myself to forget it. I would find a place eventually, maybe even quit school and take the job I'd been offered at Berlitz. Having money in my pocket would be a novelty. But I couldn't keep my thoughts away from Isabel, and I was depressed. I was left finally with a feeling that I was right and somebody was wrong, and by God, I wasn't going to sit still for it. Toward three

o'clock, habit forced me in the direction of the rue de Talleyrand. The old lady owed me three hundred francs, anyway, and I would tell the old hypocrite what I thought of her. What did she think went on in the world? Was she so lily-white herself? Probably. But what did she think she was protecting Isabel from? The little witch knew more about the world than the old lady did.

Monique answered the door as if she'd been expecting me. She should have been; I was right on time for the lesson. She was very quiet, though, and just reached into her apron pocket and handed me the money in cash. I asked if I might have a word with Madame. When she disappeared down the hall I listened for voices, but didn't hear anything. Monique took me to a tiny study of sorts I'd never seen, stuffed with a big desk and chair, shelves of books on all four walls, and a short couch I've heard called a causeuse. I sat down on it.

When Mme. de Sugny came in she held out her hand for mine and said, "How do you do, M. Prentice."

I shook her cool, dry hand. "Very well, thank you. And you?"

She gave me the same strange look her husband had given me. "Monique said you had gotten moved out all right?"

"Yes, I did. I forgot to leave a key, though. Here you are."

"And did you see Monique about . . . "

"Yes, I did. Thank you."

We stood and looked at each other. "You know, Madame, there's one thing . . . I'd like to know . . . will you sit down?" I didn't know what I wanted to know, but there had to be something. To my surprise, she sat down. "I'd like to ask you, if you don't mind, what exactly did Isabel say to you? About me, I mean."

She looked at a copper-colored buckle on the side of her shoe for a long minute before answering. "Well, to tell you the truth, it wasn't so much what she said as how she said it." She looked up as if she'd given a very clear answer and expected me to be satisfied with it.

"How she said it?"

"She is only a child, Monsieur. Her hidden motives are easy to read."

"Easier than yours, anyway. I don't understand you." I looked at the rows of leather-bound books above

her head to escape her clear blue eyes. They confused me. "Can we be frank with each other?" I said.

"I don't see the good of it," she said, standing up.

For the first time, it struck me that she was a little taller than me. "Isabel is not as naïve as you think she is," I said.

"I have no illusions about Isabel. That's exactly what I fear the most, don't you see? She knows, she feels, so much. Too much. She is in a great deal of pain over this, you know."

"You mean . . . is she very upset? I hurt her feelings, I know. I'm very sorry. I shouldn't have yelled at her like that. But I was so angry."

She smiled. "So you did see it too, Monsieur. I sometimes wondered if you did, because you seemed not to."

"Oh, yes." I nodded, still pretending that I knew what she was talking about.

"If she had only loved you a little, I wouldn't have minded. But if you saw it too, well. I'm so relieved. You can certainly see why I . . . "

I stared. If I said anything I don't remember what it was.

"You don't know how it pained me to do it to her," she said. "But a little girl like Isabel, sensitive, intelligent, and a young man like you--I think you'll agree, it wasn't at all healthy. It made her so happy. I couldn't have found the strength to cut it off now if she hadn't started to realize it herself too clearly. And to see, or at least to believe in, to give you the benefit of the doubt, a certain, how shall I say, reciprocity."

"But Madame, what about . . . Christine . . . that day . . . "

"Oh, Monsieur, I'm so sorry. I must apologize to you for that day. It was appallingly rude of me. I was so embarrassed that I couldn't think of a graceful way out of the room." She was blushing.

"But Madame, that's what . . . didn't you know that Isabel knew all about it?"

"Oh, yes, for a long time. She never said much, but I dare say it made her very jealous."

I went to a cafe near the Varenne metro and drank three fast beers. They only confused me more. Then I went to see some Americans I didn't like very much

just to hear some straight talk in English. I spent the next few days moping around the artist's apartment and drinking. I talked to her about it, drunkenly demanding that she explain it to me, on behalf of the entire French people. She said I was too triste and would have to leave. I went by the de Sugny apartment four or five times, but they were never home to me.

Finally one day I grabbed Monique by the wrist and pulled her onto the landing, shutting the door behind her.

"Please, Monique, please, don't tell me they're not home. I want to see Isabel, to apologize, do you understand? Just five minutes."

"Monsieur, I can't help you. If they're not home, they're not home. What can I do?" She gave one of those Parisian shrugs.

"Look, I know it's the old lady. She's putting you up to this. But ask Isabel. I know she'll come. Can't you do it without Madame knowing? Just ask her to come say something to me, hello, goodbye, anything."

She looked at my hand on her wrist, and I let go. "Wait right here," she said.

She was probably calling the police, I thought. Come take this lunatic away. But in a minute the door opened again and she shook her head. "She won't, Monsieur. I'm sorry. It's not Madame, it's the girl. She won't. She said to tell you, well, that she never wanted to see you again. I'm sorry." And she closed the door.

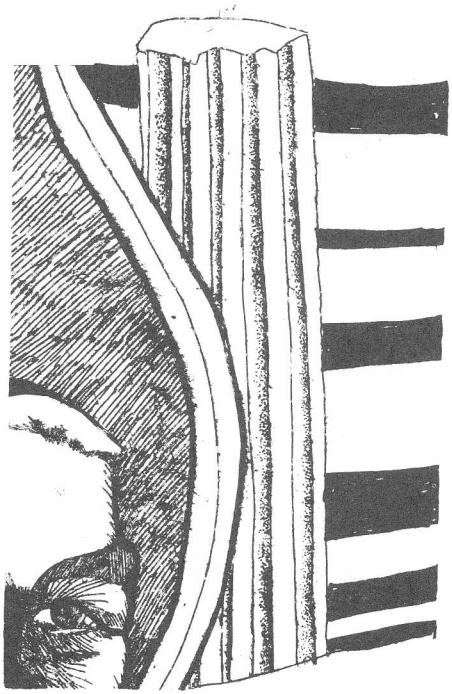
A few weeks later I was having dinner in a dingy little restaurant that squatted in the shadow of the Grand Marché. I had waited too long on the Berlitz job, I was out of money and out of friends to borrow it from, and I was sitting there staring at the oil floating on my wine and feeling sorry for myself, especially about having to go home to Wisconsin. I'd already sold my Levis at the flea market; I was considering selling my return ticket so I could stay a little longer.

It was almost dark out. I thought I noticed someone at the window staring in at me. When I looked up, nobody was there. It had looked like Isabel.

I ran to the door of the restaurant. The street was almost deserted; not many people actually lived in the area. A fat woman with huge red arms wheeled a wooden cart of vegetables out of the Marché. The stalls

were closed. She'd bought someone's odds and ends, leftovers, bruised goods. Farther down, a man in an apron with a curved pipe clenched in his teeth swept water out a door, across the sidewalk, and into the gutter. Between his slow strokes, the water glittered with the first shop lights. Church bells rumbled somewhere, perhaps from across the river. They might have been church bells. Had they just begun, or had I only just noticed them? Which church could be ringing bells at this hour? I hadn't been in Paris long enough to know. In a few days, I'd have to leave.

I took a narrow alley out to the boulevard, crossed it to a metro station, bought a ticket, and went out onto the platform. I walked up and down the length of it, looking across the tracks to the other side. Several trains came and went. I finally got on one and got out my map to see where I was going.



James Mace Ward

PETER'S FIRST KILL

I don't know where he came from.
It was like
he just materialized five feet away.
I remember his eyes
as I shot into him,
and I thought
"The poor bastard's so high
he wandered off alone
from his outfit.
Simple as that."

After he was down
and had stopped jerking,
Roger and I
checked him for booby traps.
I'd got him
through the chest
and arm.
Part of his lung was hanging out.

Roger told me to get his ears.
I said "Oh, yeah."
and got my knife
and peeled them off
from the lobe up.

That night
I dipped them in wax
and from then on
I wore them round my neck
whenever I was on patrol.

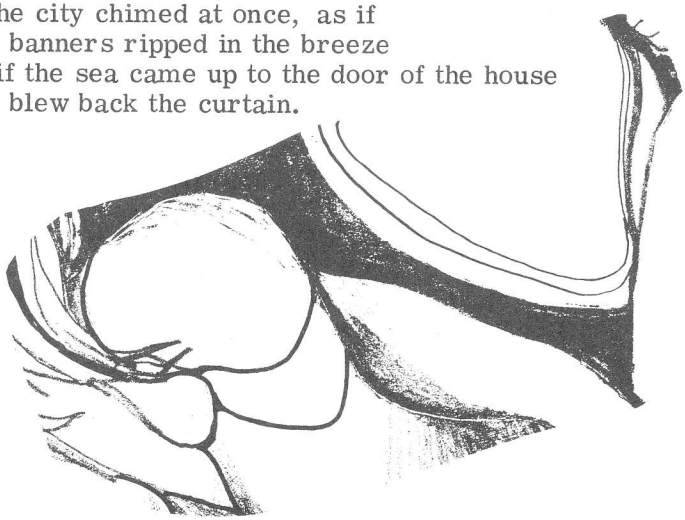
Cause ears spooked the shit out of the Viet Cong.

Sandy Hume

Miriam Sagan

A REVISION

Like St. Ursula in her white nightgown,
Asleep in the exact center
Of that great golden city,
I am waiting
For an angel to step through the door.
Instead, I carry a white rose home in my hand
From the corner florist. Light snow;
A storm enters the inner ear.
Radiator hisses. The book lies
Face down, the passage
Marked by a broken binding.
Above the dome of the observatory
The moon develops into light.
Dusk traverses the Persian rug,
Slips from the pots of basil and aloe,
Spikey "heal-burn" on the sill.
And I am waiting
For an angel to step through the door
One foot poised lightly for landing,
A green palm in the hand,
Shattering the threshold of air.
It is as if all the clocks
In the city chimed at once, as if
Red banners ripped in the breeze
As if the sea came up to the door of the house
And blew back the curtain.



Laurel Speer

SPRING BRINGS OUT THE GRAY-HANDED BUMS

We're seeking a place
to sit beneath a tree
and pull grass blades
with our whitened fingers
to catch up on a long winter's absence.
A stumbling bum approaches.
Now the cold weather's broken,
they have sought the parks,
just like us.

Please Ma'am,
he mumbles,
his rags held together
by crusted dirt.
My buddies and me,
we're trying to get together
62¢ for some beer.

We stare at each other
with incredulity.
You set your mouth
and refuse to give.
I can see the long winter's want
has left you uncharitable.
He is polite with inarticulate deference,
befuddled by the drugs
that rot his already sotted brain.

But I know that if challenged
to pull his paretic muscles together,
he might kill for less than the 50¢
I drop into his gray palm.

Maybe he's 25
and will be dead soon.

Taviishi Malhotra

APRIL MAGNOLIA

Afterwards, I stretch my arms
in surprise, waking up
in the afternoon light;
the half-shining light through
slats lingering on my limbs,
my ribs, and around me
like the scent of his touch.
Even though he has heaved
his spirit back into
a thousand social pieces,
mosaic, unemotional,
he knows that he has stamped
my words with the contours
of his breath that is now
a few hours old. And I rise
with a gesture wifely, and
look into the mirror
with his eyes, into his calm
already married eyes.

George H. Gurley, Jr.

HUSTLERS

Wherever Mosconi looks
He sees six leather pockets,
Fifteen numbered balls.

At movies and the racetracks
He scans the fans for balding heads.
At grocery stores he banks
Grapefruits among the lemons,
Feathers an onion off an orange.
He sees a cue locked in the broomstick,
Molecules inside his rack.

Over the globe,
Scattered archipelagoes of billiard balls.
He breaks the islands of the New Hebrides,
The arrondissements of Paris.
Along the routes of TWA
He lines up the shot
That caroms Philadelphia off New York,
Taps the Big Apple
Across the green baize of the middle west,
Kissing L. A. into the Pacific.

While the rest of the world's hustlers
Bend at night
Under the lamps of pool halls,
Willie Mosconi floats up over the roof tops,
Leans out over the Milky Way.
Reaching for his bridge,
He squints behind Orion's belt.

On the other side of the Big Dipper,
Minnesota Fats looks off beyond Andromeda,
Chalking the tip of his cue.

Stanley E. Banks

FUNKY MUSIC BLUES FOR A NEW GENERATION

They didn't march with Martin
Or sing a song
For Adam Clayton Powell.
They wouldn't know the name
Of the "Native Son"
Who went foreign,
But they "git down
with the Funk!"

The future is always a second past.
They live half-way liberated
In a non-affirmative state
Without handouts
From the private sector,
That's cool with bucks
But they "git down
with the Funk!"

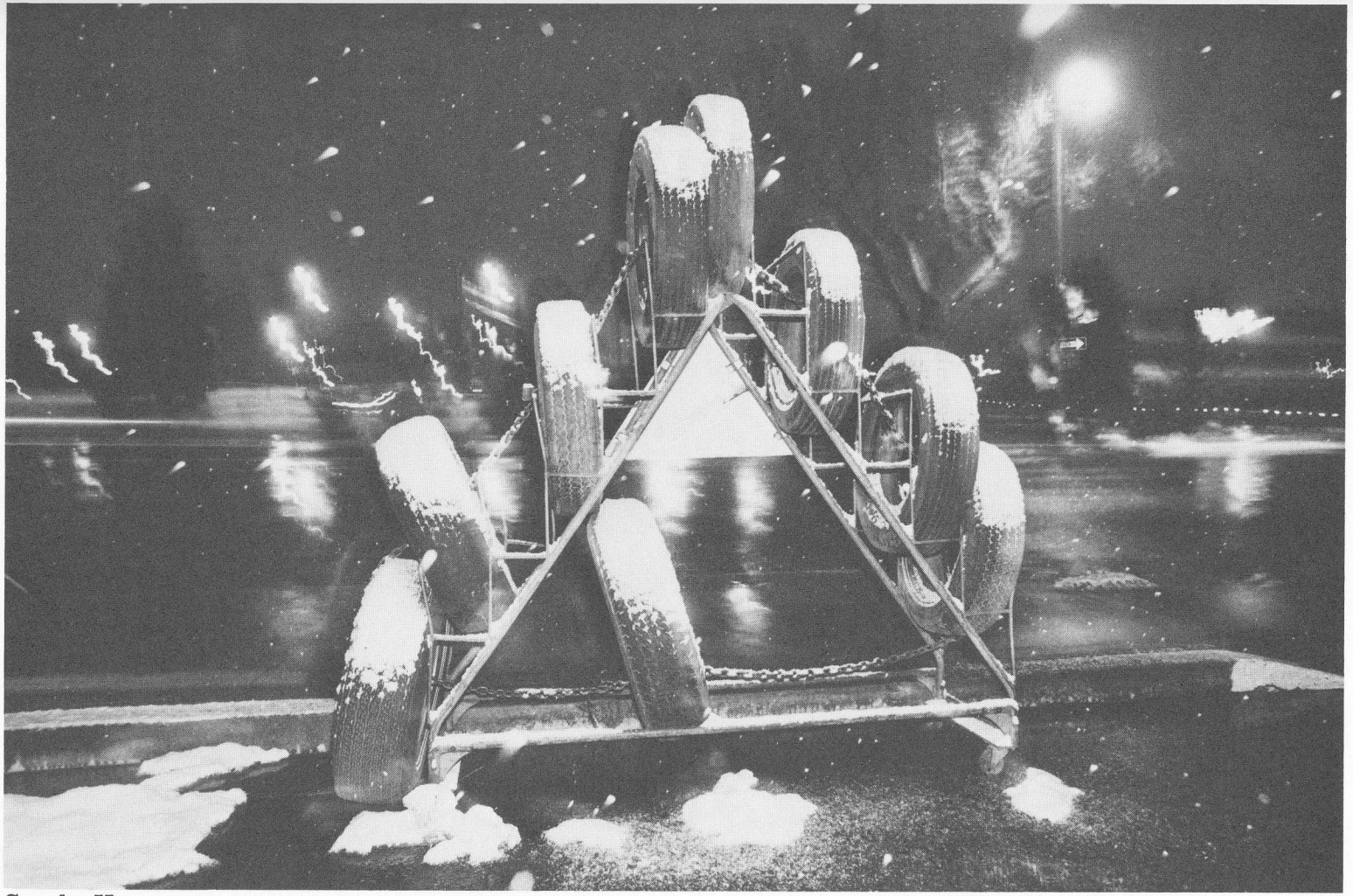
Their babies don't stand a chance
After being Relieved.
Snapping fingers
To the same old song
When the record scratches
Won't stop the music,
But they keep "gittin on down
with the Funk!"

Stanley E. Banks

GRANDMA PREPARES FOR DEATH

She's eighty years past birth,
The last of all her
Brothers and sisters,
A "voodoo" matriarch.
For her, death is coming
When pop bottles rattle
In the late night,
Walls rotate their cracking
In all four corners,
Booming bells ring
In her half deaf ears.

Sitting in her easy chair
After summoning up relatives
And old friends,
She whispers,
"Thank You Jesus,
Thank You Jesus,
Thank You Lord."
Bedtime comes at 3:00 a.m.
She inches
To the edge
Of her bed
And sits.
Her eyelids pull
Themselves shut.
She nods and
Her neck
Snaps back
Into place.
She'd like to
Wait awhile
Before she goes--
Before she goes.



Sandy Hume

Jeff Worley

RAT

I.

If you see tiny whirlwinds in dead leaves,
these are the feet of the rat.

II.

If the whip gives you pleasure
coiled in your lover's fist,
enjoy the stinging soft tail of the rat.

III.

If your dice keep turning
double ones,
then you're being
watched by the rat.
The unsprung steel
you set in the basement
is sharper now:
whetstone for the teeth of the rat.

IV.

Before dusk see
along the knife edge of the horizon
spreading for miles
the blood of the rat.

Eric Chaet

3 REVIEWS

1. Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman

Til I read it, I despised poetry-- just the blabber of clever, sensitive people frustrated by stupidity & insensitivity, futilely complaining. Then "Song of Myself" in Leaves of Grass: a gear-shifter for anyone who will engage with it, opening into nature as immediately available source of refreshment from pettiness, & provider of fuel & mental leads, thru "similitudes." America raw & so the hope of the world: that history won't merely repeat itself forever, & human life turn out meager & formalized all over earth, finally.

2. Moby Dick, Herman Melville

Uncompromisingly intelligent, original, witty. The greatest heroic human mistake: vengeance against that which injured you, not aware you existed. Whole lives dedicated to mere vengeance--which is anyway impossible. Lost potential is just lost & only remaining potential remains.

3. The Brothers Karamazov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Individuals are shown under the stress of a civilization whose traditions are shattered, & which hasn't found its new way--in some respects like present-day U.S.A. A dissolute father & his 4 sons. The eldest son--highly intelligent--mocks everything, is miserable, & flips out of control, finally; this is Ivan. Dmitri, purposeless, is ruled by his emotions, & half-wise & half-understood romantic novels. Smerdyakov, not very bright, & also illegitimate & despised, who takes some of Ivan's remarks to mean it would be good if the father were killed--& kills him, then himself. And Alyosha, at peace with himself, compassionate, dedicated to the creation of God's kingdom on earth, & as helpful as he can figure out how to be in the meantime.

Eric Chaet

THE DARK EXPLAINED

I don't know what causes darkness between stars.
Doesn't light emanate in all directions
from spheres of fire?

With or without lenses I can see
more stars than I've counted
or likely will tonight.

So why isn't there light everywhere?

Similarly,
I'm proceeding clean as sparrow song
in harmony or alone
just plain clear of confusion
enjoying & delivering value
when I fall under that spell again.

I spend more time in confusion than out!

Terry Savoie

KITTENS

One of our yearling barn cats dropped
her first litter like a bad dream
in the chicken coop. Before noon

she was out in the yard
pulling her shadow behind her
toward the porch. It was early June
and she found shade under the oak,

curled under and drew off milk
from her teats. In the furthest nest
we found four mouths: open, stiff.

Joseph Garrison

TRACKING THE LAND
(a letter to a friend)

We drove on, taking the curves,
past the last pay phone.
Your old car with its years
and the road's abuse whined
in its gears, even at low
speeds, almost frantic,
like a Maserati finishing.
By mid-morning we'd unpacked
the things from your other life
that hadn't been moved or sold--
andirons, an unframed picture,
a tent, a superbly balanced
utility cart, a ladder. You gave
the garden hose and sprinklers
to me. The shack was exactly
like you, what I'd expected,
things arranged well enough
to find them in the dark.
And, yes, it was also like you
to bring out the grass whip
and clear a path to the spring.
We tracked to the hillside site
of the house you hoped to build,
found ourselves freshly amazed
by wild columbines with their
clusters of five doves, and kept,
as best we could, to the old
logging bed. And there it was--
in the middle of the wilderness,
a floor plan you'd staked out
with kite cord. There was
your hope, as thin as the cord
and as strong, a starting line
from which to build a sufficient
house next to a good creek
you'd named for a woman
who is wise. Maybe you are right
to settle down in this place,

to say you'll dam the creek
or put up windmills. But I
wondered, when we finally left,
why you set the security chain
well up into the lane, leaving
room, as you said, for lovers.

Charles Wagner

SHADOWS

I would like to
visit
your cool
sable country

see
with shady vision
the shivering stones
of your buildings

trace
the contorted tentacles
of your trees cloaked
in the caress
of a ghost breeze

live
in a land
without faces
where voices
speak in silence.

Bruce B. Barton

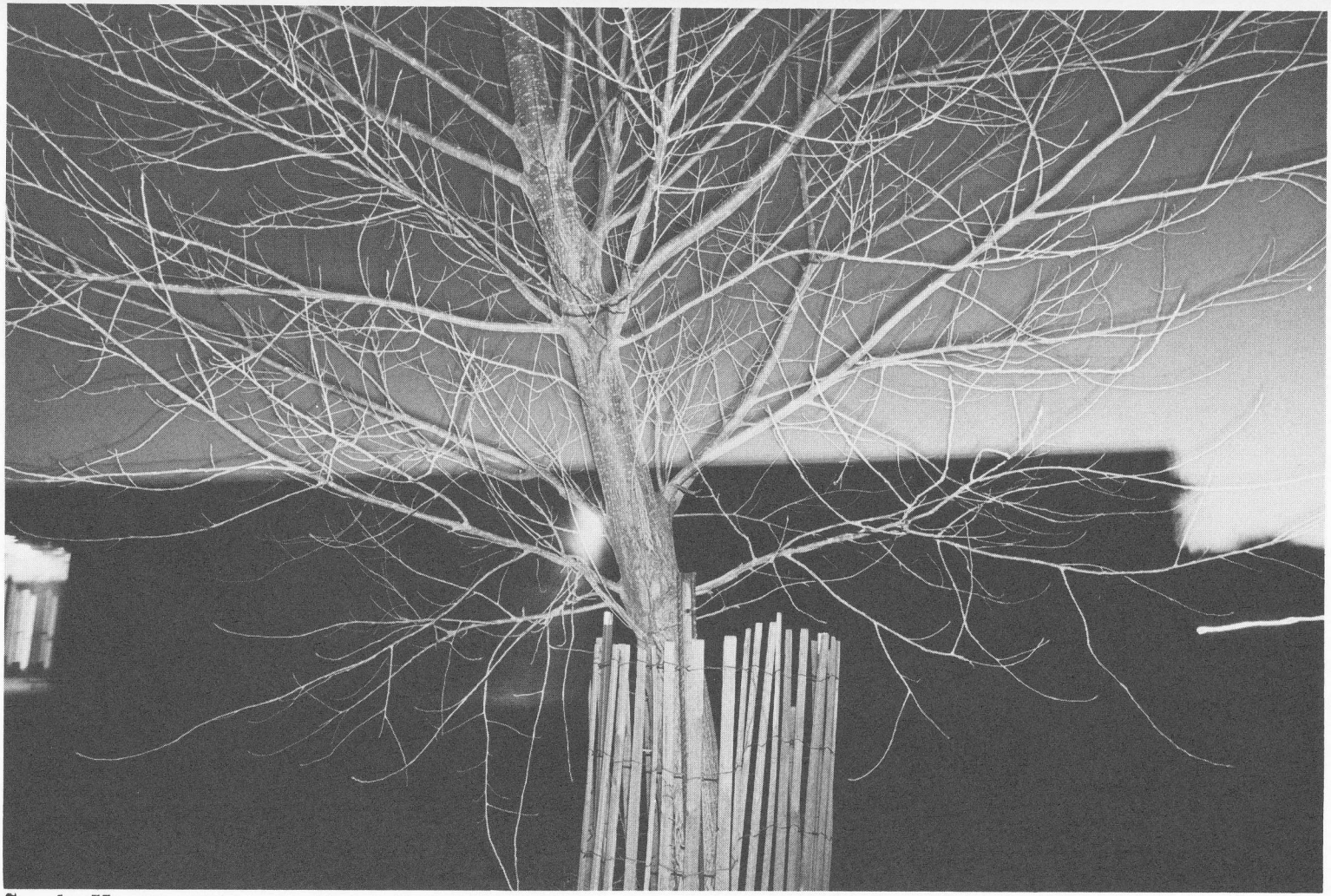
IN A BAR OUTSIDE SWANVILLE, MINNESOTA

The grasslands hover
right at the doorsteps.
The entrance says
Cold Beer
Fresh Minnows

Farmers rub elbows with the roaches,
the harvest settled on their shoulders
like mine dust.
They speak of winter
and a daughter's graduation.

In the distance
a loon wraps the night
around its voice.

The Miller sign blinks on and off:
now is the time
now is the time
now is the time



Sandy Hume

John Repp

OREGON JOHN

1

just outside Sparks, Nevada
he walks into the bar car
sits across from me
bums a Camel
& tries to sell me a camera

he's got no money
I say no to the camera
& buy him a beer

2

we have the same name
come from New Jersey
write poems & read Neruda

but I love the way
cedar stands in bogs
back home

he hates it for the dust
& loves the way spruce
smells, fresh cut

3

one time I rode in a 'copter
under one of our bombing runs
carted out the wounded
& watched villages blow apart
the napalm rolling like huge
orange marbles
in the grass of a playground somewhere

4

I fragged
a gung-ho lieutenant

hid while miniguns
shredded jungle & VC

got the clap
seven times in three months

& tasted that clean
Saigon smack
in the jungle
on a search & destroy

5

I left the sawmill
drove my car
to the edge of a cliff

walked out to the lip
threw my hat
& camera case over

hid out overnight
& caught the train
next morning

I want a new name
& to work
in words
stained glass
& wood

6

the train steams through southern Wyoming
hour on hour of treeless hills
& silence

then, a stand of trees
we pound the windows, laughing
trees ! trees !

John takes a long
pull on his beer
& says:

my daughter climbs trees
& I swear
her only war
will be in reaching
for the next branch

Jay Barwell

RAPUNZEL
(for Ann)

The man who came to cut my wife's braids
had long fingers and small white palms.

She complained the braids were tight,
gave her headaches, strangled the nerves.

I remember how I used to cling to them,
a monk in the bell-tower.

But now she wears a permanent that falls out
in the morning. And somewhere a dollmaker

fits her hair to his small wooden skulls.
She paid a man to cut them off:

I hope he gets arthritis, and warts,
because somehow she's different now

and I miss climbing to her face
each night through the dark.

Terry Savoie

WINTERING

"What the birds say
is colored."
--Donald Hall

Which of our words
has the owl
mastered? Seated
on fence posts,
he practices the "oo"

in blue. Or
crows
fastened like kites
to the tops
of bristle-pines, calling

"cold, cold"
but unaware
how necessary's the cold.
We lived five winters
at the end of a farm lane

with the small ones
that never flew south,
wintering birds
no larger than our fists.
In blizzards,

hidden in pockets of straw,
under outbuilding eaves,
they watched the farmhouse
for chimney smoke,
warming themselves

on the topmost bricks,
briefly.
Never a word,
never a color.
Never once complaining?

Joan Colby

OCTOBER

The barn weathers to cranberry,
torn sides leaking darkness,
the smell of dank straw and manure.

Broken sheds clamber,
a grey huddle
keening their rusted machinery.

The silo, erect, is a circumsized penis
aiming implacably
at the enormous blue snatch
of a giantess.

Six square empty eyes
stare forlornly
from old lace lids
at the dooryard,
the driveway wrinkling
around a lame pickup,
a yellowing sycamore,
and three tall stalky
chrysanthemums, the color of pennies
lost in tobacco niches
of pocketbooks.

Beyond this, the tattered buff
of cornstalks,
tawny frost of ryegrass,
the low hills
mauving, bronzing, rusting
into backdrop
and the sudden sumac
like clotted blood.

We walk to a brown pond
where dismal willows half-drown,
half hang on with gnarly
old-woman arms.

Cows pass--
heavy swaying tents
pitched on jutting forks of bone.
Udders like bagpipes.

A skeletal shed
confronts the weather
without hope.

Every winter something else goes.

The small successes
of our lives
shrink on our bones
curling like brown leaves.

The wind comes
low and cold.

We shiver, say
someone is walking
on our gravestones.

Valorie Breyfogle

THE FINAL DIAGNOSIS:

cancer of the imagination.
Terminal.
It was sad,
they all agreed
as they watched him
wither away,
only an occasional
black butterfly
leaking out between drools.

Sandy Hume

Janet Krauss

ROSH HASHANOH

My father turns his head
to peer down the synagogue aisle.
I am coming.
Our kiss blesses the new year.
I sit beside him.
He is calm now. I am here.
His prayer shawl is tallow white.
Its fringes trickle through my fingers.
He wets his thumb to turn the page
of his prayer book and shows
me the place. We chant together,
"Shma Yisroael, adenoi alohanu, adenoi achod."

The young choir sings in a circle,
shoulders touching.
I see mountains grow
as their voices cataract.
I see an eagle shade us
with the power of his wings
as the boys praise the all mighty.
I see the rabbi open the doors of the ark
with an angel's hesitancy.
The Torah lies in waiting
eloquent in its silver scroll.
The rabbi kisses the lives and laws
and numbers of his people
and passes the spindled burden around.

One day the ark doors are stuck together.
My father's seat is empty.
The choir has fled.
No one watches in the synagogue.
I walk to the altar.
I cannot pry open the cedar wood doors.
I may break them.
I finally leave.
All I can do is watch a candle
anywhere because its moving flame
is my father's face,
is the light that ushers around us.

Ben Santos
Scent of Apples: A Collection of Stories
Seattle and London: Univ. of Washington Press, 1979.
178 pp.

Bienvenido Santos, resident author at Wichita State University, has been exiled from his native home, the Philippines, several times. His adopted motherland has been, actually, very good to him. His American honors include a Guggenheim fellowship and, this year, a National Endowment for the Arts writing fellowship. He is esteemed by faculty and students at WSU and at other institutions where he lectures. Nonetheless, melancholy permeates his writings. And his displacement (first as a result of World War II, and now of political oppression under Marcos' military regime) assumes more than personal meaning in his writings. His conversational stories--some obviously his own experience, others apparently observed, and all shaped by fictional technique--display with poignant simplicity the results of a violent century on American Filipinos.

This is not to say that Santos' stories are merely plaintive. A playful sense of humor weaves through his writing. "Immigration Blues," the first story in this collection, makes light of the restrictive Asian immigration laws. Alipio, an elderly widower, finds himself courted by an attractive young Filipino woman who hopes, through marriage to citizen Alipio, to become a legal permanent resident. As understanding dawns, Alipio considers the advantages of his new domestic arrangement:

> Alipio replied in English. "God dictates," he said, his dentures sounding faintly as he smacked his lips, but he was not looking at the foodstuff in the paper bags Monica was carrying. His eyes were on her legs, in the direction she was taking. She knew where the kitchen was, of course. He just wanted to be sure she won't lose her way. Like him. On his way to the kitchen, sometimes he found himself in the bedroom. Lotsa things happened to men his age.

Santos does not, however, gloss over the genuine pain of his characters. Throughout, we find illumination of the difficulties Filipinos face in their adopted land. Alipio, for example, loses his pension as a result of poor legal representation. All the characters suffer from unemployment or underemployment. Filemon Acaya in "The Day the Dancers Came" found, after the war, "To a new citizen, work meant many places and many ways: factories and hotels, waiter and cook. A timeless drifting . . . ." Homesickness pervades the stories, along with Filipinos' difficulty in establishing new families. The characters, mostly aging bachelors, cover up their failures with meaningless banter and endless poker games.

The style of the stories effectively understates the problems. Short, conversational sentences and Filipino-English idioms imitate speech. Santos uses many of the same characters, including a sympathetic first person narrator in different stories, which adds continuity to the collection.

Santos suspects that his fellow Filipinos do not want to be reminded of their situation. He speaks to his Filipino reader through direct address in "The Door":

> Oh, the stories I can tell you if you but have the time to listen, but you are going away. Everybody is going some place . . . And those who will tarry here forever, they have no ears for my stories, because they have seen them happen everywhere, and they don't want them told, they are a commonplace, they say they should be hushed and forgotten.

Precisely because these stories "happen everywhere," they should be remembered and passed on. This collection of stories preserves an important minority experience, and human experience. The "commonplace" illustrates a universal element of American immigrant life.

One disappointing aspect of Scent of Apples is the age of many of the stories. Only "Immigration Blues" (New Letters 1977) appears to be recent. With his recent NEA writing award (a last vestige of pre-Reagan support of literature), Santos should have a chance to update his

cycle of stories.

DENISE LOW

Harley Elliott
Darkness at Each Elbow
Brooklyn NY: Hanging Loose Press. 107 pp. $4.50.

Harley Elliott is a poet, photographer, and painter who lives in Salina, Kansas. His work appears widely, and he has published nine books--eight collections of poems and a children's story--since 1971. Darkness at Each Elbow is his largest collection.

The central figure in this new collection of poems is Nature, or The Earth. The people walking the earth are bit players trapped in their own minds. Or, as Elliott says in "The Trap":

> I'm talking about
> a fly trapped in a coffin
> six feet down
>
> or think about
> beaver held by one foot
> trapped in a dream
> of its own drowning

The earth lies in wait for us to get through with our civilized nonsense and kill each other off. "March Landscape" illustrates this:

> Above growing civilizations of dirt
> the sky undulates a piercing blue.
> Such tiny feet on the
> bird in the grass
> and the child that
> watches the bird.
>
> The green geometry of lawns
> grows underneath them

and deeper still
the prairie waits.

With the earth as a living creature the most powerful theme of the book, Elliott can give an unusual validity to an animism that has always been central to his work. Many poems express something like a Taoist view, as in "Self Portrait as Crazy Horse":

from the hair of the
hump backed mosquito
who rests on your arm
to the great and invisible
roar of the wind.

And you are not
the center of creation
but simply a spirit adrift
in the mysteries and delights

trying to get along
with the answers given

Elliott's is a serious and powerful talent that extends beyond the regional. In fact, none of his books has been published in the Midwest. The poems here are the work of a mature artist. His handling of his material is more subtle than in previous collections, enabling him to better express the didactic meaning of the poem that parallels the visual and evident meaning.

JAMES MEECHEM

Meridel LeSueur
The Girl. 1978. $3.50.
Harvest. 1977. $2.50.
Song for My Time. 1977. $2.50.
Cambridge, MA: West End Press.

Meridel LeSueur carries on the politics as well as the name of her stepfather, socialist Arthur LeSueur, and brings even to her lightest pieces of humorous fiction her sense of the oppressive nature of the capitalistic system and her empathy for the struggles of the worker and farmer. At the same time, the ear for dialogue and eye for character that are a hallmark of her fiction bring an art to her most reportorial pieces.

These three books introduce us to the writing career of a woman whose works were blacklisted for over thirty years. Harvest is a collection of short stories, both serious and humorous, and two pieces of reportage; all date from the 1930s, and a number were originally published in such magazines as American Mercury, New Masses, and Prairie Schooner. A second collection, Song for My Time, contains pieces originally published in Mainstream and Masses and Mainstream during 1947-58. These, too, range from fiction to reportage, but the distinction between the two genres is less sharp than in the earlier collection. The struggle of the worker often seems more important than the worker's story in the fiction, while the character of individuals is more important in the factual ones. The third volume, a novel called The Girl, is unique in two ways. First, it spans LeSueur's career, making use of short stories published as early as 1935, but reworking the original material in "an extensive revision which virtually amounted to a rewriting" (Publisher's note). Second, the book is amalgamated from stories told and recorded by a Worker's Alliance writers' group during the depression.

The unique flavor of The Girl's language and its point of view seems to come from a fidelity to these women's accounts. The book's voice is the voice of those we talk to on the bus or overhear in the laundromat, people who call their daughters "Girl" and say of the dead, "They fixed him up nice. He looks real life-like." It is a mark of LeSueur's genuine concern for these women that she thanks them by name in the afterword of

her novel:

> The family of the Girl is the family of Gladys who wrote it all out of her agony and there was enough for a book. Where is it now? The getting and birthing of the child is the story of Natalie, who has been for thirty years or more in an asylum and is still alive. She also has a story for a book. Butch's death soliloquy a girl wrote down from remembering leaving her lover like that after a bootleg shootout. The bank robbery was reported by the girl who drove the car. Belle and Hoinck--and these were their names--ran a German Village on St. Peter Street.

But in spite of the specificity of place assigned to the German Village bar/speakeasy, in spite of details that place most of the action in St. Paul, Minnesota, the setting is basically that mythic kingdom in which the downtrodden proletariat always lives: the land of run-down farms, abandoned shacks, and rat-infested apartments which contrasts poignantly with the capitalists' marble banks and plush hotels--a place everywhere and nowhere. There is no shock of recognition at streets we may have walked or neighborhoods we know, only a realization that another's perception of reality can make the familiar strange, the personal impersonal.

Setting's loss is character's gain, however. The Girl (she has no other name in the novel) tells her own story, and she is a woman with neither the experience to distinguish St. Paul from any other city nor an awareness which extends beyond that which directly touches her own life: "My mama had told me that the cities were Sodom and Gomorrah, and terrible things could be happening to you, which made me scared most of the time." At the German Village, "where I was lucky to get a job in those bad times," the Girl notices things: the pregnant cat and the bets on the number of her kittens; the smell of the soup; the customers, men whose unwelcome advances she is able to handle because "Clara had shown me how to dodge and not make anybody mad"; Ganz, whose pull keeps the bar open; and Butch, "smooth as silk to look at" and capable of making the Girl feel that "something kind of exploded in my eyes."

LeSueur's portrayal of the Girl's relationship with Butch is only part of a celebration of women's own sensuality which she captures in bittersweet vignettes: The Girl recalling her mother speaking of the father who beat them all, "The times we had girl, mama said, child, girl, he looks now like he did on his wedding day"; the Girl watching Butch leave after their first night together and thinking, "He will be always leaving, getting up from the bed, and going out the door"; the mourning Belle saying of her Hoink, "He gave me it good and sweet. The bitterest people are the sweetest, truly sweet." All are women reaffirming that the price they pay for their own sensuality--the poverty, the pregnancies, the abuse--is a price they find worth it.

The Girl's plot is lively and skillfully handled. We hang on in suspense as the Girl's love affair with Butch and the bank robbery which will get them "a service station on County Road B" move toward a denouement plausible, yet not predictable. The subplots dealing with Belle of the German Village and the gradual dissolution of friend Clara soon become integrated with the Girl's life. But these plots so skillfully woven from the lives of real women, this effort to make myths of the stories told by the women of the Worker's Alliance, badly undermines the skillful work LeSueur does with character portrayal. The plot makes the Girl a proletarian Everywoman triumphing over every disaster to which the poor and downtrodden are prone, and ends with an inspiring scene of women triumphant, while the character portrayal shows us a victim--a simple woman who bumbles into a maze of graft, corruption, crime, and perfidy, following her heart, oblivious to disaster. As the world crashes down on her, she seems not so much stalwart and heroic as bewildered and anesthetized.

It is Harvest which contains LeSueur's work at its finished best. Short stories like "Fudge" and "God Made Little Apples" do a superb job with the same kind of sensitive portrayal of women's sensuality which we see in The Girl, and they do it without the distraction of a melodramatic plot.

"Fudge" is a story of a young girl invited to the home of an old woman once involved in a scandalous and mysterious love affair which her neighbors still speculate about. "God Made Little Apples" is a tale of an

exuberant old farmer's trip to town--and the woman who gives him a bushel of crab apples. In neither story does much happen, but the careful presentation of dialogue, thought, and nuances of physical action gives us vivid pictures of a young girl's realization of the powerful emotional ambiguity of sex, an aging man's reaffirmation of his own vitality, and the sensuality of women close to the earth.

Harvest introduces us to several fine and finished short stories which contrast, sometimes sharply, with the work-in-progress material of Song for My Time, while The Girl is a noble experiment, giving voice to the women of the Worker's Alliance, presenting both their sexuality and their struggles in a unique and authentic language.

ERLEEN J. CHRISTENSEN

Don Welch
The Rarer Game
Kearney, NB: Kearney State College, 1980. 62 pp.

The poems in Don Welch's The Rarer Game are carefully observed descriptions of animals and people in rural settings. Welch's description of a maturing barred rock rooster in "The Chicken Poem" shows his characteristic attention to descriptive details:

> Then he graduated,
> lying in wait for men.
> People like the Necchi-Elna
> salesman, or the woman
> who sold Watkins Products.
> Attacking their shins,
> or just running at them,
> low over the lawn, his anus
> on fire like a V-2 bomb.

Such description is fresh and imaginative, providing a

scene that seems genuine because of its proper nouns and entertaining because of the lively humor of its concluding simile.

But this fierce and now-extinct rooster also acquires a thematic significance as it haunts the barnyards of Nebraska. Like many of the other animals in Welch's poems, the rooster has an integrity of life that is remembered even after the animal itself has disappeared. A quieter form of this integrity appears in Welch's description of "The Mute Swans":

> How much of the world they had to shed
> in just pushing themselves along.
>
> How beneath the whiteness of their forms
> such black legs churned.
>
> Our children were trying to trick the geese
> into eating ice cubes.
>
> The swans swam on,
> serious, complete, of such a certain magnitude.

The geese are as petty as people in their domestication while the swans, holding themselves aloof, retain the individuality and dignity of wildlife.

The personal integrity of undomesticated animals is the primary significance in Welch's best poetry. Usually this integrity appears in isolated scenes, but in "The Last Wild Passenger Pigeon, 1899," the significance deepens to a sense of natural history:

> Only now that it is gone
> does it appear to have come
> from a strange country.
>
> But in preening the feathers
> on its back, its bill kept
> tailing off into a deft blue world
> only to return. Its iridescence
> was composed of small electrical storms,
> its breast was softer than foreskin,
>
> When it fell into history,
> little planets of grapeshot--

nuts and bolts and nails--
fired out of a gun sailed on
over somebody's field.

Otherwise, when it fell,
there was only a small buff sound,
and the long slim form
it had always believed in.

This collection also includes over a score of poems dealing directly with human life. Here we find little of the integrity that appears in the natural world. The widow who is suffocated by the flowering lilacs and sexual advances of the widower next door is clearly, if humorously, pathetic and incomplete. The duck woman who rises at 6 a. m. to feed her exotic ducks is a servant without the grace and self-containment found in Welch's descriptions of wild animals. The borders of her life are blurred into the lives of her domesticated ducks so that by these concluding lines of the poem she hardly seems to exist as a separate entity:

Then turning the empty cans over at the end of her run,
the duck woman sits down, one can to a buttock.
There, in the morning light,
she watches the drakes' heads flaring in the sun.
She feels the white circles around the hens' eyes drawing down.

The strongest people in these poems are those who at least partly detach themselves from society: the mad uncle who makes bowls of snow ice cream for the barnyard fowl, the Dutchman who taught the poet to send his hands "out into the air, cracking the backs of such things as pheasants" and sending his "fingers into their hearts and lungs," and the runner "going farther" into the hills "than he had been in years" while "the valley where he worked / kept trailing off behind him, / slowly, systematically / like some civilized fear." In the last lines of "The Shotgun," the poet directly explains the power of the natural world to restore the integrity of the self:

Next fall when I walk
the uplands with the shotgun
cradled in my arms
my academic sutures
will split open like
raw flowers in the fields.
And in the center of it all
there will be a hard silence
I will want to hold onto.

Like most regional writing, Don Welch's poetry is backward-looking in its subject matter and usually tender in its tone. Many of his poems are small in scope. He is strongest when he presents his subjects with an exact imagery: the duck woman sitting down, one can to a buttock, or the passenger pigeon whose breast is softer than foreskin. He is weakest when he goes for an intellectual commonplace, as at the end of "Singing a Bird's Song," where he instructs us: "So you only have five notes: / try purity of tone. / Sing the weight the moment / of a single branch can hold." A similar lapse occurs after the passage from "The Chicken Poem" quoted above. Having given us a wonderful description of the rooster's anus "on fire like a V-2 bomb," Welch confides, "This is why out here / we have our own terror," and then goes on for another twenty-three lines of watery explanation. But these lapses are scattered exceptions in a solid Midwestern poetry that is strikingly specific in its imagery and ardent in its praise of animal integrity.

MICHAEL SMETZER

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