COTTONWOOD

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COTTONWOOD

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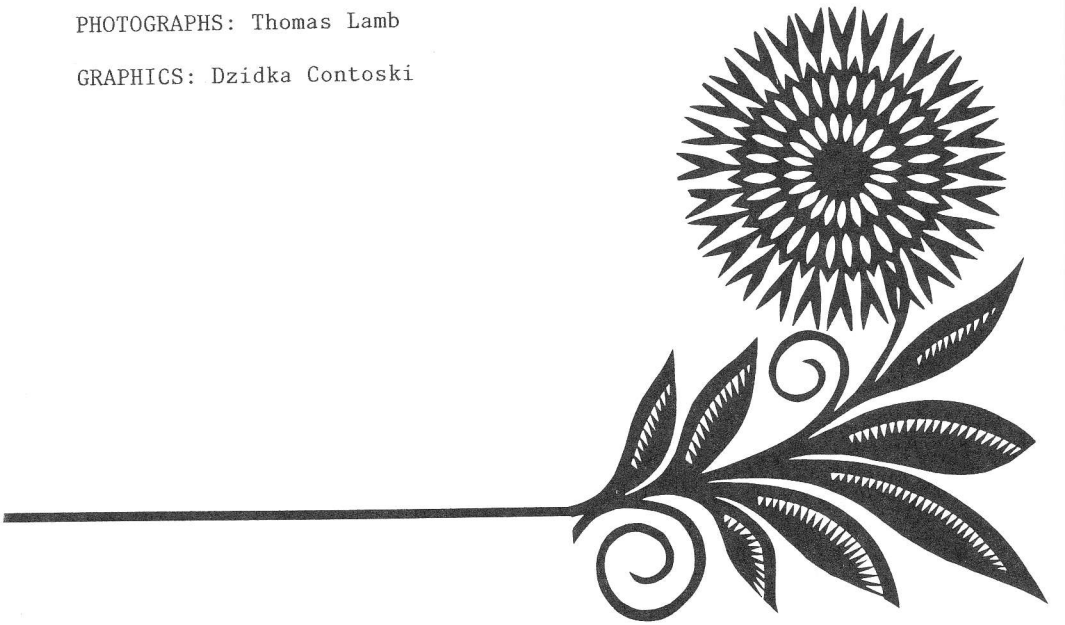
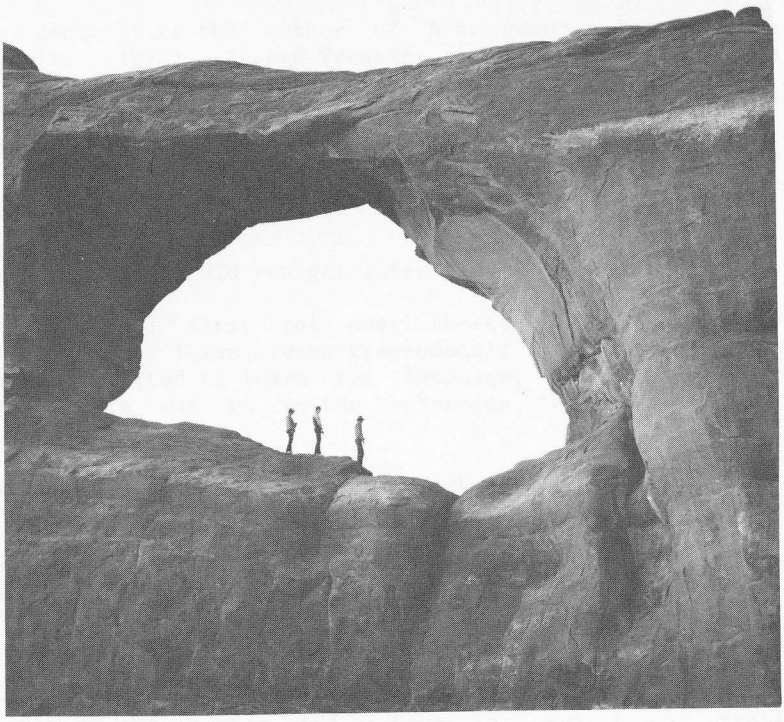


Our double fiction issue, 19 Stories, was labelled Number 27, rather than Number 27-28. We apologize for the confusion this may have caused.

Thanks to the many Cottonwood staff members, and friends, who helped with typing and proofreading. A special thanks to Brad Denton for getting Cottonwood's mailing labels on the computer, as well as typing much copy.



INTERVIEW

VICTOR CONTOSKI

AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR CONTOSKI

Victor Contoski is the author of Astronomers, Madonnas, and Prophecies (1972), Broken Treaties (1973), Names (1979), and A Kansas Sequence, forthcoming from Cottonwood Review-Tellus. He is the translator of Jerzy Harsymowicz's Planting Beeches (1975) and Tadeusz Rosewicz's Unease (1980), as well as the editor of two poetry collections, Four Contemporary Polish Poets (1967) and Blood of their Blood. Erleen J. Christensen interviewed him July 9, 1982.

Christensen: When did you get interested in Polish poetry?

Contoski: When I first got over there, I didn't know the language. But I was always tremendously interested in poetry, and when I started to learn the language, one of the first things I did was go to the bookstores, talk to people about poetry.

Christensen: Did you gravitate right away to contemporary poetry?

Contoski: Yes, probably because it was easiest for me to understand. There was no archaic diction. I translated a couple of long poems of Gatczynski's--one of them was "The Earrings of Isolda" and the other one was "Niobe"--beautiful poems. I had just started sending things out to be published, so I sent the translation of "Niobe" to The Polish Review, and they wrote back that yes, they were very glad to have it, and I was feeling pretty good so-- Then they wrote back saying, "We seem to have lost our copy of your translation"--you can see where the story's going!-- At the time, I wasn't familiar with the ways of editors, and I had sent my only copy--which they had promptly lost. Later, they sent me a letter saying that the editor had had a heart attack and things were in rough shape; they really would like to publish some of my Polish translations--did I have another long poem? I, like a fool, sent them the only copy of "The Earrings of Isolda"--the other Gatczynski translation---which they also promptly lost!

So that's why I now keep copies of everything. Gatczynski is really a very interesting poet, and I think from time to time that it would be fascinating to retranslate those two poems, but, on the other hand, it's work that I've already done once, and I don't see much point in going back and repeating it. I think I've personally learned what I had to learn from Gatczynski.

Christensen: Did you start translating quite promptly once you started reading a certain poet, or did you spend quite a bit of time just reading him?

Contoski: No, I think I started translating almost from the beginning because these were poets who were almost entirely unknown in the West.

Christensen: Might you be willing to talk about your poetry, your attitude toward poetry before you started reading Polish poetry and after?

Contoski: I might. I don't think there's a before and after. I don't think Polish poetry transformed me in any way because I was already interested in contemporary poetry before I went to Poland. I remember as an undergraduate coming across a copy of the Western Review edited by Richard Stern, which had all kinds of new poetry that I wasn't being taught in school at the time, and finding the anthology, New Poets of England and America, which I don't think too much of now but which was a pretty big revelation to me then.

Christensen: I'm going to back you way up; you said one time that you were writing poetry from about the age of ten.

Contoski: Probably earlier than that, I'm sure my mother has saved some absolutely awful poems that I wrote earlier on in life than that.

Christensen: But wasn't it at about ten that you told someone you were going to be a poet--

Contoski: Oh, I'd forgotten about this--my cousin was ten and I was about sixteen at the time, and he said, "What are you going to do in life?" and I said, "I'm going to be a poet." It shows you how naive I was at the time.

Christensen: Ah, well, you were writing at the time weren't you?

Contoski: Yes, but nothing very good. Of course, I thought it was tremendous. You know, when you're sixteen, you think you have all these great thoughts.

Christensen: What were you doing with those poems? Were you stuffing them under the bed--or showing them off?

Contoski: Oh, I didn't let anyone else know. I kept notebooks full of poetry. Fortunately, a few years ago when Marge Piercy came here, we were talking about how we got started writing poetry, and she asked me, "Do you save everything that you wrote, from way back when?" And I said, "Oh, Yes."

And she said, "Think what would happen if you would die tommorrow."

And I was utterly shocked and went home and destroyed about 400 of those early poems!

Christensen: Whom did you see as your poetic idols when you were in your teens?

Contoski: Well, I memorized a lot of Swinburne, and A. E. Housman. I think I liked Shakespeare, but I don't think I understood beans.

Christensen: But you liked the melodic lines--

Contoski: Yes, and as a matter of fact, I can recall liking T. S. Eliot. We had a textbook in junior English and way in the back was "The Hollow Men." I didn't understand anything about it; I just liked the music of it, and it seemed so strange. I kind of like incantations, and I remember reading on ahead when everyone else was reading Longfellow or whatever. I was reading Eliot and not really understanding him, just responding to the music.

Christensen: So the music of poetry came very early to you?

Contoski: Yes, I think we were always a very musical family. We'd always get together and sing folk songs. I think my interest in poetry really came from just loving the folk songs. When I was an undergraduate, I had a beard down to about my navel, and I would sit in the window of the Ten O'Clock Scholar in Minneapolis and play the guitar and sing folk songs--and all the high school kids would come by and say, "Look at the hippie! Look at the hippie!"

Christensen: And did the hippie then have pretensions of being a serious poet?

Contoski: Oh, yes! I had always thought that this was my mission in life. In capital letters. Oh, at this point, maybe, the capital letters had become small letters. At the University of Minnesota, I just took courses that interested me. I took a lot of Latin and Greek courses because I liked the languages, and also because I had been reading Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, and I thought you had to know Latin and Greek to write contemporary poetry.

Christensen: Did you take Pound and Eliot quite seriously at that time?

Contoski: Oh, absolutely! Pound was so very very intolerant of anyone, anything else---and I think that appeals particularly to the immature mind.

Christensen: It's funny how you focus on the Greek and Latin in Pound. I was immediately fascinated with his interest in things African and Chinese and completely passed over the other two.

Contoski: Well, I had four years of high school Latin and went to the Roman Catholic Seminary for a year. I figured the one thing I didn't want to take at the University of Minnesota was Latin. But I took this wonderful Latin course from a teacher I still correspond with, a woman by the name of Mrs. Forbes. And she was such a wonderful humanist. She deserves a lot of credit for opening up poetry to me. Not in the sense of particular poetry, but just by telling us what the Latin poets were about.

Christensen: So you became fascinated with the Latin poets for the first time, then?

Contoski: Yes. I wasn't interested in translating them, but I was very impressed with Catullus, and I think Horace, from that time on, has been one of my idols. I really like the philosophy expressed in his poetry. And he was a country gentleman.

Christensen: How about Pound's ABCs of Reading?

Contoski: Oh, yes, I did those exercises---

Christensen: If you were to "pull a Pound" what would you put on those lists of what every educated man and woman should read?

Contoski: I don't thing I'd presume to dictate. It seems to me that people seek out things that interest them, things that go along with their temperaments, their interests. No, I wouldn't presume to dictate.

Christensen: Were you, before you went to Poland, reading the little magazines--or primarily the contemporary poets taught in school?

Contoski: No, at the time there wasn't that much in the contemporary magazines. I was reading the Hudson Review and the Partisan Review and a couple of other magazines like that, and the poetry I was reading really wasn't that good, but then I can remember Donald Allen's anthology came out, and the Beats. I really didn't know what to think of Allen Ginsberg, but I was reading him, and Gary Snyder, and I was interested. even at that time, in seeing what "my contemporaries" were doing.

Christensen: So you felt right away that they were your contemporaries, part of the vanguard, rather than just wierdos?

Contoski: Yes, in a way it may seem kind of strange, after reading all that Ezra Pound, but I didn't really want to exclude anybody. I can recall going up to some of my English teachers and showing them some of this poetry and their telling me, "This is no good. This isn't poetry. This can't be analyzed according to Brooks and Warren." But I didn't want to exclude anybody--even poets I didn't particularly agree with.

Christensen: Who would you have put in that class at the time?

Contoski: Allen Ginsberg. It seemed to me that the whole lifestyle, the whole sense of raw power, is fairly foreign to my own work. I try to edit; I try to polish; maybe this is the influence of Horace who said you should keep the poem seven years before you let it see the light of day. But I really do enjoy polishing and working on poetry and not just letting it out.

Christensen: Was this true very early, too?

Contoski: Yes, I think so. Pound says in the ABCs of Reading you should write a sonnet a day. And I did that for about two months. Most of them were pure crap, about fairies dancing on the lawn in Ireland, poems having nothing to do with my own life, but I knew they were sonnets because they had fourteen lines, and they had all the lines in the right place.

Christensen: Did you go through that sort of early Yeats period where you wrote about the romantic and faraway and ignored your own life?

Contoski: I went through a Yeats period where I wrote a whole cycle, I think something like ten plays, on the life of Cuchulain. I can recall going and looking among things like the Red Book of Ulster and--there are some absolutely fascinating translations of Irish poetry--things like that. It just about killed my mother who thought, "What is my son doing writing about all these Irish people?"

Christensen: Was that because you were rejecting the Polish heritage?

Contoski: I think it was just an admiration for Yeats. And for England, where I'd never been. The big change was after I'd come back from Poland, and I picked up a University of Nebraska Press edition of Dave Etter's poems. I'd known about Carl Sandburg and Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters--but those guys are history already. But with Etter, all of a sudden here was a contemporary Midwesterner writing about the Midwest, writing about my life. That was the first contemporary book I reviewed--I was just so struck with that. It was 1966, 65--something like that.

Christensen: Before you went to Poland, had you been publishing, been active with other poets--or had you been isolated?

Contoski: Isolated--nobody at the University of Minnesota would admit that they wrote poetry at the time, though I'm sure all the graduates had reams of sonnets like myself. But I started sending things out. In fact, my first poem was published in The Chicago Review way back in 1956 when I was an undergraduate. A

horrible poem. I was reading a book on Welsh meters and wanted to try them out. And, once again, you could see this was poetry because it fit in a kind of meter. It was a pretty rotten poem. Then I started publishing with Duane Locke at Tampa Poetry Review and some of the other little magazines that were just starting to come out at the time--

Christensen: How did you find out about these places?

Contoski: There was a magazine called Trace, which was kind of a precursor of the International Directory, and, I think, the International Directory was out at the time. Of course, I kept sending things off to The New Yorker and to The Hudson Review and all those places. But then, when we came back from Poland, I started sending things out in earnest and started a lot of correspondence with all kinds of people who subsequently became more famous than I am.

Christensen: Who do you trace to that earliest period, the first poets you got in touch with?

Contoski: Well, Dave Etter. Jack Anderson, Dick Lourie and the Hanging Loose group. Hanging Loose published me right from the start. I think I got in touch with a lot of the little magazines from the back of Poetry magazine--they would have a list of new magazines coming out. I remember Dave Etter coming to Wisconsin, and Dick and Virginia Laurie coming up and we'd get out our guitars.

Christensen: You started becoming friends, having a circle of poets you had contact with?

Contoski: Circle is probably too strong a word. We'd give each other mutual support. We'd talk about poetry, about life and what not, what people write about, but in a way my lifestyle is so different from so many of my contemporaries that (a shrug of the shoulders). I think it is possible to say that there is definitely a group of Hanging Loose poets, a group of poets who published in The Chicago Review, but I don't think I ever belonged to any one group.

Christensen: Were your fables something you did for a short period of time, or something you dabbled with quite a bit?

Contoski: I've always been fascinated by fairy stories, and I can recall going into the Minneapolis Library and being a big person having to sit on those little chairs in the children's room looking thorough the fairy tale books. Just for the heck of it, when I was an undergraduate, I wrote three or four fables and showed them to friends. That was it. I just had them in my portfolio, my notebooks. And then when The North American Review was revived, the first number had a fable in it. And I was sending my poetry out, and I thought, "Hey, they've got some

fables here." So I sent one out to the editor, a very sympathetic person by the name of Bernie Richardson. And he sent back a very encouraging letter, the kind of encouragement I really needed at the time. He said, "I really like your fables. We would like to not print them all at once, but print one on the inside cover of the next three issues." Of course, I was very pleased with that, and when the last issue came to me, I thought "Gee, I don't want to give up that inside cover space." So I wrote some more fables, and I kept having that inside cover spot for about three years. But then the magazine changed editors, and the new editor wrote, "We've had a staff meeting, and we've discussed the magazine. We think that your fables are one of the strong points of the magazine, and we hope that we'll be able to continue to use them. Will you send us some more?" And then, before I even got time to send them some more, I got another letter, "We've had a staff meeting, and we think your fables are beneath our standards. We've decided not to use them anymore." And with that, my motivation for writing any more fables was gone.

Christensen: I see the fables as a footnote, an undercurrent, in Broken Treaties. How do you feel about that idea?

Contoski: I'd go along with it. I think one of the things I like to do in my poetry is tell stories. Perhaps in my poems I tell them less directly than in my prose. I like the idea of the artist as storyteller rather than someone who exhibits himself and makes music by pounding his head against the wall.

Christensen: I suspect the poem as photograph is played out, that the poem as story, the poem with the strong narrative line is what we're coming to--do you agree?

Contoski: I don't know. It seems to me some of the poets I've read lately go so much into surrealism that there doesn't seem to be much center in their poetry. I would like to see a stronger story line in poetry.

Christensen: One of the things that strikes me in your surrreal poetry is that it always has a strong story line.

Contoski: I think you're very perceptive! (laughter)

Christensen: Can we talk about your surrealism? The mushroom poems certainly seem part of a surrealistic vision.

Contoski: I'm not sure they have anything at all to do with surrealism! My wife can tell you that in Poland I was an absolute fanatic about going mushroom picking. I like the way they taste, like going out in the woods after them.

Christensen: I guess I'm fishing a bit, seeing you as taking a mushroom and seeing the "King of the Poison Mushrooms" rather

than taking an abstraction and translating it into the world of mushrooms.

Contoski: "The King of the Poison Mushrooms" was originally about Richard Nixon, and then after trying it with and without Nixon, and talking with my wife about it, there didn't seem any reason for limiting it to Nixon.

Christensen: So that one did grow backwards from a human representation to the mushroom rather than forward.

Contoski: I'm not sure. I think I had the idea of the King of the Poison Mushrooms going around in my head and maybe something I saw on the evening news got me thinking about Nixon. The line about the beautiful deadly daughter--I was thinking of Nixon's daughters getting married.

Christensen: And "Aminitas"?

Contoski: Oh, the Aminitas! We had some mushrooms growing in our yard, and we didn't know if they were poisonous, so we took them to Professor Edwards who said they're the most poisonous mushrooms there are. And they're so beautiful and white.

Christensen: And you called them, "God's fingers." You've been accused of having a really black sensiblility in some of those things--how do you feel about that?

Contoski: I like to think of realism. I like to think it keeps me sane. "The Confessions of a Strangler"--I'm sure my good neighbors see that and they have second thoughts about me. It seems to me that one of the functions of writing is to confront these possibilities, and somehow, one deals with them in writing, and one doesn't have to deal with them in life. But that just came, the idea that--what if there was someone who thought that this was his life's work, to become a strangler? As I wrote the story it terrified me. Still does.

Christensen: The chilling thing about the story is the way strangling becomes a university major or a professional sport.

Contoski: I suppose in a way I subtitle it, "My Life Inside and Outside the Establishment." Perhaps I should add that it was also written at the time of the Vietnam War, when I wasn't thinking too highly of our institutions. I suppose that's one thing that I had considered when I was writing. Something that just came out, that it isn't the strangling that terrifies as much as the attitudes that reward it, that the protagonist was thought of as a great artist.

Christensen: Did you start working from the idea of the strangler--or did addressing the problem of the institutions come in early?

Contoski: I think addressing the institutions just worked itself into the story. I originally got the idea as a kind of joke. When Morris Edelson was editing Quixote, I thought, "God. I'd like my picture on the cover making believe I'm strangling somebody, and kind of like a Police Gazette thing--Victor Contoski, 'Confessions of a Strangler.'" And from that sort of Byronic ideal I wrote the story.

Christensen: I notice that sort of violent imagery tends to fall away by the time we get to the A Kansas Sequence poems. Is that because you're selecting a particular group of poems, or do you think your imagery has changed?

Contoski: I think the A Kansas Sequence things are meant as an entity by themselves about Midwestern life. But living in Lawrence and becoming part of Kansas might have something to do with it, and the fact that we are not at war in Vietnam. But there's the possibility of suddenly finding ourselves in a war in El Salvador, or elsewhere. I suspect that violence is a part of American life.

Christensen: What fascinates you in other people's poetry?

Contoski: I tend to like poetry that surprises me. I think that's what I like about Charlie Simic's poetry--that I'm surprised by what happens when he looks at a knife, a spoon. Contemporary poetry is trying to push the outer barriers of language, express things that can't be expressed. So many young poets have this idea of language as something pretty. We had all kinds of pretty poets in the nineteenth century, and I don't know that contemporary life is particularly pretty. It can be wonderful. It can be brutal. But one of the things it is not, is pretty. I remain suspicious of adjectives. It's as if the poet doesn't trust his verbs, his or her nouns, enough--and uses adjectives to push them.

Christensen: You trust the metaphor.

Contoski: Yes, that goes back to what I said before, language trying to express something it hasn't expressed before. Then you can't make a direct statement. You have to do some things through metaphor.

Christensen: How do you put structure in your poems?

Contoski: I structure them by reading them aloud, seeing how they sound, and then trying to get that sound on the page.

Christensen: So you get the sound as a whole, then you get that sound into lines after that?

Contoski: First of all, I read it, and then I try writing them out and seeing if the lines on the page approximate the sound as

I make it. For me, the poems start almost more with sound than they do with an idea. Ideas come in, but they're so involved with the rhythm and the music that it's hard to separate them. When I'm arranging, then I'm thinking of form. Some poems, like the "Elegy for a Poker Hand," just evolve their own form, as that one did as the cards were being dealt.

Christensen: Did that come from a real poker hand?

Contoski: No, but a lot of the experiences did. I can recall, on a ship, watching some professional gamblers play. They had the most lurid, pornographic cards, and nobody paid any attention to the backs of the cards. The final card, the 10 of diamonds--I had four cards and for the life of me couldn't think of the other one, and I woke up at 4 o'clock in the morning working on it. And at 5 o'clock, I suddenly remembered that in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" a man had committed suicide by cutting out the red pips on his cards and blowing his brains out that way. I was so happy when I found it. It seemed just the right final imagery.

Christensen: Do you find a lot of things like that, by digging around in your memory attic full of bits and pieces?

Contoski: Yes. Sometimes people recognize this. When I read about the 2 of Clubs dreaming of the cities of Barsoon, I can see people in the audience perk up when they recognize a reference to Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter on Mars series.

Christensen: Do you think there are a lot of things like that, things some scholar will footnote?

Contoski: I would hope not. It would seem to me that people don't have to recognize the reference, just the fact that Barsoon sounds the way it does gives some idea of strangeness. Nothing kills poetry as much as footnotes. I don't know if I'm always successful, but I do love straightforward language--subject/verb/object.

Christensen: May I get back to the A Kansas Sequence collection for a minute? How long a span of time do the poems cover?

Contoski: I think that I have some Kansas poems in Broken Treaties, but by my second book, Names, I left out all the Kansas poems because I was holding them back--the idea of a Kansas collection had been in the back of my head for a long time.

Christensen: What about using the historical quotations as dividers?

Contoski: As I recall, one of my students invited my wife and I to her father's farm for the weekend, and I came across some old

grammar school books about the history of the prairie and Kansas, and as I was reading, I thought, "Hey, they'll go kind of nice in that," so they came afterwards, when I was thinking how to organize the collection.

Christensen: There are quite a few poems about towns--

Contoski: Way back when we were going around reading in the poetry-in-the-schools, I recall being in Norton and Hiawatha. I was just very impressed with the towns and started writing poetry about them. And when I had a few of them, I thought, "Gees, it'd be nice if I had some more of them." But they were all based on actual experience being in the town. I can still recall Hiawatha because when we were out there it was just a beautiful fall night, the maple leaves were just all around, and it was very idyllic.

Christensen: I'd like to know more about the Leavenworth Rookery and the ghosts.

Contoski: I got that from an article in the Kansas Quarterly or the Kansas Historical Review. The Colonel actually said that the only spirits that he believed in came from a bottle, and the womenfolk in the family tried to sleep in the room and couldn't because the ghosts kept moving in. It seemed like such a nice bit of authentic ghost lore to put in the poem.

Christensen: What about the Contoski humor at the end of "The Rookery"? Were you trying to relieve a somberness, or just give your surprise at the end?

Contoski: Years ago, John Judson was teaching a course in poetry at the University of Wisconsin. Not only my poetry, but other contemporary poets. I went up there and I read. Afterwards, I talked to the students, and I was told that the way my poetry was taught, it was very, very, very bleak, and that some of the students said that they expected I would come and commit suicide in front of them or whatever. And afterwards someone told me, "You came across like a cross between Buddha and Santa Claus." I still can not sense whether that was a reference to my personality or my shape. But people who don't know me tend to see the poems as much darker than they are. Mrs. Forbes, my old Latin teacher, when I sent her the collection, wrote back and said, "I can just see you laughing all the time you're writing these things." That was a nice compliment.

Christensen: Your humor seems obvious to those of us who know you; does it bother you when people you don't know don't see it?

Contoski: No, I think what bothers me is just this idea that contemporary poetry has to deal with the absolute depths of despair, that it has to be so deadly serious.

Victor Contoski

ANIMAL LIFE ON THE GREAT PLAINS

1

Before man came to the Great Plains
there was a huge sea in the middle of America
wherein swam great monsters.

Then the Rocky Mountains rose.
The sea contracted, the water flowed away;
But the monsters remained.

They became buffalo.

2

The Indians came.
Then white men.
Then Buffalo Bill.

The monsters retreated deep under the earth
beneath Salina and Great Bend and Wichita.

They went home to their bones.

3

They lie now under the prairie
and dream of the Second Coming of water.

LEAVENWORTH

The mansions on South Broadway
settle like fat uncles
after Thanksgiving dinner.

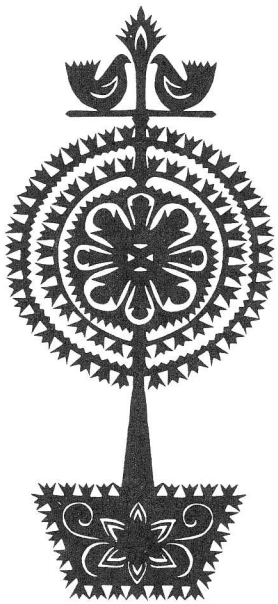
Soldiers in the fort
guard ghosts of settlers
from ghosts of Indians.

For years escaped prisoners
have thrown their grey clothes
over the white houses.

They are heavy, heavy.

So Leavenworth lies down
in the Missouri River valley
soothed by muddy water.

And rain falls on it
like dust.



And snow falls on it
like dust.

STORM IN LAWRENCE

1

The air hangs like a man.
Nothing can breathe.
Even the siren chokes.

Grass crawls into ditches
shrivels up and lies flat.

Trees put their hands
over their eyes.

Then
everything stops.

2

Lightning flexes its whip.
A scream. Crack! Scream again.

Cats dive headlong under the beds.
Bullets of hail rattle the good houses

And the wind
charges into town
like Quantrill.

ACORN SQUASH

Here it is.
The blue-black head of El Turco
the Indian guide
strangled in his sleep
by the soldiers of Coronado.

He led them onto the plains
hoping land and weather
would kill them.

They came for gold,
delicate bells that lulled kings to sleep,
fabulous cities to be plundered,
precious stones for Madrid, Paris, London.

And they found buffalo, buzzing flies,
Indians drinking from earthen bowls,
and acorn squash strewn on the ground

like the severed heads of kings.

THE ROOKERY, FT. LEAVENWORTH

The five daughters
of Colonel Pipkin
slept

one after another
in the haunted bedroom.

Something...
a presence...

At night the ghost
a little old lady
came to bed.

* * *

The colonel believed
in spirits
bourbon and water.

Wanted to sleep there himself.
Not proper, said his wife.

And the years passed.

* * *

The colonel died.
His wife died.
Their daughters died.

Their grandchildren died.

And still the poor cold ghost
little old lady
trying to get into bed.

Move over.
Move over.

All poems are from A Kansas Sequence, forthcoming from Cottonwood-Tellus.

Victor Contoski

FABLES

THE PRECIOUS PIECE OF WOOD

On the day her son was born, a mother heard the Fates prophesy that her child's life would last only as long as a certain piece of wood burning upon the hearth. She immediately quenched the fire, took out the piece of wood, and hid it in a safe place. All the time her son was growing up she cherished the piece of wood, held it close to her, talked to it at times, and sometimes even kissed it.

Then one day in the natural course of events her son committed an unpardonable outrage against his mother. Enraged, she took out the precious piece of wood and hurled it into the fire. Then she put her head in her hands and wept--not for her son whom she hated, but for the piece of wood that she loved.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Once upon a time a Beast lured a young girl named Beauty into its castle, where it fed her, clothed her, gave her untold riches, and asked for her love.

At first she refused because of its horrible appearance. It growled rather than talked. Its leering, red eyes were far too large even for its monstrous head. Shaggy hair covered its entire body, including its face; and spit and slaver dripped from its fangs. It walked on all fours, and its claws marred the fine furniture of the palace. In addition, the Beast had a strong animal smell.

In spite of Beauty's refusals, the Beast continued to ask for her hand. By and by she became used to its brutish, hairy features. She was no longer revolted at the animal smell, and at night she sometimes dreamed strange dreams.

Then one day when the Beast asked his usual question, she surprised herself by bowing her head and answering, "Yes, Beast, I will."

Immediately the Beast was changed into a handsome young prince who stepped gallantly forward and offered Beauty his arm, explaining that by loving the Beast, Beauty had freed him from an enchantment.

Then Beauty fled from him in tears. For it was indeed the Beast she loved.

THE HUMBLE SILK MERCHANT

Once upon a time there lived a humble silk merchant. He worked every day at the loom and bought and sold only at the fairest prices. "Fair is fair," he said to himself, "and I must do what I think right."

Upon hearing of him, the Emperor sent for the merchant. "You are the one honest man in my kingdom. What favor would you have of me?"

The merchant replied, "Honesty is its own reward."

"Well said," retorted the Emperor, "and now I command you to choose a casket from those before you to show the world how I value an honest man."

Three casks were brought before the merchant. One was of gold and silver; another of ivory inlaid with diamonds; and the third was made of plain wood.

"I am a simple man," said the merchant. "I will take the cask of wood."

He opened it, and it was filled with stones. The courtiers and the Emperor laughed until tears ran down their fat cheeks.

"You have chosen," said the Emperor, "as I knew you would. Go home to the scorn of your neighbors and the scolding tongue of your wife. You will live to hear your children curse you. The meek shall inherit the earth-- but not yet."

THE ENCHANTED PRINCESS

There was a young, handsome knight who rode out one day seeking adventure. He went through highlands and lowlands until he came to a beautiful city where a princess was about to sacrifice herself to an ogre. She shone in white silk, her arms more lovely than all the silver bracelets that graced them. Her hair seemed spun gold, and her eyes more blue than the deep sea. Her mouth quivered slightly, for she was almost in tears at the thought of her terrible fate.

"Wait," said the knight. "I will rescue you."

Forthwith he rode ahead of her to meet the ogre, and after a terrible battle dispatched him.

The princess bowed her head. "I am yours, if you will have me."

So the knight rode back with her to the city, and they were married the same day.

That night he entered his bride's chamber and said to her, "Beloved, all my life I have dreamed of someone lovely as you. Come into my arms and let us be happy forever."

"Wait," said the bride, "and I will show you true happiness. You must take your sword and cut my head in two."

The knight, being somewhat acquainted with enchantments, kissed his bride tenderly and took out his sword. With one mighty stroke on the top of her golden hair, he split her head down to the neck. As she was falling to the floor, there came from her head not blood--but money. Her skull was full of twenty dollar gold pieces. When the knight cut open her stomach, he found it contained pure silver, and, upon examination, the insides of her breasts were filled with pearls. The knight took out all the valuables and burned the skin.

"I am rich," he thought, "beyond my wildest dreams. The only true happiness is money."

THE ONE WHO MADE MONSTERS

Once long ago there was one who made monsters. He made them all sizes: colossal monsters, medium monsters, small monsters, and little tiny monsters that could hardly be seen. But they were all monsters. Their heads were either too big or too little. Their eyes were crooked so they could not see straight. Some had no noses, and some had huge, enormous noses, all out of proportion to their faces. Their mouths were put on lopsided, and their ears crooked. Their limbs flailed in all directions, and they lurched when they walked. Some of them tried to talk, but they could only blubber, scream, or howl. Needless to say, the one who made monsters was not too pleased.

But he kept the monsters, fed them, and made order in his laboratory. He thought for a long time about how to make a better monster.

Then one day, in a fit of inspiration, he made a monster unlike any other monster he had ever made. He still put the mouth on crooked, crossed the eyes, and got the limbs mixed up. He even bent the tongue the wrong way. But when the monster came to life, he knew that this one was different because it tried. It attempted to walk without lurching. It drooled less than the others, and it became attached to its maker. At times the one who made monsters thought he could almost understand the blubbering and howling that come from his newest creation. He felt sorry for it, and in his mind he named it The Incompetent Monster.

Encouraged by his comparative success with The Incompetent Monster, he began work on his next one more carefully. He measured the limbs for a change, instead of merely guessing at their length. He took care that the eyes matched and the nose was exactly in the middle of the face. And luckily the size of the monster turned out almost right. Perhaps he built the hips out of proportion to the rest of the body and threw in some unsightly bulges, but for him these were only minor mistakes. Indeed, he began to wonder if this creation would be a monster at all. At times it seemed almost beautiful to him.

When it first began to move, he was very pleased. It did not lurch like his other creatures but seemed to flow. The bulges became less repulsive. Its voice was soft and melodious. Its eyes seemed almost alive, but when he looked into those eyes he knew that he had made a terrible mistake. For he saw there was evil in the creature, and he knew it would use the form he gave it for evil purposes. He shuddered, but he could not find it in his heart to destroy the thing he had made. But in his mind he named it The Most Terrible Monster of All.

The one who made monsters put it in the laboratory with his other creatures, and he saw that it worked evil upon them with

its soft voice and bright eyes and bulges, particularly upon The Incompetent Monster. When he saw the cunning of The Most Terrible Monster of All, he began to fear. "I have made a beautiful thing," he said, "and it is terrible because it uses its beauty to evil purposes. I will make no more monsters."

Thereupon he went away--no one knows where. He no longer fed his monsters, and his laboratory fell into disorder. Then The Incompetent Monster and The Most Terrible Monster of All dwelt together.

And earned their bread by the sweat of their brows.

THE THOUGHTFUL FISHERMAN

Once a fisherman caught a golden fish. He took it off his hook, tossed it in the bottom of his boat, and was about to cast his line once more into the water when the fish spoke to him.

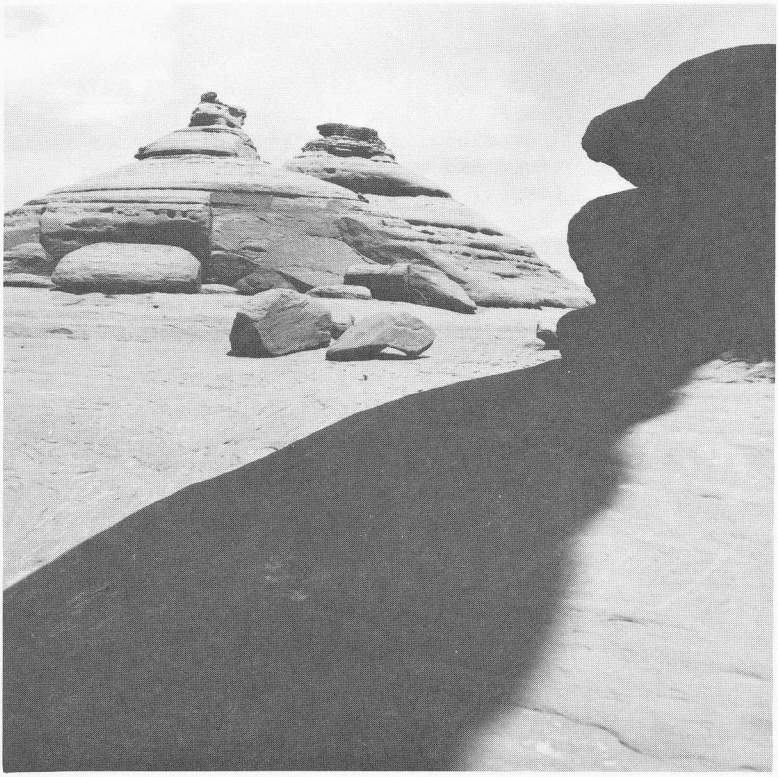
"O fortunate mortal," it said. "You have caught the King of Fishes. I will grant you three wishes if you release me."

"Aha!" said the fisherman, "I know that story. I'm supposed to wish for something ridiculous like wieners, and then I wish them onto my wife's nose, and then I've got to wish them off. You won't catch me in that trap. I'm going to consider the problem from all angles." And he sat down in his boat and thought the problem over.

He thought so long the King of Fishes died in the bottom of his boat for lack of water. The rope to his anchor rotted, and he drifted out to sea. His wife died of old age, believing her husband had been carried off by pirates. Soldiers burned his humble cottage, crucified his son, and raped his daughter. Still he sat in his boat lost in thought.

If you go down to the sea at dusk and look far out into the distance, you may make out a battered boat drifting aimlessly over the ocean. In it sits the old fisherman--thinking.

These fables first appeared in "The Fabulist" in The North American Review from 1966-70.



POETRY

John R. Levene

BLUE SPECKLED FLEA

In answer to your inquiry, I must inform you
that our reporting time varies from two hours
to eternity plus one day (Haiku takes longer).

Although we have published established authors
including such celebrities as Shymkee Bransky,
Gilpin Fligeleeni, robbie MCfenerbee, and droggs Lenigan,
our bias is toward potentially immortal poets,
and hence we prefer publishing our own work.

Because of a nine-year backlog of our manuscripts
we are not soliciting material.
With the possible exception of occasional translations
of works from Upper Latvia and Outer Canthus,
which are especially welcome, we positively will not
consider any other submitted writing.

Yes, your observation is quite correct,
we were formerly known as Green Feathered Larynx,
but as a result of confusion with a Rock Group
insensitively adopting the same name,
our popular success became somewhat intolerable.
We could virtually feel our tarnished image
turned to virdigris.

With dissolution of our affiliate
"non-co-operative" chapbook printers, (Chapped Hands and Lips,
Inc.,) we have
entered into elegantly subdued management.
With the new name, reflecting an exclusive prolific image,
we expect to regain our rather select circulation,
currently at twenty-three.

Yours sincerely,

BLUE SPECKLED FLEA.

Nikki Harmon

REPORT

Since you left me to die
things go much easier.
I stretch my legs
                in heaven now,
taking my dog for long walks
through green residential sections,
down to the pier, where the water
bashes
    on the rotten piling
and the barnacles cling for dear...
Life...
       that's how it is,
except there isn't any dog.
And sometimes the moon comes up whole,
hangs on its own in space,
making an O of surprise
                    dumbface
blunt as a nickel.

J.B. Goodenough

THE OLD MAN TO THE CHILDREN

See, said the old man, swallow
The apple-seeds and don't you know
You'll have an apple-tree
Growing in your insides forever
And the branches will find
Their way out every which way,

You'll have kerry-pippins knobbing
Under you hair, or russets
Banging in your ears, or great
Gobfuls of winesaps, and you will
Be stretched upwards, arms
Twisted out, grown crooked,

Said the old man, you will
Spit cider and pee vinegar and
Roots will vein in your legs
Bedding in earth, and after a while
You will stay put like it or not
While your leaves rot and fall.

    Quiet. They chucked the cores
    Away, watching the bees
    Crawling over his eyes. Run.

HOUSE AT THE END OF THE ROAD

It is not wise to ask.

You have heard she is
Decent folk, but then
You cannot believe all you hear.

Besides, she knew your
Grandfathers; think then
What she must know about you.

If she tells you to get
Off her land, leave. If
She asks you to stay, leave.

What dries on her roof,
What swims in her brine,
What hangs in her smokehouse,

It is not wise to ask.

Michael Smetzer

A LONG STREET

When I am walking at night and my shadow stops
it is too late to turn back
I scuff my shoes on the concrete

Around the water tower nighthawks are dipping for moths
I gaze at the lights
and there is nowhere to go

I sit on the curb and stare down the street
It is a long street of houses and yards and parked cars
There is nowhere it will take me

My shadow lies on the concrete like paint
It has stuck to my shoes
and I can't kick free

Across the street a dog barks through a fence
No one comes to the door
He sniffs and wags his tail

In my pockets I have four dimes and a set of keys
but there is nothing to buy
and no door my keys will open

THE WART

When you wake up in the morning
     your nose itches
When you look in the mirror
     there is a wart
Everywhere you go people glance quickly
and look sick
You try to hide it with your hand
but every time you touch it
     it grows

So you go to the doctor and he cuts
     it off
In a week it has grown back
larger
You wear a band-aid over your nose
     all day
People look at you like a sewer

Your lover could not stand the band-aid
and has left town
The note saying good-bye is written

to your wart
No one can remember your name

You are "the man with the wart" "the wart man"
or simply "the wart"
Pranksters leave fresh lemons on your door
Nothing you try takes it off

The wart covers all your nose
Women scream
Children call you "monster"
You only go out at night

It spreads around your eyes
It has broken up into many scaly lumps

A plastic surgeon cuts away your face
but the roots have reached into your brain
Warts come up along the edges of the plastic
They are filling in your ears

A preacher tells you to pray
You take his hands and are born again
to Jesus
The next day his hands sprout warts
He does not return

One morning you are blind
Warts are growing on your eyes

You can no longer hear
so you lie in bed and dream
In your dream you are a handsome knight
A princess kisses you and her lips
burst out in warts
You kiss her and all your warts pass
onto her body

When you wake up you are well
Only dry husks are scattered in your bed
You are weak but joyful

At noon your lover returns
covered with warts
She has come back to embrace you

Scott Cairns

ANOTHER ELEGY

--after James Wright

Any morning, you could wake
to the quick dissolve to a sad dream.
Beside you could be sleeping a woman
or a man, we, all of us, need
not to rest alone. So, if you wake
you'll find that other face beside you,
which in sleep becomes more sad
than you had known. Everything we write
turns into elegy, and every elegy
slips into our own. I say this now
because we all are dying, and dying
want some words for setting.

SO WE ARE CAUGHT HERE

as if each morning were a waking
to the shock of wind off the bay
and all the whining of sea birds
held the quick alarm of human calling.

I've seen those birds and heard
their crying through the thick morning
of the bay; I've imagined women
frantic through the fog, their white arms

tearing through the fog's white wall
to find somewhere in water a few yards out,
the child asleep beyond waking, rocked
in the sure grip of the hidden bay.

NATURE TALK

Sit back and listen.
It's time the lesson
were taken up again,
here, surrounded
by the careful talk
of trees and wind,
the hard fact of rock
pushed up from thick soil.

The lesson then: Rabbits

are as prolific here as anywhere;
and porcupines, though not overly abundant,
unconsciously keep the world
in porcupines. Pigeons, I am told,
have, up close, an odor
tolerable only to other pigeons.
And skunks, despite themselves, happily increase.

BACK THEN TO THE TIME

when there was less difference
between you and a deer
than now between you and me:
If we were unhappy
we simply changed, fell in
with what the land needed. And if we
for some reason wanted to see
in darkness, we closed our eyes
so that somewhere inside
the light blinked on to show us
what we wanted. But given
what we have come to call
the world, we might expect
there would be change. In this place
all gaps grow wider; we are somehow
different, and the deer have nothing
to do with us. Simple light
is hard to come by. Brother, listen:
The dark time may be
just ahead; I don't think we
can change anything.

for Stafford

Louis Forster

EARLY DEATH

In the hot sun
snow leaves the Rockies
and melds with the Platte
gutting canyons
as slosh lakes
contour the plains

and ice
cracks
on the Monongahela
and Red
and the Tennessee

and all
run brown and raw
washing deltas
and brown-white rock
of cut shores

where snared banners
of fish entrails and tails
wave
to empty bladders
bobbing out-of-season
down the Mississippi.

PREHUMAN

Two antique dragon flies
one with wings tipped
blue, the other red

met on a barren
fallen branch
beside a muddy river

and sat
and sat
and all afternoon sat
by the shimmering water
never flittering, never moving
until the red sunset

then they flew
tip to tip
a purple hue.

Donald Levering

THUNDER MESA

in the sheer rock wall
a single fissure
jagged as lightning
admits mortals to the mesa rim

from here the canyons
fall away like great
crankling gashes

the lichens feed
on the colors of sleet
crystals ticking
boulders split by
juniper and pinon

far beneath the memory
of nautilus tattooed
in stone
cactus roots strike water

here a bleached limb
is a goat-horn
this the plain
where thunder dances

these the charred and
palsied limbs
root-balls flaring
drummed out of the rock

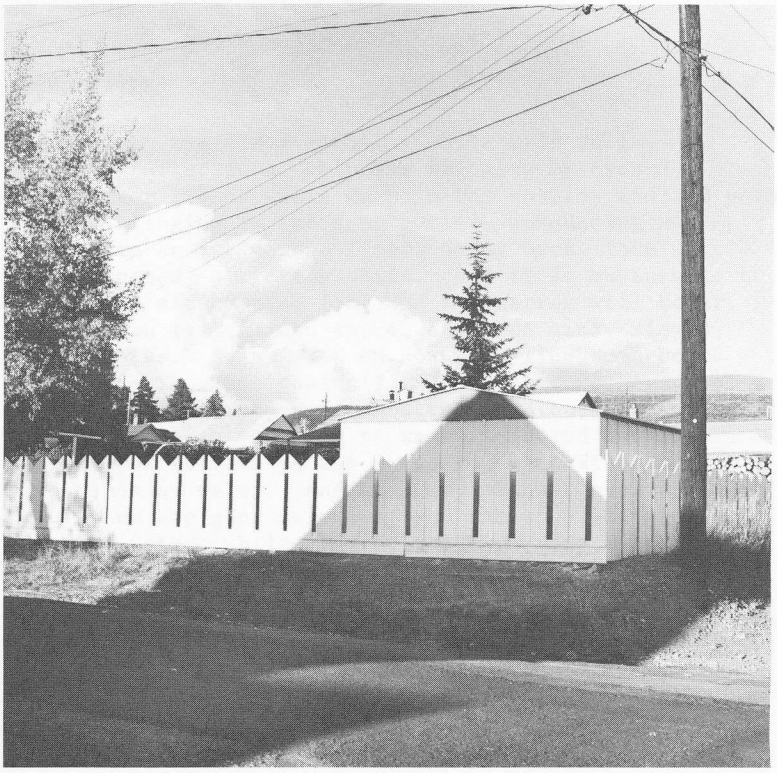
Jane Coleman

THE RAINMAKER

I was introduced to a rancher
in the lobby of the Copper Queen Hotel.
He took off his hat (they all do that,
making me want to curtsey),
and he said, "We measured two inches
up Turkey Creek yesterday."

Rain. Clouds. Water.
Their lack erases thought,
forms all conversation.
On high mesas Indians dance
draw lightning in blowing sand.
Here, the last rainmaker
with pinwheels, smoke sticks, bells,
stands, singing, on a stone
and conjures clouds.

I think I could walk in there naked
and no one would notice.
But if I said, "Rain."
If I said, "The tank rose ten feet
overnight, and the wash is running
like a highway,"
then all eyes would find me.
Then they'd say, "Hey! It's been
five years since Cottonwood overflowed.
You want to try our place next?"



Jared Carter

TREADING WATER

In the pool at the old Y--echoing white-tile walls,
glassy reflections, chlorine stinging my eyes--
The instructor stands waist deep in the shallow end and points
at me clinging to the scum gutter, announcing now
It is my turn to let go and float, on my back, face up,
arms spread, perfectly still. And it is my turn to know
How this body already too long and too narrow will hover,
as though fallen into space, and then sink, slowly,
Into the depths. As he went on down the line some boys
could do it, some couldn't. But they were boys.
It took me ten more years of unbuttoning blouses and
unhooking bras to begin to know flesh and how much
It weighs, how it fits on the skeleton, what it promises
to hands or water. And to know, without even asking,
Which of them are good swimmers, and can stay afloat
in the water, while others, whatever they might say,
Seldom go near it, except to get tanned. In the company
of a woman who swims well, whose arm to my touch
Is as familiar as that encountered in the back seats of cars
on summer nights at drive-ins, or parked by the lake--
I once again remember the different strokes, how
to relax, and let go, and make the water work for me;
She comes swimming toward me now, joyous in the knowledge
that she cannot fall, her hair spread in a dark halo,
And we meet, in the deepest part, and tread there, slowly,
almost motionless, and are borne up together.

Neurine Wiggin

PHOTOGRAPHS OF THEIR TRIP

For two weeks he snipped little pieces
out of castles, Renaissance guild halls.
Even while they were driving in fog,
lost, arguing, he hid his thoughts
like a catseye marble tucked in his pocket.

At Cologne, while she sipped expresso,
wrote a poem about earwigs,
he found their antennae
perched on the cathedral spires
feeling for the stars.
On the Rhine, he surprised god
dumping sunshine through the clouds.
He caught the Alps climbing up behind her,
handed his camera to a tourist,
hugged her close, smiled.
CLICK
After all, they were dressed alike.

Now, visiting their closest friends,
he spreads out the photos like a road map.
They bend their heads, cooing,
as if finding buttons they had lost.
Sometimes, he grins,
"It takes a hundred shots
 to make one good picture."

But she looks now as if each photo
offers a glimpse of Christmas through a keyhole.
She opens the door.

Once more, she is standing
in the formal Versailles woods,
drinking Vichy water, tired, wanting to go.
He is bent on one knee,
watching each golden leaf fall from soldierly trees,
patient as an artist applying tiny flecks of gilt.

They say goodbye to their friends.
She gathers all these moments into her purse.

They had come in separate cars.
Ahead of her he drives slowly,
like a grazing animal trailing a calf.

Just that--his implied awareness--
turns the parkway trees into sculptures.
She is pinned like a prized butterfly

to that velvet moment.

He slows to a light.
All their past catches up with the present.
The light turns green
CLICK
CLICK
He moves ahead, she follows.

J. R. Kangas

THE PROMISE

Ear to the pillow
she heard the snow
crunching a mile away
beneath his steady boots.
He was coming back
finally after all this
treacherous time, coming
to keep the promise
forgotten by the moon
in its constant purging,
a cobweb in the rafter
missed in the cleaning
spring after spring
craving light, the broom,
the fall fly bombing
the attic. He would be
closer now, and in
the time it took her
to wheedle sleep,
he would be within
gravel shot, and she
would smile him the last
few inches home, as she
did every night,
her palms to the sheet
smoothing the weave,
burning prints in it.

Jeff Gundy

IN THE SMALL TREES

With the leaves almost gone
the world is drier and clearer,
the rag of underwear left
from some hillside tryst

waves openly through a dozen trees.
A woodpecker startles
through the thin net of branches.

I belong here,
with what's left
of love and summer.

I lean on a small tree
feel it give, push a little,
and rotted through it snaps
off at the ground

EXHORTATION AND EXPLANATION #1

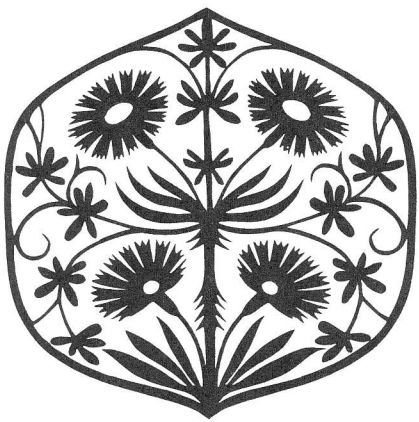
Do something lazy.
Trip over your pantlegs,
shuffle your feet. You're an
adult. No one will tell you
you can't or take away your
supper. Do something
really lazy. Resign from
sex, abandon existentialism,
go into hiding. It's all
up to you and the privacy
of your home, nine times
out of ten nobody will
report to the law anyway:
stop shining your shirts,
adopt static electricity,
eat your brain.
Do something lazy.

2.
Carry a tape measure
on your belt for half
a day sometimes. It will give you
a sense you have things
under control. Between it
and your electronic wristwatch
you have thousands

of categories. Use them all.

3.
Most of the stories
are only worth telling
to neighbors and children
who will not confuse
what happened
with any thing outside
the pure event,
who will move through
the streets afterward
with no interest in
your categories
and your learning,
no sense of
responsibility
for what it means
or what it doesn't.

They may remember
a vaguely dissonant music
as from a movie
they saw years ago:
they may turn to each other,
searching for the plot.



Patrick Worth Gray

WATCH

Her short blue gown
Is open. For whom? I stare
Into the moon and try
Not to think of the light coming on
In her room. Still, nothing
May occur. Hands may close
Only on cups of coffee,
And that rustle may be only
Her blue gown closing.

Ruth Moritz Elliott

WHEN THE MAN FROM ENGLAND SMILED

the word that is red
crossed to every peninsula

all day long
cherry tomatoes
in grandma's garden
forgot their skins

the pomegranate
I held in my head
spilled its seeds

and red-winged blackbirds
on the bloody nice roadside
sliced my heart

into tiny
 edible
 pieces.

Brad Comann

AT DUSK: DURING HARMATTAN

> In parts of Northern Nigeria, if you strike a person on the road with your car, it is advisable not to stop. Instead, you should proceed to the nearest police station and report the incident, for unless you speak Hausa, you may be beaten to death at the site of the accident.

Your passport is in the glove compartment
Along with your wallet, an address book,
And a world atlas. You have been driving
For a week now, through the North,
Through the bluish-grey exhaust
And the desert dust of Harmattan.

You should have left for the Capital an hour
Earlier. The roads and the traffic circles
Are indistinct: the afternoon has passed
Although the evening hesitates. All you
Want to do is find a place to stop and rest,
To eat salt bread and fresh groundnuts.

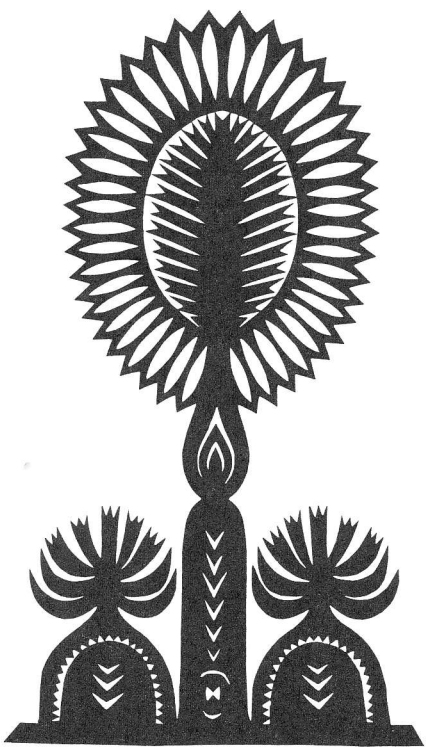
When suddenly, a figure too tall and slow
To be a goat runs in front of you.
A harsh sound follows. Your headlight breaks,
The antenna snaps off and the wheel pulls
To the left for a moment, then straightens out
Behind the car, in the mirror, people
Are swarming around, in anger, but you know
Not to stop. You do not know a word of Hausa.

The police station is near a post office.
You go inside and like a biographer
You report the details of what happened
To a clerk who fills in a form and tells
You in Hausa, then in English, to wait
Where you are. After standing all night
In a doorway, the same clerk returns
To say, "You may go now. That is all."
Outside, you start up your car once again
But now, at dawn, the landscape is as dim
As it was in the early evening; at dusk.

Carl Lindner

READYING THE SOIL

Winter's grip
loosens like a grudge.
The earth again
accepts a spade.
These days I hoard
orange rinds,
potato peels,
the flayed skin,
the broken shells.
The boy who gathered
bottles for deposit
counts the seasons now.
Early spring is one.
When the other comes,
plant me
in my birthday suit,
coffin me in skin
alone. Leave me
full of blood,
lymph, piss and sperm
and nothing more;
spare me
the embalmer's hand--
the copping of a feel
in a subway crowd.
In this bed I birth
shoots like pale fingers
stretching to light
so white
it must be felt.



Paulette M. Roeske

AFTER MAGRITTE

On this late November walk by the lake,
I meet a coho half-buried in sand.
Iris and pupil, pouting lips, each small tooth
is human. If I were daring,
I would discover unscaled legs
muscular from arguing their way
through the great lake.

I look closer for a sign: a raised fin,
an almost imperceptible lift of breast,
some hint of kinship. I have no proof.
Just the painter who warmed his palette
with one dab of sienna; then,
here on this beach, the covered salmon.

HILL HUNT

Shovels raze the ground
where the spotted mare
dropped her foal last spring.
It slipped like a hand from a pocket,
almost an accident,
and curled wet under the oak
uprooted now
after three hours work.

It is not easy to keep this body
moving across the flattened hills
with an eye on the rising future.
Suppose I arrive to find
the river dried in its bed
with only the flat rocks left,
slick as old bones in a closet.

Patricia Traxler

A SUBJECTIVE MOVIE REVIEW

I sat on the couch watching
The Deerhunter on TV
while across the room
the peony bouquet fell apart
petal by petal
the pink meat landed
with thumps on the table
I was with your hungry brother
keeping my distance
while he moved closer

and you were somewhere
else with her
your old lover
taking a chance
Robert DeNiro put the gun
to his head
there was one bullet
in it he put
the gun to his head
a wild gamble
and blew my brains out

Your brother left
in a huff at 2AM
the table was covered
with peony petals
you were still somewhere with her
and Robert DeNiro
had stood all he could

Gayle Elen Harvey

PAIN

Late at night, it chimes and clatters up and down
her back-bone--
Summoned,
legs twitch.
Blue-white needles sweat and gloat against her thighs,
but god and codeine aren't
enough--
It's everywhere, her
pain,
this toad-gray, winter coat she can't unbutton,
take off.

Lyn Lifshin

IRRITATION

starts off small
8 balls of sweet
fur you can
hold in your palm
so small if they
peed you
wouldn't notice
you go out for
a few days
suddenly there's
8 large snarling
tom cats pissing
in corners
tearing the couch
It's may or june
Before you open
the apartment door on the 4
family unit
where all the
windows are
wide open you
are knocked down

Jean Humphrey

FIREFLIES

I

Remember when we
slept in the hay?
We lay there in the shadows
of the huge barn.
Jeri said there were snakes,
and Chris said she thought she saw a rat.
We believed them because
they were older.
Fireflies
were our friends for the night.
They glowed as a nightlight
in the jar we had found for their
safekeeping.
Julie cried because
she thought a spider had bitten her
but we just laughed.
Julie was younger;
it didn't matter very much.
Snuggling down in the hay,
we shared secrets.
Remember our promise
to be friends forever and ever
and to always understand each other
the way we did that night?

II

We were awakened by the morning.
I had two spider bites,
you had one,
and Julie was already in the house.
And we almost wept
because our fireflies had died.

Layle Silbert

OLD FRIENDS ARE BEST

On a day sunny down to the ground
looking for friends
I try the cashier
at the Waverly
I know the lipstick
I know the hair
She's always glad
to take my money

The Waverly Theatre is warm
as home & dark
as the closets in it
I watch my movie friends
play their game
I know the lipstick
I know the hair

In the empty seats
Verna sits then Uncle Max
my mother my father
other dead
We take up our quarrels
Old friends
the best

Greg Kuzma

BIKER
for Jeff

He was not particular what he ate
or where, from sleeping, he woke--
to work in the sun another day--
hearing his name called--
the muscles of other men sheened in sweat--
to be hungry, to go and sit down
over a cup of "joe,"
to have some bucks, and a girl
and a bike that up some hill went fast
to blaze at twilight
turn like an unforgiving beast
into the soft curve of the slope
burn in the dark
burn, glow, throb
in the numbed midnight.

J.W. Rivers

CLASS TRIP: ON FIRST SEEING FOUR PIRANHAS IN SHEDD AQUARIUM

We can't feed them crackerjack,
say the signs.
Not even a juicy nightcrawler
from Jackson Park.

Wally Jackson says they're mean mothers.

Six of them could eat a horse,
Jack Goodman says,
hoofs and all.

John Vinke wants to put some
in the bathtub with his sister.

Why not bring her here, says Wally,
and throw her in the tank
so we can watch.

The keeper comes
with mouth-size cubes of meat.
The piranhas strike
with the razor silence of guerillas.

Charles Wagner

SLEEPING ALONE

The warped sound track
of the late show Western
trails off to a test pattern:
once again the homesteaders
fight off the cattle barons.

A pile of wrinkled clothes
has settled by the bed
like a basset hound,
and in the darkness
cold blue sheep
leap from the digits
of a clock-radio.

Switch on the electric blanket.
The dial lights up,
an all-night cafe
waiting for a lonely man
to wander in
and take a seat
at the counter.

William Page

GOING AROUND

Again and again the small plane circles
in the sky that never ends.
My brother yelled contact
and swang on the prop
while Dad said, Switch on: Begin.
I pulled up the door
that shut us in.
We took off
from a dusty field,
and looking back
I could see the straight tracks
left by the two small wheels.
Below us the windsock
had a hard on, surrounded
by fence rows and fields.
The wooden prop chattered
like a crazy aunt
against the buffeting wind.
The cylinders' heat
was all we needed
to keep us warm.
We stalled at the sun
and dived with a squeal.

The lace napkins my mother says
she'll leave to her daughters-in-law,
the silver to my oldest sister.
On the handles are designs
like revolving propellers.
And now as I look
at the past through a plastic
windshield I hear the droning motor
humming on and on and on.

Jack Hand

TO MY FATHER

You ravened through my childhood
Like a black wolf--
I played the knife game
For you until every finger
Was bleeding.
And ended the game
With my hand pinned
To a pine table with six inches
Of Italian steel.
Now you walk a warm beach
Far from the kestrel winds
Of home, following the flight
Of marsh hens and egrets
With you hard, blue mariner's eyes--
When I try to follow,
The razor clam shells
Slice the hardened skin
From my feet and the raw flesh
Leaves a trail
That connot reach you.
A father at forty,
I feel the terror
That drove you--
And play the knife game still,
My fingers bloody,
My hand pinned
To the certain center of pain,
Struggling to keep
My dark, sharp shadow
From my son's eyes.

Judith Sornberger

LOOKING FOR MY FATHER IN PHOTOGRAPHS

The picture we remember when we look
through photographs is one
that no one took--that time at dinner
when I refused to eat my peas
and you, Father, stuffed them up my nose.
Even after that I believed that,
in your case, salesman meant someone
who helps, someone who instructs
and demonstrates, never someone who pushes.

There are no photographs of you
walking furniture store floors
in suit and tie twelve hours a day
six days a week for sixteen years.
And thank God there are none
of the rooms you helped create.
Customers said you had good taste,
but finally they made their own decisions,
and the sturdy, simple lines of Early
American tables were embarrassed
too often by French Provincial chairs.
What could you do? You grimaced
and wrote out the ticket.

There were too many years we took
from you and never saw quite who
stood behind the camera. Smiling,
you clicked off the years as we grew
faster than your paychecks
into party dresses, formals, caps and gowns,
wedding gowns. When we brought home the boys
we meant to marry, how could they
ever have been worthy of those years?
Still, you hid your grimace, shook hands,
posed in your blue suit next to the bride.

Until now I hadn't noticed how rarely
you appeared in these pictures before
we had gone. After the weddings
you show up naked to the waist, thickened
in the belly, a bald man on the beach
at Mazatlan. Your arm is bent to hold
a shirt flung over your shoulder--
behind you now like the furniture store days.

And here's another one taken last year

on a fishing trip. You're standing
sunburnt on a riverbank, one arm extended
out beyond our view. You're laughing
in the picture as if all the way from there
you can tell that I will never see the fish.

William Hilton

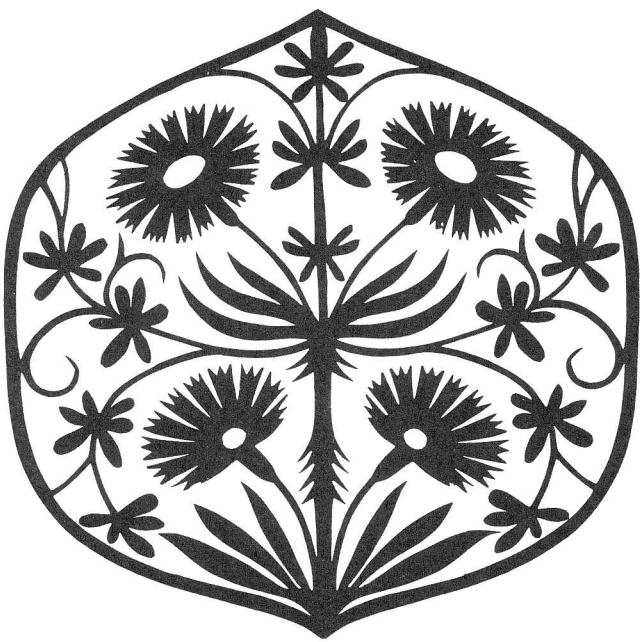
LITTLE JANET

Janet is thirteen
Tight with meanness
And ways of making one
Attend her dreary
ME'ing. At six
She saw, she said,
Blue suns and acorns
Red as pomegranates:
Was taken to
An opthomologist who
Looked inside her head;
Saw nothing there but I's.
"She'll see better"
He said, "if we poke out
Her I's," but Janet
Squalled and held
Her breath until they
All agreed to let her
Keep them in her head.
For seven years she saw
Such strange and ugly
Sights as make one faint,
Until this morning when
Janet was thirteen and two
Short men in white came round
To gather Janet. She
Pretended she could not
See them; they left and I
Caught the snicker when
She said (quietly to herself)
"I'm too smart for them."
Janet is thirteen and can't
See anyone else but Me.

William Hilton

BIRTHRIGHT

"Grandma," I called her,
But tried to hide
The blood we held between.
She lived as though
Hell might have thermostats,
In a fluid, dark,
Incessant rage
Without a center. Hate
Fell from her as icebergs
From the warming edge
Of Greenland fall
To chill a guiltless sea.
I called her "Grandma" and
Over that terrible distance
Still feel the cold.



Rodney Torreson

DOING CHORES IN THE DARK

While doing my chores
I had no good reason,
my father insisted,
for fearing the dark

but that evening a tractor
drove itself crazy
choking and coughing
over the ruts
charging around
the oatbin and crib

delirious with lights
I had, that moment
before dropping my pails
to head for the house,
all the reasons I needed
for running.

Michele Wolf

WHEN THE LAST CHILD LEFT

She doesn't notice how the carpet
Has faded, how the years have passed,
The house as quiet as winter.
She dusts the piano.
When the last child left,
She knew he would never return.

The pile of mail unanswered.
At the kitchen table,
She tastes the familiar
Scorch of hot tea,
The cat on her lap, dozing.
Today she must mow the lawn.

She carefully unfolds a yellow
Napkin beside her saucer, spills out
The jar of baby teeth,
Grazes them with her fingertips,
Their tiny rough crowns.
Little bones, they cost her
Only a quarter, each one.

Jeff Worley

POSTCARD TO MR. CHAS BRANUM

May 14, 1912

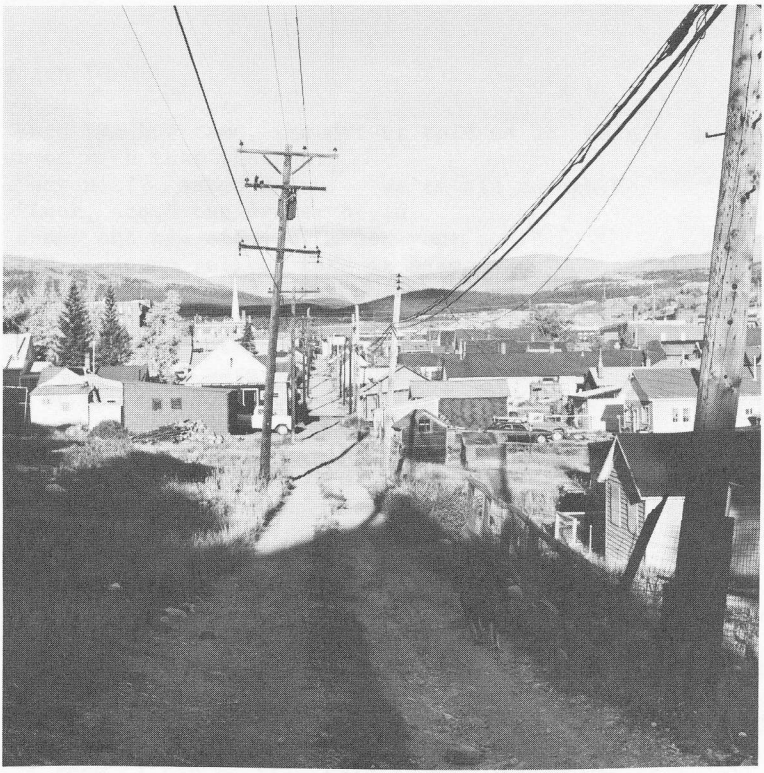
Hello Chas:- I red
your

cards all O.K. I am doing
fine. Those girls have all
quit writeing to me
up at Atlanta I guess
I will have to send them
some stamps If you
see any of them tell
them I got shot and nearly
died and see what they
will say, ans soon--
Lorne

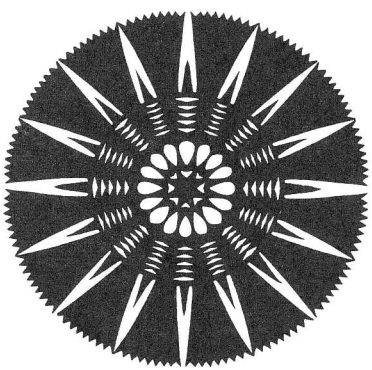
POSTCARD TO MRS. H. KREBS

Feb. 23, 1910

Dear aunt I thought I would
drop a few lines to let you now
that mamma is not of her senses
anny mor the way she is talking
she is allwais talking out of her
mind wen wee ask her how she is
fealing she wound hardly anser
us and she allwais pull her covers
of of herself from sunday on she
has been kind of out of her mind
but we didn't notice it so close that
she was so bad she don't say a
word anny more unless we ask
her som thing and then she all
wais talks about some thing ells
about someting we don't ask her.
We have set up with her to night
but ther was no neede to set up
with her I guess this is all
From Anna Hildebrandt



FICTION



Rod Kessler

BENNY AND I

When the bus came, the driver told us he wasn't going to let us on with that shotgun.

"Why not?" asked Benny. "We're old enough."

"Look, son," the driver began.

Benny cut him off-- "I'm not your son!"

"Okay, young fellow, take it easy. Now you see all those folks on the bus? You bring a shotgun on and you'll scare them out of their wits."

We looked into the bus. I could see eight or ten people, dressed like they were coming back from church. They stared at me and Benny, which isn't surprising considering the big deal the driver was making.

Benny and I had been waiting at the bus stop for more than an hour, trying to keep warm. It was Sunday morning, after we had finished Benny's route. Benny had struck matches to his pocket warmer, but the wind was too strong. When he finally got it going, it was too hot to hold for more than a couple of seconds, even with gloves. Benny said it was sometimes that way when he did his route early--it would be so windy that his eyes would tear, and then the tears would freeze on his cheeks. But when the pocket warmer got going, it was too hot. Benny said someday I could take over his route.

"Listen," continued the driver, "why don't you let me take that piece apart for you--I'll bet the stock comes--"

"I know. I can do it," said Benny. Benny wouldn't let the driver touch the shotgun. He snapped it open at its elbow and jiggled with it for a minute, and the wooden part came away from the barrel.

The driver said he was glad we'd worked it out, but Benny said "You mean you're glad you got your own way." Then we sat on the bus with our khaki bags and orange hats and Benny's broken-down shotgun. It was ten o'clock, according to Benny's watch, which still ran pretty well. Keney Cove would be the last stop.

Benny was older than me and bigger, and he showed me how to do things. One time we tried hiking to Bradley Field, thinking to hitch a ride on one of those private planes. Instead, we ended up seeing the inside of the Windsor Locks police station. I couldn't keep walking. I got so tired I decided to sit down along the road and stick out my thumb. A man picked me up. He was an off-duty cop. He stopped for Benny, too, when he caught up with him down the highway. Benny said to him, "Why don't you mind your own business?" so instead of taking us to the airport, he took us to the police station.

Benny didn't get angry at me for sticking out my thumb. He joked about it later, after his mom drove out from Hartford and rescued us. Benny's mom didn't think it was a joking matter. "He's just twelve years old," she said, meaning me, "so it's up

to you to keep an eye out for him." Benny's mom looked like Andy Devine on television, and I wasn't used to her being sore and yelling. I was used to her handing us chocolate candy and letting us do whatever we pleased. She let Benny have all kinds of things, so long as he earned the money himself. He even had a genuine World War II bayonet with real blood stains on it. But this time she went on and on about my being just twelve and how if either of us boys had a father to look after us we wouldn't get into scrapes like that.

If either of us had a father to look after us, we probably wouldn't need to take the bus to go hunting in Keney Cove. I had never gone hunting before but Benny had. His shotgun had checker-patterned carvings on the wood. Benny bought it with money from his route--he got it at Sears.

Benny had the hunting permit, but he said once we got into the woods I could shoot. I was looking forward to that, firing a real gun. Benny warned me that it would kick, but I knew I could stand it. I'd seen it plenty of times before on television.

Benny was pretty sure we'd find something to hunt. You got to hunt squirrels, rabbits, quails, pheasants--things like that, and it was perfectly okay, you wouldn't get into any trouble, so long as you didn't shoot more than the limit. We had a little book that told the limits. I thought it would be fine if we hunted a pheasant or two. Two would be best--one for each of our moms. I asked Benny if he'd ever tasted a pheasant but he hadn't. He thought it probably tasted like chicken, but better because you hunted for it. I could picture handing the bird to mom and seeing her smile and slide it into the oven. Benny explained that you had to pluck a pheasant first, then clean out its guts--and then sometimes you had to pick the shot out of it. I figured that two rabbits would be maybe less trouble than pheasants.

When the bus reached the end of the line, we were alone with the driver. As we went out the door, I made a fart sound. Benny laughed and said that was pretty good. He also said he hoped there was a different driver on the bus when we were ready to go home.

Keney Cove is a flooded-over bend in the Connecticut River. Woods creep right up to the water, which looked as still as ice, as though it were thinking about being ice, and as you walked down along the bank you could see fields behind the woods--fields of snow in the winter, but corn fields or shade tobacco all summer long. Benny said they grow cigar tobacco out here, the best in the world. My dad smoked big cigars before he died. Benny didn't know if his dad does or doesn't. He didn't care either. His dad and mom couldn't get along and his dad left them when he was only two. So he doesn't remember things about his dad.

Here and there the ground was marshy and my shoes got wet. I was walking on the inside, closer to the water. Benny walked with the gun slung across his chest pointing away from the water and me-- Benny was careful when he pointed it, even when it wasn't loaded.

When we got far enough into the woods so that we couldn't see the bus stop behind us any more, we decided to try out the shotgun. Benny had ten shells in his bag. He took off his glove and loaded one in. I took off my glove too, and he let me hold another. It was longer than my thumb and made out of green plastic formed into a tube for the shot and powder. There was a metal cap that read "Remington Peters 16 GA." I thought that meant they were made in Georgia. Benny said, "Could be."

He pointed to a clump of branches about twenty feet away and said to imagine that's the bus driver. I pictured him standing there in that green jacket, with his thumbs in his belt. Benny shot. A bunch of shredded leaves fell to the ground. Neat! I asked if I could try, and he said okay but only one. We wanted to save our ammo for hunting.

Benny loaded it for me and showed me how to hold it. I kept the butt firm against my shoulder and sighted with the bead up front. It was hard to keep both eyes open. Benny said to get him in the head, so I aimed right between where the eyes would be and I hit him, blam! I stood against the kick, and Benny said, "Frankie, you're a natural."

After the shots, everything sounded especially quiet. Benny said we'd have to go off a ways because the noise probably scared off the animals. We decided to sit down and eat the sandwiches that his mom had fixed for us. That way we'd give the animals some time to get over it and come back.

Benny's mom worked at the diner near Aetna on Farmington Avenue. Sometimes she worked at night. She was a cook, which is maybe why she and Benny are both so big. My mom taught people how to dance at the Arthur Murray studio. She also sold Compton's Encyclopedia door to door. Compared to Benny's mom, mine was thin. She was a lot younger, too. But I doubt that she'd ever let me have a shotgun.

When we started out again, Benny explained that we had to be quiet. He showed me how to walk like an Indian. I kept my eyes on the tree branches, looking for squirrels and quails, but I didn't see anything but blue sky through the branches. My feet felt cold. I could see a field through the trees on higher ground away from the river. It looked sunny and warmer over there, and Benny agreed we should hunt there after I told him a few time that my feet were freezing.

In the field yellow corn stalks chopped to the height of my knee broke through the snow crust. They threw shadows that looked golden and warm onto the snow. There was no way you could walk without crunching, though. We just crunched into the field and the sun on my face felt good. Benny said there might be pheasant in a place like this. I kept my eyes open for pheasants.

We didn't go far before we saw some other hunters. Four men walking side by side slowly crossed the field ahead of Benny and me. They saw us, too, and stood still, waiting for us to get close. I said to Benny that maybe they'd let us hunt with them. Benny just laughed as though he doubted it and said they'd probably tell us to keep the hell out of their way.

"You boys fire those two shots before?" asked a tall man wearing yellow-tinted sunglasses.

"Seen anything?" asked another, a guy with a funny moustache.

"Could we hunt with you for a while?" I asked.

The man with the moustache said sure, just so long as we both stayed plunk in the middle and Benny kept the barrel pointing downrange.

"We know how to hunt," said Benny.

"And you boys keep real quiet, too. If you see anything, just give a little whistle."

I figured for certain we'd get something now.

The men fanned out on both sides of us, and we stalked across the field. Benny shushed me before I could ask a single question. All the guns were pointed forward. I wished I had one.

"Look at her go!" one of the men shouted. "Yee ha!" Four shotgun blasts ripped down from the silent field. There, maybe fifty yards ahead, a big rabbit on the run flipped over, tail over head.

"Hey, nice shooting!" one of the men yelled.

Benny hadn't even raised his gun to aim.

The men made it over to the rabbit before we did. They were chuckling, and one man, the one in the yellow glasses, held it up by the ears. "You boys want a little hunting trophy?"

I held open the wide mouth of the khaki bag on Benny's back, and the man dropped the rabbit in. I told them we'd go home and stuff it. "Certainly has enough holes to stuff it through," said the man.

Benny and I headed back and the four men went on without us. They were passing a flask and joking around. I couldn't believe they let us have that rabbit. "Isn't that something!" I said to Benny.

As we headed back to the river, Benny let me carry the gun. It felt heavy after a while, and we sat down on a big fallen log that was soft but a little wet from rotting.

"Let's look at the rabbit," I said.

Benny took off his pack and we dumped the rabbit onto the dirt. The fur was smeared with smelly brown doo. So were the rest of the shells. It was coming from the rabbit's behind. The rabbit's behind had been blasted open. There was blood too. Maybe the rabbit had been sick to begin with. It looked bad.

"No wonder they were laughing about it," said Benny. "No wonder they gave it to us."

He sounded disgusted.

"Some present," he said. "Some big deal."

We didn't want the rabbit after that. I thought we should bury it but Benny just gave it a good kick. We went on. I still had the shot gun.

We reached the river bank and walked beside the current that was so slow we couldn't hear it running. The mud made the footing slippery and I was careful holding the gun. I kept an eye out for anything moving, besides the dried brown leaves shimmering in the branches.

Then I saw it. A little grey cat running along the ground. I swung the barrel up for a shot, but when I pulled the trigger nothing happened.

Benny said it wasn't loaded. I asked how come, and he said he'd wanted to be extra careful back there with those men.

"Careful?" I asked. "About what?"

"It was getting crowded back there, that's all."

Then I asked if it was okay to hunt cats. He said he didn't remember anything about cats in the booklet that came with the permit.

"Maybe that means there's no limit," I said.

"Yeah," said Benny, handing over a shell. The cat had gone up a tree. Benny said to be patient. I circled the tree and spotted it half-way up. I aimed along the barrel and kept the butt in tight. When I squeezed the trigger, the little cat flew off the tree and hit the ground with a thud.

It lay there quiet and peaceful, with just a little blood showing. The fur was smooth and soft. One of the rear legs had gotten shot off, but I figured we could stuff it anyway. We put the cat into the khaki bag. Benny told me again I was a real natural.

We didn't have to wait long this time before a bus came. It was a different driver and he didn't say anything about Benny's gun. He asked if we'd gotten anything and I told him what.

He looked down at me from his seat at the wheel and his eyes went suddenly tired. He was an old guy with grey in his hair and crinkles around his eyes.

"That's a hell of a thing to shoot," he said.

"What's it to you?" Benny put in.

"People live around here," he said. "Some little boy--"

"It was wild," said Benny.

"Yeah," I said, "It was wild."

We sat down. The door closed with a hiss and the bus pulled out.

"How do you know it was wild?" I asked Benny.

"Nobody who has any feeling for a cat is going to let him roam wild in the woods all day," he said.

We didn't talk much for the rest of the ride. I was happy just to be warm once again. And I was tired. When we got to our stop the driver looked away as we walked by him to get off.

"It was wild, pop," said Benny, "Wild."

Benny's mom wasn't at home. The note said there was food on the stove and pie in the oven.

We had some pie, then took the khaki bag into Benny's room. We spread the business section out on the floor and then dumped out the cat. I took it by a paw and carried it to the bathroom and ran it under the faucet. The water streamed nicely through the fur, rinsing the crud that had stuck to it from Benny's bag.

Benny said we'd have to clean out the cat's guts. You couldn't just leave it the way it was because it would go hard and start to stink. Benny had a biology kit, the kind that come with dead frogs, and he got out the fancy knife with the razor-sharp blade. We took a piece of board and stretched the cat out

on it, nailing its three good feet. With the sharp tip of the blade, Benny pierced the cat's belly, right in the middle. He cut straight down to where the cat makes. The thing opened up just like it had been unzippered. The insides smelled musty, like an attic or like your skin smells after they take the cast off your broken arm that's gotten better. Inside the cat's body everything was tucked away as neat as my mother's dresser drawers.

I thought I could tell the heart but Benny said it was the liver. The heart was under that, inside a membrane, like cellophane. Benny showed me the lungs and the ribs and the stomach and the intestines. It all fit together so neatly. It reminded me of the time we took my watch apart to see how it worked. Benny showed me the little flecks of shot.

Benny began to skin it, peeling the hide away from all the insides. He used the edge of the knife to help it along. It was like taking a kid's jacket off for him. When Benny got to the feet, it was like the jacket had gotten stuck going off inside out. We couldn't get the skin off the feet until Benny sliced them off. Then the skin slipped away just fine.

Benny had trouble with the head, too. The skin wouldn't come off there, either. We didn't know what to do. The knife didn't help. Benny got out his bayonet and just whacked the head off altogether. That meant we weren't going to stuff it, but we still had a nice piece of fur.

We had trouble at the other end, too, but after we lopped off the tail we had a real pelt. The fur was smooth, and when we cut away the three leg parts, you couldn't tell that one leg had been shot off. It really was a nice little pelt.

Benny said we still had to tan it or else it would get stiff. He went looking for his book about stuffing and fixing up animals, and I scraped away the bits of flesh that were still sticking to the inside of the skin. The inside of the fur was sleek and smooth, like the inside of your cheek when you feel it with your tongue.

Benny said that tanning the skin wasn't going to be easy. First we had to brush away all the dried blood, and then we had to salt down the skin. If we didn't do that, the hairs would come out later. Then we had to boil up some water with alum and borax mixed in. He didn't think they kept alum or borax around the house, and we didn't find any.

Benny figured the best thing to do would be to brush it off and salt it down and leave it alone for a while. The book said you could leave it packed away in salt for as long as you liked. He thought his mom would help us get the other stuff, the alum and borax.

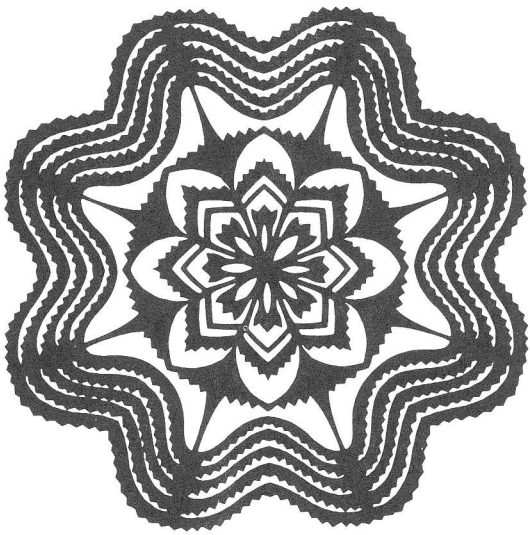
Benny got his toothbrush to brush off the dried blood, and then we used the salt shaker. Here and there the skin was still damp from the rinsing and the salt didn't go on well. It felt rough against my fingers inside the fur.

When we got it salted up pretty well, Benny wrapped it up in the comics. I figured we'd keep it in his freezer until his mom got us that other stuff, but Benny handed it to me and told

me to keep good care of it. He said it was mine because I had hunted it.

I liked the way Benny looked after me. He was a real friend. But he had a claim on the pelt too, seeing as how it was his gun, and his place, and he'd taken me hunting. But Benny wouldn't take it back. He said, "No, you keep it. This is the way it's supposed to be--to remember your first time."

He could be pretty stubborn. The way we settled it was, we unwrapped the pelt and Benny sliced it with heavy scissors. Then we each took half. I left for home then, walking through a wind so cold it made me cry. I didn't care. I was thinking how proud of me my father would have been.



Marjorie L. Dorner

IN THE EDEN CAFETERIA

The woman balanced the tray carefully as she moved along the narrow aisle between the cafeteria booths, heading as if by instinct toward the place where the room opened up to accommodate tables and chairs. The child trailing behind her stopped suddenly and peered around the woman's swaying body.

"Not down there Mom," she said in that bright, peremptory voice children often use with their parents.

The woman half-turned, eying the sloshing coffee cup on the tray.

"Why not?"

"People are smoking down there."

It was the unanswerable argument, and the woman recognized at once that it took precedence over her own mild claustrophobia. With a sigh, she turned the rest of the way around in time to see the child plump herself down in a narrow booth, her sandaled feet swinging under the molded plastic bench. At eight, the girl was just beginning to elongate, planes and angles becoming visible through the baby fat. From under her short curly hair, she flashed a radiant smile up at her mother, a smile that had nothing in it of triumph, of smugness, no consciousness of having won, but only a thoroughly winning joyousness.

The woman smiled back and began setting out food on the blue-and-white checkered table top: for the child, a plate of macaroni and beef goulash, a carton of milk, and an ice-cream dish filled with rubbery cubes of green jello; for herself, a salad and a cup of coffee.

The booths were designed for only two people, and, when the woman sat down to face her daughter, she discovered that there was no place to put the empty tray. As she bent to slide the tray under her own feet, she noticed the occupants of the booth across the aisle. From the black, high-laced shoes of the woman nearest her, there rose heavy legs with no apparent indentation for ankles, the stockings had the unmistakable sheen and opacity of support hose. These appendages disappeared under a floral-print dress that strained to cover a large, shapeless body, all of which had the downward rushing lines of permanently sagged flesh. The face, which was bent over a bowl of soup, was immensely old, folds of loose flesh hanging from the cheek and jaw bones. Thin, slate-gray hair was held back from the forehead by a small triangular scarf whose tie ends disappeared completely into the rolls of fat under the woman's chin.

Across from her sat another woman, large, round, about fifty. her hair looked as if she set it in pin curls and then didn't comb it through; it was the bright yellow color achieved by years of applying home-dyes with no professional stripping or color-toning. This woman caught the young mother's eye and smiled a vague, impersonal smile.

"Do you want some of this?" the child asked, holding out a forkful of the goulash.

"No thanks, Sweetie," the young woman answered. "I have to stick with my salad."

This exchange caught the attention of the old woman. She lifted her face from her eating and peered at them through wire-rimmed glasses which were actually steamed from the soup.

"I don't think you need that dumb old diet," the child said, oblivious of their neighbors whose booth was just outside her peripheral vision. "You look just perfect."

"Well, thank you, my dear, but that's not what my bathing suit tells me."

As they went on with their lunch, the young mother became aware without looking that the old woman across the aisle had not returned to her soup, but was staring at the child. The mother felt the familiar tightness beginning at the back of her scalp, an apprehensive twitch in her throat.

"I really need a spoon for this stuff," the little girl said. "I can get it myself, honest I can."

"Sure, go ahead," her mother said.

The child slipped out of the booth and skipped back along the aisle. The old woman's stare followed her until she disappeared around the half-wall that separated the booths from the food line. Then the rheumy old eyes swung back to the young mother. The motion and the forward thrust of the head, as well as the toothless appearance of the lower jaw, made the old woman's face look reptilian, like a Galapagos tortoise.

"Is that your child?" she said, her voice piercing, symptomatic of hearing loss.

"Yes," the mother said without looking at the old woman.

"Why is she so dark?"

The young woman drew in her breath sharply; she had grown used to much, but not to so direct an approach. She looked straight into the old face as she answered.

"Because she has a lot of melanin in her skin."

"What?" The old voice was even louder, querulous. It was not so much that she hadn't heard, but that she clearly had not understood the answer.

"Because her father is black," the young woman said flatly, hoping the directness would end the conversation.

After a pause, the old woman said, "Where do you live?"

The young woman did not answer, looked away.

Again, "Where do you live?" not angry or hostile, but loud, insistent.

The young mother glanced at the yellow-haired woman who still had the vague smile on her face, as if she were watching a television program that mildly interested her.

"We live here, in the city, " the young woman said. The child was coming back clutching a spoon in her fist, looking surprised to find her mother in a conversation.

"Is that a boy or a girl?" the old woman asked, returning her gaze to the child.

"A girl," the mother said, stabbing at her salad.

The child sat down and made a funny face at her mother, sensing a strain she could not understand. The mother smiled at her, shifting her body on the narrow bench so she could turn as far away from the aisle as possible. The little girl began scooping up her goulash with the spoon.

"Do you live here, Mrs.?" The old woman's voice cut into the silence.

The mother looked a direct appeal to the yellow-haired woman, who leaned forward and said, "My mother forgets things." Then in a voice reserved for babies and idiots, she said to the old woman, "Yes, they live here in town, Mother."

The young woman decided that a conversation with her daughter might deflect further contact with the pair across the aisle.

"Are you and Liz going roller skating tomorrow?"

"I don't know yet; I have to call her tonight."

"Does Liz have her own skates?" She could hear the edge in her own voice, could see out of the corner of her eye that the old woman was still staring intently at the child.

"Mrs.? Oh, Mrs.?" The old voice was wheedling now as if its owner retained some dim sense that interrupting was not polite, should be done only apologetically.

The young woman shot her what she hoped was a withering glance.

"Yes?" Ice in her voice.

"Is that a boy?" There was a slight emphasis on the word "that," just the barest suggestion that the child was an object, a thing, rather than a person who could both hear and understand the question.

Again, the young mother turned to the blond woman with a mute appeal, and again the woman adopted the cooing, placating voice.

"No, it's a little girl, Mother. She already told you it's a girl. Now eat your nice soup before it gets cold."

"You let me alone," the old woman flared at her daughter in an angry, vicious shout. "And keep quiet or I'll have to slap you."

The yellow-haired woman shrugged elaborately at her neighbors and smiled her vacuous, empty smile.

The child squirmed nervously and then whispered to her mother, "My milk's all gone," holding the waxed carton and giving it a shake.

"Still thirsty?" The young woman found she was whispering, too.

"Yes. Can I go get some water?"

"May I." It was a reflex; then she added, "Sure, Sweetie; go ahead. They have ice in a bin right next to the water glasses."

As the little girl slid out of the booth, her sleeve caught the handle of the spoon which was lying bowl-up in the goulash. The spoon clattered onto the bench where the child had been sitting, scattering tomato sauce against the back of the seat.

The girl stared at it with a kind of amazed detachment, as if the spoon had fallen from the ceiling.

"Just get your water, Honey," the mother said quickly, noticing a restless movement across the aisle.

The child paused only a second and then made her way back toward the food line. The old woman had pushed her glasses up toward her watery eyes and was leaning out of the booth to stare at the fallen spoon.

"Now he made a mess," she said in the same voice with which she had told her daughter to be quiet. "That little darkie made a mess and he'll have to clean it up," exactly as if she owned the cafeteria and took a proprietorial interest in its cleanliness.

The young mother felt helpless rage numbing her lower face, flushing up behind her eyes and forehead. She wanted to leap up and scream into the sagging face, "You stupid old bitch! You're going to die very soon, and I can't tell you how happy that makes me." But her middle-class upbringing and expensive education prevailed. In clench-jawed silence, she snatched napkins out of their metal holder, stood up, and deliberately presented her backside to the booth across the aisle as she wiped up the splattered food. She remained standing until the little girl came back with her ice water, shielding the child with her body from the old woman's notice. But as the girl slipped into the booth, the snarling old voice said, "He made a mess. You saw it."

The child looked up at her mother, her brown eyes registering confusion and mild alarm.

"Just eat your jello, Sweetie," her mother said, trying to make her voice sound reassuring, normal. But she was aware that her knees were shaking as she lowered herself into her own side of the booth. She picked up her coffee cup and gulped an unusually big swallow. Inside the thick stoneware mug, the coffee was still almost scalding, and it stung her mouth and throat so that tears came to her eyes.

The child paused with a jello cube half way to her mouth.

"Are you okay, Mom?" she whispered.

"Yes," the mother gasped. "Just that the coffee was too hot. Hurry with your dessert so we can get on with our shopping." Her own salad lay almost untouched in front of her.

"People think they can just go around making messes," the old woman said, so loud that heads at the far end of the aisle turned in her direction.

"Let's go, Sweetie," the mother said; then, pointedly louder, "If we can't enjoy our lunch in peace, we might as well leave."

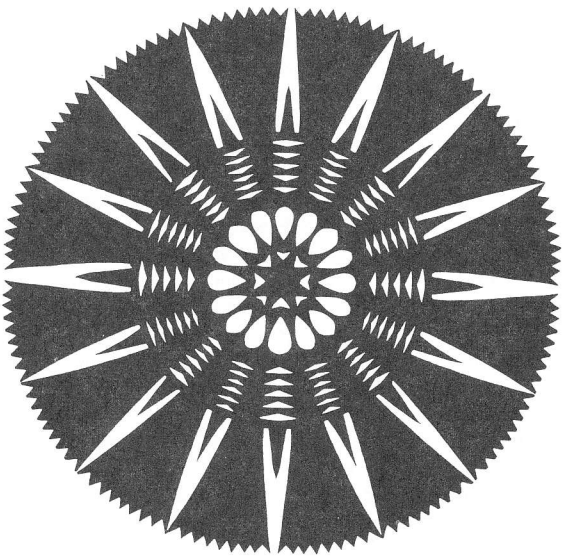
"But I'm not done with my jello," the little girl said, her eyes wide with surprise.

"I'll get you an ice-cream later," the mother whispered, standing and taking the child's hand. It seemed less the promise of the ice cream than her own discomfort that made the little girl rise without further protest and follow her mother. As they made their way toward the exit, they heard behind them the piercing whine of the old woman's voice.

"Wasting perfectly good food."

The young woman whirled and found the yellow-haired woman looking straight at her. The bland face had altered; the vague smile had been replaced by a smug, sly grin. Leaning around the shapeless bulk of the old woman's body, she called, "Nice to see you. Have a nice day," and again her mouth curled into the triumphant sneer.

The young mother fled down the maze of tables in the open part of the dining room, dragging the child behind her at such a pace that the little girl had to trot to keep up with her. As they neared the door, a woman who had looked straight up into the mother's face as she passed turned to her companion across the table and said, "Goodness. That woman looked as if she had just stolen something and was afraid somebody was chasing her."



Gary D. Wilson

FALLING OUT

He sits at the picnic table in the back yard. She stands behind him clicking barber shears. She is thirty-four, bronzed and beach blonde; he is thirty-five with white yet solid flesh and hair the color of mud. No one else has ever cut his hair to suit him, and the role seems to please her.

He jerks his shoulders, arm grazing her bare leg. She bounces back like a ballerina, comb and scissors held high. He resettles into his slouch; she steps up again behind him.

"Why didn't you slap it?" he asks.

Snip. Pause. "What?"

"The mosquito that was biting me."

"I didn't see it." Snip-snip. "Maybe it was hair sticking you."

"I know a bite when I feel one. Now I'll get a welt. I always get a welt."

"We can put baking soda on it," she says. "Or is it vinegar?"

"You should have killed it."

"They say you're supposed to leave them alone, let them drink their fill and buzz off. Then the bite won't itch as much."

"Well, they're wrong. It would itch the same no matter what, since it's the anti-coagulant the mosquito injects that causes the reaction in the first place."

"Mosquito spit?" Snip. Comb. Snip-snip.

"You Arizonans have the oddest notions," he says.

"We had mosquitoes there, too, you know."

"Not real ones. Not like----"

"----in the north woods of Minnesota," she finishes for him, sing-song.

"Except I don't believe we had the roach problem you did. No, I don't remember ever seeing a single one at home."

"I figured it out," she says. "When you smash them like that, it squeezes all their spit into you at once."

A high bright June sun steams the earth, so that even in the shade the air has the faint smell of river banks. Kansas City has a climate neither of them likes--so hot in summer there are days when it hurts to take a breath, so cold in winter bones ache and sinuses never clear. But the Heartland, as natives call it, is the best compromise they could arrive at, since one of them liked the West Coast and the other the East. Neither cared for the Deep South, the Northwest, Canada or Mexico.

Ten years ago, after finishing graduate school, they accepted teaching positions at Park College (Raymond in languages, Louise in mathematics), bought a Cape Cod house with a glassed back porch and moved in.

On Friday night the first week there they made love in the corner of the yard under an arching elm. The next morning they

bought tulip bulbs and planted them in the shape of sleeping lovers. Over time the design lost its original curves, growing more and more rectangular. That same day, in the afternoon, she began cutting his hair, a weekly ritual they have kept with unfailing devotion.

"You're still angry about last night, aren't you, Raymond?"

"Not at all. It's settled as far as I'm concerned. You now have your Bach, I have my Beethoven. You have your benedictine, I have my White Horse. You have your Russell, I have my Proust. Why you even have your anchovies, and I have my pepperoni. You have your Lifeboy, I have my Dial. You have your new job, I have my----"

"There, you see? You are, aren't you?"

"I-don't-get-angry, Louise."

"Maybe if you did," she says. "Maybe if you let it out all at once----"

"A la mashed mosquito?"

Snip-snap, as if he has not spoken. Snip. A perfect arc of flesh being laid bare behind his ear.

"Is letting it all out, as you say, another aspect of this Mock Transverse Theory of Coping you've become so enamored with?"

"Block," she says. "And you really should give him more of a chance. He's a very nice man."

"You make him sound like your father--except that on occasion you also tell me what sad eyes he has."

"He does, but I don't see----"

"Well, it's hardly a term one would use to describe a parent."

"You're jealous."

"Jealousy is a waste of energy, Louise."

"So is washing clothes, cooking, shopping, cleaning."

"Loving?" he asks.

"Don't pervert what I say because you're out of sorts."

"Am I? Am I, really?"

"You got up feeling mean and nasty and haven't improved a bit."

"It's fascinating," he says, "how two people's perceptions can differ so much."

"And if we can't be decent," thrusting the comb past his ear like a pointer, "maybe we shouldn't be around each other at all."

"I suppose I could take a vow of silence for the rest of the day," he says.

"Please don't. You make a terrible martyr."

"My God, I had no idea I was such an irritant."

Snip-snip. Comb. Fluff. Snip. "I don't really think you've been yourself for some time now. Do you?" She runs her hand over the side of his head as if molding clay.

"Can't honestly say, since I find the subject of my mental health totally boring."

"Well, it seems to me that you've been more depressed and more irascible than usual. And I can't remember when I last saw you smile."

"A month ago, wasn't it?"

The scissors stop. "I didn't specify a time, did I?"

"I thought so."

"Strange. Why a month, Raymond?"

"I don't know. Make it two weeks. Two months. A year. Whatever you want."

"It was a month yesterday that I announced my resignation."

"Is that right? I hadn't realized."

"I thought we had talked all that through."

"We have, we have."

"But you don't seem satisfied yet." she says.

"Nonsense. You had no choice. A promotion, a healthy raise, moving from a college to a university. Just because I would have had trouble doing what Block did doesn't mean he should have. He's your chairman now. He can do whatever he can get by with, and if that happens to include raiding the department here on his way out, so be it. That's the name of the game. Administrative politics at its finest. Can't blame a person for that. No, I'm just a diehard romantic when it comes to Park. As long as they want me I'll probably stay."

"Am I to feel complimented or accused?" she says.

"That is a problem."

"But it shouldn't be, not if you really do feel all right about my leaving."

"I do, Louise, I do. Now does that settle the matter?"

"Because it isn't like I'm marrying Jerry Block or anything."

"Oh, that business again. No, I've always considered him a rather rumpled old turnip. Ouch!"

"Sorry. The scissors caught."

"Do you mind scratching? In the middle. There. Harder. Harder. Thank you. Is there a welt?"

"A small one."

"I told you. Miserable creatures. Maybe we should move the barbershop to the back porch."

"But we've always come out here."

"Nothing is written in stone," he says.

"It's just so much trouble. We'd have to move the porch furniture and set up your chair every time, and then I'd still bump into things as I worked around. Not to mention how spotty the light is from the louvers."

"I suppose you're right."

"There's just no sense changing everything for the sake of one little bite."

"I said I suppose you're right."

Comb. Comb. Snip. Comb. Snip-snip.

"But we are going to do something with that flower garden," he says.

"It's the trees and the hedge. There's even grass back there now. What we need to do is give it a good weeding, maybe cull a few bulbs. Redefine it."

"Ah, the mathematical mind."

"Head down." She takes the brush from the white cloth spread on the table and whips up a thick lather in the mug. "Farther. Stretch."

The lather is cool and rich on the back of his neck, her finger marking a line down from his ear, the straight razor deftly following pass after pass. Never once has she nicked him, never once has she made light of his vulnerability. But in the middle of the next to last stroke, she pauses, and at that instant he sees in his mind's eye the precise angle of the blade, the neat indentation it makes in his skin. Despite himself, he shivers.

She wrings out a washcloth, wipes his neck and dries it. "There we are. All done."

He carries the sheet that was over him toward the tree, shakes the shorn hair glistening into the breeze, and goes inside to have a look in the bathroom mirror.

"It's too short," he says, reemerging.

"No, it isn't. Turn around."

"It's too goddamn short!"

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Raymond. It looks the same as ever to me."

Rose Marie Lowe

BLOODLINES

There was a time when I thought Jack Defoe had it better than anyone else in the world; and then there was a time when I knew for sure he'd be one of those people who can't ever find their place. I could see him shooting someone some day when he grew up, or even before. Maybe he worried about it, too. We were only ten then, and a lot of the things we worried about we didn't talk about, or could only mention in a few words, just having to accept that the other one understood that nothing at all would have been said if it hadn't mattered pretty much.

We lived in one of those small towns they make movies about now, as if such towns existed only in the past and weren't still all over the country. Everyone knew everyone, and most of their past. Relationships mattered as much as names, because the thickness of the blood passing down accounted for a lot. "You know Michael's aunt on his mother's side? When she was fifteen, she stood up in church and cursed the preacher." That would be an explanation for why I skipped out of church every time I could. It didn't directly accuse my mother, or me, of being sinful, but it kept the reason in the family where it belonged.

Jack Defoe had a pretty good family on his father's side as far as making money; being successful in an area that could boast only a factory and the standard small town street stores: one dime store, which was also the pharmacy, one cleaner's (at that time--it closed within a year; people washed and hung things on a line outside), a Western Auto, Defoe's Store, Sandy's Tavern, and Wilson's Cafe. His family had owned Defoe's Store probably as long as the town had existed, and William Defoe, Jack's father, had enough sense to stock it from St. Louis and run ads in the local paper (Dexter's), that said so. He sat as an Elder in the Baptist church, and when he decided to run for mayor he took to sitting in Sandy's Tavern until after the election. He wasn't a drinker, though, or a bad man, although my mother never liked him. He took Jack with him on trips and he invited me over a lot, and other kids, and would play softball with us or tell us stories. Their house was not really fancy, at least not the way the money would probably allow, but it was better than I or most of the kids knew. It was the old Snyder house. It had French doors going between the bedrooms, and a porch that curved all the way around. And behind it, though they were crumbling, were stalls where horse used to be kept. Once Jack wrote me a deed for two of those stalls--we had seen a western in Dexter about deeds to land--because I didn't like to play with anything that wasn't mine. I was a little bit sensitive around Jack about not having anything and about being one of the Hayes. Even if I couldn't have expressed it, I knew being one of the Hayes meant coming from a drinking line, and women that had more babies than they would ever have room for in the house or money for in their lives.

So I, and the others too, I think, envied Jack his father. And maybe found it bearable because he had the mother he did. She was one of those people who are described later, after they've died and a gracious judgment is a sign of the speaker's worth, as being a gentle person. She hummed most of the time, went barefoot in a housedress--always clean, but usually beltless. No matter the money or the clothes or the occasion, she always looked plain, when really she wasn't. She had those fine boned features that some people have only as they grow older and the skin seems to have tightened from the years, and soft, brown hair. She was always giving things away. Even new items. Every time the church had an auction, she came up with a box of things that the church ladies took without ever putting up for bid. And if any of us kids ever admired anything Jack had, and she was within hearing, she'd say, "Why don't you give that to him, Jack? He'd probably like it better than you do."

But she just didn't fit with William. And the Defoes, besides, had a history of chasing women. So I guess we kids knew about the trouble before Jack, since our parents could, and did, talk about it around the supper table, or afterwards. We knew he had been asked to step down as Elder. The Sunday the preacher made the announcement about William resigning, Bobby Wilson turned around to look at me and wrinkled his nose. We knew. It had something to do with a woman who taught school over in Puxico, and she had resigned, too.

So when Jack told us one day, hunched back in the corner of one of the stables, that his dad was gone, we didn't say anything at all. We watched him trying to roll a cigarette on one of those mechanical rollers they used to have. He was awkward with it that day, but later on, he would roll a whole box full of cigarettes, and sell them at school for a nickle apiece. He had William Defoe's blood all right. When the carnival came to town (once a year in September--the churches always held their revivals then, which is when I'd skip out of church the most). Jack would stand at a booth until he figured out which prizes people liked the best. Then, when the carnival was ready to leave, he'd buy a bunch of little things, like those Japanese letter openers, and then sell them to the kids at school. Jack always had money.

It was after his dad (and the teacher, too, according to supper table talk) had gone to St. Louis, and a store manager came in for Defoe's Store that Jack started treating his mother in a way most of us didn't like. She used to, for example, take store-bought cookies, put a little marshmallow cream on them and stick them in the oven for a minute and serve them to us with koolaid. "I don't see why you can't just buy marshmallow cookies," Jack'd say. Or maybe he'd say, "Where's your belt?" and she would look at him for a minute. I got the feeling that maybe he had picked up some of those things from William, and I sort of liked my own father a little more. He was in his cups from time to time, but he never let one of us even look cross-eyed at my mother.

Then Jack started with the war souvenirs. His dad sent him a couple of boxes filled with odds and ends from his army days: some postcards bought in Paris, some foreign money. Jack put them all on pieces of velvet he bought at the dime store and hung them on the wall. Bobby Wilson and I worried about the nails he put in the wall that Saturday while his mother was gone, but he said she didn't give a damn. And I guess she didn't, or I guessed then she didn't. Because he expanded that collection far past the content of the boxes. He rode with me and my dad to the Cape one day, when I had to have a tooth out--Witch Hazel wouldn't work and I wasn't sleeping--and while I was in the dentist's office, Jack made the rounds of war surplus stores. He had a bayonet, canteen, some kind of sword, and more medals, and he hung every one of them on his wall.

He took to smoking his own cigarettes when we sat back in the stables devising what he called war games. That was when he looked like William. He caught beetles or grasshoppers and interrogated them. He'd lean back, pull one leg off a beetle and see if it could still walk; tie some thread behind that round button of a grasshopper's head and either hang it from a nail or just pull the thread tighter until the head came off. Once we were sitting at the opening of the stall when Jack's mother came out to put up some clothes. Jack had piled a little mound of dirt and had it almost covered with black beetles, each pinned to what Jack called an attack position by one of the straight pins he had found in his mother's sewing machine. His mother didn't gag, but she stared right at him in such a way that I said I had to go home and I didn't go back for a few days.

She didn't whip him though. I asked about that, and there was no cause for him to be lying when he said no. He even said it like it disgusted him, as if she couldn't do that. And she couldn't. He'd say things like "What do you do with the money Dad sends?" And she wouldn't even answer him. She went to work at the factory, somewhere near my mother's line. And Bobby Wilson said his parents told him she put those checks from William right into the bank; never touched the money, either.

One Sunday Jack asked me to help him find some leeches. It's not hard when it's been raining, and really not hard when it hasn't. In our classroom in the church basement, sometimes they were crawling around the edges of the room where the concrete seemed to hold water year round and keep little pools in the corner. So Jack and I just went through the drainage ditches behind the main house streets and got a jarful of the black things. I've never liked them cause they won't hold their shape. Something that always looks the same you can get used to or at least know what it is. Like it's a round creature. But a leech changes. It can be roundish and flat, or flat and thin, and one minute it can be short and the next long and skinny in the water. But we got a lot of them, and we took them back to his place.

Even not liking leeches, though, I didn't care much for what Jack did. He pulled rocks up, and not by the stables either. He pushed a mound of rocks up near the house, out from

the shade of the oak tree near the kitchen window. He went in the house, and I noticed that he let that screen door slam pretty hard. I was nervous about his mother even if he wasn't. When he came out, he had a magnifying glass in his hand. He took a thickish twig from the tree, scraped out one of those leeches and held it with the twig against the rock. Then he caught the sun in that magnifying glass and kept it there. It made me hurt a little, the way that leech squirmed. I guess it would have squirmed anyhow; it's in their nature, the way they move anytime, but it kept looking dryer and dryer and changed color and I knew it was being cooked slow. I told him I had to go and he called me a yellowbelly. It was what we said then. So I stayed for one or two more, but what I watched was the kitchen window. I saw her just once, but I didn't hear the door even though I waited a while on the other side of the house.

That night I mentioned it at supper, just asking my folks if they knew what Jack Defoe did today, in that way that means maybe I heard about it. My mother gave a little shiver and said he sure was a Defoe, and then she went on in that running spiel she has when she doesn't like something, about how of course every living creature in the world felt pain, and how she still got sick over those fish she had scaled. My grandma, who is referred to by my mother as a tough old lady, told Momma that scalding fish killed them quick and made them scale easy. Momma tried it and when the fish kept trying to jump out of the water until they finally died, she ran out into the back yard and cried and stomped her foot over and over. She's only been to the eighth grade, like my father, and she didn't always act like everyone else's mother, but she was o.k. She's close to eighty now and she still says, Michael, you should go to church; you should take your boy to church. Then she'll add that I didn't turn out so bad.

I didn't even ask Jack about the leeches, but I knew she hadn't done anything, because when he and Bobby finally came to get me and we walked through his back yard toward the house, the pile of rocks was still there, with brown stains all over it. That day we just talked, although Jack smoked, and Bobby and I did, too. Jack told us how he thought he might be going to live in St. Louis, and he didn't like it in Bloomfield anymore and his mother made him sick. He said she "muled" around. I told him my mother muled around, too, and it made me sick sometimes. Bobby said his did, too. Then Jack told us his mother's birthday was on Sunday and he was going to make her present.

I think Bobby and I both knew what kind of present it would be, but we both went to the party anyhow. I took a handkerchief, which is what my mother said I should take, and she ambled on about what a poor choice that girl had made and if I'd let her know in time she would have picked up a Testament, just as a sign sort of. Bobby was there and me, and Jack's grandma and aunt, both of them with hair down to their waist, although where we were raised women over thirty are supposed to keep hair short or up. We had koolaid and homemade cake and ice cream, while the women had coffee and cake, and then she opened the

gifts. She opened mine first and it embarrassed me being so little until I saw that what her mother had given her was a homemade dress and her sister had given her a box of three oranges covered with cloves and a red ribbon stuck to them for hanging and making the house smell sweet. We had one hung right by the kitchen stove.

Jack's present was a necklace. At first it looked like one of those seashell necklaces from the dime store, made in California, and I felt good for him that he had chosen that. But the expression on Bobby's face made me look again, and then I saw what Jack had done. They were shells, all right, but snail shells, like the kind that were in everyone's back yard at times. And I knew he hadn't searched for empty, whole ones. She knew, too. She put the necklace on the table and stared at it for a while then took a deep breath. She had never looked at Jack. Then she turned to her mother and asked if they still raised chickens, and if so, would they mind going and getting one, right now, if it wasn't too much trouble, and bringing it back? She'd pay them for it. They didn't seem to understand, but they didn't question her either. Jack just sat at the table watching his mother. She cut more cake and put it in front of us with a spoonful of ice cream beside each piece and began clearing up.

"We're going to the stables," Jack said.

"No. You're not."

Bobby Wilson and I started eating our ice cream, or mashing it around, and not one of us left the table for the hour or so it took them to come back. The table was clean except for the necklace which lay right where she left it. When we heard the truck pull into the driveway, she disappeared for a moment and when she came back, she had that war sword Jack had hung on his wall.

"Come on," she said.

Outside she handed Jack the sword, took the chicken from her mother and walked over a few feet from those stained rocks, about halfway between the house and the stables. Jack stayed where he was. He held the sword, but the whole tip of it leaned against the ground so that it looked as if he were getting ready to drop it.

"I said for you to come here, Jack," she said.

He moved toward her a little, a few feet, then stopped.

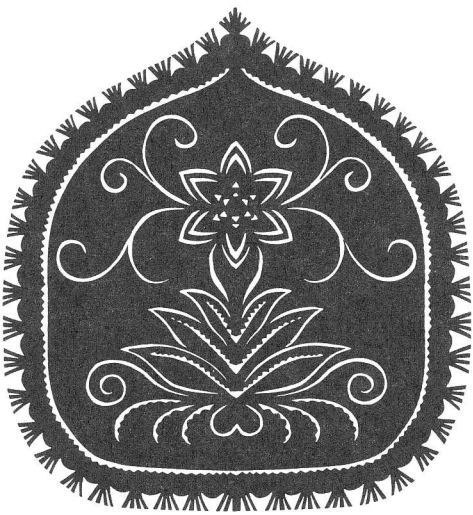
"Come on."

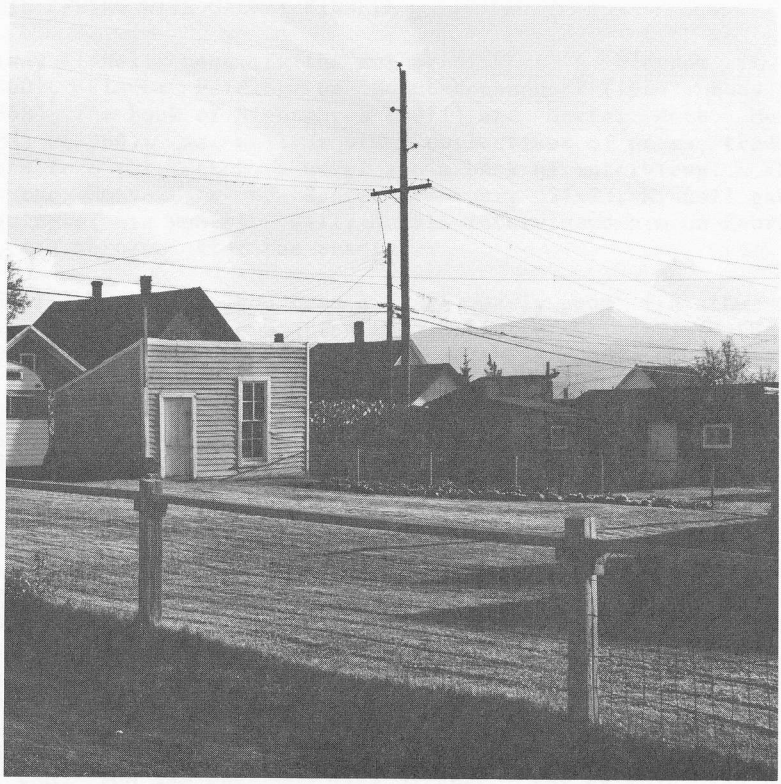
He didn't move further and neither did the rest of us. Even her mother and sister stayed in the shade of the tree. Finally Bobby and I moved, but toward the clotheslines, as if maybe we were going home. But we weren't.

She watched Jack, waiting, and then she walked halfway to him. "O.K., Jack. Here." She put the chicken down. "Kill it." He just stood there. "I said kill it, Jack," She waited a moment more, then stepped up to him and slapped his face. That was the first time I had ever noticed he was as fair as she was, when the whole side of his face turned red from her hand. She slapped him again, on the other side, and when she said "Kill

it," it was like she was crying. Then it didn't even look like Jack staggering with that sword through the back yard. His face was all twisted, still red from her hand, and when he swung the sword it was as if he couldn't see. He was swinging in big half circles, walking toward the chicken who was, like most chickens stupid, but smart enough to move from something else moving near it. Still, he caught it, only a little, just enough to scare it and knock it more senseless than usual so it squawked and reeled and squawked, making more noise than it probably felt pain. Jack just dropped the sword. His mother moved quicker than I'd ever seen her do. She took a few smooth steps toward the chicken, her arm flashed out and she had it. Then, in sort of one movement, a turn toward Jack and a snapping motion of her wrist, she broke the chicken's neck and let it loose. It landed right near Jack and flopped in that way that makes you feel guilty even though you know nothing is reaching the brain anymore. Then I knew for sure Jack was crying. Bobby and I could hear it and see it. When she stepped toward Jack, I know he backed up a little, but she kept coming and then she put her hand on his shoulder. Bobby and I went on home. I turned once to see if the chicken would keep flopping, but it was completely still.

I mentioned it at supper that night, just how she had done it, and my mother shook her head in approval as she ladled gravy; she always makes gravy. She said if someone could do it just right, it was the quickest way.





INTERVIEW

Galway Kinnell

AN INTERVIEW WITH GALWAY KINNELL

Galway Kinnell, poet, is the author of What A Kingdom It Was (1960), Flower Herding on Mount Monandnock (1964), Body Rags (1968), The Book of Nightmares (1971) and Mortal Acts, Mortal Words (1980), as well as other collections of poems, translations from the French, a novel and a book of interviews. While at the University of Kansas February 21-23, Kinnell gave a reading of his poetry. Sally McNall interviewed him on February 23, the morning after the reading.

McNall: Last night you read a fairly early poem (in the 1960 volume), "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," a new poem you are working on, "The Fundamental Project of Technology," and several from in between. Since I've just finished re-reading some of your work, such as The Book of Nightmares, and Mortal Acts, Mortal Words for the first time, I'd be interested in what you might think are some of the shifts or developments in your treatment of themes and images.

Kinnell: Well, I'm sure that you can see them better than I can. From the inside, we don't have as clear a view. That's always struck me, that I'm more able to see the changes in someone else's work. It's like the changes that take place in ourselves--we think of ourselves as the same person from the beginning to the end, but someone else who sees us from the outside may see immense changes.

McNall: Well, let me try out some of my outsider's perceptions on you, and see what you make of them. For example, the theme of time itself. You've written a great deal about time; you've talked about "getting time into your poems." Does that mean that you want to get the idea in, or drama in, or--

Kinnell: I want time for something to happen. I don't want a poem to be just a brilliant moment, but some kind of transaction. Maybe not dramatic, but some--progress, which could be very undramatic.

McNall: It needn't be a very long poem, for that.

Kinnell: No.

McNall: Yet the newer poems are often shorter, or rather there are more short poems, in Mortal Acts, Mortal Words.

Kinnell: Yes, and there are some "moments," momentary poems, in that book. I think of "Daybreak," and "The Grey Heron."

McNall: Those are single perceptions. But they reach through the perceptions, too. What about "Memory of Wilmington"? It's longer, but I'm not sure what happens in it. There have often been tramps and derelicts in your poems, perhaps that's what

puzzles me: they seem to be simply images. He's a different sort, however.

Kinnell: He wasn't really a tramp, in my imagination. He was just somebody I met when I was young. I thought of him as an experienced person.

McNall: Not like the woman in "The Avenue," who's always there--

Kinnell: The one who sells newspapers. Yeah, that's different, because I don't have a relationship with her, nor with most of the derelicts who appear in the poems.

McNall: So what happens in the poems, then, is relationship.

Kinnell: Yes. I think Mortal Acts, Mortal Words is more about relationships than any of my previous books.

McNall: There's a lot of family history in it. And that's interesting, because so many American poets have been turning to that. Perhaps especially those of us who think of ourselves, once in a while, as Midwestern poets. We write what I sometimes call "roots" poems. Do you see any of your poems in this way?

Kinnell: Actually only one poem in there, "The Sadness of Brothers," because it is a kind of history of my father and my brother. The poems to my mother don't really have as much to do with "roots" in that sense, but rather with my relationship with her, a son's relationship to his mother. This isn't like the attempt to make a portrait of an ancestor.

McNall: I was curious about "Two Set Out," which is in the first section away from these others.

Kinnell: In that section there are a number of poems about children, and those two are my children.

McNall: I missed that because you're speaking from their point of view. That's unusual for you, I think.

Kinnell; Yeah.

McNall: The language in Mortal Acts, Mortal Words shows a change, too, I think. Simpler,less thorny. I'm reminded of how Lowell's Life Studies seemed. I wonder if you were consciously trying to make the language somewhat more accessible, open?

Kinnell: Not quite consciously. There are places where the language is thick and dense. In a poem like "The Apple," the language is very much like that in earlier books. But there are, on the other hand, a number of poems in which the language is, while thick and dense, playfully so, and this may be different.

McNall: "Blackberry Eating."

Kinnell: Yes, and there are other poems which are, as you say, completely straightforward, rather simple language, but I hope not undistinguished.

McNall: There's more temporality in these poems than just time for a relationship to happen. There's time as a theme. It seems to me that in Mortal Acts, Mortal Words there's less of the terror of time passing, of transience. Does that sound right to you?

Kinnell: Hmm. Well, I'd say that book is less mournful about it.

McNall: The right word. I think of "Little Sleep's Head," in The Book of Nightmares. A very mournful poem. In the newer poem, "The Milk Bottle," you speak of "separating out happiness from time." With perhaps more assurance that such a thing can be done? There's more about memory in this volume altogether, as if it were really redemptive somehow?

Kinnell: I don't know. (Thoughtful pause.) I don't know if it is. (Longer pause.) If I had an idea, I'd tell you.

McNall: Many critics have written about your personal mythology, your private or favorite symbols and images. We had some conversation last night about the supposed differences between masculine and feminine brains. There's of course a school of criticism which talks about masculine and feminine types of imagery. The latter sort, if there really is such a thing--there's as much of that in your poems as of "masculine" imagery. For example, you write so often of living in your body--skin, bones, blood, but not in any context of violence, of danger. Even in that quite violent poem, "The Bear," where the poet/shaman/hunter is tracking the animal, you make that amazing switch and have him nourish himself on the bear's bloody excrement. It confuses people; the poet is nourished by blood. Whereas women poets come to mind who write of poetry as a loss of blood, Sexton, Plath--poetry leaks or jets away from them. What is your reaction to those private images?

Kinnell: I've never noticed how Sexton feels about it. I think a normal person is ambivalent toward the image, and perhaps particularly a woman, for whom as a menstruating being, blood has a much more direct relationship to the ongoingness of life. It's not a sign of danger.

McNall: (Thoughtful pause.) In your poetry it is often related to ongoing life. You refer to it in the living body, living currents. Ambivalent, as you say--both positive and frightening. As are other images in your poems--for example, the pelvis in "There Are Things I Tell to No One" which makes

the "angels shiver to know down here we mortals make love with our bones." There are, by the way, more angels in the new book. Do you know why?

Kinnell: There are perhaps more angels, but they are quite remote, aren't they? And they're set in a somehow inferior position to human beings.

McNall: The transcendence, so to speak, in the poems is still all human.

Kinnell: Yes.

McNall: Do you have favorites among your poems?

Kinnell: There's one very old poem that's kind of a favorite of mine, called "First Song." Usually when I give a poetry reading I read that first. I didn't last night, but that was unusual. And then there's the section from the last poem in The Book of Nightmares, about the birth of Fergus [his son], which I did read. I like that a great deal. You know, I think there are a few moments when through true luck, or whatever, I've written as well as I can, and that's probably one of them.

McNall: That's something I always want to ask about--the circumstances of writing. If there is something about circumstances which you've found makes such moments happen. Back in '75 you said you were having to work a lot harder at making a living. Is that still true?

Kinnell: It's more true. The position at N.Y.U. is demanding, and also there have been extraordinary expenses, financial problems.

McNall: But all the work is to do with poetry? Teaching, and so forth?

Kinnell: Yes. And of course the older you get the more you get involved with one thing and another. Here I am preparing a television course, and I'm also supposed to be organizing a big reading about nuclear disarmament. Life gets filled up, easily--just age brings that about.

McNall: You must want the poem you read last night, "The Fundament Project of Technology," to be ready for the reading, since it is about Hiroshima.

Kinnell: Yes, and because I've been working on it for over a year. I visited Japan in October of '80 and I've been writing that poem ever since.

McNall: And not in the best of circumstances? The poem's a new departure, isn't it? You write often about death, but usually as a very personal, individually felt thing, not a historical--even, here, a global approach.

Kinnell: Actually in my first book there's a poem called "To the Lost Generation" which is about the same thing.

McNall: Back to the circumstances for poetry, for a moment, if you would. You talk in one interview about "open time." How much could you use at once? What would be the right balance?

Kinnell: About--hmm. About--five-sevenths of the time. (Laughter.)

McNall: And what did you write when you had this ideal balance?

Kinnell: The last time I really had open time was when I was writing The Book of Nightmares. And I could not have written that without that kind of time. It just happened that for a period of two or three years I worked occasionally, but I worked just as a visiting teacher somewhere. For example, one of the most fruitful times, when that poem began, I spent a quarter at the University of Washington. My family was in Spain at that time, so I was alone there, and I first drafted the whole poem during that quarter, a draft which I subsequently threw away and didn't use more than a few dozen lines of. But I couldn't have written that whole draft without having every day basically free, just a few hours a week of teaching. And then that fall I lived in Vermont and didn't teach at all. I started the poem again, there. That winter, we all went to Mallorca. There I didn't really have a job, but a position as a poet-in-residence. All I had to do was reside. They provided me a house, no funds or anything, but there was also a house over the sea which I had to myself. So every day at eight o'clock I was there in my house, and came back around five in the afternoon. I had seven--or eight, or nine days a week--(laughter) and there the poem really came into shape. When I came back to the States I taught at the University of Iowa, and taught two seminars, Wednesday afternoon and Wednesday evening. The rest of the time was free. So I was able to bring the poem to a rather finished condition. But it was accident, really, that I had over a year like that.

McNall: You revise a great deal. Do you often throw a whole draft of a poem away and rewrite? Without keeping a first version around?

Kinnell: Occasionally, when I've realized that while the conception is good, I haven't gotten it into the words. In that case I'll start over, fresh. But that's not a very promising approach. I think it's most useful when the poem requires some good clear writing, nothing particularly brilliant.

McNall: Is there a particular kind of cut you make, material you discard? When you take things out, what are they?

Kinnell: Lots of things. One tends to say things twice. I take out one of those times. Extra adjectives. A certain banality that some lines have; probably I don't strike enough of those. And also just bad writing, bad sentence structure. I think that's one of the most vexing things, to see that--maybe because you've been writing poetry--you've allowed yourself to be clumsy with the syntax, and thus imprecise in forming the thoughts.

McNall: How does giving a reading help?

Kinnell: In a reading to an audience of some size--I don't know if this works with just a handful of people--where you feel responsible for producing a listenable, formed whole, you feel more keenly the shortcomings of the work, so that you feel how it goes in your own mind. It isn't a matter of looking at the faces of the audience, but how I'm feeling about it. I'm giving everything its weight; I'm able to gauge the rightness.

McNall: When you're teaching, do you submit your own manuscripts for discussion in your classes?

Kinnell: Sometimes I do that, just to make them feel it's all a democracy.

McNall: Is it?

Kinnell: No. (Laughter) But it is, really. I think of myself in those discussions as first among equals. Quite a few students feel I should be more emphatic and give my opinions in a much more decisive way. Yes, sometimes I've actually wanted to know what my students have thought of my work. When I was at Iowa, I gave a manuscript copy of The Book of Nightmares to all my students, and went home and went through it word by word, and some of them had quite useful suggestions.

McNall: William Stafford claims he won't "give approval" of student poetry. His method is to ask, about certain lines, or technical things, "Why did you do that?" Can you comment on that?

Kinnell: I'm not sure what follows from his question. "Why did you do this?" seems to me to imply something's amiss, right?

McNall: Only if the student can't think of a reason.

Kinnell: Well, I never do that. Sometimes when a poem looks confused I will say, "What did you actually mean here?" The student may say something quite lucid, and when it's substituted for the turgid writing, this will clear up matters. But no. Of

the very best of the writing, I would never ask why. I hope that there is a certain fate in words--which come forth as if by themselves. What I try to encourage in students is for them to be carried away--to fall into a deep concentration. So that they're surprised at what they're saying. Poetry which is mapped out in advance I don't find interesting. Therefore I wouldn't want to try to make my students talk about those moments when I sense that kind of fate.

McNall: Do you assign a subject matter for the week? or a technical experiment?

Kinnell: No, I don't. I suspect that's bad for them.

McNall: Do you assign readings?

Kinnell: I do have them read certain things--but what they like to read. I have them memorize them, and then recite them in class. So that's about as far as I go in a workshop, with assignments. Sometimes, with a particular student, who seems to be going on a line that has been taken by some other poet, I'll suggest they read along that line, the way they're going.

McNall: Once in an interview you said that students of writing shouldn't necessarily be reading contemporary poetry: that it might better be used as texts for other courses. Could you give examples? Of, for example, a psychology poem? An anthropology poem?

Kinnell: For example, if you're studying the relationship between technology and war, I think Dickey's poem, "The Firebombing," is a superb text. I used to think of it as brutal, and somewhat fuzzy as to what it was about. But I now think it's a brilliant exposition of the connection between the desire for supernatural life through technology, and the ease of killing which results.

McNall: I'm reminded of a character in one of your poems--the Viet Nam soldier in Book of Nightmares who keeps "shooting the friendlies."

Kinnell: Yes.

McNall: We've talked a little about how teaching can be helpful to your own work, but you've also said it can be harmful for a poet to teach the writing of poetry.

Kinnell: Yes. You might lower your standards a little. You might not want to be as severe on your students as you would like to be with yourself, and in the process you might grow a little soft regarding yourself, too.

MCNall: Has your attitude toward your poems, parts of your work, changed over time?"

Kinnell: Oh, yeah, poems--poems tend to fade. They've just been out too long in the sun. And I think that a poem has to be more than good when it's written to be good after time has passed. So for example that poem "Little Sleep's Head" was too rich for me when I wrote it; I couldn't read it publicly for some years, literally couldn't. Though I would read all the other sections of The Book of Nightmares without difficulty. They seemed good. Now that one is the one I like best; it seems good, while some of the others have faded, and aren't as interesting for me to read. At the beginning there was too much emotion in the poem, and now there is enough.

McNall: What do you want, reading contemporary poetry?

Kinnell: For me a modern poem has to be personal. It has to be about the plight of the self in our world. That seems to me the truest, the most useful subject of poetry.

McNall: And so you don't want--

Kineell: Amusing poems, interesting, intelligent poems basically remote from the problems of the self.

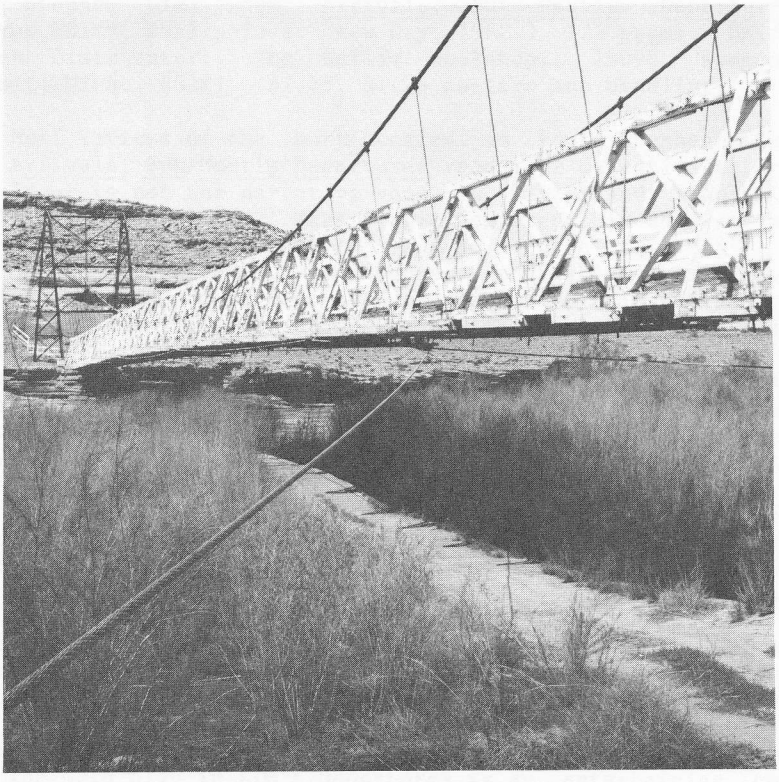
McNall: Without asking for a list of your contemporaries who are your favorites, can I ask for a couple of favorite women poets?

Kinnell: One of my favorite woman poets is no longer alive. That's Anne Sexton. I thought All My Pretty Ones one of the finest books we have. It wasn't recognized as such when Anne was alive, which I think hurt her, because she was always trying to do as well, and couldn't, and she wasn't quite sure, even, that she had done that well. There was a prejudice against that confessional mode. But for me, her poems were over-good, the confessional mode was so rich, but that makes them good now. They don't fade.

You know, the characteristic thing of the poets of my generation is to produce one wonderful book. A messy period before, and a messy period after--but there comes the moment. Say Merwin's The Lice, or Levertov's O Taste and See, or Snyder's Rip Rap, or Ginsberg's Howl. One wonderful book. Not a great career, usually. Typical.

McNall: This seems the moment to ask you if you are thinking now in terms of another book length collection.

Kinnell: Yes and no. The conception is there in my mind. I'm not sure I can carry it out. So I have to say yes and no.



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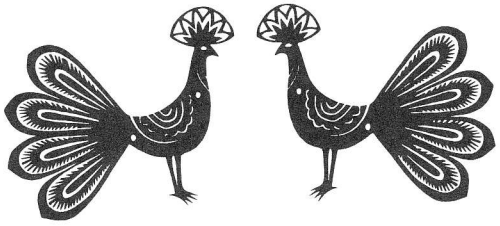


Paul Stephen Lim. Some Arrivals, But Mostly Departures. (Quezon City, Philippines: New Day, 1982.) 132 pages. United States Distributor: The Cellar Bookshop, 18090 Wyoming, Detroit, Mich. 48221. $7.75, $1.25 postage and handling.

Most reviews of the short stories in Paul Stephen Lim's Some Arrivals, But Mostly Departures read like detective tales--i.e. Is or is not the narrative voice in "Victor and Other Issues" that of Paul Lim? What tragic occurrence in the writer's past produced "The Love Letter"?--and so on.

Such speculation is, I suppose, inevitable. As a new American citizen of Chinese descent who was born in the Philippines and has a Taiwanese passport, Lim possesses a background irresistible to literary detectives. The drawback of these inductive exercises, however, is that they ignore another fascinating aspect of these stories: Lim's treatment of the language. A critic of Lim's plays once wrote that Lim is a playwright "in love with language." That love affair continues in the short stories of Some Arrivals, But Mostly Departures.

In "Victor and Other Issues"--my favorite in the collection--the word play begins in the title, with "Issues" having at least three key meanings in the story. Jack O'Grady, the protagonist of a later piece, tells a cabdriver, "You don't need to know Alice in Wonderland from Ulysses in Nighttown in order to fix a Maverick or mix a screwdriver." Perhaps not, but in the language of "Victor," the influence of Joyce is pronounced. Even its concluding "God and my true ancestors help me!" is strongly reminiscent of the closing cry of Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

The word play in Lim's Departures is an entertaining constant. In "Malediction," a father informs his son that ". . . prepositions should never be used to end sentences with." In "Cliches and Manufactured Goods," an ad man returning to the Midwest theorizes, "Home is where the heartland is, after all." In "The Love Letter," an American in Amsterdam insists on dining "Dutch treat" with a woman he meets in the Rijksmuseum.

Occasionally, as in the fiction of Peter De Vries, the word play becomes excessive, overshadowing other elements in the story. Still, there's something admirable in a writer with the nerve to compose the following: "Affluence, according to Mother, can fake anything. It can even make cheap rhinestones look like Elizabeth Taylor's diamonds. . . . When it comes to 'faking' it--be it in things material or matters spiritual--MUM'S THE WORD!"

Fortunately, Lim's control of the language encompasses more than the pun. In "Malediction," a Hoya Bella plant becomes a symbol of a disturbing, threatening sexuality. Its description is as lush and cloying as the plant itself:

> The moonlight streaming in from the south window was casting a pale and rather sad-looking sheen on the clusters of wax-like flowers hanging, like tiny teardrops, just inches away from his face. Also, the sweetish scent of the

> flowers was heavy and oppressive, almost overpowering, and it was coming at him from both sides of the bed. At one point during the night, the boy reached for one of the buds, wanting merely to feel its texture, and was surprised when several broke off and dropped into the palm of his hand. He held these up against the moonlight. Like the leaves on the vines, the creamy-white petals were round and fleshy, and at the center of each bud was a small five-pointed star-- deep red in color--full of nectar, and therefore moist and sticky to the touch. Andy wiped his fingers against the sheets.

Some Arrivals, But Mostly Departures should not be read as thinly-veiled autobiography--nor should it be read merely for the pleasures its word play provides. The danger in either approach is the loss of eight well-told, often disturbing short stories. Whether arrivals or departures, the short stories of Paul Lim are enjoyable flights of fancy.

CHUCK MARSH

Kenneth Wiggins Porter: The Kansas Poems. (Topeka: Washburn University of Topeka Bookstore, 1982). $1.35.

Kenneth Porter (1905-1982) grew up in Kansas and returned here when the Depression interrupted his graduate career at Harvard. After finding economic refuge in Kansas, he went on to pursue a distinguished career as an historian in Oregon. His strong political and historical perspectives, honed by his involvement with socialist "rebel poets" and The Poetry Forum group of Cambridge (Jack Conroy, Seymour Gordon Link, Harry Hurd, and others), have obvious influence on his poetry. And the Kansas landscape is also an apparent influence. In his introduction, Tom Averill states,

> Many of his poems celebrate the landscape as it is, as it was, and as it will be. Many of his poems provide brief, but insightful, lessons in the meaning and interpretation of Kansas history.

This volume is the only book of Porter's poetry that is in print. It pulls together the poems specifically about Kansas from his two books, The High Plains (1938) and No Rain from These Clouds (1946). In addition, four recent poems appear here.

"Dark Saying" illustrates the political insight of Porter's vision:

> In Kansas the farmers have raised so much

wheat
that in some of their homes is nothing to
eat.
Rest easy, food-gamblers, for you have not
seen,
as have I, the dark corners where Winchesters
lean. (1930)

The poems celebrate political rights of the working man.

The form of the poems is a merger of traditional patterns (rhyme and rhythm) and prose. His lines are often long and sometimes irregular. He does not hesitate, in the longer poems, to break the pattern for the sake of content.

Embedded in all his forms is an awareness of the musical possibilities of the language, both formal and vernacular. A few lines from "Catalpas in Kansas" especially show this sensitivity:

You do not seem at home here by our corn-rows
you with your showy, strange-shaped,
odorous white flowers.
You should companion palms near dim seraglios
and scent the air which steals through
contained bowers.

Sometimes Porter's forms clash. His faithfulness to traditional poetic patterns clashes with his need to express complex ideas. Some awkward lines result, such as,

We neither grumbled that we'd lose a day
nor played the changes on the harvest-jest--
dear to the weary--of "More rain, more rest,"
but watched uneasily, and some arose
and climbed on racks to view their southward way,
and as I gazed I heard one lookout say . . .

The addition of "and" in this last line simply fills out the syllable count to a round ten. Other times poetic devices achieve arresting moments, as in the extended metaphor of "The Land of the Crippled Snake." Here the lines delineating the Great Plains on a map are compared to "a length of discarded lariat, / dropped carelessly in the dust of a vast corral."

Porter quit writing poetry after his second book failed to receive recognition. The interest of contemporary Kansas scholars brought him back to the art, and he helped Tom Averill compile this book just before his death. Most of the work is from the 1930s and 1940s. This book is an essential link in the development of midwestern literary history.

DENISE LOW

George H. Gurley, Jr. Fugues in the Plumbing. 5725 Wyandotte, Kansas City, MO 64113; BkMk, 1980. 63 pp. $4.50, paper.

George Gurley's poems begin in the small accidents and events of modern life: home movies, ice skating, going to the dentist. But like that other poet of the modern city, David Ignatow, Gurley evokes surfaces and isolated events only to probe for the depths and hidden connections they contain. As the title suggests, everyday experience and the timeless world of art and emotion constantly interpenetrate in these poems.

There is also much overlapping of themes in the book's three sections. In general, "Manhunt," the first section, focuses on a quest for personal identity. "Visiting Hours" looks outward, to other people and landscapes, and the title section centers on relationships and the poet's past. A constant inventiveness of language and situation allows Gurley to give well-worn themes, like that of identity between the hunter and the hunted, new freshness. His private-eye approach in "Manhunt" has a quirky directness.

> My hound and I are tracking an escape artist.
> He taunts us with clues,
> Leaves fingerprints on everything I touch.
> Whenever we arrive he's just checked out.
> His cigarettes still burning in my rooms.

Many poems have a strong, often surrealistic narrative line, as the pursuit of the mysterious, unreachable double goes on through a series of transformations. The speaker, always reaching out for the other, sometimes finds himself merging into him, as in "Railroad Detective." In "Home Movies" the cameraman-father disappears into his recording apparatus, and in "Dying Out" a kind of self defined by externals and negatives becomes the speaker's goals. But in "Medicine Man" the invisible self becomes the imperial self, making vast claims for its strength and potency:

> Now I light fires with my words
> My enemies stalk themselves
> Meat hunts for my knife.
> My eyes rise up the sun
> My ears give the wind its voice
> Both my hands are right.

The pun in the last line is typical; Gurley has a keen sense for the kind of wordplay that keeps him from pomposity and predictability. Poems like "Estate Planning" begin prosaically: an old man "studies an ash tray painted with geese." As the images develop they become more intense, almost gaudy, but with an interior logic that makes the final vision seem at once surprising and inevitable:

His pulse starts down the stairs,
Stars fizzle on the ground,
The price of diamonds falls.

Geese stagger across the skies
Like a cardiogram.

Jonathan Holden has recently criticized many modern American poets for avoiding the difficult, banal subjects of ordinary life: television, football, shopping malls and so forth. Gurley takes on these subjects, and more, without pretension or aloofness; it is refreshing to see a poet admit not only that he watches football but that he misses it during the off-season. But for all the detritus of civilization these poems are crammed with, they are not "realistic." Gurley's constant interest is the mental adventures possible within the most ordinary environment. Thus the title poem, which opens the final section of the book, begins with a shower interupted by a phone call. No one is there, but the house has come ominously to life: "Now the snake in the staircase/ Cracks its back,/ The thug in the refrigerator shudders,/ I search the cupboards with a butcher knife." The speaker hears a "faint carillon,/ This celebration in the plumbing, which leads off into another, less civilized world:

Perhaps a tiger.
A clicking sound like bamboo sticks,
The hinges of the trees.
And in the rafters under the wind. . .
This sound of bells.

Gurley's liking for this sudden escape into the ozone mars the third section. At times the motion does not seem earned, as in the final poem, "Hustlers," in which the closing image of Minnesota Fats "On the other side of the Big Dipper, /Chilling the tip of his cue:" is unconvincing, fancy for fancy's sake. The strongest poems reach for a broadening of vision rather than simple distance. "Sacraments," for example, moves from the nearly precious image of trash bags "conniving how to rule the world again" to this powerful statement:

It is the butcher who redeems us
The exterminator who expiates our sins
Clergymen who slash our tires.
It is the weight that carries us,
It is the waste that spares our lives.

This is the voice of a fully mature and engaged poet; beneath the exuberant wordplay and the mild surrealism, it is this kind of awareness that gives Gurley's poems their weight. At his best, he has the ability to focus, record, and imagine both the surfaces and depths of a city and a life. He is worth your time.

JEFF GUNDY

Anthony Sobin. The Sunday Naturalist. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982). 75 pages. $7.95 paper. $14.95 cloth.

The relationship between art and life and the relationship between the human race and the rest of the universe have been the subjects of much poetry and more philosophical speculation, but seldom have the two concerns meshed into the sort of unique and individual vision Sobin presents in The Sunday Naturalist. This is a book about seeing, seeing as an artist, as an individual, as a member of a species that, after all, makes a minor mark upon the planet.

The first of the four divisions of the book, "Concerning Archeology," is about painting as much as about archeology--and it is about the effort to see through the recording eye, to preserve the past, more than it is about either. The quirky unreliability of that eye is seen in the opening poem, "19th Century Landscape with Pond," a poem which pulls the reader into the whole enterprise immediately with its opening line, "You are in an outdoor painting." Sobin has a pictorial strength which quickly sketches the idyllic scene by a barnyard pond and then contrasts "you" with what can actually be seen on the canvas.

> Once
> you stood close to the boy, bored,
> looking off into the vanishing point
> in the yellow and mauve pastures.
>
> But the painter, in a single
> moment of dissatisfaction,
> pulled the grass up over you
>
> and now, where you are buried,
> a cow with an everlasting thirst
> drinks from the pond.

The human race's place in the order of things, that nagging problem that has plagued us more than usual in the years since the discoveries of Lyell and Darwin, is subtly present in the cow that replaced "you." It is more overtly addressed in "Concerning Archeology: A Report, A Photograph, A Painting," the longest poem in the collection. The first section of this poem is "The Archeologist's Report" in which the poet speaks in the factual voice of a 19th Century archeologist reporting his find of "3 well preserved Neanderthaloid / skeletons in the sitting posture." Again, Sobin vividly and quickly sketches a picture, the three "At original ground level" surrounded by their possessions--the sandstone pipe, the stone ax, and scrapers. He ends with the observation, "about the shoulders and in the skull / of the last are scattered / thirty-one fresh-water pearls."

In the second section, "A Photograph of 19th Century Archeologists," the poet steps back and looks at a photograph taken at that excavation in Northern Iowa, at the two men and the woman who discovered the grave mound.

It is late afternoon
and in the long exposure
the one [archeologist] on the left has coughed
obliterating most of his face and neck
and all of his right hand.

The act of being alive and moving erases us from the record we would like to keep.

In the third section, the poet steps still farther away in time and method of recording as he describes "A Painting of 21st Century Archeologists." In the painting, colorful and minute in detail, are a man "with ochre hair" at a typewriter and a woman reading a book about the expedition described in the first section and recorded in the 19th Century photograph described in the second. Another man, disappearing into the kitchen with a glass, can be seen right down to ". . . a tiny drop of blood / where the man has been biting his fingernails." The book the woman is reading and the report that the man is typing can be read in a mirror. The report concerns a tomb where hieroglyphs turn into "a bird-like woman," run off like herons, and, as the report says, "the wall where half of the hieroglyphs are missing appears as an unfinished page of typing. . ." Sobin's poem ends with the characters in the painting "reading aloud," "speaking" as a "slight breeze passes over the table." "The man with the ochre hair is about to say/ dig all you like." All is turning, moving, evolving, even that which we think is fixed like reports, photographs, paintings.

The second section, "Fear of the Telephone," is a far more personal section, in which the world is perceived directly rather than through created works. There is a somber tone, but what distinguishes the poems is not their concern with death but their acceptance of time as a living entity. In "Propping up Bodies to Fool the Indians,"

It is your birthday.
Another man falls dead at your feet

and his body is like a shadow
that stretches out from your black shoes.

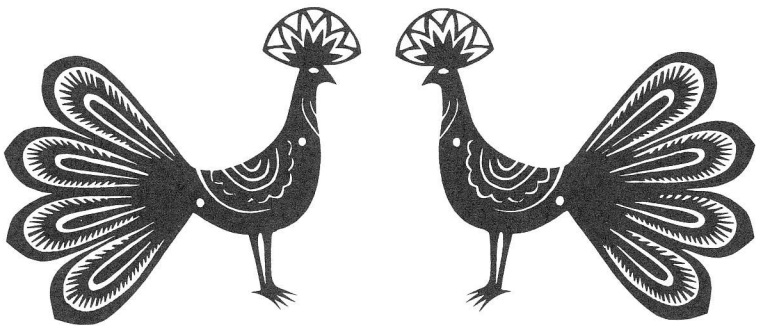
The metaphor is sustained, developed as the body is propped against the wagon with others, a long line stretching from "the handful of infants" to "the gang of boys with slingshots" and on to "men in their twenties" until the poet notes:

Your masterpiece, though, is the man at thirty
set apart, nonchalant, without even a gun--just
showing the Indians how fearless we all are.

The unusual metaphor, carefully developed, is Sobin's strong point. And as the metaphor develops it becomes a thing of itself, and we have stepped through the looking glass. The temptation is that the trick will become its own reward. At

times, in the third and fourth sections, Sobin comes dangerously close to this as he turns seeds into planets and starfish into children. But basically, he avoids the pitfall. His final poem, "Ha Ha You Assholes So Long!" audaciously pulls the looking glass trick off as we find ourselves in a movie theatre where "the real audience whites-out" and the "Screen audience puts on coats, lights cigarettes, ambles down aisles out of theatre." The "projectionist," a 20th Century brother of the painter of the first poem in the collection, is left "alone in all the world," putting out his cigarette in the snow and shouting "Applause Noise!" to no one.

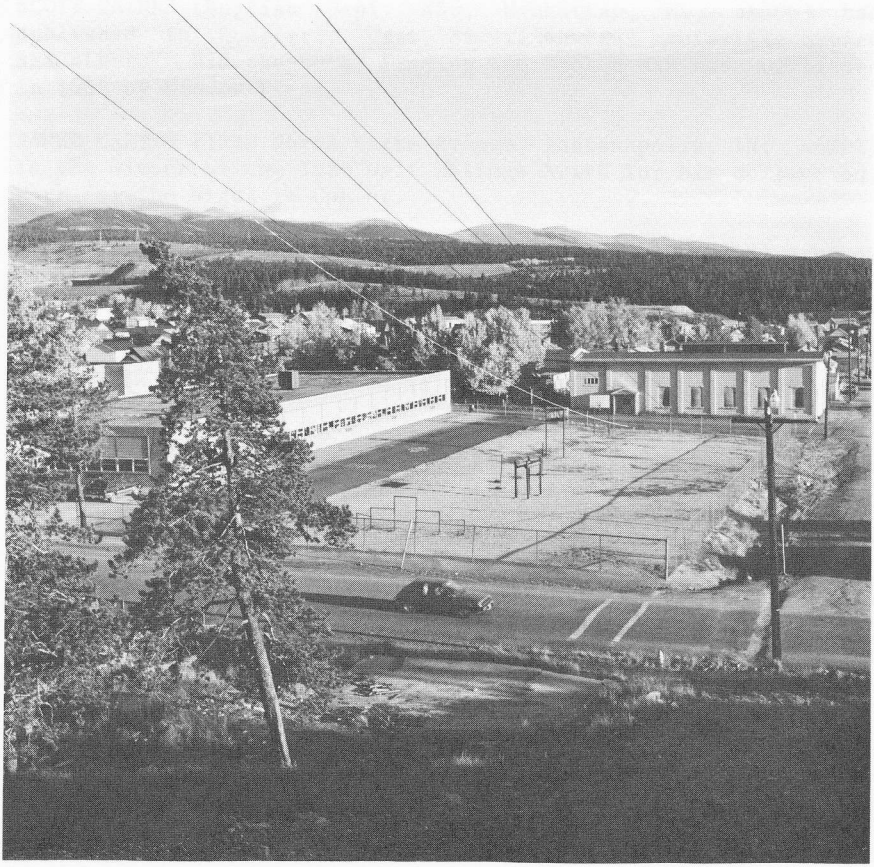
ERLEEN J. CHRISTENSEN



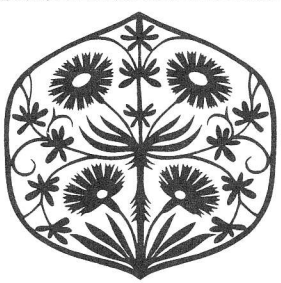
BOOK NOTES:

Mid-America Trio (BkMark, 1980) is a three-chapbook collection which includes Denise Low's Dragon Kite, an interesting glimpse into the life of her Asian-American family. There is an ethnic quality to the collection as Stanley E. Banks' On 10th Alley Way takes us into the black community, and Greg Field's The End of This Set brings us the jazz musicians of the 1930s.

One Smart Kid (Macmillan, 1982) by Ed Moses, native Kansas recently of Lawrence, recounts the adventures of a small-town Kansas boy, a sort of 20th Century Huck Finn, who does battle with McCarthy Era prejudice and real gangsters. His most engaging battles, though, are those he faces dealing with an alcoholic mother and cold, withdrawn father.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES



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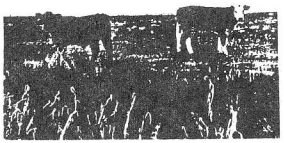

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