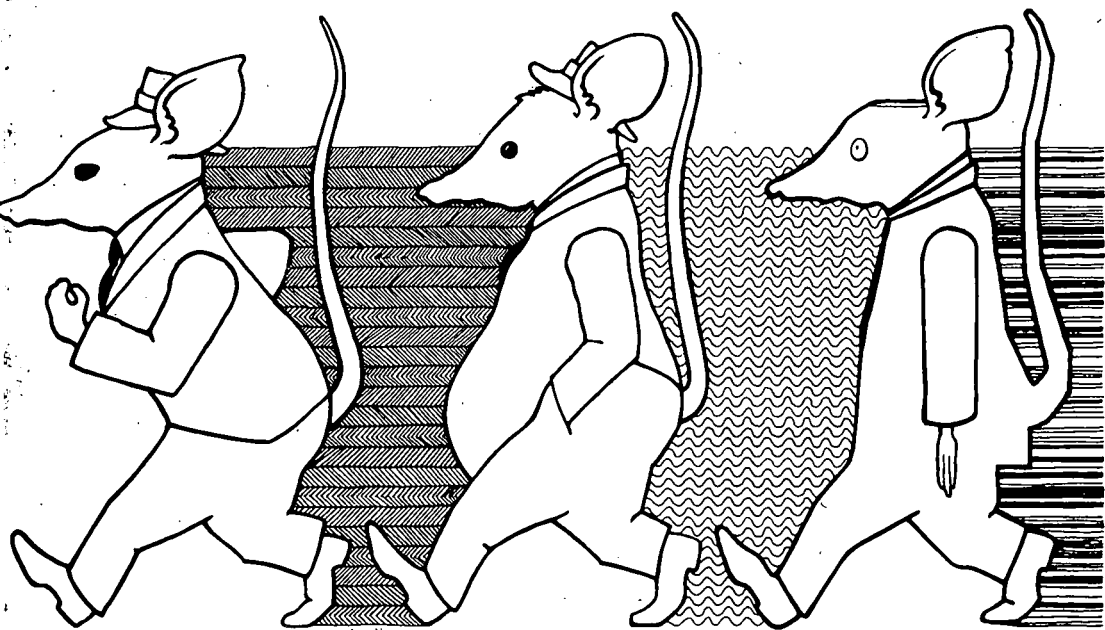


COTTONWOOD

33



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COTTONWOOD magazine welcomes submissions of fiction, poetry, graphics, photography, translations, reviews of small press literature, and articles on the arts from both local and national writers and artists. Poetry submissions should be limited to the five best, fiction to one story. We cannot return submissions which do not include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Since COTTONWOOD has no regular source of funding, we depend heavily on the interest and support of our subscribers. Issues appear tri-quarterly at \$4.00 per issue or \$12.00 for a three-issue subscription. Although issues are sometimes irregular, three issues are guaranteed per subscription. Subscriptions and submissions should be directed to:

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COTTONWOOD 33

EDITOR: Erleen J. Christensen

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Sharon Oard Warner

FICTION:

Gary Brown

Betty Campbell

Jim Carothers

Brad Denton

Tamara Dubin

POETRY:

Pat Catto

Sally McNall

Lynn Shoemaker

Chuck Wagner

Phil Wedge

PHOTOGRAPHY: Jon Blumb

UNIVERSITY LIASON: Michael Johnson

SPRING 1984

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GRAPHICS: Harley Elliott
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 RR 3
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BOOK DESIGN: Erleen J. Christensen

EDITOR'S NOTE:

About a year and a half ago, Saralynn Reese Hardy of Salina and I had a long talk about the arts in Salina, a talk which inspired me to plan a "Salina issue" of COTTONWOOD. A busy year with scant time for COTTONWOOD has meant that many of the grand plans of that initial inspiration never came to fruition. But we are still proud to be featuring Salina poet and artist Harley Elliott, Salina photographer Terry Evans, and a review of the latest book of poetry by a Salina poet—THE GLASS WOMAN by Patricia Traxler. I want to offer an apology to Salina for omitting much that is a part of the "Salina Renaissance," and I hope that we can do more justice to the arts in that part of Kansas in later issues.

This issue is the first issue of COTTONWOOD in several years to be typeset. We want to thank the many people who have made this improvement in format possible. First and foremost, we want to thank all of you who purchase, read, and recommend COTTONWOOD. Without our loyal readers, COTTONWOOD could not exist. Next, we want to thank those at the University of Kansas who made this improvement possible—the English Department, which has provided help with the typing, and the Computing Center and the Printing Service, which have given me much help in learning to use computer-typesetting. Finally, we want to thank the Kansas Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts for their continued financial support.

COTTONWOOD continues to thrive because the members of its staff put in so many volunteer hours reading and evaluating manuscripts—time which must be found in already busy lives. A big thank you to all our staff members—and a second round of thanks to Sharon Oard Warner and Sally Allen McNall who did the proofreading for this issue.

A thank you to all of you for the enthusiastic response to our contemporary poetry anthology, CONFLUENCE, edited by Denise Low. An addendum to this issue is an apology to a few of you for errors and omissions in that issue, especially to Elizabeth Mayer, whose poems were omitted, and to Jeff Gundy and Deborah Goodman, whose poems are reprinted in this issue with corrections.

We are all looking forward to COTTONWOOD 34 which will feature new poetry by William Stafford. Hutchinson poet Steven Hind interviewed Stafford during his January visit to Kansas, and that interview is a delightful meeting of two poets who share a deep affection for south-central Kansas—as well as many other things.

—Erleen J. Christensen



GREAT HORNED OWL

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Healy, Elmer

POETRY

Jack Anderson

THE WORRIED STONE

A stone got worried.

It worried that any day now
they would climb the hill for it
and chop off its head.

To calm it down
they tried to point out
it didn't have a head.

But that
only made it feel worse.
"They've already done it."

The stone kept on worrying
that next they would amputate
its arms and its legs
or pluck out its eyes.

So day and night it
maintained a vigil,
it was always on guard
so no one could surprise it.

Then they said the stone
was foolish to worry,
for it had no
arms, legs, or eyes:
stones, in fact, they said,
had nothing but stone.

The stone was appalled
and started to shout:
"But how can you hear me
if I'm nothing but stone?"
"Stones can't talk," they said.
"Everyone knows that."

The stone was now
more worried than ever,
for it was either
insane, it concluded,
or else not a stone,
and it couldn't decide which
—or which was worse.

It just sat on the hill worrying
forever and ever.

**BOLDLY THE DEAD GO
(FOR K.W.)**

*... do not forgive
Jeremiah 18:23*

You must have been thinking
how boldly the dead go
in their coffins to the grave.
A parade of black,
people bring flowers like flags,
giddy in the sun.
Eight years old,
you watch the box go into the hole,
Oklahoma dirt falling to wood.
My father is in there,
and you wanted to go with him.

More will go into that hole
than a dead man in his box.
You want to step in like a sleepwalker,
make decay become your first dance.
Later you will learn
how skin splits to the bone,
how the heart moves out from ribs
like a worm.

Your mother,
frail and thin as wind,
bent to you, whispering
forgive him, forgive.
Drill a hole in that word,
Kathy. Send it to sea.
It will founder there among waves,
thin letters like arms
flailing.

SHE HAS NEVER KNOWN

She has never known when to leave well enough alone,
when to take the charm out into the marketplace
and buy groceries with it: celery for a week's soup,
scrap meat for her dinner. She has never learned, for instance,
to buy millet for cakes. She refuses to learn this, buying it instead
for the bluejays, for the shy cardinals, even for the grackles
which peck at her ears as she will sit in the snow to talk with them.
Her hands know only to warm the ice from her peach tree, her plum,
even the mulberry which grows wild as she does
in the weed patch she calls her yard.

She will never learn: she has been told this.
She has never known
That her province is smaller than she thinks it is,
That there is no wonder or magic in the decay of the old things
she fills her old house with; that to save the log with the squirrel-stored
nuts is to deny her house heat: nothing more.

With the charm she could buy shoes for her children,
swaddling for the littlest one who now roams everywhere
naked as the peaches on her summer tree. She could exchange
the charm for all that she now makes: she could hear music
other than that those birds make, for instance.

She will not listen. She will not know
that there is more to a charmed life than the charm.

Instead, she will take the charm,
Holding it sometimes in her mouth to touch the designs on it:
sometimes she can read the year it was made with her tongue.
For some reason, which escapes everyone else, she laughs
when she does this, her eyes falling behind her rising cheeks
like sunsets in open country.

William Trowbridge

DEVIL CLOWN

I

In that picture of
the Gypsies brained
in the square with cast iron pipes, thugs
prowl shirtless among the bodies for a moan,
a heave of breath. There, behind the crowd
of citizens, the Devil Clown loiters,
hands in pockets.

II

After your great-great-grandfather kissed
his brood and was last seen riding down the pike
to join the slaughter, the Devil Clown passed
the house on a sorrel that a neighbor swore
he recognized.

III

When your uncle, the family shame, appeared
on the news between two patrolmen, his hands
shackled to his waist, his mouth showing
the slightest smirk, the Devil Clown had outlined
the body with chalk. In the picture it looked
like a man running.

IV

When you parked the Volvo in the underground
garage on State Street, feeling the din
rise from the pavement, your heart stainless
and ready for onslaught, the Devil Clown
presented your ticket, winked.

V

In church, as the Doxology raised the hair
under your collar and the organ swelled deep
in your chest, the Devil Clown, carnation in lapel,
passed your row the plate, his foot tapping.

VI

Those nights when your heartbeat wakes you
and your legs feel like running and running, you get
the pistol and go to the picture window.
His hands are clean.

FIRST LOVE

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt.
I owned
the slanted rim
knew
the dead spot in the backboard.
Always the ball
came back.

Every day I loved
to sharpen
my shooting eye,
waiting
for the touch.
Set shot, jump shot,
layup, hook—
after a while
I could feel
the ball hunger-
ing to clear
the lip of the rim,
the two of us
falling through.

NEW ORLEANS/ALGIERS—1978

Your Tante liked me.
I talked Creole,
brought her shrimp cones
from Galliarde's.
Your Oncle liked me too
for my good tobacco,
twenties I put in the rent jar.
Tante said a jeune fille your shade
was just right for a nervous white boy like me.

(My Port Arthur buddy said,
"Them yella niggers been sellin
their daughter's asses for a hundred years."
He was right: kept women bob in your French blood
like corpses in floodwater. Like nuns and suicides
in my Boston family.)

Tante promised, "A creole girl
make you sleep good,"
but you never let me sleep,
woke me at three
to see voodoo Baron Samedi tapdancing
through the graveyard.
His tails cut Frenchy
and magic in his top hat,
leaning from his head like a mud dauber's nest
but never falling off.

He did a hot buck and wing
on the rusty marble roof
of the Letellier crypt.
Below, the bones
of Hercule (b. 1846 d. 1900) and Agathe (b. 1860 d. 1932) Letellier
float in eight inches of greasy bayou water
from last year's flood.

Oncle and Tante and M. Le Baron
mumbled over the mojo bone,
made love magic in the sink,
caught you a boy your own color.

(Port Arthur said,
"I told you they'd do you thataway."
He and I go drinking, spend my money
on skinny white girls with no eyelashes.)

Pat McCulloch

2 AM TRAFFIC JAMS

In the 2 AM traffic jams,
I keep thinking I'll see you—
on the all-night sidewalks
or the nameless bistros
But you slip away, reappearing
the next night as a
glance backwards through the
frost on my rear windshield
waving to me from the shores
of your hidden city

MARKET INCIDENT

I am standing there, a carrot in my hand,
"This one," I ask the woman, "How much?"
She looks away and scolds her wizened husband
who is stacking tomatoes.
Her indifference makes everything precious.
No stew without carrots.
no washing up, laying out the pan,
adding water, or nurturing the camp stove
into its random blue light.
No evening without a meal.
No life without the carrot.
The wizened husband, desperate in her gaze,
plunges his ugly thumb into a tomato.
It bulges, then gives: the ratta-tat-tatting
of tiny seed-bombs across his worn shirt.
She screams at him, something like,
"No profits without tomatoes you scoundrel dog"
"No stew without carrots," I say politely,
holding out silver with my free hand.
This looks funny. I've become a scale:
thick, tuberous, fairy-tale carrot
in one hand, three coins in the other.
Can it be worth this much?
No buyer without a seller.
No life without a carrot.
She returns to me, the stranger,
as the wizened husband
sinks down on a seat of rage.
I wave the carrot.
I want to destroy her
as the tomato seeds destroyed him.
I want her to name her price.
No going without the carrot.
No give, no take, no grain.
Or humbled, I could invite her for stew
but she would rant and rave,
fishing it out, slice by slice.
Wearing a sage and nasty grin,
she'd wrap the pieces in her kerchief
and disintegrate into the night, calling,
"No stew without a carrot."

I say aloud, "You win."
She turns, bawls out her child
and throws a broken tomato at a lame dog.
She is an excellent shot.
I place my carrot, the king
of carrots, back on the pile.
I throw one coin at another dog.
The rest of the change goes
back into my pocket
and I go farther into the crowded market
searching, now, for cheese.

VENICE, CARNIVAL

Who will you be in Venice
beneath the year's third moon
when the crowd of Carnival
pours toward you all in greasepaint,
all in masks and capes? Who will you be
in this humanity and buildings
floating on moonlight and sewage?

Laughter from a canal taxi
skips along the painted water
and ricochets off rotting brick.
Your personality hangs like a rusted
iron shutter. Be anyone but yourself,
Carnival advises. Be sewage,
puke in the canal, beg, sleep
with cats and pick through garbage.

Be moonlight, fall in love, swell
like Caruso's voice. A Danish woman
winks at you from across the restaurant.
A small Italian boy lights a firecracker,
and the pigeons scuttling along your tourist's boredom
panic and swoop up through your heart.

Be Italian and close your window
to the riotous alleys below,
returning to your tidy apartment,
your statuette of Mary, your proper life
of grief and lace and spices. Be American,

gawking at the gawdy jazz architecture
of San Marco; order a beer and puzzle
at this sinking city (why don't they fix it?).

Be European in this crowd, yes,
wear *that* history for a while;
work hard at language, gesture, shout,
pose, strut. Forget about Kansas,
blond in the corn heat; forget about
flat American English that naps on your tongue

and then saunters toward the barn. Be the crowd,
be the anonymous mime face, talk another's conversation,
kiss another's other, tilt your head back and laugh
a lunatic's happiness to the Mardi Gras moon.

Joan Ritty

LOOKING NOT LOOKING

There were not enough
windows in her childhood.
Now, at midnight, the dark
creeps under her bed,
hangs in her closet with the clothes,
folds into not-quite corners.
It peers beneath her eyelids,
backs into the cracks along the door
and hovers like fog above the rug.

She knows it is there
surrounding her,
round as the moon
shapeless as fear.
She remembers
how her eyes hurt
in sunshine.

FIFTY MILES ONE WAY

She drives into town,
into the noon whistle—
to stop his waiting,
touch his tweedy face.
to see his eyebrow arc up,
his mouth curve down,
when she says,
"You look good."

Upstairs, summer reaches
into his room—
curtains billow gauzily inward,
windowshades slap the screens.
Outside, dusty green leaves
chatter on the trees.
Lying here, she sees the way
his collarbones lie under his skin,
light and smooth.

Everything drowns but
the clock in the corner.
What if, in three hours,
she doesn't drive back home?
What if she just stays?
She lies flat, imagining it.
But she's already left.
He's here in the room alone.
She's well into the long drive home.

THE ASCENT

homage to James Dickey

I went there once.
Past all the snowy mountains
that run into summer,
their snow pooled above
to let down trickle by trickle
into a larger freshet,
over ruined pit and boulder
past stump and great dark heavy logs
soaked in the autumn rains of ten seasons
then in its crystal explosion
to crackle like fire all winter,
thawed down into mud
and the tail of the lizard
dragging its little s
over pebble and gravel
grasses and dark blue ferns
which lie along and go out
with the river.

And climbed up past
mortise and pestel
among all the shatter
in and amongst fragment
where even the overhung leaves
seemed ripped from a puzzle
which no one could ever
put back together
and sunlight adazzle
all over the water
to glance back up
from its low lying
into my face and eyes.

Then took the way home
while my legs still held me
over the hard stones.

BLOODTIES

(for Theodore J. Stoneborn, Waverly, Pennsylvania, 1896.)

1.

It has rained all spring
in Kansas. I didn't know
it mattered 'til now.
The Kaw River fills.
and empties. I see
we all grow older.

I met a woman out here
who told me her mother's mother
floated to Kansas in a wooden boat,
a little girl set out from
the woods of Pennsylvania.
There was water enough
for the rivers to meet then,
she said.

2.

Water runs like blood
coursing deliberate
through new corn
and tractor ruts.

The field is thick
with it, promise
and decay, like hands,
whose time is soon,
still cutting wood.

3.

Grandfather, you are dying
and I am halfway cross
the country. The rain
comes endlessly, or not at all.

GRANDMOTHER'S PAPERWEIGHT

Each afternoon my grandmother took a journey
away from her illness.

I sat on the window seat to see her off.

In a room that was a bed and an isle,
I looked at a wall that was a window
and watched the snow feathery as the edges
of her breath.

Awake my grandmother was sick. She coughed
and coughed until the blood came.

Her one lung was not enough.

Each breath was gravel on gravel—
a catch, a shove to get her to night.

I listened
and read about a little train that could.

Sometimes in the long afternoons
while she slept, I played with her paperweight.

I made a storm of snow on a church,
two evergreens and a wandering fence.

Calm settled on that scene, descended
as a quiver over a harp.

Through a curve of distorting glass,
that place came clear where I hoped she was.

I thought of it as a heaven where angels
were as light as bits of artificial snow.

Jerked away by the bone-rattle of her cough,
she never knew how still the air had been.

I think of that stillness now.

How we learn to locate our love,
to give it a place.

How that place returns to us.

How we often settle to it
out of the swirling eye of our journey.

PLAYING TIME

On the front steps, our mothers wait for us, flushed in their pastels and bermuda shorts. Our jump ropes have coiled to the ground, chalk margins dissolved on the avenue. It's getting dark as we lean back on their

sunburned knees, while they talk as though we aren't there about the note Irene left her husband, the hole Jim put in the bedroom wall with his fist, and how thirteen year old Betty teases her hair now. Then they teach us a game called Time. The mothers nod and touch our shoulders to tell us where to sit. They ask questions and range us on the steps by our answers. Joy and Janie answer, take new places, answer, brush against me as they move again. The questions are hard: I finally lose each step I gain.

The game can't end. We play Time for hours. I wait for my turn and follow the croon of questions, the signals to move, the mild halt of a wrong answer, the penalty of descent. Passing cars brighten the asphalt briefly, the rub of tires erasing for a moment the sounds of crickets and cars down on Belair Road. It's dark now. I can't see the scoop of freckles on my mother's neck, so I look through the trees for a simple constellation, something I would know. I listen for my own mother's voice. She speaks tonight without the strain of calling me, as she must each day to span the neighborhood with the syllables of my name, calling me to lunch and supper, chores and sleep, calling me away from other games. This time I want to answer.

ILLUSTRATION

The thin tight
wall of a balloon
is attacked by air

pressure. There is
resistance but with
time air is always

allowed to seep
through. Can you
picture the idea?

Maybe like root's
growth filtering
through earth. Maybe

as if time were passing
through us instead of us
passing through time.

Michael Hettich

ROMANCE

Your father kneels on the roof, cleaning
gutters while your mother
types letters to magazines
thanking them, and you
walk around
your bedroom, doors closed, humming all
afternoon, identifying
birds in your head, in your shadows on the wall.

The woman you'll marry is talking politics,
silence, the war that is not quite
happening
all over the world
and the ones that are killing nobody
you've ever known, but you haven't met her yet.
She lives down the street. You won't touch her for years.

B.H. Fairchild

THE WATER BALLET

From a balcony where Strauss spills from a speaker
I watch the midday sun float like a hollow ball
in this blue pool, this chlorinated heaven
whose clouds hang deep below, darkening at the center
where the drain waits for winter and its sucking spiral.

Around the edge, our sons and daughters let their legs
dangle. At some hidden signal, they stand, spread
their thin brown arms like wings, touch finger tips
and, bowing to this mirror sky, fly into the sun.

WHERE THE DRAGON LIVES

Out here, away from the city
I don't have to imagine anything:
I can plainly see a dragon
gobbling the moon.
When my children slip up for air
they are quick to agree, "Look,
a dragon is eating the moon."
We all see his jaws working, his long
white fangs, that swinging tail.

When our dragon gallops on,
my children springing from the pond flash
silver in leftover
light of water and moon. And when
he devours a mountain slab that juts
into his path, we dance beneath
the portion he leaves behind,
and a moon, half eaten.

Tonight, the dragon rides;
tomorrow, who knows, a unicorn
and the moon,
a mite-sized bigger,
the swallowed
crown of mountain growing
back whole again,
my silver fish rising
from water to testify,
"Look mom, a unicorn . . . "

PHONE CALL TO ROBERTS

We've seen
a long wind
sweep down the plains
and have watched
the willows
bend to breaking,
bare limbs clicking
like teeth
to the ground.
In the year
since we've
last spoken,
winter has frozen
the hoof the deer
and left the snake
immobile in his coil.
Let's just mention
the early thaw—
the yellow flower
that lights
in the fog
and lifts the snow.

Robert Funge

AM I A BAD MAN? AM I A GOOD MAN?

Dream Song 239

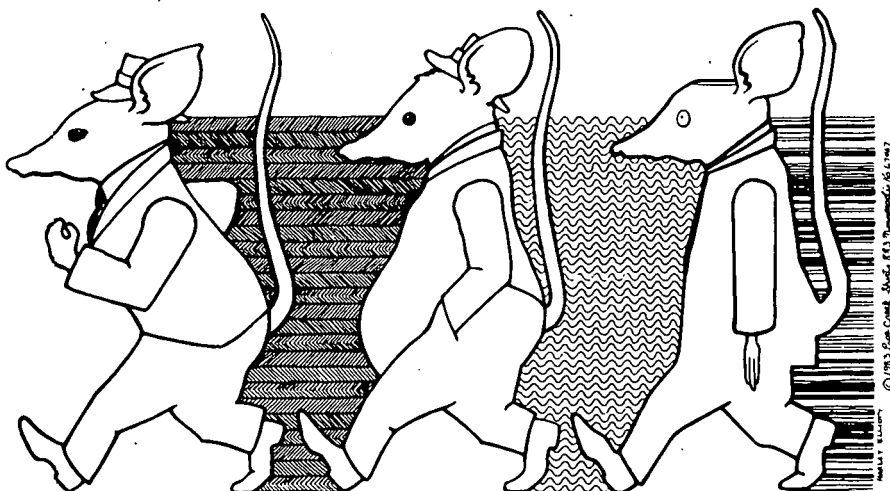
Toyed I once as a down cheeked boy with a jezebel
rubbing her tummy softly with my hand
altoing sweet soft nothings in her ear.
Tugging my hand she murmured *Lower lower*
so I dropped my voice an octave &
I uttered deeper nothings in her ear.

Played I once as a young man strong with a Southern belle
in a field & she rang me till the cows came home
until I could toll no more
my clapper gone to rest. As I un-rose
to leave she lilted languedly *Now y'all come*
again I said I'd like to but I can't.

Layed I now as an old man long in a cold motel
while the walls like the eyes of gods flamed through the room.
I have consumed
a fire that should have been allowed to burn.
Now I understand Becker who killed his son for bread.
There will be no more jokes. There is nothing funny. This cannot be said.

THE SALVATION OF UNCLE FLOYD

Uncle Floyd's head comes bobbing up,
the cigar still smoking, words
seeping like cheap wine
from the corners of his mouth.
He strikes a match in my skull,
peering across the forgotten years.
There's the office he clerked
in, there's the bar tended
the year he was on the wagon.
Tattooed on his forearm, a drunk
sprawls in a slumway door. He
recognizes it; it's him.
Uncle Floyd blinks hard, until his eyes
clear. His mind's like a journal
entry glistening. He takes
the Havana from his mouth
and pronounces his name— Master
Sergeant Floyd Coile, born again in
the U.S. Army, his pocket full
of pencils. The typing ribbon
and the multi-colored forms
have saved him. He signs
himself the man of letters,
the clerk, the right hand
of printed orders, the promoter,
the demoter, potato peeling
detail, sick call, leaves and
A.W.O.L.'s. Uncle Floyd, ready for
the reenlistment binge.



HARLEY ELLIOTT interview—poetry

AN INTERVIEW WITH HARLEY ELLIOTT

Denise Low interviewed Harley Elliott when he was Poet-in-Residence at the University of Kansas in October, 1982.

LOW: Do you think that writing poetry has changed the way you perceive reality?

ELLIOTT: In a negative sense. When you're in a state too conscious of poetry, it's very hard to have any kind of authentic life, because everything is seen in relationship to material. So that was a change.

There was one point when I thought it was very important to know all the names of things, and I guess poetry led me to that. Poetry also got me to the point of not wanting to rely too much on that, and I credit poetry. I don't know—if I were a runner or, God forbid, a football player, these might do the same kind of thing. It's hard to separate out poetry from other kinds of activities. I like to sing (parlor singing, not stage singing), and I think it has affected things, too.

I guess the best thing is it gives a person alternative visions or alternatives ways of maintaining . . .

LOW: Maintaining against what?

ELLIOTT: Oh, I'm not so sure it's against. It's maintaining a certain kind of equilibrium with, you name it: weather, hunger, relationships, or twisted personal considerations.

LOW: So you think that poetry gives you insight into yourself?

ELLIOTT: Well, yes. If it didn't, well, okay. That's one of its primary benefits. You know more about the monster you are and the angel you are. Poetry is a good mirror. The mind has a lot of ways of clouding that and avoiding looking in it. Poetry is one way to belly up to the trough—I'm mixing my metaphors. Throw a mirror over it. But you can't help but see what came out there and what is good about it.

LOW: Do you ever feel an urge to teach poetry? I know you have taught art at Marymount for many years. Since you have such a strong background in English and art majors as an undergraduate, do you ever regret not having the opportunity to teach writing?

ELLIOTT: I would like to teach poetry now and again. Actually, I'd like to teach art now and again. Anything that's a day-to-day thing I have to keep pushing to keep it fresh, and I'm sure poetry would start to throw a pall over my own personal interpretation of things if I had to deal with other people's poetic insight or poetic problems. One's enough. But I would enjoy it. Teach is one of those lovely words . . . The question is always

there. Can you teach art? Can you teach poetry? Essentially I think the answer is no. You can teach its nature or its forms or approaches to it. But I think the right kind of attitude and spirit is there or isn't.

LOW: When did you become aware that your spirit is that type of spirit?

ELLIOTT: As far back as I knew what a poem was, or heard about poetry. But it was poetry to myself. I wrote junior high poetry, "I feel better" poetry.

But for a shift, in terms of what poetry can do, I'd say I went to poetry readings when I was in graduate school. I remember particularly a poetry reading by Ed Dorn. He read his earlier stuff. This was in 1964. And there was something about the nature of the work that was different from other poetry I had ever heard before. But it wasn't anything new. I had also heard Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, and other people. But for some reason, I remember Dorn's poetry. It's not really rural, but it's countrified, his earlier stuff. I'm thinking of "The Plumber's Daughter." There's a certain resonance out of his stuff, and I didn't spend too much time wondering why it happened. All I knew was that after that reading I felt real good. I mean that inexplicable kind of good, and it seemed to indicate that poetry could be used for a larger thing than just making yourself feel better about everything.

LOW: What can poetry be used for?

ELLIOTT: Road signs, like a road sign: "Watch out for falling rocks." "Slippery when wet." This whole idea of fate or reality or whatever you like to call it.

Things are so tentative. And the idea of being in control of your own life is ridiculous. Maybe you're in control about one percent of your life—if you're really up on it. But the rest of it you're just out to make some kind of peace with it. People die that shouldn't die. That's an old thing—and people don't die that should, or whatever. The title of a poem that one of the K.U. students brought in was "Some Things Connect; Others Never Will"—I think I'm paraphrasing it—but that's the idea: we're so orderly we want things to end properly and begin properly and match. And this is bucking the current. Poetry doesn't help you buck the current. It just helps you to see why we get into the whirlpools a little easier. A little on the outer ring rather than the center pool. It's a way of sharpening up readiness. It makes you readier to meet the world, its inimitable current.

LOW: So you see yourself as always trying to stay in the current? I'm thinking, too, of your remarks about poet Dick Lourie, how he is always in the center of things, how he has this special quality of being in the world and in the time frame of each moment.

ELLIOTT: Yeah. It's knowing when to project and when to be. I think most people project too much. I think it's the human tendency to abstract and

project. Otherwise, we wouldn't progress. I had someone show me a chart once that was a right angle. The base line was time and the vertical line was space. Most of us are represented by little dots down in the angle. We just can't think in long terms. And then you have Einstein and Rembrandt and those folks way out there, able to project way out there. I think it's important to be able to think beyond the next five minutes as a possibility but not as a reality. Like I hear someone say, "My five year plan is . . ." and I find it hard to understand that.

LOW: Could you tell the Dick Lourie story about time?

ELLIOTT: Dick Lourie has the magical quality of being alive from moment to moment. Dick Lourie, Ron Schreiber, and John Gill and myself—and I probably shouldn't dump my insensitivity on to Ron Schreiber and John Gill too, guilt by association—but we were driving to Buffalo, New York, from Ithaca, and we had a certain time period to be there for a conference. Dick was not driving. Otherwise we probably would not have made it. But he kept seeing places like Mabel's Homemade Pies and saying, "Let's pull in." The three of us kept clamoring simultaneously, "Shut up. We've got to get to Buffalo, and we don't want to do that." And we'd pass a flea market ten minutes later. Dick would suggest, "Let's go back." We'd be a mile down the road, and it's hard for me to turn around and go back. It's one of the things I really hate about myself. But we kept slapping Dick down, and we didn't stop until we got almost there and knew, yes, we could afford five minutes.

I didn't think too much about it at the time, but later it always impressed me that Dick was right where he was at every moment. And if he saw something that caught his senses, caught his imagination, he wanted to turn toward it through some sort of magnetic thing. The rest of us were plugged into some further reality, and we just didn't want to have to deal with what was really happening. So we were missing it. He was alive and into things. That whole stretch between Ithaca and Buffalo might as well have been walled in on both sides of the highway as far as we were concerned.

LOW: Hearing his story again, I am reminded of your interest in American Indian cultures. Do you think there's any correlation between Dick's state of mind and the way of living that a lot of Indian cultures had?

ELLIOTT: Sure, and it goes beyond that, even. You can find other cultures even today that have that attitude. It's called animism. I think it's the way we all lived before the neocortex got really fat. It's a so-called primitive way of viewing the world. You are in it, rather than you are in here and nature is out there. Somewhere along the line, when we started getting very conscious, it seems that we split. I don't know whether I'm talking about the I-Thou or the development of the ego, maybe. And Dick seems to circumvent that, or maybe he never—I know he's a very

intelligent man. He's got a neocortex, but he just seems to have the animistic view of "I'm in it."

Now, I may be loading that interpretation on Dick. But I don't think so from reading his work and being around him. I think it's a much healthier way to view existence. That way you don't run over trees real easily with big machines or tear things up just because you'd like to see a square of asphalt there. If you do it, you have some sense of what you're doing. That's the old apology to the victim that the Indians and other societies used, because you don't kill the deer without changing your own life. It's not just that you get a full belly out of the deal. It seems to me that animism is a much longer view of things. It has the insistence on the fact that you're going to change something, and you've got to have some respect. I guess that's the word I think of when I think of Dick. He has an overall respect, and it's not just the things that you might like, but a flea's a part of it, too. I certainly don't want to present Dick as a goody-two-shoes who wouldn't dare scratch himself if he itched.

LOW: No. One of my favorite poems by him, "throat" in the "Suite (three love poems)" sequence is about the phlegm in his throat being like Camembert cheese.

ELLIOTT: I think I missed that one.

LOW: He scratches himself.

ELLIOTT: Yes, well, he's quite sensory, I think. He's a good animal.

LOW: What is the connection between animism and the senses?

ELLIOTT: I think if you believe you're in things, then you just obviously pay more attention with the five senses that we know about and the five hundred we don't. Otherwise, maybe you just let the brain take all the heat and let your brain define reality for you.

Sometimes I think of the brain as a separate creature, a lot like the geneticists are starting to talk about the genes. It's like human beings are just bags for genes.

LOW: Sociobiology. I've gotten very interested in how genes define our perceptions and our behavior.

ELLIOTT: Right. There's a book, *The Selfish Gene*, you might like.

LOW: I have one poem where I've tried to make that connection between lust and genes . . .

ELLIOTT: Some things might be best left unsaid. We're so fond of defining what is, you know. This is a maple and that is not. And I don't think that it's possible to come up with one of those snug old kind of definitions. Your reality is one thing, mine is another, Daniel's is another.

The soda cracker is certainly another, and so maybe as a poet it's just trying to put a little bit of personal definition on what is, with the understanding that it is in flux.

Just because you've written a poem, you certainly haven't nailed it down forever. Maybe for that moment. I think the best poems I've read, that's how I feel: for a moment it was nailed down. I've had moments like that, where reality was like this. But I think it shifts so much of the time.

LOW: I agree.

ELLIOTT: It's like the scientists bombarding an electron and telling about the nature of electrons. Well, the fact that they've bombarded it has changed its nature, so what they're reporting on as the nature of electrons is actually the nature of what's under bombardment. But we accept it as a totality.

LOW: I see you've been reading new physics.

ELLIOTT: Not too much. I get really hung up in physics. I read whatever I find that looks interesting. But I do read science books.

LOW: Now, what's a poet doing reading science?

ELLIOTT: That's the trouble with labels. It's just one big soup. There are some science books that really disturb me. I just read about the man who is spending his life severing the nerve between a frog's brain and a frog's eyes, scrambling the connections, and gluing things back together. And then the frog is sort of back to normal. When an insect flies into what they call the frog's "visual field," or the left upper quadrant of the frog's visual field, his tongue flashes out in the lower right quadrant. In other words, he misses it by a mile. And they've done this to a number of frogs.

LOW: At least it's not people.

ELLIOTT: Well, not that we know about. My first reaction was, okay: you screw with a frog's brain; you yield a screwed-up frog. And I'm sure that this is all applicable down the line where we may be able to correct genetic defects that occur at birth and that sort of thing. So it's all for a good cause. But. I don't know where to go after that word. There's also something obscene about it.

LOW: Do you think that for a person to be worth reading as a writer that he or she really has to be conscious of what we know about reality through science? You have to look at that as well as British literature, as well as psychology, as well as geology, history—a vast foundation—before you can say anything that takes into consideration all the complexities of the world we are living in?

ELLIOTT: Well, I want to know about the rocks, the sky, the trees, the people's thoughts. It's all a gravy. It's all the same thing. I know we're going towards specialization, but I can't see it. I just don't like that attitude of defining your own drawer and crawling in and pulling it shut.

You know, it used to be that the arts were looked to for the push. Now it's science. The arts gave us hope.

LOW: You're talking Renaissance.

ELLIOTT: Yes. Now it's science, but the stress is different somehow. We're really control-oriented, and I guess that's what I'm objecting to. We don't want to find out about the stars simply for the sake of being able to speak to the stars and the clouds more clearly, or hear them more clearly, but we want to find out so that we can make them do what we want.

LOW: Seeding clouds for rain.

ELLIOTT: Yes. Or even more bizarre examples than that. It is bizarre enough to me that New York City is considered reality, the natural state of things. Though that's not to say that there is anything superior to living in rural Oklahoma.

LOW: Or Kansas.

ELLIOTT: More species seem to live—and there's the word "naturally" again—in what we think of as nature rather than what we think of as civilization, excluding roaches and pigeons. But this is the old control orientation, this ability to think abstractly. We say we need sky scrapers, and we need this and that, we try to satisfy these perceived needs in the immediate sense. The long range effects aren't really followed too much.

LOW: That is true. That's exactly the center of the energy problems.

ELLIOTT: Right. And we're also just greedy as hell.

LOW: This reminds me of how Gary Snyder laments the decrease of the genetic variety on the planet.

ELLIOTT: Hear, hear. Yes, exactly. There are genetic theories that the pure strains are the weakest because they are so local.

LOW: So the pure animal strains become extinct first. We humans seem to be the mongrels that can make it anywhere.

ELLIOTT: It is humbling to look at something like that on a long-term basis. I was told about the Irish elk, who went for the antlers. Over generations the antlers kept getting larger and larger, because it was

more attractive to the females, I suppose, and better fighting. They started having trouble with trees, and Irish elk are no longer around, because it was just a bad idea, and other kinds of elk are still around.

LOW: So do you think that pretty soon we'll just be reduced to cockroaches, pigeons and humans?

ELLIOTT: I don't know. I think you can take any one species and say that the ones who are going to survive are the ones who can adapt. I'm wondering if our modern brain is the equivalent of the Irish elk's antlers. In the long run is it going to turn out to be that we got too big-headed for our own existence? Maybe our brain has just gotten too big to fit into things.

But I'm not anti-progress, as long as I can find a good definition of that. I'm not one of these back-to-wood-clubs-and-animal-skins types. We seem to move really fast with what we can do. It's like a scientist said to me once, when we were talking about sociobiology, and I was mentioning this attitude of control that they all seem to have, and his response was, if we can do it, why not? And that was all that was important to him, being able to do whatever it was. If you can, then you should. I don't agree. To me it's a doomsday philosophy, because one thing we know we can do now is snuff it.

LOW: These are also issues that I have been turning over and over and over in my mind, the ideas about science and economics and business and ecology and the stock market and how all of it affects how we think and how we perceive.

ELLIOTT: War and business seem to provide the impetus for progress or discoveries. We could do something about hunger, a hell of a lot more than we are. We could do something about misunderstandings between us. All his nationalism of one kind or another—I'm a Kansan, and I defy a Nebraskan to . . . whatever. Or I'm five feet tall and anybody shorter than me or larger than me really sucks. It just keeps everybody apart.

LOW: It's a certain kind of tribalism.

ELLIOTT: Yes. Other people said this long before—Buckminster Fuller and Malcolm X and Gary Snyder—all kinds of varied people have said this. We're growing away from homogeneity. We keep bitching and bickering among ourselves from our different modes rather than getting together and avoiding the cataracts that are coming up, which are, it's obvious.

LOW: I recall you saying that one of the most important writers you read is Marcel DuChamp. And then, also, comic books, Don Marquis . . .

ELLIOTT: And the blues.

LOW: And the blues. And you're synthesizing just a wide variety of sources—rock and roll, too.

ELLIOTT: Well, how do you keep it out? I think that people would have to struggle very hard to maintain a fine beam on life. How do you keep from what we call distractions? I think it would be easier to go ahead and let stuff in.

LOW: Is there anything else you want to say about influences on you as a writer?

ELLIOTT: Well, once every four years or so I read a book that I can't explain to myself, I can't dismiss, I can't do anything but feel good about—*One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Every so often I feel the need to read that again.

LOW: Who's the Japanese poet you read?

ELLIOTT: Kenji Miyazawa, who I had never heard of before and just bumbled into. He affected me real strongly.

An artist, Kunioshi, late 1700's. Mostly ink drawing and some wood cuts. There's something about his lines—they become just more than pure form. Enticing lines that are just like well-turned rock.

DuChamp, Joseph Cornell, the obvious ones like Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Caravaggio. I can't get enough Caravaggio.

I know I'm leaving out hundreds of people that I think are just wonderful, but it's hard to think of them when you're supposed to. But they could be any kinds of people. It could be someone you see in a grocery store. It all has the same kind of priority to me.

LOW: I'm appreciative of how pleasant my associations with other writers in Kansas have been.

ELLIOTT: God love us.

LOW: Yeah. But do you consciously feel yourself as part of a community of writers in this part of the country?

ELLIOTT: No. Not necessarily. I think it would be limiting if I did that. I'm closer to them, and I am liable to meet them more often and be able to talk with them. But I'd like to think that if I had a Lear jet that I could fly to Ithaca, Venezuela, or wherever I chose, and I would be able to feel community with some people there, too.

LOW: Would you use that jet to go back in time? To meet Miyazawa?

ELLIOTT: No, well, if I could do it, sure. But once you've got Van Gogh's paintings, you don't really need Van Gogh any more. And I've read a lot

of Van Gogh's writing. I don't care for the way he thinks in his letters. Sometimes I want to kick his ass and say, quit whining and bitching and feeling melodramatic about life.

I think poets of all the artists would find it hardest to avoid getting out of touch with everything else, because poetry uses words, and they have a social connotation and a social sense. That's what they were made for. Whereas in the visual arts, there was a time when they sort of split away from being a means to an end. They started exploring form purely for its own sake, and paintings became an end in themselves. They didn't mean anything or stand for anything else. And that was a stated goal of some of them, like Ad Reinhardt. This painting is a brand new creation, and it stands for nothing.

LOW: Nothing anthropomorphic or metaphoric.

ELLIOTT: And it's great. You're as close to God as anybody will get. But so what?

In many ways the visual artists have painted themselves into that corner. Now nobody wants to look at that stuff very long. They buy it, and okay, it's about form. I see red, I see blue, I see green, I see lines. What else do you want to see? Well, then you have to start loading stuff on to it. And that's kind of from you, not the painting. The painting is pure, after all.

So the painters can do that. I think they're almost phasing themselves out of existence in a way, because after that, the concept people came along and just dropped the object. We don't need this middle man. The idea is what's important. I'll just transmit it to you in the easiest way possible. My work is the idea, from my brain to yours. But there is no "make" involved. I guess I'm one of those guys slopping in the mud who likes to have something made.

And the poets can't do this. They tried to do concrete poetry, where they said, "Let's get totally away from a poem being a vehicle, free it." But it doesn't work so well with a poem, because if they can't use words, they have to use letters. The next step is the blank page. And I guess that's been done.

LOW: Hallmark's done that.

ELLIOTT: And the dematerialized books.

LOW: What's a dematerialized book?

ELLIOTT: It's lot like Kline's dematerialized paintings, in which there is nothing on the wall. A light is shining on the gallery wall, and there may even be a title card there, but nothing else is there. He sold two of these, for gold.

In ways I'm for him, I think. Go ahead. Show the hand. But the equivalent book would be, I won't write you a poem. I'll sit down and bullshit whatever I think, and that's my poem. And then you'll filter it and

tell somebody else, and that's your poem.

I think a little ritual is important. A little making of something to carry the thing, the content.

You read the New Testament, and somebody will ask Christ, "What about this?" And he could just say yes or no. Or explain it really clearly. But he doesn't. He tells some stupid story about a fig tree. And the guys all go away saying, "What in the hell?" And they're going to live with that for a while, and it's up to them to untie it and sort it out. And then it stays with them because they bring it to climax. Now it's a part of their life, really. But if you just said, "Yeah, be good. Treat people right. That's all I've got to say." Well, we've heard that before.

LOW: So metaphor gives the other person's imagination a chance to work.

ELLIOTT: To carry it, whether it's a painting or a poem or some other thing. The carrier has a lot of built-in clues, and I guess the thing is to make the clues ambiguous enough so as not to be dismissed easily, but available enough that you can get a grip until you come out with some kind of resolution.

POEMS BY HARLEY ELLIOTT

PARKING LOT

you stretch so far
and make the blue sky
ache with emptiness

I know I am only a
bump on a bump here

where the bright October
sphere of light
turns on my hands.

Beneath this shell
my feet strike earth
and farther still

the roofs of temples
rigid in the dark.

YES SHE SAID BUT NO

Before he asked he made sure
the censor was stripped and
staked out in the garden
to attract brightly colored
birds.

Yes she said but no
not with these tall clouds
coloring the sky with rain.
So he went away a year
and then came back.

The censor was carried in
a marble box awash in agate and flint
to transmit the thought of centuries
shorthand:

yes she said but no
that knock on the door
is the Red Chinese Army
Quick! Say something poetic.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

The censor was chained in the attic
overblown on cookies and milk.
Yes she said but no
not with this apple
leaning sideways in the light.
He went away for a year
and then came back.

By now the censor was a
sacred relic done up in ermine;
his thoughts sold in the common
market as a cure for gout.
Yes she said but no.

Their movements became a constellation.
Mountains languished.
He went away she went away
all they had know went away.

Even the censor forgot their names
and the exquisite details
of their forms.

TO BUILD A FENCE IN THE RAIN

you need to want the fence
beyond anything.
Time equals wire:

get it strung
get it stretched
get it stuck.

Duckwalking gulley mud
barbs spanging off the roll
for once you don't pick up
every turtle snake or stone.

Fixing metal strand on metal pole
steel pliers pockets full of metal clips
metal stretcher chain dragging wet grass
where you fling it into and lean against
the metal truck tell me
is the lightning still galloping
off in the southwest?

No matter how hard it rains
shift your noisy boots
and say it's letting up.

THE STORY OF CHICKEN FRIED STEAK

The phrase first fell into
my callow young head as a chicken made
of red fat veined beef
a poem on a plate.
I assumed they caused certain
chickens to have steak meat
instead of their own.

Then I saw one
that flat crusty yellow slab
which was a chicken fried steak.
Only one of the words was true.

But chicken fried steak had already
gotten into people's blood.
It settled on a big
spread in the market
and took the world from there.
Everyone knew it was a lie
but chicken fried steak
was stronger than they were.

It stands tall on the menu
in the hand of the man who
wonders if the chicken fried steak
is worth a shit today

who would not like to hear
himself asking for oil fried
breaded meat product
and a cup of hot
coffee crystals please
but will fight defending the honor
of his chicken fried steak.

In our prime we could laugh a chicken
fried steak right off the plate
but age turns us to the names that are true:
Morning Glory and Oatmeal.

We tell you these things.
The ones who gave the words
chicken fried steak
have designated you soft target.

Soft target this has been
the story of chicken fried steak.

CIRCLING THE BLOCK

Driving Delta 88
full skid down late
fluorescent winter streets

the air is cold the light
clear navy blue.

Looking at our maps we see
the Year of The Horse
run out a white one
for these banks of snow
stretched in a starry hide.

On the Speedo meter an
ornamental border of 7's
rolls up.
Let's circle this block

just for the sake of time
and to hear the snow squeak
around our lives again:

there's the steering wheel
and there's the ring around the moon.

AT LEAST I KNOW HOW TO EAT MY EGGS

At least I know how to eat my eggs.
At least the stranger behind me
in the cafeteria line informs me so
after seeing me put tabasco on them.

Perhaps there is something worth saving.
Redeemed by a cluster of red
drops of pepper juice
I thank God for the simple life.

Perhaps this man will be
an expert at saving wretches:

Better then if I had
failed completely
and not even known
how to eat my eggs.

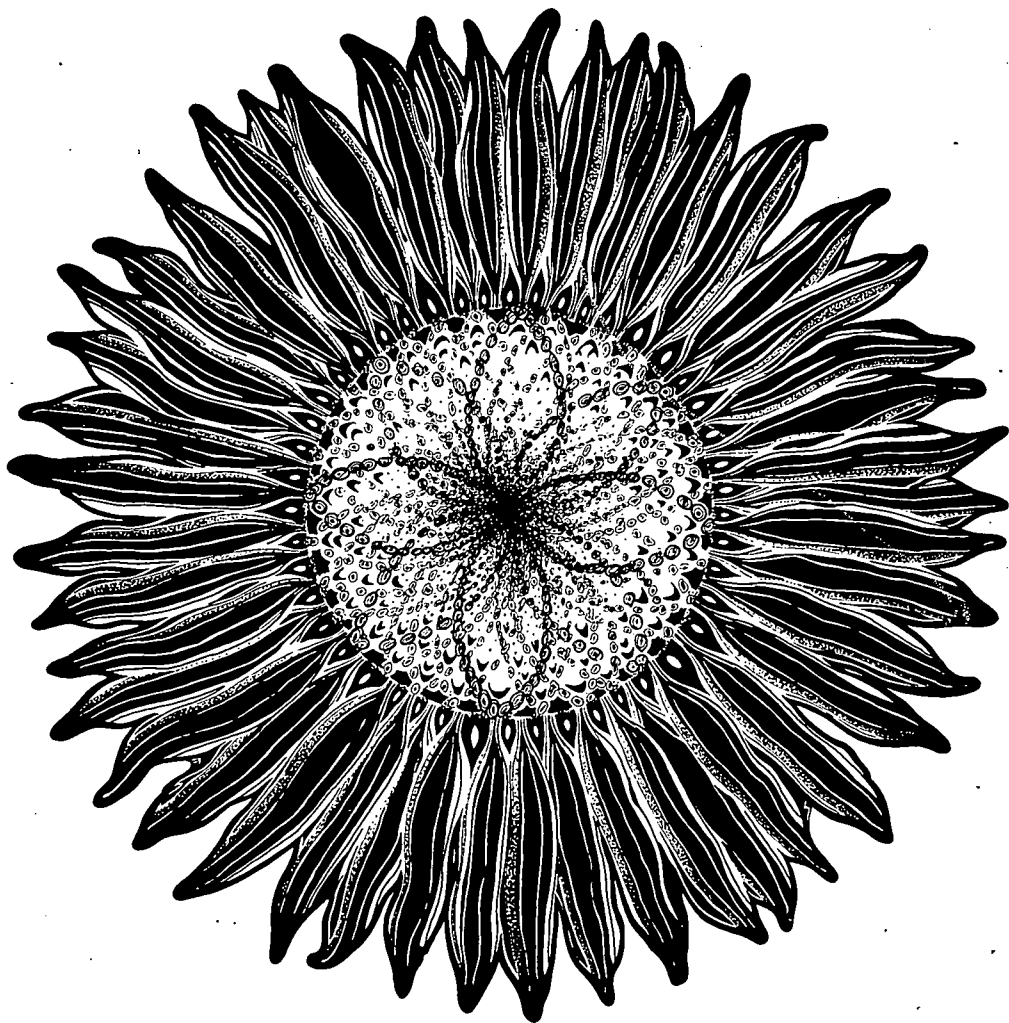
ON CONSIDERING ANTS

On
considering ants
this young boy
suspecting he is born to power

tries the theory out.
It is noted what the sole
of one's sandal can do.

In the brown plier jaws
a single cookie grain expands;
blue sky dwindles
in the broken eye.

The foot that danced
and destroyed is burning
with a deep blue fire.



PHOTOS
by Terry Evans

THE PRAIRIE—Terry Evans takes its portrait, and we realize how much we have not seen of the land around us, the grass beneath our feet.

Terry Evans lives in Salina, Kansas and is presently working on a book about prairie, with an introduction by Gregory Bateson. Her work has been featured in numerous exhibitions including *An Open Land* at the Chicago Art Institute. A two-person exhibition, *Terry Evans/Earl Iverson* (Spencer Museum, University of Kansas) is presently on tour.



Maxwell Game Preserve, March 1984

Terry Evans



Cave Hollow, June 1981

Terry Evans



Cave Hollow, Fall 1981 and and Spring 1984

Terry Evans



Prairie, Salina, Kansas, March 1984

Terry Evans



Prairie, Salina, Kansas, Fall 1978

Terry Evans



Maxwell Game Preserve, March 1984

Terry Evans



Maxwell Game Preserve, March 1984

Terry Evans



Maxwell Game Preserve, March 1984

Terry Evans



Rosalea's Hotel 1984

LITTLE RED HOTEL ON THE PRAIRIE:

Café Society Among the Ostentatiously Unknown

by Helen Ashmore

Just because you paid your reservation at Rosalea's Hotel and scorched your way across 250 miles of Kansas July afternoon to get there doesn't mean Rosalea is going to let you in. The door is locked, leaving you to contemplate at your leisure the wide, clean and only business street of Harper, Kansas (pop. 1800).

The street is empty. At one end a plainly ugly waterless brick columnar fountain bakes in 103 degrees at 5:07 p.m. by the bank's digital clock. At the other end a car that looks as if it may or may not be working is parked in front of the unrestored 1883 Patterson House Hotel, now Rosalea's. The hotel lost its cornices sometime in the 1950's; its facade is covered with plaster, and it has been freshly painted a fresh tulip red.

It is here, 46 miles southwest of Wichita, that Rosalea (who does not use a last name) tries to nurture art and conversation into an art community and café society—a sort of Greenwich Village of the Prairie.

While Rosalea does not come to the door and you do not cool your heels on the egg-frying pavement, you may study the windows and the signs that introduce you to this scarlet oasis of manic individuality in the middle of nowhere. A row of inverted mannequin legs in the window backs up the motto "Bringing culture to agriculture since 1968." Small typewritten notices are plastered on the door, advising the newcomer of proper procedures.

You must park in front. "Despite wishful thinking on the part of the town's residents, this is not a whore house; if you're afraid to park in front, don't come in." Ring twice, advises another sign, if you have a paid reservation (refundable only if there is no room; sickness or any other excuse is no excuse); ring three times if you are delivering goods. If Rosalea likes your looks, she will let you in.

Ring once to signify intent to gawk at the eccentric Rosalea and her strange hotel; do not ring if you are a relative in town for the big family

(mostly staunch Mennonites) reunion today. In either of these cases, Rosalea does not wish to see you.

Ring carefully, twice, then. Stand in the sun feeling like the mannequin outside the window. Somewhere, you sense, Rosalea is looking you over.

The inner door shakes open with a clattering of many keys. Rosalea shoulders open the outside door and greets her guests with a smile. Her black t-shirt bears the legend "I'm not cynical, just experienced." Her white jeans, torn at the pocket, are hitched up with a big brown belt. Rosalea looks about forty and altogether pleasant and normal; if there is any excess in her demeanor, it is an excess of energy. Soft curls back away demurely from the smooth forehead and high cheekbones of a good face. Her eyes, although deep brown, are bright and darting; her smile is incessant.

Rosalea's Tourist Trap

"Food and Souvenirs for the Discriminating Tourist!"
Across the street from Rosalea's Hotel
116 West Main Harper, KS 67058



Rosalea grew up in a large Mennonite family on a farm outside Harper. She does not smoke or drink. Her manner of speech is slangless, clean and direct. Her occasional use of unacceptable-in-the-company-of-ladies language seems almost intentional.

In 1962 she went to the University of Kansas at Lawrence, where she studied art and where, she says, "nobody paid any attention to me." Then she went to New York, lived in the East Village, and dated a now successful Japanese sculptor.

But in 1968 she returned to Harper. "I need them," she says of the townspeople who reject her. "They clarify things for me. I get my energy from them."

This cybernetic theory does not embrace—except for members of her immediate family—her blood relatives.

"It is," as Harper resident Wes Hall, whose business is leasing properties for oil rights, explained, "when Rosalea dresses in shorts and cowboy boots to walk the dogs that she upsets people." She especially worries the sensibilities of the local religious community because she was herself a member of the Mennonite church until she was in her thirties. But Rosie, as most townspeople call her, is no longer a member of the Church.

"They treated me like an oddball when I was a kid. So here I am now, a celebrity eccentric. They want to get a look at me because I was on

Wichita television—they did a little feature on me. I was on *twice*; I think that's what got my relatives. So they want to see me. Well I don't want to see them."

Rosalea ushered us into the huge, high-ceilinged, foil-papered lobby. The overall first impression of Rosalea's Hotel lobby is of Rick's place in Casa Blanca—after taxes, or after the war; perhaps after bankruptcy.

A rainbow laundry of 8-foot square pastel weavings hangs pleasantly in the far corner. "Tissue," Rosalea answered. A tall fan, two wicker chairs, a couch and bookshelf (where Machiavelli, Edith Hamilton, and Alan Paton share quarters with *Ebony* and the *Gay Liberation News*) congregate amicably to the right.

Miscellaneous art works—some of them more interesting than others—sit around or hang out in the lobby with various knickknacks and vintage (some just old) fashions. These were our only companions in the room—or in the hotel for that matter—for we were the only guests at Rosalea's on an otherwise hot Saturday night in Kansas.

A shelf by the door held a cash register and a log book with information about new members. Name, address, the most courageous thing you have ever done, and what you would name a pet ant. Sample answers from Rosalea's clientele: "I have not yet done the most courageous thing I have ever done." "I got out of bed this morning." "Virgil" and "Decad-ant."

Only members may stay at Rosalea's. The rooms are without air conditioning. There is no television and no telephone. "Can't stand the damn things," said Rosalea, smiling; "they'll drive you crazy." And she explained that making and breaking reservations is not her idea of a productive way to pass the time. No, not even paid members are allowed to see the rooms before they are assigned one, but must choose, even as they stand in the lobby, from abrupt listings such as one finds in Fodor's or Fielding's. At Rosalea's the game is played entirely by Rosalea's rules.

The Oasis of the Bible Belt Since 1968

Although respectable townspeople generally avoid the Hotel and its Redneck Café when it is open "sundown until conversation dwindles . . . for junk food, fresh fruit, pop and nuts," there are enough local free-loaders that a minimum 25 charge is enforced. And, Hall said, with a certain amount of respect in his voice, "she gets people down here from all over the country."

Rosalea has entertained ostentatiously unknown visiting artists as guests at the hotel in exchange for their work, now on display in a comfortable upstairs gallery, and here and there throughout the hotel. She publishes a zany newsletter which, when it is intelligible, clearly embraces the cause of supporting living artists.

Tiny (1" square) printed propaganda pieces for the cause of supporting art and artists are tucked away in surprising places. They fall out of pillows, show up in clean ash trays. Others, the same size, are for leaving at local businesses: restaurants and gas stations. They say "You're getting my business because I stayed at Rosalea's."

But who embraces Rosalea's cause, her artworks made of tissue paper, foil, and plastic animals—creations that could hold their own in some of the more eagerly modern collections? And who helps her with the big project, the hotel?

The first answer is found on a sign on the wall next to one of her collages in the bathroom of the honeymoon suite. "NOT FOR SALE. Can you imagine? No one had the sense to buy these beautiful creations when they were for sale. They will be destroyed at my death. No sense my relatives getting money for my work when I couldn't."

An effort to pursue this topic, change Rosalea's mind, was wasted. She apparently means it. She talked of going to work in an office to support herself and her projects, but she insisted adamantly that she will not sell her art.

The historic foundations she has approached have not shown much interest in helping her restore the hotel. But then Rosalea doesn't show much interest in restoring it herself. She wants to save it. And she wants to have fun with it. The hotel is therefore perhaps more historic sight than site. It is Rosalea continuing art project, one that embraces the arts of keeping the roof from falling in and of finding money to repair ceilings when the roof does fall in.

"Restoration," she says with a huff, "how boring. Anyone can restore a place, put it back the way it was. I want to *do* things with this place."

She has already done some things. She has stuccoed the corner wall "to keep it from falling down," painted it its notorious red, papered walls with foil, filled hallways with gravel and wood boardwalks—which offers the guest shuffling to the shower an unusual interior country road experience; she has provided black lights, a red negligee, and an orange hunting hat, along with mirrors and a bare mother and child mannequin to the honeymoon suite.

She has appointed one bathroom with icons and paintings—in what could be called turn-of-the-century American Romantic visions—of Jesus. (Another designation for this genre is "Christ with Assumptions.") Rosalea has put out the call, somewhat brazenly perhaps, that at her hotel one may "pee with Jesus."

In addition to this somewhat rocky and ill-advised public relations program, the hotel is plagued by problems of not fitting into categories that might allow support for it.

The state historic foundation "wouldn't even talk to me," said Rosalea, "for two years. When someone finally did, they said it didn't qualify because stucco covers the 26" bedrock wall. The fact that this was done in 1885 to keep it from falling down—that was a little detail they weren't interested in."

"Then, because someone took the cornices off in the 50's—we don't know just who did it or when—the hotel doesn't represent the architectural style that had cornices. Is this my fault? It's still a good old building."

BOX 121 / 121 WEST MAIN
HARPER, KANSAS?
HARPER, KANSAS!
67058-0121

At dinner time, Harper's private Copper Club, warehouse-size and filled with banquet tables, was crowded with fleshy, pleasant farm folks roistering into Saturday night with the will that comes of going all week without society. As the hostess led us to our place she referred with unaggressive interest to the big event in the area that day. "Did you go to the horse races today, Rosalea?" "Not me," answered Rosalea, smiling firmly, "I don't like horse shit."

The ruddy man we were seated beside greeted us with a hearty "Sit down girls, I'm not dangerous" and then set himself off to a great long laugh at his bon mot.

After an hour and one drink, dinner looked hours away. So Rosalea took us to the French Roll, which advertises on a highway sign just outside the door, six flavors of ice cream. It offered good French Dip sandwiches and pleasantly mock-Suisse decor. Rosalea envied without rancor the owner's ability to decorate a place so nicely.

"I'd like to have money to do nice things. I had a benefactor once. He sent me \$20. I wrote him and thanked him, and he sent me another \$20. That man sent the \$20 just about every week all summer. But then he went bankrupt. I paid a boy to help me work on the hotel with the money."

"We went to see my benefactor once, my sister and I, and we had to meet him in a cornfield outside town. I'm not kidding. A cornfield. Probably he thought his wife would get the wrong idea."



Rosalea has had three husbands. The last, an anthropologist named Barry, edited the book she has written about the hotel, and Thursds, her newsletter printed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper and cut into thirds, so offending articles can be thrown away without disturbing other news. "He's a good editor. And he helped me in other ways. He gave me money for essentials—gas and food."

But Barry is divorcing her now and going back to Cincinnati. Possible replacements for this husband seemed to us a good topic, because Rosalea clearly needs help, especially carrying sheetrock for new ceilings

and fixing the perpetually collapsing roof that falls in on them. (Some rooms are closed most of the time because of ceiling problems.)

"How about Paul?"—our friend who is a good strong worker and a rebellious spirit.

"Can he edit?" Rosalea replied briskly. She likes small men, she said, "but they seem to have a lot of problems."

A small man breezed into the French Roll and greeted us energetically.

"How about him?"

Rosalea just laughed.

He asked to join us and Rosalea introduced us to Chip (not his real name) "one of the few Harper citizens who dares to be seen with me." Chip told us at some length about his success as a haybaler salesman in a great many states and in Canada. He spoke of two homes in Arkansas and one in Harper, and of his expense account.

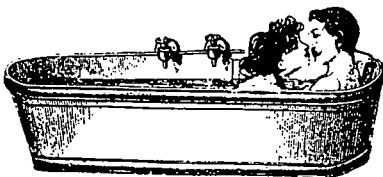
When he left, the owner called out, "Hey Rosalea, I didn't see you. How's it going?"

"I brought you some business, see?" Rosalea smiled back through the screen door.

"Hey, these people are nice to you, Rosalea."

"It's just facade," she answered.

On the way home Rosalea said, "Chip there, he's too cheap to pay the quarter admission at the Café. He finally got so he'd bring a sack of aluminum cans instead of a quarter. So I let him in for the sack of cans."



open may 1 thru labor-day

Oct 31

At breakfast in the upstairs library/kitchen at the hotel, Rosalea explained how Barry helped her understand her "position in life."

"It's like life is a river and as it goes along it gets wider as time passes and knowledge increases—and all the fish are going along with it. But here's a little fish, going the other way. And pretty soon, here's another one, bucking the stream. They don't go along like the others. They're just different.

"Barry said that all over the world in every village and tribe, there's someone like that, like me. And I like to think of that—that there are lots of us. In a way, we're a kind of group, even. And we're the ones who always go out first to greet the stranger. Probably because we're lonely."



FICTION

POINT OF RETURN

It had been over half a year since Mark had seen Emily, when suddenly at 20th Street and 8th Avenue, he realized he was in the right neighborhood. He was riding an old Raleigh three-speed bicycle on loan from a friend—"just until your Volks gets better"—and since Friday was his day off, he was just riding around. If his Volkswagen hadn't developed something the mechanic at Otto Body's called "deep, deep cog trouble," he would have been driving around, and to hell with the summer gas restrictions. Mark's father had been a great one for taking rides in the country when Mark was small, and he had at least inherited his father's penchant for meandering about. Meandering about might be driving to the St. Marks Cinema without seeing the show, or walking disconsolately in Central Park, looking for disconsolate female pedestrians. The form of locomotion and the intent behind it depended on his mood.

This Friday, despite the day off, he felt hot and hostile. It was ninety-six degrees, and the cabbies were making inroads on his part of the street. He had already stopped twice at fruit vendors' stalls for two over-ripe plums, and he knew he was getting nowhere. If one is to meander, one must nonetheless accomplish various destinations or purposes, no matter how aimlessly reached. After the two stops at the fruit stands, he hadn't done much of anything—he might have been riding in a half-mile circuit, for all he knew.

The traffic light changed, and Mark looked up to see the street sign. Emily, at last parting—an amicable enough New Year's Eve party—had been living at 218 West 20th Street. It was a peculiar area: across the street from each other were a Sabrett frankfurter vending outlet and a police precinct. "Those short fat Sabrett men, getting their huge jars of mustard and bags of rolls in the morning. I think the policeman all eat hot dogs for lunch." Emily had summed up the view from her window, blue uniforms and red umbrellas.

Maybe he should tear off a sheet of paper from somewhere, write her a note, slip it under the burglar-proof door, and pedal away to another fruit stand. He was mentally composing a casual message, a series of sentences constructed to say 'hello,' when a black Chevy shot out of a parking garage two feet in front of the bike. He swerved and braked to avoid being sideswiped, but the side-view mirror of the Chevy gouged his knuckles.

"You all right, buddy?" yelled the Chevy owner, who ran two red lights to avoid hearing an answer. Mark actually hadn't felt much, but when he looked at his hand, blood was dripping from three fingers. The cuts

looked rather dramatic, and they were getting the handlebars slippery with blood. So Mark's casual letter to Emily turned into a casual visit, with the dual purpose of saying hello and getting something to put on his hand.

He locked the bike clumsily against a piece of metal grillwork and unlatched the gate in front of the steps to the building. Number 218 looked like a collapsed milk carton, a truncated two-story brownstone shared unequally by a landlord and two tenants. But of course Emily might not be at home, or she might not even live there anymore. As he rang the bell, he found himself fervently wishing that she would be in; he had the feeling it would soothe him immensely.

The small white grid by the bell sputtered into life. "Who is it?" The voice was overlaid with static, sounding as if it came from some dark section of the stratosphere, but it was Emily.

"It's me, Mark," He paused, realizing the lines he had composed for his letter were no good. "Um, may I come in?"

He got a door-opening buzz for an answer. He walked into the hallway, trying not to display his fingers too prominently.

Emily was some twenty feet away, still short and plump, wearing a French-cut t-shirt and white painter's pants. Why had he expected any change at all?—except that he had grown slimmer over the past months for no discernable reason. Possibly, without commitment, he tended to shrink inward. Emily came toward him now, her passage lit by a faint smile.

"Hello. Stop by for a visit?"

"Well, yes. Listen, I just mashed my fingers in a bike accident— some damn Chevy driver. Do you have a band-aid?" He cupped one hand in the other, so as not to drip blood on the carpet.

Emily never averted her gaze; she inspected his wounds clinically. "They look deep," she commented as she went to get band-aids. "You can wash your hands in the kitchen."

The kitchen was as yellow as he remembered it, a few cloves of garlic hanging over the sink, with a row of plants in submarine silence trailing along the counter. Emily had cooked him Chicken Kiev here one night, with butter cookies and lemon ice cream. "I made you ice cream and cookies for dessert," she cooed, rubbing her shoulder against his arm. They had been very much in love then, and every scene was an occasion for minor romance.

He saw the purple grapes in the ceramic bowl from Mexico, the wok that hung from the peg board, and the blue watering can that leaked when poured at a certain angle. His own apartment was comparatively drab, a modern cubicle. When they were going out, he always felt as if she were the one infusing him with life, and he was simply taking it all in, like a patient with an intravenous tube in his arm. His own meager contribution was a carefully detached cynicism, meant to elicit more vital emotion from her. This, in fact, was the reason Emily had given for their eventual separation.

"I'm tired of trying to make you cheerful. You want to be entertained all the time."

I thought I was being flippant. I thought you liked my being flippant."

"You like it. I never did." She had liked his humor when it was diverting, clever signposts leading everywhere but toward him. Later, she regarded it as a defense. Mark had broken one of her china bowls as a response. All their arguments had taken place in the kitchen; so had all their tender moments. Eating and loving seemed curiously mixed with Emily. She had a new lover now, he had been told at a party, someone named Randy.

The stream of water was washing away the blood: two deep gashes, not three, nothing serious. Emily came into the kitchen with band-aids, gauze, and tape. She always knew what was right for these things, knew dozens of remedies for minor calamities without ever seeming to have suffered from them. She made him put ice on the swellings and cleared a place for him to sit down at the table. Periodicals, cheesecloth, and a glass of seltzer formed a still-life. "Needs a few grapes," he mumbled, pressing the ice wrapped in the towel she had given him.

She cocked her head to one side, her most endearing or annoying trait. For Mark, most of her mannerisms had become irritating: her occasional use of Britishisms, such as "expect" instead of "suppose," and "aluminium"; her little triumphs, such as a mutual friend's letter being addressed to her instead of to both of them. He explained his comment about the grapes, realizing that his flip observations were probably no longer welcome. Bandages and badinage, he said, but only to himself. "It's been—what? About six months." Emily was prompting the invalid with the ice-pack to talk. She had a very attractive smile which she didn't waste on many people. "Well, *you* look good, at any rate. Would you like something to drink?"

"No, I'm fine thanks. Except for my fingers. I think the skin is stripped off." Bandage it up for me and make everything all right. Please.

"Just keep applying the compress. Then we'll put gauze on it." She gestured at several slit-open letters underneath the day's *Times*. "Did you see I've gotten a letter from Robin? He says he's very bored in Antigua and is sorry he ever joined the Peace Corps." She laughed with her head back, showing her teeth. Her brand of humor, people in unfortunate situations. Her friend Eric the carpenter who was allergic to sawdust, for example. She really could be quite cruel at times.

"I saw Jan riding a Lexington bus yesterday, at least I think it was Jan. I've been riding a bicycle since my car broke down. It's not mine, but I've been thinking of buying one. It lets me go where I want, and it's just as fast in the city.

"*That's* nice." To tell him he was being boring, but in a friendly way. What could he say that would interest her, so he could stay here forever? He used to stay up nights thinking of amusing topical conversation, once he had realized that they actually had few interests in common.

Self-deprecation often worked. So did irresponsible behavior. He smiled. "I think my fingers are turning numb."

"Silly. You're not supposed to press that long. Here, give me the towel." She held out her hand like a parent confiscating a child's slingshot. She brought over the gauze and the tape and neatly bound up both fingers. The bandages were securely in place, perfect.

She turned her broad back to him to clean up at the sink, and he had the sudden urge to seize her and kiss her. He suppressed it by pressing down hard on one of his hurt fingers until the shock of pain stopped him. She was no longer bound to him; she was only the nurse who swathed him up to the neck in cotton and then went to another patient.

"Emily?"

"Mmm." She would let him stay longer if he wished, he knew, but the purpose of the visit was clearly over. He had a mad vision of rushing out to buy her flowers. In his vision, he and his bicycle were run over by a truck on the way back.

Where does it hurt?

All over. I'm dead, Emily.

That's not funny.

Yes, it is. Please think so, anyway. Or love me.

He got up from the table, flexed his stiffened fingers. "So. Thank you for the rescue operation. Maybe I'll give you a call one of these days. We could go to a movie or something."

"All right. Maybe. Have you ever met Randy?"

"No, just heard of him. I'll . . . see you."

He stood on the top step and waved as she closed the door firmly. He spent a while on the doorstep, thinking of possible destinations, Emily's kitchen, and how he could ever return there without some awful pretense or greatly distorted circumstances.

It was a few minutes before he noticed the bicycle was gone. The steel cable he had used to lock it up protruded from the grillwork like a cut worm, dangling in the air. Where was the bicycle? Dazed, he slowly descended the steps, unconsciously smoothing the bandages on his fingers over and over again, as if he were petting a cat, or rather, the spot on the rug after the cat had long ago got up and walked away.

The cable was severed cleanly, he saw, snipped in two by a fireman's cutters. The thief was probably miles away by now. A series of urgent questions converged around the obvious theft: it wasn't his bicycle, what would he tell his friend, how would he get home, should he call the police? What should he do now? As he thought of what to do, a small feeling of satisfaction began to grow within him.

Emily?

Yes.

You won't believe what just happened.

He let go of the cable, which wobbled on a point of the grillwork. Unlatching the gate, he walked up the steps and rang the bell.

SATURDAY BATH

She could hear him splashing in the bathtub from where she sat reading at the kitchen table. With every splash her irritation grew. He would walk out as usual, leaving her to mop the floor after him. The longer she stayed with him the more he irritated her. He didn't even have the sensibility to realize that there was something wrong. She had stopped loving him long ago. She couldn't remember when she'd first realized it, it was something that happened gradually. She wanted out of this marriage, but knew that he would never allow it. As far as he was concerned she was his for life.

Everything he did annoyed her, from the way he drank his coffee to the way he slept stretched out across the bed with a part of his body always touching hers. She had begun to get up in the middle of the night to sleep on the couch. She knew that if she'd had any guts she would have left long ago, but she was afraid of him, and she stayed hoping that something might change.

The splashing stopped. She wondered if he was falling asleep again. Every Saturday he took a bath like this, and she spent two hours calling out to him or going in to check that he was awake. She'd heard of people falling asleep and drowning in the bath. At least, her mother had heard of it happening. He told her that it was impossible, that no one could drown in the bath, but she'd found him asleep more than once so she continued to check on him.

Looking back, she couldn't understand why she'd married him in the first place. If she'd been honest with herself, had followed her instincts then, they would never have been married. Ten minutes before the ceremony, she'd wanted to back out, everything inside her had screamed no, but she went ahead. There didn't seem to be a way of getting out of it at that stage.

She strained to listen for some movement again. There was none. She told herself that if she had any sense she would let him stay asleep. For once she would prove a point to him. She had no sooner thought this than she heard him moving again, as if he had heard her thoughts. She went on with her reading until she was aware of the silence again. She waited a minute, then got up and walked down the hall to the bathroom. She almost tripped over the old electric heater as she went through the doorway into the bathroom. She resolved once again to throw it away. It was so old that she was sure it was dangerous, especially in the bathroom. It was like a steam room in here. Moisture ran down the walls. There was no need for the heater. It wasn't cold, and the way he splashed water around he could electrocute himself.

He was lying back in the water, eyes closed, mouth open, the water lapping around his chin. She had felt something for him once, she must have, but now she was almost beyond the point of hating him. She wondered if all marriages wound down to this, this indifference. She looked at his hair sticking straight up and decided to let him sleep. She wondered how long it would take for him to slip down into the water, then she knew that was what she wanted to happen.

When she sat down at the kitchen table her knees were shaking. She almost called his name, but forced herself to remain silent. When she was a kid her mother had annoyed whoever was in the bath by continually calling out, asking if they were okay. If there was no answer she would come rushing into the bathroom. Her mother had any number of catastrophes in mind for the children, things that had never yet happened to anyone. She had learned her fear of snakes, horses, planes, electricity, gas ovens, and falling asleep in the bath from her mother. She tried to read but couldn't concentrate. There was still no sound from the bathroom, then she heard a faint snore which made her jump. She wondered how long it took to drown. Surely a person would wake up as soon as he started breathing water, but then if you were really asleep maybe you wouldn't know. They said that drowning was a pleasant death, that you went into a kind of peaceful swoon once you had swallowed enough water. She heard another snore. His nose must still be above water.

She wondered what she would do afterwards, how long she should wait. She got up again and went to the bathroom. He had slipped down and the water was almost up to his lips. He was still snoring, his lips slightly parted. She tried to find something in his face. It had attracted her once. She remembered that she'd liked to look at him. When she first knew him she tried to memorize his features so she could go over them when he wasn't with her. It wasn't until it no longer mattered that she was able to call his face up at will. He had very fine eyebrows for a man, and under the closed lids she could see clearly the big brown eyes, so open and honest, even when he was lying.

She had just broken up with someone else when she met him. A couple who worked at the office had felt sorry for her, and had invited them both to dinner without either of them knowing about the other

beforehand. He wasn't her usual type, but she'd been flattered by his attention. He asked her out the next night, and the night after that, and then she got into the habit of him. He was as possessive as her previous lover had been casual, but after a while his jealousy became a burden.

Once, early in the relationship, he followed her home from the office. That night when he picked her up he asked what she'd done after work. When her story matched what he'd seen, he confessed to what he'd done. That had been the first warning signal she'd ignored. He wanted to know her past in minute detail, who she'd slept with, how many times. At first she'd laughed and told him, then he would ask her to repeat incidents, and she realized he was trying to catch her in a lie. No, she didn't realize it then; the realization had come long after.

His head rolled to one side, dipping an ear into the water. She held her breath but he continued to snore. There was a kind of arrogance about his face, even when he was asleep. She couldn't see the rest of his body under the gray water, just his head. He had acne scars on his cheeks. He talked about having cosmetic surgery. He was the vainest man she'd ever known. She had learned not to make jokes about the paunch.

She used to excuse his arrogance. He was European, came from a different culture, had different expectations of women, but she told herself as she walked back to the kitchen, that there was no excuse for being a bastard. Back at the table she didn't attempt to read. In the back of her head she knew what she was doing. She also knew that it would be called an accident. She could hear her mother telling someone that the first time he hadn't been called in the bath tub, just the first time. . . .

During the five years they'd been married she'd lost contact with most of her friends. He was even jealous of the people she worked with. She enjoyed her work. Sometimes she would bring home a report and work on it at night. He didn't like that. He didn't like her to read either or to knit. He would sit in front of the television set, demanding cups of coffee whenever she was busy with something. He wanted every part of her to himself. She had gradually felt more and more isolated.

They used to be invited for dinner, and at the last minute he would say he didn't want to go; he never gave a reason except that he didn't feel like it. She would call and say he was sick. Sometimes she went without him, but that meant a cross examination when she got home. It was the same when they had people over, except for the few times he'd invited people. He would be pleasant while her friends were there, but after they left he would start tearing them apart. After a while she realized that he liked her to be isolated. He told her often enough that married people didn't need friends.

She looked around the kitchen and through into the dining room. After five years they had nothing but debts. They were still renting a house. Whenever they seemed to be getting ahead he would quit his job and stay at home, sometimes for months. Two years ago she'd taken a job as a waitress three nights a week so they could keep up the payments on the car. Her eyes stopped at the phone and she jumped up to unplug it.

They visited her parents once a week, occasionally went to a movie, and the rest of the time he watched television. If she agreed with everything he said then life was pleasant. If she cooked what he liked, washed his clothes, pretended she still enjoyed his love-making, he was nice to her. Nice, the way a master pats a good dog. He wouldn't let her go out with a girl friend. It was okay for her to work at night when they needed the money, but she couldn't go to a movie he didn't want to see.

A car backfired, making her start. She went to the bathroom, but he was still in the same position he'd been in when she last looked. He'd come home after work yesterday an hour late, with some more records and a pair of fifty-dollar shoes. He did something like that every second pay day. He knew she would manage to keep them in food and pay the bills. She hated having to borrow from her father, to make up some weak story she knew he didn't believe. That bastard wouldn't even drown. He'd stay alive just to make her life miserable. She bent to pick up the clothes he'd dropped on the floor, then straightened up. Let them stay there. She wouldn't be his maid any longer.

She looked at his face again. There was something about the curve of his cheek that reminded her of what it had felt like then, but she couldn't summon up the feeling. Whatever they'd had was long gone, and it was his fault.

Back in the kitchen she looked at the clock, but couldn't remember when he'd fallen asleep. What if he should wake up now? Surely no one ever drowned in the bath. That first rush of water would wake even the soundest sleeper, but her mother had told her of cases. But maybe that was like all the stories her mother had told her, about rolls of cloth from India with little poisonous snakes, or kids being decapitated leaning out a bus window, or not washing your hair when you had your period. The one about electricity and water was true though. He used to prop the electric heater on the shelf at the end of the bath tub until she'd seen it, and made him promise to keep it on the floor. She should have let him electrocute himself.

She got out of the chair and stood at the window. The grass needed cutting again. He was such a baby in many ways. She often wondered how he'd managed on his own for so long. He probably had a slave around to do his bidding, and he was very good at giving orders, at making someone submit to him. She should have left him the first time he hit her. By staying she had allowed it to become a pattern in the relationship. He was always sorry afterwards. She sometimes wondered if he didn't deliberately egg her on until she said something that would give him an excuse to hit her. She was afraid of him. She used to hear stories of women who stayed with men like him, and think they were stupid. She still didn't understand. There was only one way out.

She went back to the bathroom. The water now covered his mouth. He would either wake up soon or he would begin breathing water. She looked at him, feeling nothing, not even hating him. It was like looking at a stranger. She had no idea now what the chances were. It was strange that she'd never thought of this before. Every week for five years she'd worried that he would drown in the bath, even when she'd been full of

hatred for him, had been thinking of how she could get out of this. She put her hand into the bath water. It was getting cold. Surely that would wake him. He snored a sudden loud snore and moved his head. She jumped back, almost knocking over the heater, balancing herself with her hand on the wall. His mouth was out of the water again. She stood watching him for a minute, then made up her mind. If she could place the heater so that it would accidentally fall into the bath tub then. . . . The shelf at the end of the bath was cluttered with bottles, razors, and stuff that had piled up during the week. She would have to clear it without waking him. She started to move the bottles back from the front of the shelf. A bottle overturned and began oozing shampoo. She began to wipe it up, then decided to leave it there. She turned to look at him. He was still sleeping. She should have remembered that he slept through anything. He slept through the earth tremor last year that shook the bed and had every dog in street barking.

She unplugged the heater. The cord didn't look as if it were long enough to reach, but she knew he'd managed it before. She remembered almost tripping over it the day she rushed in when he failed to answer her call. She placed the heater close to the edge of the shelf and turned a bottle of conditioner on its side. The heater still looked too stable to fall. She looked from him to the shelf and back again. She wondered if he would feel anything, and decided that it would be over before he had time to know what was happening. She moved the heater closer to the edge. She could always push it, but didn't want to see it happen. There was a mess of shampoo and conditioner on the shelf now. Maybe that would be enough to slide the heater forward so it would overbalance. She moved it forward another half inch. The front part of the legs was now over the edge of the shelf. It was balanced, but just. She'd forgotten about him while she was concentrating on the heater. Now as she turned to plug it in and leave the room she looked at his face, and saw in a flash their whole time together, the memory divided into two columns, good and bad. She plugged the heater in carefully so as not to pull on the cord and went to the kitchen to wait.

She strained to hear some sound, to hear it sliding forward, but there was only silence ringing in her ears. After a while she realized she was cold in spite of the sun streaming in the window, and then she knew she couldn't do it. She would leave him. She would unplug the heater and pack her clothes. She would change jobs so he couldn't find her. She'd worked two jobs to make car payments. He could have everything else.

She ran to the bathroom. As she bent to unplug the heater she looked up and saw that it hadn't moved in spite of the yellow stream that dripped from underneath it and flowed into the bath. She went to the shelf, set the overturned bottles straight, and picked up a wash cloth to wipe off the bottom of the heater. She was ready to set it on the floor when something made her stop. There was no sound so she continued to wipe the heater. Then as she turned to put it on the floor she saw his open eyes, incomprehending at first, then widening and going back to normal as he understood.

She didn't know how long she stood there, heater in one hand, a soapy cloth in the other, her eyes fixed on his as on a snake that is about to strike. Sometime during the time their eyes were locked she understood too. She had no way of knowing how long he'd been awake. She waited for him to speak, the horror of what she'd almost done going deeper and deeper into her consciousness, then bouncing back at her until she wanted to scream. He suddenly looked away, and she was free to go.

From the kitchen table she heard the water draining out of the tub. She wanted to get up, to look at long, living grass out of the window, but she couldn't move. She heard drawers opening and closing in the bedroom, and the sound made her want to scream again. Every noise he made was final, said dead. She put a hand to her mouth. She heard a suitcase being thrown into the hall, another sudden sound that made her jump. He walked by her without a word, then back again with a box from the garage. She sat at the table listening to him pack his records. She wanted him to take everything. She heard the aerial fall from the television to the floor. Every sound he made was a scream stifled in her throat. She was still waiting for him to do something.

The front door opened, the car door. She heard his steps again as he went to the bedroom, and the scream of the coathangers as he pulled his clothes out of the wardrobe. She waited at the table, a hand over her mouth, but he continued to pack his things. She saw the understanding in his eyes again, saw herself setting the heater on the shelf, planning it cold-bloodedly, and didn't believe it.

At least there was silence, but she still waited. She heard the rattle of his keys and knew he was taking his key off the ring. She heard it hit the floor, waited for him to say something, but the only sound was that of the key sliding across the dining room. She didn't look up until she heard the car back out of the driveway. By the time she reached the bedroom window the car was at the Stop sign at the top of the street. She threw herself onto the bed and screamed into the pillow.

WE GET ALONG HERE JUST FINE

We get along here just fine, I tell them all, daddy Hal and me, I got no complaints, but they take him out anyway and Velma's crying and Lilac's trying to look like she's crying and Louis, he's holding my shoulder. I can't believe how big his hand is. I look up and there are those melty eyes I wish were mine, they are so peaceful.

"Ain't nobody coulda loved you more'n him, Erleen." He looks out our window toward those stupid railroad ties, all in a circle without a single trailer parked at them. His pretty eyes are far away, somewhere I can't see, "And nothing you can do about them clouds, Erleen, they just keep a' comin'."

"Ain't no one here but us niggers," he hoots.

"Chickens," I say, "Ain't no one here but us *chickens*," but daddy Hal just laughs and laughs. And in'll walk any one of his old friends and drop down in our paisley chair. All of them act like they been trudging plenty of miles to our house and barely made it and say, "Whoo-eee, Halsey, whatta haul I have *had*" Naturally, I bring out something for them to eat on while they're here, but mostly they chew at each other.

I guess you get used to wherever you been set down and pretty soon don't much think about it anymore. That's the way I figure my daddy Hal. He's been living in our old house since he was real little, points at the wax pictures he made under the steps sometimes and says, "Done that when I was only four," and he leans forward, hands closing on his knees, breathing in your face, "Near to burn the place down and I blamed it on my sister." Of course, everybody knows his sister, Velma, and they all get a big laugh out of that. I've heard it a million times. Then he always tells the rest of the stories about being little in this house, about all the old niggers who lived in the barn with the cows. I learned to call them Blacks, but Hal, he won't listen to that. Once his friend black Louis was over, who has the prettiest eyes, soft and melty as frosting. My daddy Hal was telling about the niggers in the barn and them talking to the cows. They did talk to the cows. My mama said the first time she saw Hal he was disciplining a nigger about talking all the time to those cows, but mama said cows gave better milk when they were talked to, and the best when she sang to them. She said they kind of purred.. Anyway, Louis was

smiling with his pretty eyes and I was turning red while Hal just went on and on and every "nigger" jumped at my ears, so I couldn't hear anything else, just nigger, nigger, nigger. I thought he was doing it on my account, telling me he knew what's what with black skins. "They ain't neither 'black,' " he would say, "they's brown chocolate, nee-gro. Nigger." Louis is a big man, I knew he could crumble Hal up like a corn husk and sweep him out the door. Right then I wouldn't have blamed Louis a bit, not at all, but he only smiled and rocked, kind of sad, I thought, in our paisley chair. I squirmed in my old wood chair, not looking very often at his melty eyes.

That night daddy Hal got real sick, I knew it because I couldn't get him to tell one story. I threw him all the little hints about starting up a tale and he let those throws land at his feet, which were wrapped up in blankets and resting on pillows. I teased him about his tender feet and he just sighed and I was sorry. The room was hotter'n I could stand it, I felt like running outside with nothing on, but I just opened my window and poked my nose out, letting fresh air in my lungs just to revive them. They felt like they'd sucked all the hot old air they could take. Aunt Velma came over and daddy Hal and me were none too happy. She talks as much as Hal but it isn't pleasing and I can't fade her out. Her mouth goes crooked, which makes her words come out full of o's and r's. Her favorite word is ornery, oornree. Her voice banged on the air around my head that night, and I had to hear it all. And she brought her horrible girl Lilac who I would have had to entertain, except daddy Hal was sick and even Velma could see I wasn't to be pushed too far any direction. Lilac had to sit on the rug by herself, and she whined.

I saw Rooney come up outside while Velma was here, but I knew he wouldn't come in, not a chance. Velma can't stand Rooney, especially now. She puts her lips together all wrinkled when daddy Hal asks where he is. It used to be that Velma just didn't like to talk to Rooney. He stops in the middle of speaking to draw on his beat up pipe, finding his next word. Velma likes conversation to go zipping along, with her doing the most of it.

Rooney's the one who had the idea about the trailer campground in the first place. He says one night, after they've been drinking, "Hals, you gots a good piece of highway property, you do." Well, it's good property but the highway's got nothing to do with it. Daddy Hal was quiet, giving Rooney time to collect what's running around in his head. I sit still myself, waiting. He proceeds to go into big detail of a trailer camp site we could set up next to the highway. For recreational vehicles on their way to Birmingham. I wanted to ask why he thought recreational vehicles would be heading for Birmingham and why any of them that were would want to stop just one hundred and fifty miles away from it, especially out here in the middle of nothing, but I didn't. I sat in my corner needle-pointing dark blue ducks. I am resolved to be unlike my aunt, and right then I felt a wave of Velma coming over me. So I was quiet, but listening and watching daddy Hal. He kind of perked up. I mean, his head tipped forward and one hand started moving on the rocker arm, tapping a little, while the other fluffed his hair, which means he's thinking. I knew we'd

never get our chicken shack built or dig our new well if Rooney convinced him of this lame idea, so I finally asked Rooney if he really thought there were recreational vehicles out in this neck of the woods. It was my big mistake. Rooney even stood up, no pauses, and told us how he'd been out sitting on our hill for a couple of days now counting recreational vehicles go by. Round about four an hour. Well, I did us in on that one. Daddy Hal says, "Four an hour." Still tapping away at the rocker, pulling on his hair. But I've seen those vehicles. They all have little motorcycles on them, probably would tear the bejeez out of my garden and scare all the chickens. "I vote no," I said, but daddy Hal wasn't listening to me. The very next day he bought a bunch of railroad ties and set them in a big circle next to the highway. Now, I wish those vehicles would have stopped here. One, anyway. Morely, I guess I wish old Rooney would have kept his mouth shut and his ideas running around in his own head, or that I had jumped right in like a Velma and said what a lot of foolishness it all was. But that's spilt milk I'm not going to cry about now. Nope.

So daddy Hal dragged in some limestone boulders to make a fire pit in the middle of the railroad ties. I think he visioned a bunch of those recreational vehicles put together end to end like a wagon train with everybody singing around a bonfire under the moon. Harmonicas and coyotes, too. I guess it was a pleasing sort of thought, but not for real, I knew that. He had to roll the boulders off of our hill, and I couldn't hang clothes for fear of being flattened out by one come banging down. He'd holler and I'd go dashing into the house, yelling for the chickens and they'd come running. They put me to mind of old fat ladies with their skirts pulled up, stepping kind of dainty, but quick. A boulder'd come thunking through, which he always told me about after he pushed it off, barely time to get myself in. The last rock got one of the chicken legs but I made him kill her, wasn't my fault, after all, and we had her fried for supper.

After the pit he put up an outhouse. Just one. I sat on top of our hill smoking and watched him build it that day. He made it out of old KEEP OUT signs from when we were keeping people out, back in hippy days. A keep outhouse. He painted it white but I could still read the signs. The roof was slanted funny; anything that fell on it would roll off one corner. It looked like something the kids in my Sunday school class would make out of popsickle sticks or some such. He worked all day on that little building, so hard I didn't have the heart to tell him he was going to have to make another for the ladies. Maybe out of NO HUNTING signs. But I bet those recreational vehicles got their own stools anyway. Wouldn't surprise me, but I didn't tell him that either.

He and Rooney took to standing out by the highway or sitting on the ties, waving like fools at the traffic and rearranging the boulders around the fire pit. Velma's the one who brought up the fact that we got no wood out there "to build a far with." So Rooney talked my daddy Hal into hacking up trees. They both knew that wasn't going to do a 67-year-old any good whatsoever. I could see the axe handle hang in the air for just a second every time daddy Hal swung up. The blade'd catch there behind

his head like it was going to pull him over on his back, and then he seemed to just barely get a hold of it and it'd come sailing down, whack, into the wood.

Rooney says he don't believe in God. No god at all of any kind. But that strikes me like what old Clarence Pink used to say back in school about it being okay to stare at blind folks because they can't see you looking. Clarence Pink has probably been eyeing those blind girls at the Institute for some years, and I think Rooney feels no shame about leading my daddy this way simply for the reason that there is no god watching. But me, I would be in a rotten stink all day, even if there wasn't eyes on me, God's or anybody's. I got my own eyes on me. Oh, I pretend sometimes there are other eyes on me, somebody's. Maybe some boy I don't know yet, and he likes the things I do. He thinks I look lonely and mysterious when I am sitting on the hill with my arms around my knees, watching the sky and the birds. He thinks it's pretty nice when I am very quiet and the little things in the trees and underground come out even though I'm right there looking. Of course, he doesn't get to see everything, like when I sing out loud or smoke my cigarettes. Doesn't seem he'd probably like that, whoever he is. It used to be Clarence Pink I imagined was seeing me, but then he got too foolish and I didn't want him watching at all, pretend or otherways. I used to get Clarence's papers at school and trace my pencil over his words, try to see how he wrote, I thought he was so great. Makes me a bit sick to think over that again. Well, I am digressing from the main project here. You can tell old Rooney's got no conscience though, that's for sure.

Rooney says four recreational vehicles (he says it *vee-hicles*) every one hour will be pulling into our trailer site to set up for the night. Of course he doesn't say where all those recreational vehicle people will be buying their food to eat around that bonfire, but they'll be buying at Mabel and Rooney Rice's store, across our highway. That place has nothing but Mabel Rice's favorite things, Hershey chocolate and tomato soup. They got four kinds of mustard and not one kind of catsup; Mabel says, real nasty when I ask, use her tomato soup for catsup. I go to Albertville, fifty-three miles away, where there is an A&P run by reasonable folk.

It rained most of July. Every day would start out okay, but by the time the recreational vehicles were coming along, late afternoon, the clouds were piling over. They seemed real anxious to get here, bubbling like grey foam, from the North, gathered above our trailer campground to pour down on us for an hour or so. Then it'd be muck out there and the ties would sink a little bit.

Daddy Hal decided the first of August all we needed was some advertising. He and Rooney painted up some boards to put along highway 75 and spent a week driving up and down looking at them, seeing if they were effective. Still no recreational vehicles stopped and daddy Hal developed a weak back. He began to stay inside during the day, looking out our picture window toward the campground. Louis and Rooney came over to discuss all their business and this and that and say

how troublesome the world and those clouds was. One would say, "Hard to live, it is." And another would shake his head like yep, sure is hard. Then one'd find some cards and shuffle for awhile.

"Game of runner?"

"Nah, don't recall them rules."

"Five-high?"

"Nah, had enough of that."

"Dirty Eight?"

"That's for kids," quiet for awhile, "but that be okay, if *you* want . . ."

And then they played Dirty Eight all afternoon. If I was bored I'd come in and tell them what the others had. Those days got to be more and more, watching the trailer court while the rain ran down the window and made daddy Hal's back ache. I guess that'd have been okay with me, but daddy Hal seemed so tired all of the time then.

His friends all call me Erleens, like there was more than one of me hopping around. Maybe that's the way it seems to their rheumy old eyes. I wish there was two of me out here, we would have a better time.

We had a hell of a night near the last. The wind blew hard everywhere, fall coming, and daddy Hal and me sat here lonely with each other and snapping. I was making some bread with the end of the flour. Maybe my hands were shaking because I was cold or maybe because I was mad at the thing in me that makes me mad, I don't know. But I let loose of the jar of flour and it fell onto the floor, broke into bits. Daddy Hal jumped from the paisley chair and screeched at me. Well, I scooped up the mess and put in the best of what we had, dates and molasses and baked it up. Why I did it I don't know. Maybe all that quiet wind blowing. I waited in the kitchen right by the oven, warm and it smelled good, till the bread was done and then cut me a slice and bit into little pieces of glass. I knew they were there all the time, why'd I go on cooking? The paisley chair kept rocking and squeaking and daddy said bring him a slice. Mean tears were falling off my face and the bread was mushing around in my mouth, and I hollered it's full of glass, daddy, all full of glass and cried till I choked. Daddy Hal brought himself into the kitchen, holding his back, and was about to say something about mama never wasted like that, but he must of had some sense to shut that up. He stood there looking at the rest of the flour on the floor, putting his hands up like he was going to touch me, and then dropping them back at his sides, like he was lost. It was awful.

Later, I crumbled that bread and threw it to the birds. Of course, I decided right after I'd thrown it to them that I didn't want them cutting their throats on glass, so daddy Hal and me went out and gathered up all the pieces in our robes.

Daddy Hal didn't give Velma the pleasure of dying while she and Lilac were there, oh no. He waited till much later, when I was asleep and the fire was out. Then he just kicked over, and I woke up to no noise, but it was the kind of a quiet that comes right after an important and short sound, too quiet. I knew he'd died. I waited in my quilts and prayed I'd hear something, any old thing. Nothing. Little snakes of cold came creeping up my legs, settled in my stomach. I thought about my mama. She was

three round parts, top, middle and bottom like a number eight with a head, but I am surely my daddy's daughter, his bones and all. We are skinny and straight with skinny and straight hair. When my mama died, daddy Hal said only thing to do was to plant. He planted quite a bit that year. Flowers, all of our bud trees, and plenty of vegetables. We buried mama in back, under her mimosa tree and he cut down all the vines that tried to grow around the trunk. I feel like those vines have come back and are growing around my legs, strangling me like they almost did our mimosa. Of course, that's just a dream I had that night.

I used to dream that Mama came back. She always was walking from the mimosa with her head down so I couldn't see her face. Her face was the first thing I forgot, and I used to be so unhappy that my dreams couldn't bring it back.

It was along these paths my thoughts went running that night daddy Hal died. I started thinking about losing his face too, so I got up in the cold and shivered all the way downstairs to his bed by the burnt out fire. Well, I knew he was dead before I got there, so I don't know why I took to screaming then instead of hours before, but I did. Started howling. I knew I'd get Mabel Rice but I didn't care. There was my daddy Hal's face, clear as clear is, I looked in his eyes to see if there was something in them that he saw last, still reflecting, I've read about that, but there was nothing. They weren't shiny even. While I was wailing I was keeping part of my head unsentimenting, saying remember those eyes and the long hairs around them, recall those busted veins on his nose, get an image of his teeth, one missing, and the slumping shoulders, lower because of the railroad ties, lowest of all when he was drunk. Or asleep. Don't forget his face. And I cried harder yet because my mama's face was lots nicer'n his and if I remembered one it should have been hers.

I always have been partial to morning glories. I like their colors, I like their faces. I can't say they make me happy, exactly, but they look so full of big things early in the morning, opening up and being bright as bright is. They appear to be wondering at all that light, being amazed as little children. But then seems like sometime in the day, about noon, when the sun gets to be just a touch too much, dust's thick, they shut on up. They close pretty fast, I have noticed, like tiny fists.

They've stayed around through October this year, the last of the blues are hanging onto our busted fence. Maybe their seeds'll blow all over this yard. Maybe they'll come up everywhere. I sure would like to wake up one day in the spring, not too far from now, and see those old rail ties sprouting morning glory faces. Sure would be a pleasing thing.

A DRINKING MAN

In the second year of my father's retirement, my parents moved to California to be near their daughter Angie. Late that February my mother, said to me on the phone, "I just don't know what to do anymore. I stay in my bedroom almost all the time. He throws empty beer bottles on the lawn in front of the apartment and all the neighbors see them in the morning before I can pick them up."

I stood in the kitchen of my apartment, fingering the handle of the freezer door.

"I'm so mortified. He walks around the complex drunk, talking and swearing to himself."

"Probably nobody hears him." "And he's getting more and more abusive. Last night he called me a dirty animal."

"I'll write him a letter, Mother, and threaten him."

"Oh, yes, Anthony, please do."

"But it won't do any good. He'll only lay off booze for a couple of days."

"I don't know what to do. You don't know what it's like living with that man. I almost never come out of the bedroom. I can hardly say the rosary. He pounds on the door and says those dirty things to me. What can I do?"

"Leave him."

"I can't. I just can't."

"Mother, you asked. Leave him," I said. "Pack a suitcase and go to Angie's." I knew she was suffering, but where was it written that I had to share the burden of this marriage and do penance for it?

"*Nobody* knows what it's like living with him. Nobody will *ever* know. I say novenas constantly that the man will change. And the stench from his colostomy is overpowering. The doctor told him to stop drinking to keep regular. He's drinking himself to death."

"I'll write him a letter." I thought it would be easier to write my father directly about his drinking because my mother had recently come to identify her husband as an alcoholic, a sick man with a disease, like leprosy. But she wasn't always sure.

"Is alcoholism a disease? I wish to God someone would tell me."

I was opening and closing the freezer door. "It doesn't matter. Leave him."

"As soon as I hung up I sat at the table in the dining-L and cleared away a small area from the mass of dissertation file cards, overdue books, and papers. I immediately got up and brought the half-gallon

bottle of gin and a glass of ice to the table and poured several ounces. I took a warm beer as a chaser from the case near the table and sat down again, brushing off some eraser leavings with the back of my hand. When my father received the letter, my mother told me, he read it and threw it in the garbage. "I guess I'll have to be good," he told his wife. Two days later he came back from checking the car so drunk his facial muscles were slack. He went to the refrigerator, got a beer, collapsed into his chair and passed out.

A month later my mother called and said she wanted to come to Pennsylvania for a visit.

"I just have to get away. We never should have moved to California," she said. I never heard her sound so weary.

"Sure. Come and stay a couple of weeks." I tried to sound casual so she wouldn't notice the implied time limitation. "I have classes to teach, but the evenings are free."

We drove right from the Amtrak station to my small apartment in Greensburg, fifteen miles from St. Vincent's college.

"It's small, Anthony, but I'm sure it's just right for a bachelor." She paused slightly before bachelor, as if it were a racy word.

In the early evenings we played rummy for a tenth of a cent a point and then watched TV until she nodded off in a chair. It usually took me three or four shakes to rouse her and then she went to bed and fell asleep with one of her rosaries entwined in her wrinkled, bony hands folded on her stomach, the bedspread tucked under her chin. She looked so diminutive in my bed that I felt like lifting her and putting her on top of the dresser for the night. Two votive lights, one on either side of her, would complete the setting.

One night when I looked into the bedroom and saw her asleep I was sure I could imprint my thumb on the loose flesh of her face. When I was a boy, at night in bed my mother would make the sign of the cross on my forehead with holy water from the small font tacked to the doorjamb of my bedroom. Now a sharp sadness took me unawares. *I will anoint her forehead with a sign.* What sign?

I often wondered why, after seven years, she had decided to journey over two thousand miles to see me, but I couldn't think of a tactful way to ask her.

"It's very nice here, Anthony, even if it is almost March. It must be beautiful in the spring."

Maybe she was preparing to die.

I was not surprised when Angie called a week after my mother returned to California to say our father had lapsed into unconsciousness. I should take the earliest flight to Los Angeles. I could call back to tell her my arrival time and she would pick me up. Angie's husband Vic had picked the old man, drunk and shivering, off the kitchen floor of the apartment and had driven with him in the ambulance to the hospital outside Irvine. All the way my father had cursed his wife, calling her a dirty animal and a rotten bitch.

"I'm not sure he's going to make it," Angie said. "There was blood coming out of his colostomy and he was puking up this awful yellow stuff."

I arrived at LAX at 1:00 a.m. California time. Angie almost missed meeting me because of the fog. She began talking as soon as I stepped into the terminal. "Anthony, you don't know what it's like living near them. She's always asking me to drive her to the store, then back again because she forgot something. When she says, 'Do you mind?' I could tear my *hair* out." She clenched her bleached hair in illustration.

"I know."

"You *don't* know. She drives me crazy. I don't blame you but you live in Pennsylvania and get her once for a couple of weeks. You *don't* know what she's like."

"She's a pain in the ass. But I wouldn't want to live with him, either," I said. *Know* them? Hadn't I lived at home until I was twenty-eight? Even now, I felt separated from them only by distance. Soon after I moved out, I had a dream about my mother in which I stood by the front door with two empty suitcases and suddenly I knew I had forgotten to pack. My mother was saying, "I'll never, *never* give you a divorce. You'll have to ask the pope for an annulment."

"Did it ever occur to you that we were *taught* to hate Dad?" Angie asked. "He worked his ass off for over forty years and she never once told him she loved him, or even kissed him."

"It occurs to me all the time. Everything they say or do occurs to me." I dug my nails into my palms.

"You really like living inside that head of yours," she said. "Is that some clever thing you picked up doing your dissertation?"

"No. Virginia Woolf would never say that. Too obvious." I laughed to cover my spite. Angie had never read Virginia Woolf, I was sure.

By the time we reached the car I realized how much we'd already said. Angie always assaulted a point before I could get my bearings, and I usually got trapped before I knew it.

I tried to pay the parking attendant, but Angie waved me off. Then she waved at the fog. "Of course, there's always this shit."

I thought of my father but wasn't ready to hear the worst yet. "Did I ever tell you about the time Dad and I were watching an old Western on TV? It starred an old cowboy actor who was about six foot six. In one scene he beats up a whole gang of bad guys and walks away without a scratch. One of those barroom brawls. Dad said, 'That's my idea of a man.' I was in college but it made me feel like a peanut anyway. If that character was a man, what was I? I'm five eight."

"Anthony, I'm sick of sad stories." Angie came off the ramp onto the Santa Ana freeway doing sixty. Her hands were tight on the wheel as she looked over her shoulder at nearly impenetrable fog. "My God, Anthony, did you *have* to get here in the middle of the night?" Reluctantly, she let the car slow.

"You said to get the next flight."

She sighed. "Okay. Anyway, you'll stay with Mother. Drop me off and

you can use this car. I'll drive to work with a friend. Vic can use the other car during the day. You go to the hospital in the mornings and afternoons with Mother. I'll take the night shift. Vic'll take that graveyard shift. Whoever's on duty calls if something comes up. Okay?"

"Okay. How is he?"

"He's either unconscious or semi-conscious. He probably won't know who you are. It's his pancreas. I don't give a shit what the doctors say, he's dying from booze. And his colostomy looks like a raw volcano. I saw it. Disgusting." She leaned over to press in the cigarette lighter. "Mostly he sleeps and mumbles curses. It's getting pretty bad. Yesterday when Mother and I were in his room he said, 'No good cocksucker' as clear as could be. Right when the nurse was fixing his intravenous."

"What did Mother do?"

"Oh, she said to the nurse, 'You know, he's an alcoholic. He's not responsible for what he says.'"

I imitated our mother's hushed whisper. "He's Jewish, you know."

"Yeah, that's it." Angie laughed and blew smoke out her thin nose.

I was remembering when my Uncle Jim was laid out at the Seneca Funeral Home and a man who said he was a friend came to view the body. My mother recounted the story. "When he asked your Aunt Irma what he died from, she told him cirrhosis. The man said he didn't know Jim was a drinking man. I was never so mortified in my life. I *told* Irma to tell people he died of cancer of the liver. I don't know *where* her brains were."

"Sometimes I feel like I'm ten years old," I said. "Mother *did* make us ashamed of him. But once in a while I did break through to him, once when we were both drunk. There wasn't much. I just got closer to his anger. One time when I was in college and Dave Heaton came over, we were sitting in the dining room. Clear as I'm talking now, only louder, Dad said, 'Dirty Jew bastard' to himself. He was drunk, of course, sitting at the kitchen table. You know, as long as I'd known Dave, I was still embarrassed, and I wanted to scream in Dad's face."

"I feel like jumping out of this goddamn car and wandering in the fog."

"Okay. No more sad stories." I felt guilty for breaking some sort of agreement and tried for a laugh to cover it. "But as Mother would say, I was never so mortified."

"Anthony, you're thirty years old. You don't need a father. Forget it. Christ, can't you just forget it?"

I wanted her to tell me she understood. But Angie never lost or surrendered the advantage. Ever since she'd made it through her too rapid adolescent growth, when I'd stand next to her I'd check our heights to see who was taller. And she always seemed to have the edge.

"How's Vic?" I asked into the silence.

As Angie speeded up, she moved her head close to the windshield, as if she could will her way through the fog. Then she slowed. "Let's change the subject."

"I just did."

"Anthony, Vic hasn't worked in seven years, you know that. I told him

he ought to do *something*. Take a job to keep from going crazy. Pick oranges, pick some goddamn thing or other."

I didn't know what Vic used to work at, only that "He sets up businesses for people." Angie had a way of making a subject seem formally closed, as if she had pounded a gavel and scanned the wings for the next witness.

She pulled sharply into the driveway of the double garage behind her condominium and hit the brakes just inches from the door. I wasn't sure how I felt, but I think I wanted to wring her neck.

The old man had deteriorated and been moved to the intensive care unit, along with the network of tubes that sprouted from his body. Because he'd been admitted with several day's growth of beard, the orderly mistakenly thought he had a moustache, which was now neatly trimmed. It gave him an air of distinction and mitigated the sharp beak of his nose which had been broken five times in brawls during his professional hockey days. Once the family doctor told me I looked like my father except for the nose. "You haven't got your father's nose." My father told me, "I haven't got my nose. The goddamn thing is spread all over ten hockey rinks." I'd laughed, in a rare enjoyment of my father. In the doctor's office I'd felt a powerful physical affinity with him. As the doctor probed the glands in my neck, I was surprised at the formation of a thought I felt I was almost articulating. *A father is a progenitor.*

Now, looking at the tube that came from under the sheet, divided into irregular segments of urine, I again felt my father as a body. At one end of the tube was his penis, dribbling waste into a plastic container under the bed. I tried to imagine that penis erect, tried to feel some profound connection to it, but instead I remembered the words of St. Augustine: we are born *inter urina et faeces*, between urine and feces. I pictured my father's wrinkled buttocks, the anus wired shut, the colon diverted to the colostomy opening in his side.

The next day my father was hooked to a respirator. I watched and listened to the machine wheeze and cough oxygen at precise intervals into the wasted body beneath the sheets. The upper half of him jerked up involuntarily on the machine's intake, as if tossed playfully by some huge beast.

"He doesn't feel anything," the doctor told us. "It's a reflex action." To me, standing and watching, it was my father's body lurching in a macabre game of see-saw. I remembered what the nuns had taught: the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Now a rude machine was tossing this temple, a doll stuffed with failing organs.

Anticipating my mother's doubts, I said, "I'm sure the doctor is right, Mother. He doesn't feel anything." I wasn't sure if I was trying to comfort her or find my own response. What's more, I didn't know what that response should be. I felt weightless and dizzy.

The next day at 3:00 a.m. the nurse, not Vic, called from the hospital. I wondered if Vic had *ever* been there. The possibility that he hadn't wounded, then angered, me.

On the way to the car my mother asked for the third time, "What were the nurse's exact words?"

"There's been a change in his condition."

"Is that all?"

"The doctor advised that we should come to the hospital. Something like that. And that we call Angie."

Surely my mother knew my father was dead, but neither of us spoke again until we reached the hospital.

Angie pulled into the parking lot behind us and we went in together. A nurse standing outside the intensive care unit told us to follow her to a nearby waiting room. The doctor arrived a minute later and sat on a small wooden desk, holding his clipboard to his chest like an attentive schoolgirl and looked at us individually. "I'm sorry," he said, "we lost him at 2:45." He went on, adept at his lines. There was nothing they could do, there were too many complications. But he never suffered at the end. He lapsed into a coma, as we probably knew. The doctor was terribly sorry.

"Oh, no," my mother said in a slight whisper, not disbelieving, but adding her small note of finality.

I thought I now understood why some people are at first not shocked by the death even of someone close. There is no vicarious death. Death is the felt corruption of one's own body.

I looked at my mother for a sign of sorrow. I saw only that she was tired. She had slept little and in fits. "Her vigil" I almost said to myself, but she had merely waited for her husband to die. Still, her dammed-up grief would overflow when her loss was fully revealed to her. No. I had never known my parents to touch. They were not bodies to each other, nor soul mates, nor even roommates. Maybe my father was always a kind of corruption to my mother and his death was just another stage in the process: he wore it on his left side, the dark pink, soft knob of flesh with a hole in its center—his colostomy, that opening that discharged, uncontrollably, his bodily wastes.

Whenever my father had appeared in his open robe to show me the enflamed flesh of his rerouted colon, my rage choked off any sorrow or sympathy. "How would you like to have this goddamn thing the rest of *your* life?" Only once did I feel pity for him, the one time he didn't scream about his fate. He almost cried. I even thought I loved him then.

Now I imagined a transfigured Christ in a glowing white loin cloth, pointing to his side, a colostomy ringed in thorns, dripping precious blood.

She'll never grieve for him. Then, who would? He hadn't borne his suffering with meekness and forbearance, but with outrage, not the way of martyrs. Only my sister, who was clasping my mother's hand to her chest, would grieve. "It's all right, mother, we love you," she said.

"Yes, we love you, Mother," I heard myself say. "Everything is going to be all right." "Maybe you'd like some coffee," the doctor suggested.

Obediently, my mother nodded.

"The doctor's right, Mother. Come on, let's get some." Angie led us to a small area reserved for staff coffee breaks. Father McCordle rose to greet us.

"Ah, I was sorry to hear about your husband. May his soul rest in peace." He had administered the last rites to my father and assured my mother that he had not suffered.

"Thank you, Father," said my mother. "Please pray for his soul."

"I will, I will," he said in his sincere post-mortem voice. "That I will certainly do."

As the priest sat down he winked at me and moved his head toward the door. After he left, I followed and joined him in the hall and he led me to a vacant room where we sat on beds facing each other.

"You know," said the priest, "the Church now allows cremation. I thought it better not to mention it to your mother for fear of offending her. It could save a great deal of money, I'm sure."

"Yes, that's right."

"The only stipulation is that the ashes may not be brought into church for the funeral Mass. Would that be a problem for the family?"

"I don't think so. I'll ask my mother right now and see what she thinks."

My mother's response surprised me. "I was going to suggest that, but I wasn't sure how you and Angela would feel." We assured her it was all right.

"Let's go home now. I have a novena to say, and the rosary. But I want to see your father one last time."

The nurse said it was all right to enter the intensive care unit where the body lay.

My mother walked to the bed next to the still respirator, touched the covered feet and looked at her husband. She took her rosary from her purse, kissed the crucifix, and blessed herself. Angie went to the head of the bed and touched her father's forehead, then his lips. She stared at his face, then turned and left the room.

If only my mother had called my father honey or darling, just once. Did I have to feel grief? I turned and went out the door to join my mother and sister.

"I'm glad I went to see him again," my mother said.

"So am I," I lied.

When we got to the car, I looked back at the hospital, which was like a hacienda restaurant without a sign. When you die in a Detroit hospital, I thought, you die on the fifth floor behind brick and dirty windows, not in a giant Taco Bell without old trees that dropped their leaves for half the year. I hated Southern California.

The next morning I went to the Saddleback Mortuary and arranged for the cremation and the copper urn that, to my amazement, was shaped like a box, not a vase. Was this a California urn? The mortuary would have the body transported to the crematorium. A family member need only "take possession" of the ashes the day after tomorrow.

On the way back to Angie's I bought a fifth of gin and put it under the car seat. After we had a late meal, Angie disappeared upstairs. After an hour I sought her out and found her face down on the bed, crying.

I sat down beside her.

"What's the matter?"

"I loved that man," she said into the satin bedspread. "I really did. I loved him."

I felt myself reach down for her to smooth her hair. "I know." She had loved him, but I didn't understand why, or how.

Angie sat up. Her face was splotted and shiny. "Nobody else ever did. I never knew anyone who *ever* loved him. Everybody treated him like he was a freak." She stopped as her feeling built again, then choked out, "Not that woman with her rosaries and holy cards. Goddamn her" She sobbed again. "And that bastard Vic downstairs. What's the matter with that man? I don't understand him, I'll never understand him. *Why* won't he go to Detroit for the funeral?" She beat the pillows with her fists.

"I don't know."

"Bullshit. He's your drinking buddy, isn't he? You suck up drinks all day up and down the coast, don't you? *You* tell me. *Why* won't he go to Detroit? The bastard."

"Spite, I think." I paused. "I guess. Come on, you go wash up and I'll go down and pour you some wine, okay?"

"Wine? That's your medicine. And his. I want tea."

Drained and shaky, hair plastered to her forehead, Angie got off the bed. "Give me a few minutes, brother of mine."

When she came down in her robe, face washed, she was her capable self again. "Mother, we'll sit on either side of you," she said while she poured herself more tea. "You won't even feel the plane take off." She had taken advantage of our mother's desire to get back to Detroit as soon as possible and had cajoled her until she relented. It would be her first flight.

I, my mother, and Angie had left the motel in plenty of time to be early for the 9:00 a.m. funeral Mass at St. Brigid's. My mother felt it was appropriate for the family to be seated in the front pew before friends and relatives arrived. As they filled the pews immediately behind, I felt faintly popular. My mother had asked me to say words at the crypt where my father's ashes were to be placed, and to lead those gathered in a short recollection of my father. *Lead them*. The words gave me a slight thrill.

During Mass I stood, knelt and sat down as my mother did, feeling no connection with the priest, his gestures, or his words. I wondered where my father was, the one for whom this Mass was being said. In defiance of the Church, Angie held him under her coat, as he had been inside the small suitcase she carried on the plane from California.

I tried to picture my father, to discover some fond memory of him. Instead, I found myself wondering what would become of his tools, especially a set of small screwdrivers he used to tighten the stems of the family's eyeglasses. Where were they now? *Gone are his hands from those instruments*. I felt guilty trying to turn the circumstances into a bad poetic eulogy, even if it was only a diversion.

But where *was* my father? In heaven? The word felt archaic. Besides, it would be grotesque for my parents to be reunited in heaven. My

mother's small body, the wen on her head, her partial bridge. My father's colostomy, his hook nose. What could either have in common with God? Maybe God was the God of my mother's novenas, and maybe the saints were the good people of her prayer cards—colorful and bright with holiness. Or maybe heaven was a place where angels scoured your body clean, a decontamination chamber. Then I wouldn't need gin any more and my naked body would know, without my mind searching, what it felt.

Angie, first out of the family pew, carried the urn shielded by her camel's hair coat. On the way to the car she said, "I'm glad I brought his ashes to church."

"Yes, I am, too," said my mother. During the drive to the crypt I tried to rehearse what I was going to say, but the only words that came were, "And he will be sorely missed." Or, "This man will be sorely missed." Or maybe, "We'll now begin to sorely miss him." Too soon, before I had decided on the right expression, I had pulled up to the circular drive and come to rest in front of the greyish marble building.

After about twenty minutes, only about a dozen or so cars from the church had shown up. My mother said we had better go in, that everyone who was coming had arrived.

As soon as we got out of the car, Angie handed me the urn. As I took it, I wondered if there were a ritual way to carry it, like a priest conveying a chalice or an altar boy a cruet. I settled on holding it with both hands, against my ribs. As we walked the short distance to the embossed metal door, the relatives followed closely behind. Angie pointed to a small antechamber of white marble off to the right. She led us to a wall that held rows of small doored receptacles for the urns, one of which stood open to receive my father's ashes. No one knew whether to take a prayerful attitude, since there was no priest to establish an atmosphere. It was up to me.

"This is my father," I began, holding the urn away from myself. "You all knew him and he will be sorely missed." After my cousin Al's "Amen," I had no idea what to say next. I placed the urn in the receptacle and closed the little ornate door. I saw anger flash across my mother's face and immediately disappear.

"Angela will now lead us in a decade of the rosary," she said, kissing the crucifix before handing Angie the lavender beads.

Angie took the rosary, grasped it, and made a ball of it for her hand. "Hail, Mary," she began, her hands white, her uneven voice revealing sorrow and rage.

I just deposited my father's ashes. I felt as if I were in a bank, had just examined my safety deposit box and returned it. All that was missing was the turn of a key and a manager's reassuring smile. Whose valuables were these ashes? Not my mother's. Not mine. Angie's? More than anyone else, certainly, she could lay claim. I could hear her high broken voice intoning, "Holy Mary, mother of God . . ." Grief, I thought.

And how does one visit ashes? Stand in front of the marble wall and whisper to the door concealing the urn? "Nor in thy marble vault . . ." But I had no song, hadn't even the language or wit to create a two minute farewell to an urnful of ashes.

And would my mother be a companion urn? Her sparse body would make scant ashes, would fit a petite brass box, a HERS to her husband's HIS. Maybe her body would yield no ashes at all, would instead poof into a tiny white wisp of smoke, as if touched by a magician's finger.

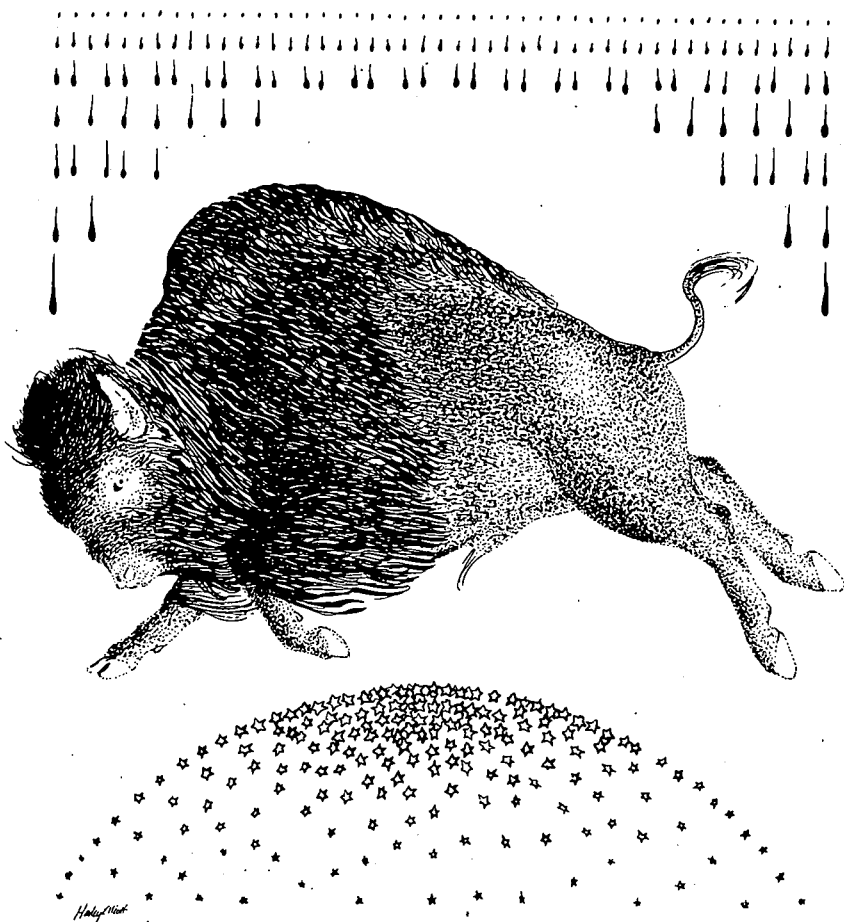
Fleet of foot hockey player finds final rest. The hockey fans called my father Speedy, chanted that name when his body raced down the ice, all parts working harmoniously, unmindfully. Before booze, before his colostomy, before his wife. And before me. I saw my father sitting on a white bench in the locker room, his face and chest glistening with water from the shower, drying his hair vigorously with a white towel. His arms were powerful, his loins gorgeously relaxed; his buttocks rode firmly above the sinews of his thighs as he stood to dress. And he was smiling at a boy standing at the door. I felt a sensuous current go through my body.

Was this another diversion? I was being sentimental, I knew. Angie could grieve in tears and choke out words of love; she cried for the real father. I had to create an ideal one. But why should I love my father now, in death? Why so overwhelming a desire?

Then, at least in part, I knew. My father's separation was more real than his physical presence had ever been. The realization sent a shock through my body. So now I felt strangely outside this small congregation inside this crypt. Detached, unborn. But clearly related to the ashes a few feet away.

Now I knew my father was entirely gone and I loved my idea of him as surely as Angie loved hers. Only his death made this possible. Ashes. I thought of opening the door of the receptacle, lifting the lid of the urn, pressing my wet finger into the dust of my father and then to my tongue. Bitter. *The taste of ashes on my tongue and in my mouth.* Love for the father's gone body, the fear of corruption, the fear of my own choking rage that echoed my failed love. Father, body, ashes.

My sister completed the final Hail Mary and returned the rosary to her mother who kissed the crucifix and deposited it in her purse. Now we were all going for hot coffee and a late breakfast and, as though in sudden recollection, I was terrifically hungry.



REVIEWS

THE GLASS WOMAN by Patricia Traxler

THE GATEKEEPER by William Page

HANNAH'S TRAVEL by Richard Speake

CARPOOL by Donald Levering

ON COMMON GROUND edited by Mark Sanders
and J. V. Brummels

THE GLASS WOMAN by Patricia Traxler. Hanging Loose Press: 231 Wyckoff Street, Brooklyn, New York 11217, 1983. 95 pages, \$5.00, paper.

This collection of Traxler's poems has been divided into sections, and of these, three are poetic sequences. In the "Glasscutters" sequence, which opens the book, the tension of her metaphor (the fragile=love) works, often brilliantly, to confirm the tension of unexpressed emotion. The woman of the poems, watching while the man sleeps, knows

That two people can share one dream
but only if one stays awake

—and knows that waking the dreamer will shatter that sharing.

There are certain dreams
that return year
after year in homage to the dreamer
who put them in the soil
who knew
exactly how deep they should go
and no further.

In the sequence "The Woman in the Window," poems for Traxler's grandmother, we meet another wakeful woman, transplanted from Ireland to Arizona—"her own eyes [are] open in the black room" while her new family sleeps. Like her grandmother, Traxler has been transplanted, and poems throughout the collection are about learning a new country. Like falling in love, the process is a mystery, doing it is discovering a secret. Traxler imagines finding and not finding arrowheads in Kansas:

secrets the land did not choose
to give away today.

Or, from another poem,

Plunge
your fingers in: you will come up
with fragments that tell you
only what you haven't asked. That is all
you may take back with you. The rest
belongs to itself.

Secrets are buried beneath the surface of many of these poems—in the eyes of other people, alive and dead, in her grandmother's tea leaves and ledgers. Often Traxler fixes what can't be stated in a lucid and multi-valent image such as "I dreamed the icicles wouldn't melt above the soft

bellies of crocuses," from the love poems, or the image of the "sharpest paring knife" and its action in "Asparagus Season." However, at other moments in these poems, the mysterious is merely "something I can't name," "something no one can describe," "a time we can't imagine" or "a light unknown on earth." Here, as in the use of "dream" in the "The Cowboy in Dreams" and "Rapunzel," the reader isn't given the directions for getting there, doesn't share the experience.

The book's last and title sequence is uneven, but still very scary indeed. This woman is not only awake to danger, she is danger.

If the light is
just right
you can see yourself
in the glass woman
when the light is just right no one
comes
near
her

When the glass woman poems become incantatory, they do not, it seems to me, gain in power. The best of these poems are those where passion is given a sharper edge by restraint. The exception to this rule, which any review of Traxler's work must acknowledge, is her funny poems—and she can be very funny. It is survivor's humor: from the freewheeling goofiness of "Contest of Nerves" and "Number Seven Love" to the risky exaggerations of "How Trust Works," "Suppers," and "The Roomer" (laughing at the end of love, at wives and death). Traxler is a survivor as long as she keeps her eyes open.

—Sally Allen McNall

THE GATEKEEPER by William Page. Racoon: Suite 401 Mid Memphis Tower, 1407 Union Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, 1982. 47 pages, \$4.50, paper.

William Page shows us in this, his second book, a life (his own) spent not in fanatical pursuit of Art but one that accepts the grit of daily existence: cars that will not start, a house with blistering paint, a left-over piece of cake, or a woman in galoshes picking at black dirt with a rusty hoe. His poetry does not transform such objects; rather it gives them a special emphasis, a special setting that shows them in an altered perspective. In "Petal of My Tongue" we find a familiar situation. The poet, drink in hand, contemplates the oncoming night as his wife sleeps.

This night arrives
much like any other,
the moon already high
in its cracked face,
my wife asleep
on the sofa, and a piece
of cake on the plate.
I rattle the ice
in my glass, but
she doesn't awake.

Here sound patterns emphasize important words. *Night arrives*—and already the high, weird music of the long *i* sounds becomes established, to be reinforced throughout the stanza by *like, high, wife, I, and ice*. And not just any night, *this* night. The hushed *s* also echoes through the stanza in a kind of counterpoint: *arrives, face, piece, ice, and glass*. Between these sound come the subtle off-rimes of *face, plate, and awake*. As the poet thinks of the passing of time, his frustration grows.

... my hands turned to fists
and each fist a hammer
beating under the moon
that stands in the sky
like a silent drum.

Since he still holds the glass, I presume that the fists as hammers reflects his mental state rather than an overt physical gesture. They beat against the air in soundless protest, marking time as they do so. And the haunting music of the poem climaxes in the hushed sounds of *moon and drum*.

Yet Page need not always be serious. At times he looks at himself and smiles, even laughs. In "Just When You Least" he goes out to start the car on a cold morning. No luck. He begins to philosophize about the unexpected—but the unexpected happens again: the car starts. We can

almost see the grin on the poet's face as he says, "And what can I do, / but let the day begin?" And in "Season" he concludes a poem about ascending a mountain with another wry smile.

I will bring back the
mountain shouting in
my pockets. I will spend
my life going up and
coming down again.

Such acceptance of the ups and downs of life makes Page a comfortable poet to be with. He wears well.

And much as I like such poems about middle-age, I find his poems about childhood even more impressive. He sees it both from a child's and an adult's point of view. In "Hurt" the boy cuts himself at play and runs home to his mother, who cries with him out of sympathy. Then the exhausted pair sleep until day. Suddenly time shoots forward.

Soon the crow would be cawing
against the heaven of the field
as we drove through the morning
past the broken sun
and the slashed grain
growing by the road
and the field of corn
that had risen toward the moon
and toward the boy
who ran into the night
and never came out again.

The various *o* sounds (*soon, crow, drove, broken, growing, road, moon, out*) and *n* sounds (*soon, heaven, sun, grain, corn, moon, again*) make music hauntingly appropriate to the sense.

Can anyone remain unmoved by such poetry?

—Victor Contoski

HANNAH'S TRAVEL by Richard Speakes. Boise State University: Ahsakta Press, 1982. 45 pages, \$3.00, paper.

Hannah's Travel, a book of poems linked in narrative sequence, relates the thoughts and daydreams of Hannah Emblen—wife, mother, pioneer—and chronicles one family's emigration from Missouri to the California of the 1850s.

What is at once noticeable is that this work, purporting to relate the innermost feelings of a woman, is written by a man. There is an important precedent, and that is John Berryman's *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*; however, the two cycles differ sharply. Anne Bradstreet is an historical figure; Hannah Emblen is not. Berryman's character is a poet who is alienated from the narrow conventions of Puritan New England; Hannah, outwardly unaccomplished in any art, never expresses deep dissatisfaction with her status or her society—in fact, a contentment with her lot in life pervades the work:

I was a dance amongst myself
& led with my thickening body
a partner who knew the music
by heart.

("Feeling the baby move")

Hannah's art lies in her thinking, her day dreaming. Bemused and sometimes ironic, her striking observations center on her husband, her child, her farm, and her housewares:

The fields, the barn, all
things in rows or housed, squared
near as can to plumb, relax
in luxuries of error.

("John in sleep")

Here are signs and wonders
one stitch at a time,
& the nine year girl saw
her hand flare up tethered
to each, the blue crewel yarn
slack or taut depending, just so
as the wind goes, like its echo,
like wind and where the leaves go.

("Grandmother's sampler")

Fully half of the work is devoted to Hannah's preparation for the long trek west, and this is due to her preoccupation with domestic matters—sorting, packing, planning:

I sang while I packed
as if I were in the woods, telling
the bear I'm on my way & mean
little, a bouquet, wildflowers
for the table.

I topped the last crate
with a hymnal, put all those songs
in the dark with jars of seed,
forget-me-not & sweet pea,
one chopped clump of rose, roots
bound in burlap.

("Making ready")

Once the westward journey has begun, her perspectives broaden—but the emphasis on domestic matters remains:

A line from Missouri to the Rockies
runs through my heart & shakes,
a string drawn taut until it hums,
the song that trembles in my throat
when I cook or mend or wash
dishes in sand.

("June 9, 1852")

The narrative ends on a mysterious note: Hannah's last observation takes place three days out of Fort Laramie, over a thousand miles from her destination. It is as if the vastness of the unsettled continent has swallowed her up; as if she catches up with her personal dream of the West:

Each day we stalk
a curtain that waves & waves before us.
On the other side John sees rock-sure
the new start awaits us . . .

("June 21, 1852")

The first requirement of a cycle of poems is that the individual pieces are able to stand alone and unaided by the others—Speakes accomplishes this admirably. The tight, slightly formal syntax and the well-wrought imagery combine to make Hannah Emblen a thoughtful, shrewd, credible character. *Hannah's Travel* is a rich and wise book—one that will remain fresh after many readings.

—Philip St. Clair

CARPOOL (TELLUS 7) by Donald Levering. Tellus: 1003 Rhode Island, Lawrence, KS, 1983. 21 pages, \$2.50, paper.

Donald Levering leaves you little choice. Faced with the call to:

Rise, cough up a hocker
Put the coffee on &
Forget those dreams
The fog will rise . . .

he enlists you as a passenger in his *Carpool*.

But the fog never really rises. Levering portrays the travellers as if seen through the haze of highway hypnosis. We know their names; we can even smell the "bacon breath" on one of them. Yet it is hard to realize how they feel, what they are thinking. His carpool, including a roofer, a painter, and a gravedigger, seem to aspire to higher ambitions—only to be hauled back to reality. The roofer Dan:

has lead in his veins
from plying stained glass
but no one buys
hand-crafted panes
so he hammers roofing
for wages.

The painter George lives in a past world war:

The road's turns
he takes by rote.
I steer the subject
from the War to blackberries
invading my garden.

A momentary diversion at best.

If in one sense the poems chronicle the life of commuting, in another these poems present an odyssey of isolation. The passengers appears ill-fitted to one another. Besides the mutual need for transportation they have very little in common, little compassion for each other, and little hope. They seclude themselves, wrapped in an envelope of personal space. Interactions stem from idiosyncracies and minor irritations:

. . . He lights up.
I fan my nose and ask him not to smoke when it's too cold
to roll down windows. Nails in your coffin adds Dan.

The passengers fake no comradery and hold no sense of adventure. Thus, when the driver stops to pick up "The Hitchhiker":

George predicts this one's a
communist, Joy fears his germs
Mark wonders if he's got a gun
and I'm fretting over wasted time.

Because of this isolation these poems do work—these people do exist. Anyone familiar with the boredom, loneliness, and hypnosis of routine realizes that part of daily life. The fog may burn off and an outside event is recorded in “The Sighting”:

Joy's the one who spots
coyote with a feather-beard
homing. Following her finger
my eyes are blinded by
a sudden flare. But Joy
keeps pointing through the sun
until we see Coyote from a rise.

—Tim Skip

ON COMMON GROUND: THE POETRY OF WILLIAM KLOEFKORN, TED KOOSER, GREG KUZMA, AND DON WELCH edited by Mark Sanders and J.V. Brummels. Sandhills Press: Ord, Nebraska. 1983. 276 pages, \$8.00, paper.

In his forward to *On Common Ground*, Mark Sanders struggles anxiously to disassociate his book from the regional perspective its conception and title imply. The four poets represented in the collection were selected because, from combined local and national perspectives, they seem the most prominent and influential poets writing within Nebraska. Presumably then, they are the best poetic representatives of the state. But by the end of his forward, Sanders is claiming that the book is simply "an ovation for four poets with four distinct voices." This simply cannot be reconciled with the book's origin in J.V. Brummels' idea of (in Sanders' words) "a definitive collection of Nebraska's poets and their best poetry." Sanders concludes his comments on the book's title by saying:

Therefore, the common ground I would hope the readers see is, first of all, the world that exists around them, regardless of the reader's residence, and that transcendental worth to people far removed from the Plains. Secondly, the common ground is the immutable perception of each poet, that drive to *see* and *explain* in terms that *create* the image of *knowing*.

Why this retreat to abstraction? Clearly, the book originated in regional consciousness, as did many of the poems it includes. Is it necessary that poetry be transcendental—of all places and all times—in order to avoid the negative aspects of regionalism?

Conflicting attitudes towards regionalism and the experience of life in a Great Plains state appear frequently in the poetry and articles collected in the book. *On Common Ground* presents substantial selections of poetry by William Kleofkorn, Ted Kooser, Greg Kuzma, and Don Welch. Before each poet's work are two articles on the poet and an interview with the poet by Brummels or Sanders. The result is a very solid book that not only presents some excellent poetry but that also presents sufficient poetry by each poet and sufficient discussion for the reader to form an understanding of the poet's work and the aesthetic issues behind his work. Repeatedly, the aesthetic issue is the poet's relationship to the Great Plains.

Greg Kuzma is a product of New York state who moved to Nebraska to teach at the University of Nebraska, and as a result, his relationship to the Great Plains was, at least originally, as an outsider from a distinctly different region. The other three are of the western Midwest. William Kleofkorn grew up and taught in Kansas before moving to Lincoln; Ted Kooser spent his first twenty-four years in Iowa before also moving to Lincoln; and Don Welch has spent most of his life in Kearney, Nebraska.

For these three poets, the issue of regionalism is more pressing because their sensibilities were formed and have been maintained in the western area of the Midwest that is loosely referred to as the Great Plains. As might be expected they have some opinions about the term "regionalism."

In his interview, Ted Kooser emphatically rejects the term:

Most of the talk about regionalism and sense of place is little more than boosterism . . . The idea behind most of the sense of place talk is that there is some magical unifying theme pervading the writing of certain writers. This is complete nonsense as far as I can see. What writers on the Great Plains share is the Great Plains.

But at the same time, he does accept that writers on the Great Plains share "commonality of experience" and have the same world around them to draw on for their concrete imagery. Shared experience and shared imagery can be very unifying, and they can lead to similar themes.

Let's look at two poems on the basic subject of Nebraska itself. In "Some Directions for the December Touring of Westcentral Nebraska," William Kloefkorn advises the reader to "go cold and / Hungry over these wintered ranges / Where only on a cloudless night / Can the sky outstrip the land." He conjures up the tumbleweed, herefords, rusting cultivators, and hunting hawks; he directs us, "Walk barefoot over / Steaming dung along the / Dormant seeded rows of / Next year's yield." And near the end, he instructs us, "Go dizzy with the / Windmill. Stretch even the / Fingertips against sand-coated hills." We have the contest of the land and sky, the vitality of agriculture even in the dormant season, and the human hand held out so that it is superimposed on the hills.

Where Kloefkorn's poem is a somber image of winter, Ted Kooser's "So This is Nebraska" is a happy poem of summer; yet the experiences and images are clearly related. Again we are riding down the road through an agricultural world, now in the fullness of July. We have cedars and hollyhocks in place of tumbleweeds, loosening barns and broken tractors in place of rusting cultivators, redwing blackbirds and meadowlarks in place of hawks, cataracts of hay instead of dormant seeds, and billows of dust in place of steaming dung—a translation of the winter world into its summer counterpart, perhaps a hundred miles or so further east. The land is even more prominent over the sky here, where an old pickup "settles back to read the clouds." Particularly notice two things that appear in the lines below. In both poems the poet is your teacher in the spirit of the place, and the reader is presented with a kind of reverse of the pathetic fallacy, in which the characteristics of nature are reflected in the feelings of men:

. . . You feel like letting
your tires go flat, like letting the mice

build a nest in your muffler, like being
no more than a truck in the weeds,

clucking with chickens or sticky with honey
or holding a skinny old man in your lap
while he watches the road, waiting
for someone to wave to. You feel like

waving. You feel like stopping the car
and dancing around on the road. You wave
instead and leave your hand out gliding
larklike over the wheat, over the houses.

And look at that image of the hand! Again, we have the outstretched hand superimposed on the landscape. Surely, both poems focus on the power of the landscape over the human spirit and contrast the size and durability of that landscape with the size and transience of a moving hand.

All of this is to say that a commonality of experience is a real and important bond. When Don Welch in "Nebraska" compares the state to a Russian woman with "a certain large-boned and spare beauty," he is expressing a feeling that resonates in the work of Kloeckorn and Kooser. And when Welch concludes that poem by having this woman Nebraska ask, "Why do you keep imagining me in other / places and states? / And why do you keep assuming our children / are unhappy?" he asserts an acceptance of his place that is inherent in Kloeckorn and Kooser.

In his very good article on Ted Kooser, Dana Gioia states the basic objection writers have to the term "regionalism": "Regionalism is ultimately a political term, a dismissive label applied to literature produced in and concerned with areas outside the dominant cultural and economic centers of a society. It implies that a book cannot be judged by national standards. It suggests that certain subjects will be of only local interest." Gioia goes on to point out that Southern literature and literature of the Irish Revival are simply regional literatures that have become canonized, adding, "The regionalism celebrated in the universities usually centers on a few familiar territories, which have been described by such a long line of writers that they have been as thoroughly mythologized as Ilium or Rome, rather than the notion that literature should be rooted in the reality of a particular place."

If "regionalism" is not being used for the boosterism that Kooser objects to or as a dismissive label, what is its relationship to place? Kloeckorn, in his interview says: "But what finally matters is the attitude that is taken toward the details that are used. If the attitude prevails, the poem is not regional. If the indigenous details prevail, the poem is regional." It seems reasonable that a poem designed primarily to capture the peculiar details of a particular place and time should be called regional, but if, like the Kloeckorn and Kooser poems examined earlier, a poem represents the spirit of a region, it seems odd to deny that it is in

any sense regional. Welch in his interview talks about poems that transcend their locality and "assume meaning far from their places of origin." This sounds like what Sanders writes about in his forward, but Welch adds that "they never forget what parented them." In other words, such poems retain an underlying sense of place.

Whether or not you call it regionalism, this quality of being grounded in a region seems the great source of strength for the most successful poems in *On Common Ground*. And it is more than simply finding some concrete images. The region establishes a world that supports the images, actions, and ideas of these poems. Ultimately any great literature, whether a collective body or an individual effort, needs a supportive world of some kind. It is the essential context that we must try to recreate when we read literature from the past. It is what is missing in the isolated short poems that make up the bulk of contemporary poetry, that poetry which speaks with the same standardized voice as our trained announcers. Perhaps the reason Nebraska has such good poets is that, thanks in part to Willa Cather, and thanks in part to the absence of any such organization as the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Nebraska is the Midwestern state with the strongest sense of regional identity.

Taken as a whole, *On Common Ground* is an excellent introduction to the work of its four poets, and I highly recommend the book for the poetry it contains. The articles and interviews, however, are very uneven. Mark Sander's article, "Rocks, Water, and Fire: Kloefkorn's Use of Symbol" is sterilely academic, but his interview with Ted Kooser is lively and to the point. William Harmon's article, "Kuzma's Midwest" is a sort of exercise in literary free association that wanders about the history of Midwestern literature and literature in general, touching at points on Greg Kuzma's work. Harmon's article does include some interesting details of the who-is-from-where variety, but the comments deal more with the Great Lakes states than with the western Midwest, without seeming to realize that there is any difference between living along the Wabash River and living along the Platte. On the other hand, Vic Contoski's short review of Kooser is good, and Dave Etter's review of Kloefkorn, which begins the book, is a good opening statement on the importance of regional knowledge. In her long article, "Greg Kuzma: A National Poet," Helene J.F. de Aguilar gives a convincing documentation of Kuzma's self-indulgence, but a much less convincing demonstration of her inflated claim that Kuzma is a major poet and "a national treasure."

Adding the good prose pieces to the solid selections of poetry produces a surprising amount of value under one cover, much more than I expect to find in a small press book. *On Common Ground* can serve both as an excellent introduction to the individual work of Kloefkorn, Kooser, Kuzma, and Welch and as a substantial text for students interested in poetry that draws on the experience of the Great Plains.

—Mike Smetzer

CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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Guri Andermann (2516 N. Orchard, Tucson, AZ 85712) is the contributing editor of MAZAGINE and has had poems published in CALYX, THE BELLINGHAM REVIEW, and ASCENT.

Jack Anderson (110 Thompson St. 1C, New York, NY 10012) is the author of seven books of poetry, including two that appeared in the last year: THE CLOUDS OF THAT COUNTRY (Hanging Loose) and SELECTED POEMS (Release Press). He is also a dance critic for the NEW YORK TIMES.

Helen Ashmore (3518 W 83rd 211, Prairie Village, KS 66208) is the author of LORD CHESTERFIELD'S STEPDAUGHTER and a syndicated medical columnist for UPS. She has published in CHOUTEAU REVIEW, NEW LETTERS, and FOCUS MIDWEST.

Wendy Bishop (Box 176, Tsaile, AZ 86556) works at Navajo Community College and has poetry forthcoming in THE POETRY MISCELLANY, THE THREEPENNY REVIEW, and THE YALE REVIEW.

Elizabeth Campbell (311 Mississippi, Lawrence, KS 66044) has had publications in VANDERBILT REVIEW, COTTONWOOD, and NEUE GLAS/NEW GLASS. She is presently completing a novel.

Victor Contoski (English Dept, Kansas University, Lawrence, KS 66045) has published widely. His most recent book of poetry, A KANSAS SEQUENCE, is from COTTONWOOD PRESS.

Peter Desy (1626 Cunard Rd., Columbus, OH 43227) has new fiction coming soon in NEW AMERICA and THE PASSAIC REVIEW. He has published poems most recently in THE SOUTHERN POETRY REVIEW, WEST BRANCH, THE TEXAS REVIEW, and THE LAUREL REVIEW.

Harley Elliott (Art Dept. Marymount College, Salina, KS 67401) has published widely in little magazines. His latest book of poetry is DARKNESS AT EACH ELBOW.

Terry Evans (740 Highland, Salina, KS 67401) has had numerous exhibits of her photography. Her published work includes: TERRY EVANS/EARL IVERSEN, AN OPEN LAND: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MIDWEST, and KANSAS ALBUM.

Marc Dion (5401 Brookside Blvd. 109, Kansas City, MO 64112).

B. H. Fairchild (2317 Bowling Green, Denton, TX 76201) has a chapbook, *C & W MACHINE WORKS* (Trilobite Press) as well as work in *NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY*, *KANSAS QUARTERLY*, *QUARTERLY WEST*, and other magazines.

Robert Funge (PO Box 1225, San Carlos, CA 94070) has a book of poetry, *THE LIE THE LAMB KNOWS* (Spoon River Poetry Press). *GREAT RIVER REVIEW* has recently featured eight more of his poems from *JOHN/HENRY*.

David Galef (201 W 105th St. 61, New York, NY 10025) has published short stories and poetry in *PUNCH*, *DEKALB LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL*, *WRIT*, and other small press magazines.

Victoria Garton (Rt. 3, Nevada, MO 64772) has had poems in *PRAIRIE SCHOONER*, *CIMARRON REVIEW*, *FOCUS MIDWEST*, and the recent *MISSOURI POETS: AN ANTHOLOGY*.

Michael Hettich (16401 NE 4th Ave, N. Miami Beach, FL 33162) is an editor of *MOONSQUIET PRESS POETRY CHAPBOOK SERIES* and has published in many small magazines.

Linnea Johnson (1716 Springfield Rd. 12, Bloomington, IL 61701) teaches at Illinois State University and has published *FRONT LINES* (Number One Press, Lincoln, NE).

Greg Kuzma (English Dept, Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588) is one of four poets featured in *ON COMMON GROUND*, reviewed in this issue.

Ken Letko (300 S. Summit, Bowling Green, OH 43402) has published a collection of poems and short stories titled *WISCONVERSATION*. He teaches at Bowling Green State University.

Carl Lindner (Univ. of Wisconsin—Parkside, Kenosha WI 53141) has a collection of poems, *SHOOTING BASKETS IN A DARK GYMNASIUM*, as well as numerous publications in little magazines.

Denise Low (1916 Stratford, Lawrence, KS 66044) edited *COTTONWOOD'S* anthology of contemporary Kansas poetry, *CONFLUENCE*. Her latest book is *QUILTING* from Holiseventh Press.

Pat McCulloch (1710 Indiana 2, Houston, TX 77006) writes out of Houston while awaiting the return of Halley's Comet.

Sally Allen McNall (3026 Riverview, Lawrence, KS 66044) is recently back from a year spent teaching American Literature in New Zealand on

a Fulbright. Her poetry has appeared in CONFLUENCE, IMAGES OF AGING, and other magazines and collections.

Al Ortolani (601 W 3rd, Pittsburg, KS 66762).

Antonya Nelson (6161 N. Panorama Dr., Tucson, AZ 85743) is working on an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Arizona and is an editor of SONORA REVIEW.

Hans Ostrom (117 C St. C, Davis, CA 95616) has had poems in such journals as CALIFORNIA QUARTERLY, INTRO 10, HARVEST, WIND LITERARY JOURNAL, and SIERRA JOURNAL.

William Page (English Dept., Memphis State, Memphis, TN 38152) edits MEMPHIS STATE REVIEW and chaired the Regional Poets group of the South Central MLA. His first collection of poetry, CLUTCH PLATES is from Branden Press, his second is reviewed in this issue of COTTONWOOD.

Denise Papin (10853 State Line 2, Kansas City, MO 64114) has published poems in THE SPOON RIVER QUARTERLY and NUMBER ONE.

Theresa Pappas (519 Northwestern, Ames, IA 50010) teaches at Iowa State University and has poems forth-coming in AKROS REVIEW and ANTIOCH REVIEW.

Joan Ritty (10070 Mission Rd, Overland Park, KS 66206) has published in KANSAS QUARTERLY, LITTLE BALKANS REVIEW, COMMONWEAL, and many other magazines.

Tim Skipp (1842 Vermont, Lawrence, KS 66044) recently published a review of Dave Etter's poems in NAKED MAN.

Mike Smetzer (English Dept. BGSU, Bowling Green, OH 43403) edits NAKED MAN and has had poetry published in such magazines as KANSAS QUARTERLY, POETRY NOW, and HANGING LOOSE.

Philip St. Clair (English Dept. BGSU, Bowling Green OH 43403) is working on an MFA at Bowling Green State University.

Ellen Stone (230½ Clay St., Topeka, KS 66604) graduated from Antioch College and works with young children. This is her first published poem.

Mary Tisera (1906 Morrell St., Pittsburgh, PA 15212) has published in DARK HORSE, CALYX, and TENDRIL and has poems forthcoming in PULPSMITH, KANSAS QUARTERLY, and BLACK WILLOW.

William Trowbridge (223 W First, Maryville, MO 64468) has had poetry in PRAIRIE SCHOONER, THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL, NEW LETTERS, POETRY NOW, and many others.

CONFLUENCE addendum:

Elizabeth Mayer

LOVE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Ten miles away I know that you're awake
fighting the same pollen-loaded breeze for breath.
And I know while you wait
for your medication to take effect
you think of me.

There is a temptation to let them know—
the younger ones—
what we've learned;
show them a thing or two;
but that would not be kind,
and one thing we've learned
is kindness.

When you lie back and close your eyes
I know you will think about my mouth,
and I will breathe easier myself
for knowing the warmth
you could bring me.

If Romeo and Juliet had lived till middle age
They might have learned
sometimes it's better to postpone things
until the worst of need has passed;

that in some ways a shared infirmity
can be as intimate as if we shared a bed.

WHY I AM GOING BACK TO NEW ENGLAND

Three years ago I lost the change of seasons
and now I find myself at night
walking naked to the calendar
to search out the intensity of sleet.

Here in the south
the plumbing never freezes below the ground
but there is no root cellar;
if there were
the bugs would get the turnips.

I dust the curved mahogany
but my hands remember
the straight lines
of an old cherry dresser

and in a soft bed on a warm night
I look at you sleeping
and cry, thinking myself depraved
for missing the pea beneath the mattresses,
the granite inside the down and innerspring,
the need for woolen socks,
the straight white steeples of New England.

THE FENCING LESSON

The commitment in this sport
is to death. You are in black,
formal, deadly as the Devil.
I am in novice white.

You are aloof, a lover
from the Renaissance
to whom I gladly would have given
my scarf, my sleeve,
would have met in some bower—
not on this strip
with a metered distance between us

knowing that once the salute is given
we must move forward,
our movements tough, controlled,
describable in French—
a conversation conducted in steel
according to the rules
of right-of-way, of parry
and riposte,

and knowing at all times
we must maintain
an elegance of motion
as we work toward
this small assassination,
move forward to *la belle*,
the touch before *la morte*.

DRIVING ROUTE 80

On the road at five-thirty,
so underslept that when I
close my eyes the dreams come
pressing in at once,
an old woman walking,
a thin, blond child,
hands hanging empty.

At Davenport a shred of newspaper
settles before us.
An orange balloon hesitates
through the unsprouted corn.
I dream the road curling
into foothills, clouds,
slopes of rock, ice, pearl.

I open my eyes. It is still Iowa.
The old hill road ends
thirty yards above, chopped free.
In a wooded pasture
black sheep and black cattle
bend to the bright grass.

from THE END OF THE TRAIL

The End of the Trail is a motel at the end of Skyline Drive, which begins in Mena, Arkansas and passes over Rich Mountain to Broken Bow, Oklahoma. The main attraction along the route is Wilhelmina Inn, a yellow sandstone edifice built in 1896 as a summer home for the Dutch queen Wilhelmina Helena Pauline Maria. While Wilhelmina fought for neutrality and fled a German invasion, the home became a hotel and gift shop, an attraction for the mountain folks with its high ceilings, chandeliers, and great stone fireplaces. They called it "The Castle" and took home souvenirs—pieces and quartz and glass swans whose broad backs opened into bowls for flowers, greenery, Christmas candy. Sometimes the old men would walk to Lovers' Leap to look out over the valley to the hills they never crossed. Out-of-state tourists began making the drive, circling through the parkway, eyeing the Castle, then driving on to Broken Bow to the End of the Trail where rooms were cheaper, the kids slept free, and hamburgers at the stand down the street cost half as much. The Queen abdicated, the Inn burned, motel business slowed. No one paid it much mind. Indians slept in the light of the Trail sign, the Dutch took on alliances, the governor made the Inn a state park. Two lovers sealed a tryst and leaped over the cliff.

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SALINA ISSUE:

Drawings, poetry, interview with HARLEY ELLIOTT

Photos by TERRY EVANS

Review of THE GLASS WOMAN by PATRICIA TRAXLER
