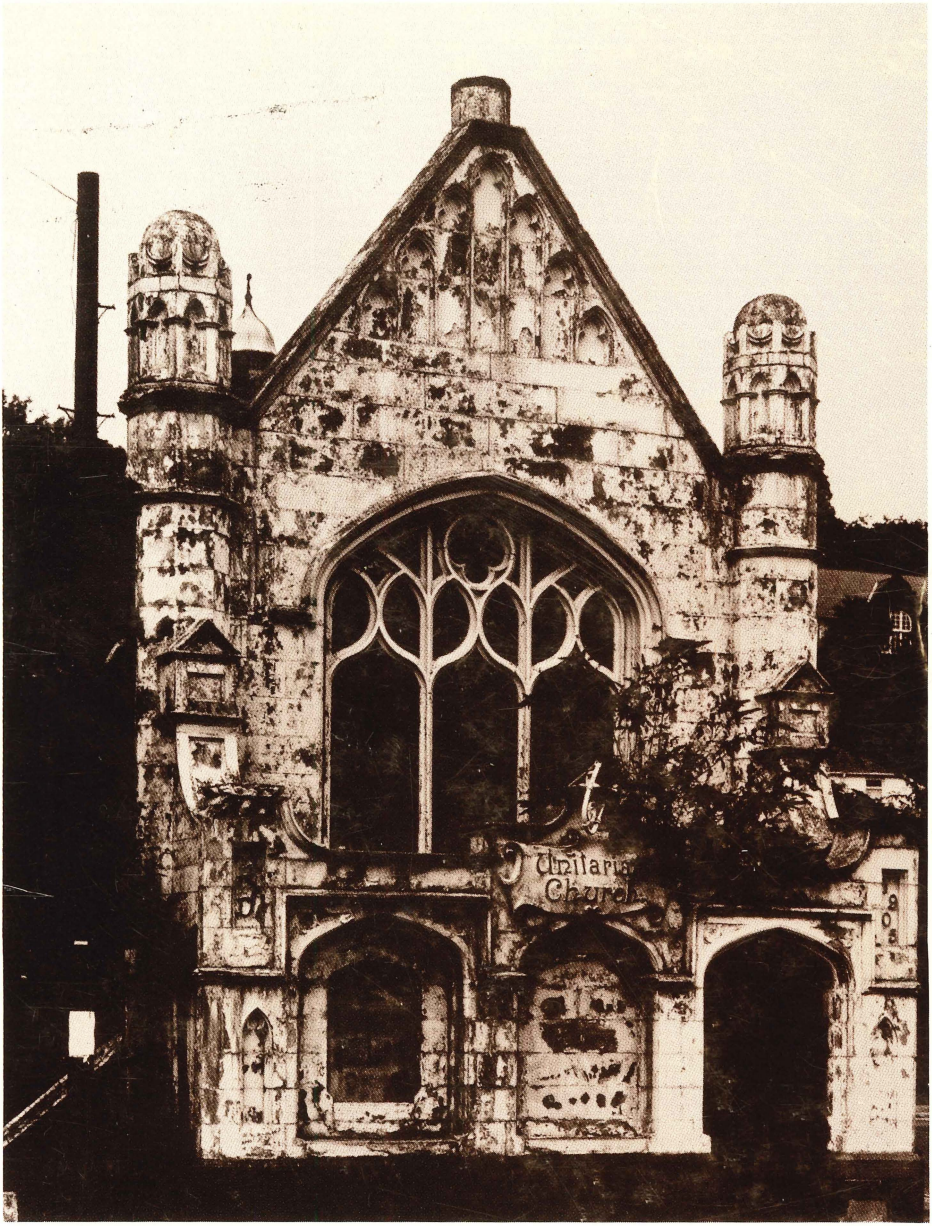

NDQ

North Dakota Quarterly

Spring 1989



North Dakota Quarterly

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ON THE COVER

The photograph is by David Bailey and is of the Unitarian Church in Pontypridd, Wales. Courtesy of ffotogallery, Cardiff, Wales, from their exhibition "Part of the Valleys Project" (1985).

NDQ

North Dakota Quarterly

Volume 57, Number 2 Spring 1989

Contents

John G. Adams	1	On Salerno Bay (memoir)
Jeffrey Bartlett	19	Jeffers and California Today
Christopher Cokinos	26	If We Can Be Saved: Robinson Jeffers Today and Tomorrow
David Galef	40	Butch (story)
Catherine Diane Mellett	53	The Wild Boy (story)
Dusty Sklar	63	Stay. Please Stay (story)
Max Westbrook	75	The Piano Lady (story)
Andrew Dillon	81	Edgar's Journey: Shame, Anger, and Maturity in *King Lear*
Jeffrey Alan Triggs	92	A Kinship of the Fields: Farming in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas and Wendell Berry
Duane Niatum	103	Landscape of the Whirling Dust (poem)
Mary Slowik	104	Henry James, Meet Spider Woman: A Study of Narrative Form in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*
Paul G. Zolbrod and Glen E. Rodgers	121	The Scientist As Storyteller: Storytelling As Science
Arnold Krupat and Brian Swann	137	Of Anthologies, Translations, and Theory: A Self-Interview
Katharyn Machan Aal	148	Writing As an Indian Woman: An Interview with Paula Gunn Allen

ANGLO-WELSH POETRY: A SELECTION
Raymond Garlick, Tony Curtis, and James Ballowe, eds.

Reviews

Yahya Armajani 163 Hasan Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*

Mary Ellen Caldwell 165 Robert F. Gish, *Frontier's End: The Life and Literature of Harvey Fergusson*

Joseph DeFlyer 168 Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds., *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers* and *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*

Joanne Desotelle 176 Chinua Achebe, interview; excerpts from *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah*; James Baldwin, interview; excerpts from *Just Above My Head*; Gloria Naylor, interview; excerpts from *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Mama Day*

Monica Dorenkamp 179 Jane Gallop, *Thinking through the Body*

Robert Gish 182 Janice Emily Bowers, *A Sense of Place: The Life and Work of Forrest Shreve*

David E. Hailey, Jr. 184 D'Arcy McNickle, *Wind from an Enemy Sky*

Edward Lynskey 186 Donald Hall, *The Ideal Bakery*

Donald McCaffrey 187 Jeffrey D. Mason, *Wisecracks: The Farces of George S. Kaufman*

Gregory McNamee 190 Gershold Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*

Sara Edlin Marlowe 192 Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator As Critic*

William Marsh 194 Andrei Codrescu, ed., *American Poetry Since 1970: Up Late*

Lenard D. Moore 197 Joseph Bruchac, *Near the Mountains*

Peter Nabokov	198	Richard Stephen Felger and Mary Beck Moser, *People of the Desert and Sea: Ethnobotany of the Seri Indians*;
	202	Carolyn Gilman and Mary Jane Schneider, *The Way to Independence 1840-1920: Memories of a Hidatsa Indian Family*
Mark Phillips	206	David Kilgore, *Last Summer*;
		Kathleen Coskran, *The High Price of Everything*
Mary Jane Schneider	208	Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture*
Anne Sternal	214	Linda Whitney Hobson, *Understanding Walker Percy*
Peter Wild	217	J. Allan Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain*;
	219	Gary Paul Nabhan, *Enduring Seeds: Native American Agriculture and Wild Plant Conservation*
Robert W. Lewis	221	Duane Niatum, ed., *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*;
	223	*Patterns of Life, Patterns of Art: The Rahr Collection of Native American Art*
Editor's Notes	225	
Contributors	227	

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On Salerno Bay

JOHN G. ADAMS

The main American force in Italy was the Fifth Army which, by the time I arrived in Italy, was headquartered in La Reggia palace in Caserta, about thirty miles northeast of Naples. The palace had been built between 1752 and 1774 and was intended to be the Versailles of the Kingdom of Naples. It contained twelve hundred rooms, and adjoining the palace was a park, of Parisian design, which was supposed to match the gardens of Versailles.

Even so large a unit as a field army headquarters could occupy only a very small portion of the space in the mammoth building. Part of the second level of the palace was given over to sleeping rooms, to one of which I was assigned. It had a thirty-foot ceiling and a floor space about forty by thirty feet entered through massive floor-to-ceiling double doors. My army cot and meager personal equipment were its sole furnishings. There was no electricity, and if I made the mistake of losing track of my flashlight after dark, it could be a long night. Bath and related facilities were meager. It was about one hundred yards to the nearest toilet or to running water. American officers of various ranks, usually senior to me, and apparently all strangers, wandered the halls forlornly after dark. There was no heat, so windows were kept securely shut, and I usually slept in the same sleeping bag I had used since I had first arrived in Ireland eighteen months earlier. Because of the chill, I usually slept in all of my clothing except trousers and shoes. My room was not decorated, and I assumed it was one of many which two centuries earlier had been allocated to servant use.

There were a number of separate messes on the first floor of the palace—a couple of enlisted messes, an officers' mess, a general officers' mess, which usually served fifteen or twenty generals, plus the private mess for the army commander. The food was the same in all messes. It consisted of standard GI chow which was universally disliked by all who were required to endure it for any extended period but which contained all the nutrients necessary to health and well being.

Certain staples never changed: dehydrated potatoes, powdered eggs, canned vegetables and fruits, a butter with a very high melting point

which was generally referred to as "grease."

Mobile field bakery units soon became available, and fresh bread was a welcome addition. Mobile ice-cream makers arrived, and a very palatable ice cream could be turned out by adding water to the premixed powder and turning on the mixer, which was usually run off a portable gasoline-powered electric generator.

The basic meats were canned: corned beef hash, Vienna sausage, and a canned pork which gave the Hormel meat packing company great irritation during the war because all of it, good, bad, tasteless, or too salty, was generally disliked and was universally called Spam by the soldiers, thus deriding Hormel's premium canned ham product of which it was proud. In the palace, the hundreds of officers and men became accustomed to fresh bread and ice cream periodically and also, rather regularly, fresh meat. But farther north, less than fifty miles, in the rugged mountain fighting areas, it was a real struggle to get food of any variety, particularly hot food, to the men on the battle line.

At the palace my duty was frustrating, and, I thought, pointless. I sat at a large desk in a large room with about forty other officers and picked papers out of my "In" basket and put them into my "Out" basket, dutifully initialling each one. But I had very little idea of what they were about or why they were sent to me. I was never told my mission, nor what it was that those immediately superior to me were supposed to be doing. This misery I suffered for a number of weeks.

The palace offered no recreation except for an occasional walk in the palace garden in the afternoon and the evening in a club area. There were enlisted clubs and an officers' club. It occupied an enormous room on the first floor, a room at least forty feet wide and sixty feet long with a ceiling about thirty feet high.

The officers' club had a variety of lounge chairs, cheap junk built in Naples especially for the purpose out of the poor wartime materials then available. Insofar as I could determine, most of the palace furniture and treasures not already looted and taken north by the Germans were locked away for ultimate return to the Italians.

There were two or three bars selling mostly Italian wines and liquors. The one I favored was called "Dago Red." It was a sweet potion, a brandy-like liquor, supposedly made from a cherry base, and one had to consume it with caution, but it was very good at warming cold feet and hands. I spent an hour or two most evenings in that club, first because it was heated and well lighted and one could read the daily *Stars and Stripes* from cover to cover in comfort, and then also because many other officers with a feeling of uselessness similar to mine sat around there also.

It was also the recreational area for USO performers who were overnighting at the palace enroute up to or back from the forward area. Many of the famous names of the film industry of the late nineteen thirties were to be seen there. One week Humphrey Bogart and a troupe including his wife, Mayo Methot, were in and out quite a few times. They did a lot of drinking and fighting every night, and on one occasion, Bogart and his wife got into a name-calling fight as good as any performance he ever put on in the movies.

The palace was also the stopping off place for officers coming from the United States and in transit to forward units. Under the Army's wartime promotion system, it was necessary to be in a position calling for a certain rank in order to be promoted to that rank. Thus, an army officer could be assigned to a unit at a certain grade and be put in a billet calling for that grade. Then, if vacancies did not occur in billets calling for more rank and to which he could be assigned, he did not advance in grade. This happened to many officers who came back from two or three years overseas at the same rank as when they had first set sail.

At the same time, at some stateside bases, an officer whose basic training might have been in a combat arm such as infantry or artillery through some college ROTC program might find himself promoted once or twice or even three times without ever having had duty in the lower ranks in his basic branch. I knew one such officer, Dan Evans, with whom I had some civilian contact before the war. He had been a great college athlete, and then for seven years had been a high school coach. I met him at the Caserta officers' club. He was a major wearing the cross rifles of infantry. As soon as the war came he had been called to duty to a very large post where he at once had become the post assistant athletic officer and coach of various athletic teams. In less than three years he had advanced to major and was in charge of all athletics at the post. But he had never served as an infantry platoon leader or as a company commander. He didn't even know how to strip and assemble his side arm, nor did he have the slightest idea how to operate the M-1 rifle.

In the fixed infantry slugging match going on before Mount Cassino the heaviest casualties were among battalion officers, majors and lieutenant colonels, because it was they who were required to move from area to area to check the status of the companies under their command. These moving targets were prime objectives of the enemy snipers not only because they were officers, but also because they were the chain of communication between units. Attrition among them was enormous. A call was made to Washington to send infantry majors and lieutenant colonels by the plane load on a priority basis.

The Pentagon made a broad sweep, and its net caught my friend, Dan, along with scores of others. In one day he left his post, his wife and child, and found himself flying across the South Atlantic on a C-47 via Natal and Ascension Island to Dakar and Morocco until, in about four days, I met him at the Caserta officers' club. There were many of us who knew about the program and what he could expect. Dan's orders were to report tomorrow to one of the divisions at the front. An officer from that division was with us in the bar, and he told Dan that by tomorrow night he would be manning a battalion command post on a snowy mountainside, keeping the phones going, keeping track of the battalion commander, and keeping contact with higher headquarters.

Dan said, "I can't do that. I am absolutely untrained in all of the weapons and in tactics." Nevertheless, he went forward the next day, hoping to explain his inadequacies to the division commander whose reply to him was, "You're an infantry major; you'll do what you are told." He was sent forward to the regimental headquarters, and when he refused to go forward armed with only his pistol to find his battalion command post, he was first threatened with court martial for misbehavior in the face of the enemy, the conviction for which offense could have meant the death penalty, and then finally, back at division headquarters, he was permitted to resign for the good of the service on the spot. In the army of the time, this disposition of an officer, "resignation for the good of the service," was the ultimate disgrace. The stigma was terrific. It meant that he had been kicked out of the officers' corps for being a coward.

Wearing no insignia, Dan came back through Caserta that night, ordered home as a civilian on the slowest returning cargo transport, and required somehow to explain to his family and friends why he was home and out of uniform a year before the end of the war. His local newspaper carried a small note that he had returned, separated from the service for medical reasons, and he went back to coaching.

The combat area at Mount Cassino was too far from the army headquarters to please the army commander, so the main headquarters split off a smaller unit called Army Forward. I was in it, the lowest ranking of three officers in my section, a brigadier general, a lieutenant colonel my own age, and me. For practice, we moved out of the palace into a tent camp in the palace gardens. The only difference from being in the palace was that now we were also subject to rain and snow, and there was no club room in which to while away the evenings.

In a week or so, the forward unit moved to Presanzano, which put us within sight and sound of Mount Cassino. Again I was mystified at what anyone in my tiny section was doing. Each separate unit, G-1,

G-2, G-3, G-4, Engineer, Ordnance, Artillery, Signal, and so on, was in a small separate area under some trees supplemented by man-made camouflage. The general in charge of each unit had a vehicle which was a combined sleeping van and office. Here he had a desk, wall maps, and a kerosene stove; field telephones connected all units through a central control system. The back doors of the van were swung open, and a large tent was attached to the rear of the vehicle. It contained desks and other paraphernalia sufficient for his assisting officers and enlisted personnel to run the small mobile unit. Again my work seemed primarily to consist of putting incoming papers into outgoing boxes. To give privacy to the general, canvas curtains hung over the back opening of his van, which was entered from the rear by walking up three portable steps.

I didn't have much idea of what we were doing or trying to do because whenever anything would come up, the young lieutenant colonel would go into the general's van where he'd pull the curtains and they would whisper while I stayed outside and shuffled papers.

I became friendly with our staff sergeant, a shrewd Irish kid from Chicago named Sanders. He had been with the headquarters since it was organized in Morocco, months before I arrived. He soon filled me in on the gossip about the senior personnel of the forward unit, particularly on the sexual peccadillos of three generals, "A," "B," and "C," all of whom had mistresses.

"A" was already established with an Italian contessa, the former mistress of a German general who had quit Naples for safer haven to the north only a few days before she took up with our General "A" when the Americans took over in Naples. "A" managed to get back to Naples, first from the palace, and then later from Presenzano, on overnight visits twice or thrice weekly, ostensibly on urgent Army business, and his official need to go to Naples periodically was sufficiently logical that he didn't even try to cover up his overnight visits to the contessa's apartment. And it was even assumed that she was being true to "A" because he had access to luxury items sufficient to keep her in the same creature comfort as had his Nazi predecessor.

"B," the second general, had a mistress, a Red Cross worker, who was stationed in Naples. She often came up and overnighted in his vehicle. Since each little unit was sequestered in a clump of trees one or two hundred yards from the others, he had a gay old time, and none of his peers or his seniors ever walked over to the little clump of trees where he nested in comfort.

His embarrassment came when it was discovered that the combat troops were using up one type of ammunition so fast that there would

soon be none left and none was enroute by sea to replace it. His unit hadn't managed inventory control carefully enough to anticipate the shortage, and he danced a pretty tune as he tried to get out of that pickle. But strange was the way the shortcomings of generals were treated by their commanders; and "B" managed to survive, holding his job, his rank, his van, and even his mistress.

"C" was the general of my little unit. Sanders told me "C" was unlucky. His American Red Cross mistress was stuck back in Morocco, and the Red Cross hadn't been inclined to transfer her to duty in Italy, so "C" who had just received a handsome portrait of his faithful wife back home, which he kept on prominent display on the desk of his van, just pined away for his Morocco sweetie. Sanders referred to her as "Fat Ass."

One day the head of the Red Cross in Italy asked to come to Presenzano to see General "C." She had a problem. The Red Cross could get no supplies such as coffee, sugar, and flour, except from the Army, and if the Army chose not to sell supplies to them, the Red Cross clubs could not serve free coffee and doughnuts to the soldiers. The base section supply commander at Naples had refused her request because of short supply.

Sanders offered a bet. He said, "You watch the way the general gets Fat Ass over here in a trade. I'll bet he gets it done in five minutes."

I was alone in the outer tent as she was ushered up the steps into the general's van. When she started her pitch for sugar, coffee, and flour, General "C" coldly interrupted to ask why Miss Fat Ass hadn't been transferred to Italy since so many units had left Morocco.

"Why, I think we can manage that, General," she said smoothly. Whereupon General "C" picked up the field telephone and called the base section commander at Naples ordering him to fill the Red Cross's needs at once. Sanders won his bet; it took two minutes.

In a few days, Fat Ass arrived in Naples and came up a day or so later to call at Presenzano. Sanders and I watched as she mounted the three steps into the van and the curtains were pulled. Then the four feet came together, two facing two, as we could hear the hungry smooch of a reunion.

After that, "C" cooked up a cute arrangement in order to be seen at the general officers' mess at the evening meal, and again at breakfast, and yet to spend the night with Fat Ass in Naples, eighty miles away. The headquarters had a number of small liaison aircraft, one of which stood by for him every evening on the strip below the hill. "C's" chauffeur had been dispatched two hours earlier to the Naples airport where he would pick up "C" from the liaison plane which had carried him

down after supper, and he would be driven to Fat Ass's apartment. The driver stayed at some military billets nearby. Very early in the morning the chauffeur would whisk him to the Naples airport and the liaison plane would carry him back in time to walk into the general's mess for a cheery good morning at 7:30 A.M.

Usually when "C" was away for the night the last thing each evening I would go into his van to be sure no classified documents were lying around on his desk, being watched as I did so by the portrait on his desk of the lovely looking woman who had inscribed on it, "To my dearest husband, with all my love, always."

My release came when my former brigade commander called me and told me that he had an assignment for me which would last about a month, and then, if I wished, he himself had a new command coming up in which he could use my help. It was a tremendous feeling of liberation from a prison of uselessness.

The "end run" at Anzio had taken place somewhat earlier. It was designed to put American troops from Naples ashore north of the Cassino line, and thus outflank the Germans and open the road to Rome. Unfortunately the American commander on the beach had not been sufficiently aggressive when his troops got ashore, and the little bridgehead found itself contained within a pocket on the beach by the Germans, who had reacted to the landing instantly, and who now held the high ground with large and well-equipped forces, being quickly resupplied down via Appia and by rail from the north.

An operation was set up in Naples called Ferry Control, and the general sent a group of us to Naples to coordinate the landing and dispatching of landing ships with supplies from Naples to Anzio, hoping to have the vessels move as much as possible during the nighttime to avoid German air attacks, which were still coming down from the north with some effectiveness against sea traffic which did not have the advantage of ground-fire protection.

I was billeted in a small old building in the port area, the Hotel Turistico, to share a room already occupied by some other officer. I met him at the end of the first day. It had been raining heavily all day. He was dressed in his blouse and pinks, the Army officers' dress-up uniform, but rarely worn by anyone in Italy, most officers preferring wool ODs and a field jacket. His name was Jim Kelly, a handsome captain a few years younger than I. After he had taken off his raincoat, blouse, and shoes, he reached under his mattress and took out a bottle of scotch on which he went to work.

I told him what my duty was, and had been, and how I didn't think much of the challenge of my recent past assignments. He said he'd trade

with me or anybody else, anyday. He was a reserve officer in the Quartermaster Corps who had been in the clothing business as a civilian. When he arrived in Naples he had been put in charge of the U.S. Army cemetery. He had a few enlisted men who helped with records, and a number of Italians who dug graves, lowered corpses, and then covered the graves. He was at the cemetery from early morning seven days a week, burying, burying, burying. These weren't battlefield killed, but rear-echelon deaths, auto accidents, plane crashes, hospital deaths of seriously wounded who had been brought back to the larger hospital facilities in Naples and had then succumbed.

"Today," he said, "I buried two nurses. Nice looking girls. In a jeep accident. And all I could do was put them in those damn cloth bags in the rain, and see them dropped into slop-filled holes and covered with mud. It nearly killed me."

He drank pretty steadily every evening and he regularly told me the number of burials of the day, thirty, eighteen, fourteen, twenty, and so on. About once a week, he went down to the base section headquarters and sought a transfer.

We roomed together for a couple weeks, and when I left for my next duty, his parting words were, "I can't get out of it. I tried again today."

I met a major in Oran a few months earlier. He was in charge of the very large transient mess which served about five hundred officers every meal. He had said to me with some disgust, "I am an undertaker. I came into the Army to do graves registration work, and here I am running a mess hall."

The civil populace of Naples and as well all of Italy south of Mount Cassino was near starvation in the winter of 1944. The retreating Germans had stripped and destroyed as they withdrew, and the advancing American and British forces were too busy with fighting and troop resupply to worry too much about the starving Neapolitans, much less about the hunger in the outlying villages.

Theft of military food supplies was rampant, and there was widespread blackmarketing. The coin of the realm was the lira, but it was practically worthless. Dollars were welcome, but by far the most marketable medium of exchange was the American cigarette. One cigarette was valued highly, at least more than a chocolate bar, and a package of cigarettes costing a soldier 5¢ in the PX could bring a bottle of quality liquor or a night of love.

Hustling by young girls and pimping by their small boy confederates were widespread. The standard approach of a ten-year-old urchin to a soldier was, "Hey, Joe, you fuck my sister? Very good, very clean.

Ten cigarettes, ok?" The port area around the Turistico was thick with young girls of all ages, 18, 17, 16, and even younger. The hotel had a small canopy on the front, and often when it rained sunken-cheeked girls took shelter under the canopy, forlornly waiting for a customer. They had all picked up a smattering of English, and their stories weren't much different one from the other. One drenched girl told me that she lived in a village about eighty miles away, in the mountains, with an entire family, including countless relatives, who had left the overrun and bombed larger towns like Naples and Salerno. In desperation, she was in the city, where she hustled among the soldiers, using a room in a half-bombed building for which she paid the owner a share of her daily take.

Using the barter system with the dollars and cigarettes she earned in her multiple daily trysts, periodically she would convert in the black market for sugar, flour, canned meats, or other edibles, and then go by whatever dilapidated public transportation was still in operation back to the village to share with hungry relatives the gain from the sale of her most precious self. I once asked a scraggly priest who roamed the area if the girls who were so occupied would be welcome at mass, and he replied, "How can God not forgive his children who suffer this way for the sake of others?"

When I left the Turistico, I went to Salerno with the general. He had organized the first of three U.S. Army Amphibian Brigades on Cape Cod in 1942 and had been its commander when the successful landings in Algeria had occurred. He had already commanded a special Invasion Training Center in Algeria through which the divisions which later landed in Sicily and Italy had practiced the art of getting from ship to shore without self-inflicted disaster. Now he was designated to set up another such center at Salerno Bay to be used for practice of ship-to-shore landings of the divisions which were scheduled to land on the French Riviera as soon as they were readied.

At Salerno there was no military occupation and the general was going to be about the only symbol of the U.S. presence. The city hall was to be his headquarters. I was sent to look for suitable quarters for his use and to arrange for the necessary housing for those of his personnel who would be stationed in the town and who were soon to arrive. These were to be few because he planned that most of his support officers would be in small tent areas strategically located near the beaches next to the swampy, mosquito-infested farmlands and very near to the planned practice areas. For the general and his headquarters staff officers we found the Villa Luisa out the Amalfi drive about three miles in a small village named Raito. It was owned by an Italian Air Force

general who used it as a summer retreat but had not occupied it in the past three summers. It sat about four hundred feet above the bay, facing south and west, with a spectacular view of the sea, of mountains, and of the Amalfi coast going west toward Ravello.

There were four or five bedrooms on the second floor, each facing the bay, and below was a living room, dining room, and kitchen, together with sufficient other ground space for a chauffeur, orderlies, and a cook. In front of the building was a large patio about forty by seventy feet giving a spectacular view of the bay area. Within two or three days, the general, three colonels, a major, and I were housed, complete with cook, chauffeur, and orderlies.

The major was of the Adjutant General's Corps. Within a few days he had a chance at a better assignment and the general released him. I told the general I thought we didn't need an Adjutant General for so small a unit with such ephemeral life, and why didn't he just see if I could take on that load (which was no load at all) in addition to my other duties, which, in the main, were undefined. He agreed and designated me as adjutant of the center. This was a move which pleased the junior officers because I had served with many of them either someplace in Ireland, Africa, or in Italy, and now they had a buddy not only living in the general's house and seeing all the general's callers, but also reading all the official mail coming into the headquarters, and only a damn lieutenant at that. It was a first-rate way for the men to feel assured that they would know what was going on, and it was also a means for the general to feel that if there was any misbehavior among his officers, he would know it—that is, if I told him. This I didn't usually do because testy generals with hangovers no more liked to face disciplinary problems than did junior officers like to think that one of their own was a stool pigeon.

About a week after we were settled at Salerno I went with the general back to Presenzano for a meeting. He wanted to do it by car all in one day, which was about 140 miles each way over terribly banged-up roads. The meeting concluded in midafternoon and we started back. Being somewhat curious, the general wanted to go up forward for a closer look at Mount Cassino, so we turned north. In no time the chauffeur got lost. We had no map and the confusing guesses of the two back-seat passengers were no help. After a mile or two the road forked, and we went to the right on a road pretty well concealed by trees on both sides, until suddenly we came to a clear area. There at a distance of about two hundred yards to our right were four very well-camouflaged U.S. Army 240 m.m. cannons, all pointing at about 45 degrees skyward directly over us. We were in the center of the four of them.

The 240 was the largest cannon the Army had ever used. Each gun weighed about fifty tons and rolled along on an enormous tractorlike undercarriage being pulled across the ground by a very powerful tractor. The gun tube was about sixty feet long, and the weapon could throw a six hundred pound projectile the size of a man a distance of about fifteen miles with remarkable accuracy. The powder charge to fire the gun was contained in enormous bags, a tremendous number of which, almost too heavy to lift, had to be inserted before the gun was ready to fire. Its forward blast on firing bent trees for hundreds of feet ahead, and it belched a sheet of fire of astonishing size. The blast effect would easily knock a man down who was standing anywhere within a few hundred feet ahead of it.

Anything of this size was well hidden and used sparingly in the hope of concealing its location from the enemy who had similar cannon in place to fire back. Each side had spotters strategically located on hills and in trees hoping to see and locate the cannon's blast and immediately set their own cannons to counterfire with hope of accuracy.

I had no more than said, "Jesus, look at those two-forties," when all four of them fired. The blast and following winds ran our car into the ditch, and the terrified driver was out of the car and underneath it before he could be stopped. The general jumped out of the car and barked at the chauffeur that if he didn't come out and get us the hell out of there, we would be in the center of returning German fire in about thirty seconds. We managed to get the car turned around and moved in the direction from which we had come as fast as any staff car in Italy had moved that entire spring, and none too soon, as the enemy began a quick exchange.

About two hours later, while driving back, it was dark as we passed Vesuvius, showing its ever-threatening fire from the cone. The general grumbled, "Any officer ought to have more sense than to go forward just to have a look-see if it's not required of him."

"Yes, sir, General," I replied.

From the villa on the hillside to the city hall in Salerno was about three miles, all downhill, and all with the lovely view of a budding spring. Usually I would walk it in a fast half hour, getting into the headquarters about 7:30 A.M. Often as I walked down the long road I would count the months I had been in the service and think how useless my service had been.

The general was a great walker. He had walked me into the ground on half a dozen occasions back in Africa, but he usually preferred to ride down from the villa in the morning. He never said it, but his morning hangover was usually pretty rough.

Often in the evening he would stand on the patio and look across the valley to the west at a high rocky hill about three times our altitude and would urge somebody to join him in scaling it. One Sunday afternoon a gung-ho lieutenant colonel named Williams, one of the villa's occupants and about my age but considerably heavier, most of it flab in the middle, took the invitation and agreed to join the general. I drove them in a jeep down the roundabout path to the seashore below and watched them begin the climb; then I drove back to the villa and sat on a chair on the patio with the general's binoculars and idly watched their ascent. By the time they were abreast of me across the wide valley, the colonel was falling steadily behind. At the three quarters mark he collapsed and lay on his belly as the general chugged steadily on to the top where he sat down and smoked a leisurely cigarette. I picked the two of them up at the bottom of the hill and drove back to the villa. The general ate a hearty dinner, but the colonel had gone to bed, not to appear until the next morning, a wan and chastened man.

Sometimes when a division was due for a landing practice the division commander would come for dinner a few days earlier, and then, later on, the general would go down to mosquito meadow and have dinner with the division commander at an abandoned farm house which we had resurrected and put into shape for the various commanders to use as a temporary headquarters during their landing practices.

One division commander, General "L," came by city hall one day and invited the general down to the meadow for dinner. His aide sat in my office with me while the two generals conferred. "Does your guy drink?" he asked. He said his general really liked to go at it heavily both before and after dinner, and he hoped the general could keep up. "Not to worry," I assured him; "these guys ought to be great buddies."

I went down to the meadow in a jeep during the evening, and after shooting the bull with some of my friends in their tent "club" and sipping on some dago red, I drove by the farmhouse and chatted with General "L's" aide. He said the two generals had really been hitting it off, a long staff conference and then plenty of highballs, both before and after dinner. I stood there until the general tottered unsteadily out to his car, with his host pleasantly and soberly calling orders from the door.

The general showed up for breakfast on time about 6:15 the next morning, silent as always, more red-faced than usual, and consumed many cigarettes and lots of coffee, but little else. Before leaving for the downhill walk, I , as usual, asked him if he would care to walk down this morning. To my surprise, he said yes, and walked at a speed march gait I found hard to keep up with all three miles to city hall,

never saying a word when I'd point out some unusually beautiful sight or piece of flora.

Later in the morning when I took a paper into his office, I remarked that I had just seen General "L" drive by. He grunted, "That guy drinks too much."

Because I had had a very tough bout with pneumonia two years earlier, I was quite interested in the Medical Corps. I had a hypochondriacal devotion to all suggestions the doctors issued. This hypochondria made me acquainted with numerous hospital personnel. If we were located near a hospital I soon was on friendly terms with lots of doctors of the lower ranks. Working at it steadily, I found that it also introduced me to lots of nurses, a result which I highly favored. There was a field hospital out near the malaria meadow, and its commander said there was lots of VD showing up, and our troops should be warned. The general thought it was a good idea to put out a warning notice, which I duly sent out to all units we had contact with, describing the most common symptom showing up at nearby hospitals, i.e., a small sore called a chancre, usually appearing on the genitals, and the telltale sign of the dreaded syphilis. Not long after that, one of our captains, an officer with whom I had made the original African landings, came to see me, plenty scared. "I think I've got the syph," he said. He had been shacking up with a local woman who lived in a nearby apartment. He thought he was ruined forever—syphilis was then treated by at least six months of injections every five days with a drug called 606, and then with follow-up therapy which might go on indefinitely. The drug was so named because reportedly it had been Pasteur's 606th experimental mixture which had finally proved effective against the syphilis spirochete.

Further, up until just before the war, the Army still clung to the archaic practice of disciplining any soldier who became infected. Realizing the shortsightedness of this practice, they had later adopted the policy of education and efforts at quick counterattack to the infections in order not to lose the soldier's services.

But my friend was disconsolate. He thought the general would despise him and send him off to some purgatory. I assured him that no doctor or hospital had a right to send such a medical report to the general, and I said that, if by accident one did come, I would intercept it. Thus encouraged, we went to the field hospital down the road and I introduced him to a doctor friend who started him down the long 606 road back to safety. I saw him in France about six months later, and he told me that he was cured, that he had had two successive Wasserman tests which were negative, and he was off the shots.

I had known a young woman Red Cross worker in Algeria, and had been once or twice to the apartment in Algiers she shared with four or five other women, but I had never succeeded in dating her. She came from some place in the Midwest, Columbus or Indianapolis. She was about twenty-six years old, and she loved Europe, which she had visited before the war, and she talked often of its ancient heritage. I had heard that she was now in Italy, and I sought to locate here to see if I could get that date in Italy that I couldn't pull off in Africa. On a day when I came up from Salerno to Naples and had some free time, I went to the central Red Cross office and asked about her, learning that she was a patient in one of the Naples army hospitals, recovering from injuries received in an air raid. She had been in one of the Red Cross clubs in the forward area farther north, near Mount Cassino, and after dark, while running with others for shelter when an air raid occurred, she had fallen over a cliff onto rocks about thirty feet below, suffering numerous fractures.

It was a few days before I was able to go to see her. She was in sorry shape. Her bed was surrounded by a large frame, a combination of pulleys and chin bars, poles, and pipes, to which her splinted legs and other parts of her banged-up torso were connected in various weird ways. When I arrived at her room, the nurse attendant asked me to wait while she went in and covered her with sheets, because in her injured condition, and due to the many injuries needing attention from various sides, she had been lying in the hospital bed nude and strapped to the various apparatus for many days. She was dewy-eyed when she saw me. Other than dutiful calls from her Red Cross colleagues, which were lessening as time went by, only her brother, a soldier in a combat unit in the forward lines, had been to see her, and that only once, about two weeks earlier.

We visited for whatever time I was permitted. She said somewhat tearfully, "I can't even manage things enough to put on any makeup." I told her I hoped I could come in again, but our schedule at Salerno was getting crowded and I was forty miles away, so I couldn't be sure when it would be. A couple of weeks later I came again and learned that she had been put on a hospital ship and sent home. I never saw her again.

Vesuvius erupted in January. It had been showing angry fire from the cone for weeks, but its blasting eruption was sudden. Great balls of red-hot rock were hurled thousands of feet in the air. At one of our airfields four or five miles from its base, 95 bombers were destroyed on the ground in a couple of minutes. Molten lava ran down the side of the mountain for days. Five towns were evacuated and 26 people

were killed. Air Force pilots told of flying at altitudes of twelve thousand feet and seeing flying red hunks of rock high above them. Estimates were that the massive cloud of fire, ash, and dust rose fifty to one-hundred thousand feet. Volcanic dust and ash rained over southern Italy for a hundred miles for many weeks. The sight was spectacular. The *Stars and Stripes* reported one soldier as saying, "They'll never believe this back in Cedar Rapids."

Regularly I would drive the road to Naples which passed the base of the mountain ten miles away with falling pebbles of hard ash falling on us as we passed between Pompeii and Herculaneum, the two cities which had been buried by a similar eruption nineteen hundred years earlier. In one period, for nearly two days there was a steady fall of hard black carbon pellets the size and shape of blackened Grape Nuts. They made a blanket two to three inches deep on the roads and in the patio of the Villa Luisa which was over thirty miles from the volcano. I assumed the fallout from the eruption would guarantee no crops that spring, but nature, with its marvelous capacity at renewal, ignored the mess and things grew as before.

The village of Raito stretched along the sides of one road for a few hundred yards, with little cottages cut into the hillside and gardens made by terracing the rocky inclines. Down the one road beyond the Villa Luisa there was a small collection of eight or ten houses in one of which the daughter was due to wed a village youth. The ceremony took place in the local church which was centered on the small main plaza, and then the procession of villagers walked down the road past the Villa Luisa to the little house where the wedding celebration took place and where the bride and groom were to spend the night. I had been invited to come for a glass of wine and did so. The bride sat demurely in the parlor dressed in her family's best lace, and the groom, in his wedding costume of neat trousers and a clean white undershirt showing off his muscular arms and shoulders, stood in the patio and accepted congratulations and sipped wine.

It was early evening, and after an appropriate time, the house was vacated to the small plaza area out front, except for the bridal couple, who remained inside. Three elderly and partly toothless crones sat at the front door to guard the bridal chamber, gossiping and cackling. Some time later they went inside and then returned, carrying a blood-spotted sheet, proof that the bride just taken had indeed been a virgin deflowered. The music and dancing continued for some time until the bride and groom reappeared to a great cheer and the celebration went on into the night.

On the central plaza of the town, except for the church, there was

only one edifice of consequence. It was fronted by high walls as was every town building in southern Italy, but from a road far above it the walls protected a splendid villa and garden, the property of the largest land-owning family in the area. But the owners were little known to the villagers. Most of the beneficiaries of the land's good providence preferred to live in the north, at Rome, or, prior to the war, in the Alps, or beyond, in Switzerland or France.

The only known occupants of the villa, beside servants, were an eighteen- or nineteen-year-old girl and a middle-aged woman, a distant aunt or cousin who was the girl's guardian and protector. The girl, along with an uncle who lived in Rome, was the co-heir to the family property. Her name was Marie. She had been schooled in a convent in Rome, but the family had moved her to Salerno to protect her from the feared excesses of the Germans.

I saw her two or three times as she and her chaperone would walk across the town plaza enroute to or returning from church. She was pretty, well and modestly dressed, and usually veiled, almost like a Moslem woman.

The general's orderly was a devout Irish-Catholic corporal from Brooklyn named Dan McKenna. He was anxious to please, but was ignorant and unpolished and he had practically no education. The church was only about three hundred yards from the Villa Luisa, and McKenna went to mass daily. He became attracted to Marie and began going to all the services so as not to miss seeing her. He was a good-looking fellow, neat and soldierly, and his dog-like devotion to her was not unnoticed. He got invited to tea, and then his calls became quite regular.

Marie spoke no English, and he spoke no Italian, but after a month or so he assured me that they were engaged and that all that remained was family approval, which would come when Marie's uncle made his next visit to the south to look over the crops and confer with his various tenants.

McKenna was beside himself with anxiety as the day of the uncle's visit approached. Would I come to meet the uncle and speak to him on McKenna's behalf? I told him no, that I thought this was a show he would need to handle for himself. The uncle arrived, and I saw but did not meet him. One look at him told me the romance was doomed. He was dressed in riding breeches and expensive leather boots and spoke both French and English. He was obviously a man of the world.

McKenna called on the family, including the uncle, that evening, and that was the end of it. He was told that he was not to call on Marie again nor to speak to her if he came upon her in church. He was heart-broken and couldn't understand what had happened.

The road passing the Villa Luisa had a knee-high retaining wall to restrain vehicles from running off and falling down very high precipices. Urchins from the village often sat on the wall, all eager for cigarettes or chewing gum, and equally eager for conversation. I became friendly with some of them and periodically sat on the wall visiting with them and trying to pick up the language. One afternoon I was working hard repeating a phrase two of the boys seemed most anxious for me to learn. Two nuns were walking down the road, and as I repeated it in a loud voice, they put their hands to their ears in horror and hurried off. The boys were scampering down the stairway to the lower level in delighted laughter. I learned later that the phrase I was being taught was the most vulgar sexual profanity in the language and directed at the Holy Mother.

A pretty young woman named Teresa d'Allessio was often in evidence around city hall. She was in constant search of employment. She spoke some English and I came to know her well enough that we often went walking around town in the afternoon. Once she took me to her home to meet her father, who was crippled with arthritis. She lived in a banged-up house in a banged-up neighborhood in the old part of the town which I couldn't have located the next day had I tried. After we left her home, she took me by the neighborhood church to meet the priest, an old man in a black cassock who wore sandals but no stockings, even though there was slush on the ground from a light snow of the previous night. She told me he wore no stockings because he owned none. Whatever clothing he got, he gave to others because, she said, everybody there was both cold and hungry.

I never sought to take her out in the evening because there was no social life available, and a request for an evening date could only have meant to her parents a suggested assignation. There wasn't much more to it than that, and when I left Salerno there was no special farewell. I can't remember whether she even knew I was leaving.

Three years later, in the winter of 1947, when I was living in Washington with all the comforts available to a citizen of a conqueror nation, I received a letter from her, a plea for help for herself and her family for food and clothing. She said they had no fuel and everybody in the area was starving and freezing. I remembered her as being about the same size as my new wife, to whom I showed the letter. She was full of concern and wanted to gather together what we could from clothing of her own and send it at once, at the same time writing for more details as to what was needed.

For some reason, I didn't want to respond to the plea. I put the letter aside, and the next day, the letter with her address couldn't be found.

One of the officers at the training center was a young second lieutenant from Michigan named Raymond Zussman. Zuss was an effervescent youngster of about 23 with an engaging grin. He was filled with anxiety that he was overseas as an officer trained in armored warfare but not assigned to a fighting unit. He was billeted down the beach. The farm area inland would have been more suitable and convenient, but it was infested with the friendly anopheles mosquito, which was just as busy that spring as it had been a thousand years earlier when it had killed off the entire ancient city of Paestum just down the road.

In the evenings when landing exercises were due to take place a few hours later, to while away the hours until the craft would come ashore, officers would gather in one of the tents near the beach, heavily covered with mosquito netting, and entertain themselves with soldier talk.

Zuss talked a lot about the Jewish persecutions in Europe, and one evening he expounded at length about Hitler, Mussolini, the American Nazi Party, and the German American Bund of the late 1930s. He couldn't understand why the Allied political leaders and the Vatican weren't speaking out more forcefully about what was happening to the Jews in Europe. He said if he knew about it and he was just a little Jewish guy from the sticks, they must know about it.

When the mission of the training center was about completed, Zuss asked for a combat tank assignment. When he was ordered to a tank battalion which was scheduled to land on the Riviera in the assault wave in about a month, he was delighted and exulted, "Now I can do something."

After the landing, his division moved up the Rhone Valley to a little place called Norey le Bourg, and one day when his tank became disabled, he got out and moved ahead on foot, armed with only a carbine, and, in the face of severe enemy fire, he single-handedly killed eighteen Germans and captured 92 others. For this action, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, but he didn't live to see the award, being killed nine days later while engaged in a similar skirmish, still trying to "do something."

The evening of the day the mission of the training center was completed the general entertained the officers of the staff at the Villa Luisa. The next morning I turned in the villa's keys at city hall as we drove to the Naples airport. We flew to Corsica, landing at a small field near Bastia.

I had been in Italy for ten months and had never seen a German soldier.

Jeffers and California Today

JEFFREY BARTLETT

> Helen, do you remember at all
> The beauty and strangeness of this place? Old cypresses
> The sailor wind works into deep-sea knots
> A thousand years; age-reddened granite
> That was the world's cradle and crumbles apieces
> Now that we're all grown up, breaks out at the roots;
> And underneath it the old gray-granite strength
> Is neither glad nor sorry to take the seas
> Of all the storms forever and stand as firmly
> As when the red hawk wings of the first dawn
> Streamed up the sky over it.
>
> —"Tamar"

I have read Robinson Jeffers, off and on, for nearly twenty years, since I returned to my native California to go to college. His austerely beautiful evocations of the north coast and the primal conflicts in his narrative poems add a much needed dimension to life here. My generation, born at the advent of post-war suburbanization and a tremendous population boom in the state, is largely dispossessed of access to unviolated nature. Unless you go to rather great distance, you're limited to public parks, many of which government has "developed" for us.

As the major-domos of literary history never tire of reminding us, California has produced few great writers. These arbiters of taste seldom grant Jeffers high stature. I remember, when I was trying to get into Stanford's doctoral program, a professor telling me, "Around here, we don't read the stay-at-home poets—Frost, Jeffers, and the like. I've written a book on Pound, Soandso's written a book on Pound, and Whozis is an authority on Eliot. Poets have to contribute to their culture." I went to Iowa, where I managed to work "Roan Stallion" and some lyrics into an introductory course I taught, and got a Ph.D.

Now I live in northern California again and work as an editor on a computer-industry magazine. Since I have left university circles and don't have the abundance of leisure for browsing and keeping up with trends that comes with those jobs, I choose my poets carefully and

bother only with those who nourish my imagination directly.

Jeffers is emphatically one of them, though he has flaws and is particularly hard to swallow when he drones on about his credo of Inhumanism. Happily, I've just finished reading Volume I of his *Collected Poetry* (ed. Tim Hunt; Stanford University Press, 1988), which is more than 500 pages long, though it includes the work of only nine years (1920-28). In this period of tremendous productivity, Jeffers wrote four major narrative poems and more than sixty lyrics, as well as shortened verse renderings of the *Oresteia* and the *Bacchae*. Over the course of three years, Stanford plans to issue the complete mature work in three volumes, with a fourth for early poems, some prose, and "the edition's editorial apparatus." This project is the first to show the complete shape of Jeffers' career as it emerged, placing the often neglected narratives in context with the lyrics. At $60 retail per volume, however, the edition clearly is meant for libraries rather than general readers.

Perhaps the Stanford professor mentioned above may find his press's effort merely provincial. (Jeffers' home in Carmel is less than 100 miles south of Palo Alto.) Certainly Helen Vendler, a doyenne of the snide remark, doesn't find it worth much. Writing in *The New Yorker* for Dec. 26, 1988, she sneers her way through Jeffers' life and work, lamenting the puzzling fact that he "is periodically resurrected" (even beginning her piece by identifying him as "the poet," as though her readers may have no idea who this odd duck is). Essentially, Vendler discounts his "turgid narratives" entirely because they are long, violent, and, well, narrative—a form hopelessly out of fashion. This leaves her to remark that his best poems are the lyrics but that Jeffers couldn't really write lyrics. Add to this her opinion that his unrhymed long lines are "finally boring" and speculation that he was a psychotic sadist afflicted by "moral timidity," and the only sop she can throw is to call him "the first to give an adequate description in verse of the California coast."

In truth, Jeffers is "periodically resurrected" because he continues to attract some scholars and because people continue to read him. (One can almost hear Vendler groan at this plebeian taste.) I want to speak of his value as a poet for one reader who also faces west from California's shore.

While his line resembles Whitman's, his sentiments emphatically do not. Jeffers' father was a theology professor who gave his son thorough grounding in the classics, and while Robinson attended school and traveled widely in Europe, his early education, especially in Greek, proved the most formative for his poetry. Even in Volume I of his works, which stops when Jeffers was 41 and had more than 30 years of writing ahead of him, his essential vision is fully present. (To Vendler,

this is his fundamental shortcoming, that his "center" did not change.) His Inhumanism is scarcely a "philosophy" at all but a revulsion from the pettiness of humanity. When stated explicitly, it is a hobbyhorse that deforms the work it dominates; as a motivating instinct that propels the poetry, it has something of the sensibility of the Greek tragedies and is the source of his finest accomplishments.

In his introduction, Tim Hunt quotes this well-known passage from Jeffers' only major statement on poetics, the Foreword to *Selected Poems* (1938): "I could see people living—amid magnificent unspoiled scenery—essentially as they did in the Idyls or the Sagas, or in Homer's Ithaca." Most commentators note this conjunction, but not many follow it far enough. Carmel and Point Lobos became the poet's promised land, another instance of California as the incarnation of a dreamer's hopes. Living at land's end fed Jeffers' hunger for the eternal.

"Point Joe," one of many meditations on the landscape, immediately follows his first great narrative, "Tamar," and within a series of lovely images makes this statement:

> Permanent things are what is needful in a poem, things temporally
> Of great dimension, things continually renewed or always present. (90)

This is perhaps the positive corollary of Inhumanism's misanthropy; it is certainly the heart of what is best in Jeffers' work—and of what is most valuable for anyone trying to live reflectively in California today, hoping that what one loves well may remain.

Residence at the edge of the continent, where the American westward movement ended, led Jeffers to think on last things, as it has many people. Written around the same time as the poems just mentioned (1922-23), "The Torch-Bearers' Race" is a prayer to the spirit of life that has driven humanity west from its presumed origins in Asia and will last even after humanity expires. He says,

> I am building a thick stone pillar upon this shore, the very turn
> of the world, the long migration's
> End; the sun goes down but we have come up to an end. (99)

The "pillar" is, of course, the tower Jeffers built next to his stone house as a retreat for his wife; it is a symbol of his vantage on the world, from which he looks not only ahead to eternity but back inland to the land near the sea where his characters live and enact their fates.

California today does not want to think about such things, past or future. We have built on the coast wherever permissible and now turn back on the hills and valleys, putting up suburbs, shopping malls, and business parks on every available acre. The past is for tourism and the future is next month. To deal with the anger and despair this rapine generates, you need a long perspective like the one Jeffers acquired.

Two short poems on facing pages in the last section of Volume I (1926-28) offer an example.

"Bixby's Landing" is a portrait of an abandoned depot for lowering carloads of lime by cable to waiting ships. Containing vivid nouns and a quietly stirring cadence ("wild buckwheat blooms in the fat/ Weather-slacked lime from the bursted barrels"), it presents detail upon detail until the whole scene is drawn, and concludes with an invocation to "our mother the wilderness": "your returnings/ Are even more precious than your first presence" (388). This is far from an inhuman sentiment and one I wholly support, eager to be comforted that nature will reassert itself over men's business.

The subject of its companion poem, "The Summit Redwood," is an "old tower of life on the hilltop" that has survived lightning strikes "more than twice a century" and forest fires. The tower is perhaps the image Jeffers valorizes most, symbolizing endurance and therefore a link to the eternal source. Even as I was reading these poems, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that a judge has momentarily "blocked Pacific Lumber Co. from carrying out plans to log more than 300 acres of old-growth redwoods" north of here. This is what Jeffers meant by "my own coast's obscene future"; the alternative he holds out against such venal profit-taking makes powerful consolation.

On several occasions he invokes his own ghost after death, a tutelary spirit still watching over the land he loved, as when he bitterly imagines "remote generations [that] will giggle at my ghost when it curses the axemen,/ Gray impotent voice on the sea-wind,/ When the last trunk falls" (204). In this context, who can accuse the poet of uninvolvement in human issues, if we intend more than the pettiest sense of the words?

Tor House is hard to find now, with Carmel grown up all around it. After correcting the misconception that it is at Point Lobos, which is a state park, we drove through neighborhoods built on old forest land with enough trees left (many of them planted by Jeffers) to make it picturesque, finally locating the house and tower hemmed in and dwarfed on three sides by much newer constructions. Similarly, the fabled monarch butterflies that give notoriety to nearby Pacific Grove when they return in droves each spring are now threatened with dispersal (and worse) by incessant home-building. In some cases, the written record of Jeffers' ecological mind and heart is all that preserves his area.

It is important not to stop with these examples because they do not take into account the narrative poems. Far more than demonstrations of the doctrine of Inhumanism, they embody Jeffers' vision that people in this once isolated area, subject more to the influences of sea, forest, mountain, and fire than to society, lived in circumstances heroic

and tragic. The dowager Helen Vendler (making no comment on the Stanford *Collected* but reviewing a new volume of selected lyrics only) ignores the narratives to condemn him as a minor poet. This is about as fair as considering Pound's achievement after throwing out *The Cantos*. You have to take the narratives seriously to assess the status of Jeffers.

They are more austere yet more readable than, say, the folktales of Longfellow; Jeffers' diction combines aspects of the American vernacular with the sonorities of Greek drama. He escapes the soporific regularities of fixed meter and rhyme, but his verse occasionally pays for it with inconsistency. At his worst (which is usually declamatory), he seems to lack all rhythm:

> The sea's voice worked into my mood, I thought "No matter
> What happens to men...the world's well made though." (117)

But in these lines from "Roan Stallion," he shows skilled command of accentual rhythm and alliteration:

> the wheels of the buggy
> Slipped in deep slime, ground on washed stones at the road-edge.
> Down the hill the wrinkled river smothered the ford.
> You must keep to the bed of stones: she knew the way by willow
> and alder[.] (182)

The vowel repetition in these lines reminds us of Pound (also interested in Greek rhythms, of course), for example, in "Canto I."

Jeffers apostrophized his area as "This coast crying out for tragedy like all beautiful places" (209). His Grecian sense that beauty is linked to tragedy led him to write not pastorals but violent tales that exceed the most fundamental taboos of civilization: incest, rape, murder. Here he created characters who lived beyond social constraints, driven by compulsions and circumstance to act out tragic destinies. After meeting Tamar Cauldwell and Fera Martial, thwarted women who cause disaster and then suffer for it, one is not surprised that Jeffers later wrote a stage version of *Medea*. Likewise, in their own ways we find aspects of Oedipus in Cawdor and of Lear in the Reverend Barclay.

Precisely because these are verse narratives, told through images, glimpses, fragments of speech, they take on a mythic quality. The characters are distant, sketched tersely. They aren't kings and prophets but not people like us either. The grandeur of the coast and hills adds a similar dimension: In this setting, the trivialities of the town and the fashions of the city are irrelevant. But the actual place names and realistic detail in the landscape remind us that these are no fairylands, and we cannot dismiss what occurs in them as fantasy.

"Roan Stallion" is one of two shorter narratives in this volume (20

pages, like "Home"; "Tamar" exceeds 80 pages, and "The Women at Point Sur" and "Cawdor" are over 110). It is often anthologized because of its length but moreso because it is magnificent writing. And it is an allegory of the history of California, which is the name of its protagonist. She is one-fourth Indian, part Spanish, sired by a Scot who immediately abandoned her, and married to a drunken redneck named Johnny. Like other women in Jeffers, she is associated with the land and abused by men as it is.

Jeffers immediately describes her as "erect and strong like a new tower," his symbol of natural strength. California enters into a nearly sexual relationship with the stallion her husband wins in a poker game. Like other situations in Jeffers' work, this carries the Freudian tinge much in vogue in the twenties, but it is hard to write anything in the mode of classical tragedy that doesn't. It also associates the woman with the powers of nature—the roan is compared to a god. (Jeffers wrote his rendition of the *Bacchae* within three years after this.) The stallion destroys Johnny when she has run to hide in its corral rather than submit to sex with him. In Jeffers' view, this action symbolizes nature's triumphant revenge against the crass men who have savaged it; the tragedy comes when California, "moved by some obscure human fidelity," shoots the roan with her husband's rifle. Her face then becomes "the mask of a woman/ Who has killed God."

Earlier, the poet has intruded upon the tale in a sermon-like aside that urges humanity to rise "out of its limits" and break the "mould" of being merely human, that is, out of touch with the eternal forces. Among instances of doing so, he cites "Slit eyes in the mask [and] wild loves that leap over the walls of nature" (189). California has broken the limits, but no one can remain in this exalted realm, hence her destruction of the god. In a nutshell, we have the longed-for reassertion of natural right and the fall back into the bonds of humanness that continue to plague this state today.

Robinson Jeffers matched California to ancient lands where, we imagine, people rose, however briefly, above the limits of materialism and exploitation of others and nature. He recovers its essence where the great drama of life was played out in its glory and its horror before expansionist America overran it. In poem after poem, he evokes the ancient spirits of cave dwellers, Indians, and others who lived here, still present in the land that nurtured them. He prophesies that his ghost will join them, as in these lines that end "Tor House," one of his most beautiful poems:

> My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably
> Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on wind
> With the mad wings and the day moon. (408)

His poems are a solace to those of us who live here today and care that something more existed, may again, and may yet beneath the shit. Our world is being destroyed for money, and Jeffers is one of the few people who offers a perspective that sees beyond the trash, imaginatively restoring the source of primal, mythic energy that is lost. His best work is of inexhaustible value.

If We Can Be Saved: Robinson Jeffers Today and Tomorrow*

CHRISTOPHER COKINOS

In a single essay, perhaps even in a single sentence, Robert Hass makes sharply obvious the relevance of Robinson Jeffers not only to the present, but to the future as well—assuming, of course, we have one: "He came to feel, with tragic clarity, that human beings could be saved, if they could be saved, only by what they were destroying."

This one insight shears through years of neglect, or worse, vociferous attacks, and helps cut a path for a middle way of reading Jeffers, not simply reacting to him. Hass's brilliant introduction to *Rock and Hawk* delivers the kind of subtle critical attention Jeffers deserves, demonstrating how complex the issues that attend this poet really are. Hass points to a way beyond the years of coterie worship and scattered, frequently second-rate scholarship that have too often limited this poet from California to being considered only that, a California poet.

Hass's introduction and his fine selection of poems (generally fine; there are always quibbles) serve to show us that Jeffers is not a regional poet. Far from it. He is a global poet. Jeffers was rooted to the Pacific coast of Carmel, but beyond evoking that wind-and-water-ravaged landscape which he happened on in 1914, he proclaimed—that has to be the word—a transhuman consciousness, what he called "inhumanism." In this age of human-induced environmental catastrophe, Jeffers suddenly makes much more sense than he did just a few years ago. He believed that by thinking too highly of ourselves we could delude ourselves and, in the end, lose touch with the planet, ravage it. Jeffers saw before most that nature—this Earth, this universe—contained *us* and that we have no special claim above it, though our cunning and tools have led us to believe otherwise. These are lines from his famous poem "The Answer":

*Robinson Jeffers, *Rock and Hawk: A Selection of Shorter Poems*. Compiled and edited by Robert Hass. New York: Random House, 1987, xliii, 290 pp., $19.95.

A severed hand
Is an ugly thing, and man dissevered from the earth and stars
and his history...for contemplation or in fact...
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness, the
greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine
beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
or drown in despair when his days darken.

One does not need to share Jeffers' infamous and misunderstood "misanthropy" to at least sympathize with this attitude. It is an attitude that defines us by what surrounds us, "the divine beauty of the universe." We must understand we are part of that, Jeffers says, or we are doomed to despair and failure. This is a theme to which I shall return.

While reading a poem like "The Answer" makes clear that Jeffers matters as much for what he says as for how he says it, he did develop two notable stylistic features in his work, though neither is as pyrotechnic as the innovations of the modernists. He forged a powerfully long line to carry his angry, prophetic, often full-throated thunder, and he welded direct statement and direct observation in a way I think no other American poet has ever done.

After two unpromising volumes, Jeffers began to set down his distinctive long line, a structure he employed for the rest of his life, especially in the narratives. It was a line that could strain to carry his hard music or, at times, slacken to a dull prose. Not surprisingly, Hass includes an interesting and insightful discussion of Jeffers' prosody in his introduction, demonstrating that this line was "much more a sobering up of Victorian verse, a suppression of those rocking-horse rhythms that the prepositional phrase invites into the English language, than it is a leap to Whitman's exhilarated and playful long line."

But perhaps Jeffers' greatest achievement—one of style, but borne of sensibility—was a wedding of direct pronouncement to direct observation. His fusion of abstraction and physical detail is unlike anything else we have in 20th century American poetry. Listen to "Salvage," originally published in the 1963 posthumous volume *The Beginning and the End*:

It is true that half the glory is gone.
Motors and modernist houses usurp the scene.
There is no eagle soaring, nor a puma
On the Carmel hill highroad, where thirty years ago
We watched one pass. Yet by God's grace
I have still a furlong of granite cliff, on which the Pacific

Leans his wild weight; and the trees I planted
When I was young, little green whips in hand,
Have grown in despite of the biting sea-wind,
And are accepted by nature, an angry-voiced tribe of
night-herons'
Nests on the boughs. One has to pay for it;
The county taxes take all my income, and it seems ridiculous
To hold three acres of shorelong woodland
And the little low house that my own hands made, at the
annual cost
Of a shiny new car. Never mind, the trees and the stones are
worth it.

But it's darker now. I am old, and my wife has died,
Whose eyes made life. As for me, I have to consider and take
thought
Before I can feel the beautiful secret
In places and stars and stones. To her it came freely.
I wish that all human creatures might feel it.
That would make joy in the world, and make men perhaps a
little nobler—as a handful of wildflowers.

Looking at the world caused Jeffers to express its universal characteristics: the physical prompting a pronouncement, an abstract statement. At his worst, Jeffers lapsed into the merely rhetorical general statement, into its "banality and lameness," as Hass puts it. As well, Jeffers could be "verbally careless. Language itself is simply not one of [his] subjects." For example, in "Hungerfield," Jeffers writes of "great eyes/Bent to the book," as if eyes and not backs bend when reading.

But at his best, as in "Salvage," he avoids such verbal mishaps; and we see the physical and the abstract work off each other. He begins with a general statement, "It is true that half the glory is gone," but then he *renders* through time and place. In this poem, as well, he personalizes, poignantly discussing the land on which he still lives, the wife he once had. He has earned the abstract language of the end, and reinforces it with the final simile. "The beautiful secret" might make people "perhaps a little nobler—as a handful of wildflowers," which returns the abstraction to a physical detail. I think Hass is right when he says, "... Jeffers is strongest in the descriptive and meditative lyrics. There his directness gave him the old power of poetry—not to say what no one else had ever thought, but to say what everyone has thought and felt." "Salvage" itself embodies familiar feelings, but I think in a fresh and quietly powerful way. It portrays the sadness of old age and a touching determination to not compromise one's values in the face of society; in fact, Jeffers continues to preach the superiority of

his values in the face of those encroaching societal inflictions.

To say that Jeffers' lyrics are his greatest achievement is surprising because Jeffers has lasted in the canon (to the extent that he has) primarily because of his narratives, those explosive, weird, violently energetic and sexual poems such as "Roan Stallion" and "The Women at Point Sur." To say that his directness speaks to "what everyone has thought and felt" is even more surprising because Jeffers, in admiring nature, diminished the importance of the human race—even, at times, hoped for its end. How odd that so anti-social a voice would be able to communicate so directly to his audience—an audience not restricted to other poets, but these days more likely made up of scientists and environmentalists. (Just recently, I was in the environment/naturalist section of a large bookstore; there, at random, I found two books that prominently quoted from Jeffers' poems.)

But Hass is right about the strength of the lyrics in contrast to the narratives and about the power of his directness. I want to work from this second point later to discuss Jeffers' views on humanity, bearing in mind another important insight of Hass's: "He was not afraid to stake a large claim. Critics have been inclined to expound his ideas systematically, but it seems to me that he is, in the end, an intuitive, unsystematic, and contradictory thinker. It is as a feeler not a thinker that he matters." I hope to illustrate that Jeffers was more ambivalent about the role of people in the world than one might think by reading only a few of his poems; his bitterness towards humanity and civilization is certainly evident (and often entirely justified), but was tempered at times by a more sympathetic view of human interaction with the land—a view, unfortunately, that he did not fully pursue or come to terms with.

To address the issue of the narrative poems, it must be pointed out that Hass subtitled this book *A Selection of Shorter Poems*. Considerations of space preclude most of the narratives, though what he does include is enough to give the reader a fair idea of Jeffers' narrative project. He includes "Roan Stallion"—an important early poem for Jeffers but one that contains, quite frankly, some of his worst writing—as well as fragments from other narratives such as "Cawdor" and a late narrative, "Hungerfield." These poems and fragments constitute only a tiny fraction of Jeffers' narrative output. They are enough, though, for one to see that the narratives frequently are, as Hass says, "repellent" and "psychologically false somehow." And yet. And yet they *do* remain compelling. Brimming at times with windy and grandiloquent language, with dialogue that usually rings false, Jeffers' narratives are almost never wholly successful, but are nearly always energetic and raw. Too often, finally, the narratives seem vehicles for

his ideas, not, as in his lyrics, embodiments of his attitudes.

Of course, the narratives have attracted greater attention precisely because they are *big* poems and so sweepingly weird. "In the last narrative," writes Hass, summarizing the plot, "the brutal man Hungerfield, furious with the black angel of death which has dared to invade his house and take the mother who despised him, wrestles death to a standstill." This poem was first published in 1952. Hard to believe anyone would read such a thing, given the poetic climate of that time. A man wrestling with the black angel of death? Really? One can imagine the responses. Yet, Hass goes on, this poem "written in the spirit of a tender gift to his dead and beloved wife, haunts the reader." "Hungerfield," above all the other narratives included in this book, haunts because it seems compelled less by philosophical-rhetorical motives than by genuine emotion. Jeffers begins the poem with these lines: "If time is only another dimension, then all that dies/Remains alive; not annulled, but removed/Out of our sight. Una is still alive./A few years back we are making love, greedy as hawks,/A boy and a married girl." He begins in a typically abstract mode vaguely reminiscent of Eliot, but turns from the philosophical to the emotional in a way that is quite bold and poignant. "Hungerfield" is a poem written by a sad man. It shows. It moves. By contrast, there is no such genuine emotion in, say, "Roan Stallion," other than a kind of wonderment, contained within the text itself, not merely the reader's own wonderment. And it is less wonderment than recognition of a dazzling manipulation of two-dimensional characters at the mercy of Jeffers' ideas.

While I am discussing "Hungerfield," I must point out a rather serious flaw in its reprinting in *Rock and Hawk*. Namely, two pages—nearly 60 lines—of the original are not included here. The missing text comes early in the poem and is crucial to providing a personal context in which to read the piece. The missing lines deal directly with Jeffers' love for his wife and describe the hardships they faced during her illness. Of course, I cannot believe Hass would edit these lines out, especially because he gives the poem attention in his introduction. The error is baffling and frustrating.

Certainly the narratives will continue to attract attention. They should, for they are *interesting*. Their obsessive focus on human perversity, their grand settings and reach are close in spirit to ancient Greek tragedy. This is not surprising given Jeffers' classical training. He did write versions of Greek tragedies; for example, *Medea*, which enjoyed considerable theatrical success in the late 1940s. Jeffers was, for both good and bad, imbued with a vision like that of the ancient Greek dramatists, especially like that of Aeschylus—humanity as the House

of Atreus. It is in the narratives that this vision achieves its widest possible scope.

In contrast to the strangeness and sprawl of the narratives, the lyrics tend to be more accessible and focused, though they too cover the terrain of inhumanism. They can range over continents and eons but with a concision of execution, a directness, sharp-edged with prophecy and detail. To the narratives' boulderous bulk, the lyrics are sharp crystals, many-sided and dark.

Hooded Night

At night, toward dawn, all the lights of the shore have died,
And the wind moves. Moves in the dark
The sleeping power of the ocean, no more beastlike than manlike,
Not to be compared; itself and itself.
Its breath blown shoreward huddles the world with a fog; no stars
Dance in heaven; no ship's light glances.
I see the heavy granite bodies of the rocks of the headland,
That were ancient here before Egypt had pyramids,
Bulk on the gray of the sky, and beyond them the jets of young trees
I planted the year of the Versailles peace.
But here is the final unridiculous peace. Before the first man
Here were the stones, the ocean, the cypresses,
And the pallid region in the stone-rough dome of fog where the moon
Falls on the west. Here is reality.
The other is spectral episode: after the inquisitive animal's
Amusements are quiet: the dark glory.

This book contains one fine lyric after another, spanning the whole of Jeffers' career. "Salmon-Fishing," "The Place for No Story," "November Surf," "Distant Rainfall" and "Shooting Season" are just a few of the superb but lesser-known lyrics in *Rock and Hawk*. They are poems we should be thankful to have. There are too many like these to mention here, along with poems better-known and still fresh, such as "Phenomena," "Shine, Perishing Republic," "The Purse-Seine," and "Love the Wild Swan."

In a few lyrics, such as "Salvage," we hear a less didactic and more personal tone, and we can be surprised at the humanity—for want of a better word—of this craggy poet. This is especially true of the later poems, those from *Hungerfield* and *The Beginning and the End*, poems such as "Patronymic" and "Vulture" and the beautiful "The Deer Lay Down Their Bones," in which an older Jeffers writes of finding

a hidden clearing filled with "bones lying in the grass":

clean bones and stinking bones,
Antlers and bones: I understood that the place was a refuge for
wounded deer; there are so many
Hurt ones escape the hunters and limp away to lie hidden; here
they have water for the awful thirst
And peace to die in; dense green laurel and grim cliff
Make sanctuary, and a sweet wind blows upward from the deep
gorge.—I wish my bones were with theirs.
But that's a foolish thing to confess, and a little cowardly. We
know that life
Is on the whole quite equally good and bad, mostly gray neutral,
and can be endured
To the dim end, no matter what magic of grass, water and
precipice, and pain of wounds,
Makes death look dear. We have been given life and have used
it—not a great gift perhaps—but in honesty
Should use it all.

In this poem, as in some earlier ones, notably "Return," where Jeffers is so tired of contemplation and language he declares he will "touch things and things and no more thoughts"—in such poems Jeffers quiets his fury for a few brief, enduring moments. Which is not to say the fury in other poems is less successful as poetry. It is to say that Jeffers was capable of a wider range of tone than many have given him credit for. We hear his closer, quieter voice in such surprises as "Shane O'Neill's Cairn," dedicated to his wife Una, and this depiction of one night at their home, Tor House:

October Week-End

It is autumn still, but at three in the morning
All the magnificent wonders of midwinter midnight, blue
dog-star,
Orion, red Aldebaran, the ermine-fur Pleiades,
Parading above the gable of the house. Their music is their
shining,
And the house beats like a heart with dance-music
Because our boys have grown to the age when girls are their
music.
There is wind in the trees, and the gray ocean's
Music on the rock. I am warming my blood with starlight, not
with girls' eyes,
But really the night is quite mad with music.

For many, this must be a new side to Jeffers. Then, there is "Hurt Hawks": "I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk..."

This is the Jeffers that scares the hell out of his readers, that, ultimately, turns so many away from him. "Hurt Hawks," I think, puts his priorities most bluntly, most personally, while elsewhere Jeffers speaks more abstractly of a finer future free of the human race, a planet clean of our scourge. For example, this line ends "The Purse-Seine": "There is no reason for amazement: surely one always knew that cultures decay, and life's end is death." For Jeffers, "civilization is a transient sickness," as he says in "New Mexican Mountain." Humanity is just another animal doomed to suffer an end like so many animals already have. His view of the world was cyclical, an incessant process of natural growth and decay beyond our control and nearly beyond our ken. If in this process humanity comes to an end, so be it, Jeffers believed, because we have not—as his Orestes has—"fallen in love outward." We have machines and hubris enough to create an "obscene future" ("The Broken Balance"). Even though he admits at times our place in this world, the weeds and insects will someday overtake our buildings, reclaim to earth what we erected, and finally, Jeffers thought, they are better than us.

Hass has two observations about this attitude that bear repeating here. First, he notes that Jeffers' fury "always feels a good deal like self-loathing..." And he sees a possible biographical reason for it: "It seems to be the fate of American poets to reinvent the religions of their childhoods in their poetry. Jeffers is certainly an instance. And if he needed, in Calvinist fashion, to believe in the perfection of God and the absolute depravity of man, man in the twentieth century seemed to cooperate with that need."

In a recent article in *American Poetry* David Copland Morris discusses Jeffers' attitudes in the context of control. Ironically, by relinquishing our "control" over the world, we might come to better understand it:

> If the definition of value can be irrespective of human mind or will then the world is not entirely controllable, an idea that everyone understands at some level, but a notion which seems to the dominant Western intellectual tradition a profoundly discomforting truth. As the critic Gilbert Highet has pointed out, the most difficult, the most resisted of Jeffers' themes is that "the human race is not needed." But, says Highet, it is also the grandest theme, and the most profound. For the very recognition of our insignificance opens us to the power and beauty of the larger universe of which we are a part. For many, this openness to a realm of value outside the control of the will is [a] frightening experience.

As Jeffers says in "Credo": "The mind/Passes, the eye closes, the spirit is a passage;/The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient

to itself; the heart-breaking beauty/Will remain when there is no heart to break for it."

Jeffers saw humanity drawn in scale to this universe in which we partake. So it is perhaps easier to see Jeffers not always as a misanthrope, but as a preacher, like his father before him. Rather than diminishing human beings before a Judeo-Christian God, though, Jeffers diminished human beings before the world that is god. He speaks explicitly of our duty and relationship to this god in "The Beginning and the End":

> This is man's mission:
> To find and feel; all animal experience
> Is a part of God's life. He would be balanced and neutral
> As a rock on the shore, but the red sunset-waves
> Of life's passions fling over him. He endures them,
> We endure ours. That ancient wound in the brain
> Has never healed, it hangs wide, it lets in the stars
> Into the animal-stinking ghost-ridden darkness, the human soul.
> The mind of man....
> Slowly, perhaps, man may grow into it—
> Do you think so? This villainous king of beasts, this deformed ape?—He has mind
> And imagination, he might go far
> And end in honor. The hawks are more heroic but man has a steeper mind,
> Huge pits of darkness, high peaks of light,
> You may calculate a comet's orbit or the dive of a hawk, not a man's mind.

There are times, then, that Jeffers believes we can attain the possibility of a redemption, but we can find it only outside of ourselves, in the world. In fact, in a few scattered passages Jeffers goes so far as to sketch human life in balance with the natural world. He writes of an old cattleman in "The Wind-Struck Music" whose life was "...concerned with cattle, horses and hunting, no thought nor emotion that all his ancestors since the ice-age/Could not have comprehended. I call that a good life; narrow, but vastly better than most..." From the same volume, *Such Counsels You Gave to Me* (from which, incidentally, Hass leaves off the "to"), Jeffers declares in "The Coast-Road" that "...the life of men who ride horses, herders of cattle on the mountain pasture, plowers of remote/Rock-narrowed farms in poverty and freedom, is a good life." "You were not born to prosperity," he addresses America in "Shine, Republic," "you were born to love freedom." This, I think, helps illustrate Hass's point: Jeffers as feeler not systematic thinker. These statements indicate, contrary to much of his other poetry, that Jeffers could glimpse a healthier relationship between humans and the

earth. Regrettably, however, he never did more than sentimentalize these portrayals. As the critic John Elder has shown in his important book *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*, contemporary poets such as Gary Synder, Wendell Berry, and Robert Pack have moved well beyond Jeffers in this regard. They have, with others, Elder writes, contributed to "a depiction of how far we have gone wrong and an attempt to find a healthier, more inclusive understanding of culture—one that can value the city and the wilderness alike, but without denigrating one or domesticating the other. Poetry's task is to ground human culture once more on a planet rich in nonhuman life and beauty."

Like Jeffers, we can still be overwhelmed at the extraordinary beauty of things and see how they put us in our place—we are smaller than our hopes and machines might have us think. Yet we may also see, as he did not, that our diminished place in the universe does not necessarily shrink human beings relative to one another. A fierce, clean love of a wildflower does not disallow a fierce, clean love for "...dreams of universal justice or happiness," dreams he considers futile in "The Answer." These two loves, these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Compassion from one human to another and another and another is possible and desirable—even while we take realistically our more modest role in nature. Understanding, empathizing, and admiring Jeffers' love for the world and his rage at our nearly chronic abuse of it, we can now assimilate his attitude. We can move beyond rage.

Jeffers' inhumanism, more precisely his rage, for all its more admirable qualities, led him to a breathtaking moral blindness when it came to the dark years before and during WWII. The poems from this period are among his worst. Full of polemic against war, these poems considered Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin to be the moral equivalents of Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. (In retrospect, he was right in one case.) Jeffers' publisher, Random House, suppressed a number of these poems from his book *The Double Axe* and prefaced a disclaimer to it. Of these censored poems, Hass picks one, "War-Guilt Trials," because of its reference to the treason charges leveled against Ezra Pound. It is otherwise an uninteresting poem. Only "Calm and Full the Ocean" and "Orca" rise here to poetry, though the end of "Orca" is certainly polemical. It contains some of Jeffers' most clearly pessimistic sentiments: "[mankind] looks like a botched experiment that has run wild and ought to be stopped."

It may well surprise some to discover that Jeffers, given that he was prone to frequent and awesome depictions of violence in his poems, was a pacifist, stoutly opposed to America's entry into WWII. Jeffers realized the role violence plays in nature. Human violence, though, he

saw as arising not from predatory or reproductive need, for example, but from cruelty, hubris, greed, and perversion. The human violence he depicts—violence we do to other people, and, in his eyes, worse violence we do to defenseless animals—develops out of self-interest grown malignant. Incest too was another symbol of Jeffers, a symbol of our having turned inward, having turned wrong.

To turn outward, he thought, is the right way. We can disagree with Jeffers that the planet would be better off without us. But it is sometimes hard to believe it wouldn't be—at least as long as we continue to behave as we do. *This* is Jeffers' most important message: we are not the "lords of creation," as metrical fundamentalist and aspiring cultural force Frederick Turner believes us to be; we can be, however, the lords of destruction. Jeffers' love of nature and the obligation to be responsible that such love entails shows us this much.

I am brought nearly full circle. Here is the passage that contains Hass's observation with which I began:

> Looking out at the Pacific landscape, with its sense of primitive violence that time and the weather had not quietened and eroded, [Jeffers] found himself haunted by the riddles of desire and suffering, and he thought he saw a way out of the cycle, and that way connected to his almost mute, though intense, feeling for the natural world—for all the life outside of and imperiled by the rapacity and unconsciousness of the human usurpation of the planet. He came to feel, with tragic clarity, that human beings could be saved, if they could be saved, only by what they were destroying...As a poet he kept trying to make images from the movements, serene and terrible, of the life around him for what he had discovered or intuited—for the power at the center of life which reconciled him to its cruelty. One feels him straining toward it, toward what is not human in the cold salt of the Pacific and the great sundowns and the rocks and the hawk's curved, efficient beak. It is in the farthest reaches of this intuitive straining that one feels most in Jeffers the presence of a great poet.

The challenge of Jeffers is not only environmental. The challenge is to alter our perspective, to "...unhumanize our views a little, and become confident/As the rock and ocean that we were made from," he says in "Carmel Point." Of course, as I said earlier, this is not the last word; contemporary poets have already metabolized Jeffers' attitude and given us the codes to midwife the birth of a more inclusive, holistic way of living.

For now, though, we continue to pollute the world in many imaginative ways. Whole towns must be emptied and sealed off. We hear on evening documentaries of children who die in "clusters" from

cancer. The summer of 1988, the worst drought since the Dust Bowl, sucked the earth dry, sucked the life from crops and livestock. "The greenhouse effect," the scientists tell us: perhaps not responsible directly for this drought, but surely contributing to climatic conditions that will make droughts more frequent. If we do not change our lives, we will change the face of the globe, the warming globe. And we are *all* responsible. Our cars, our factories, our tons of grime spewed into the atmosphere and sea. Reading Jeffers reminds us that we must all become "environmentalists" today for the sake of the earth's tomorrow.

In his article "Ideology and Environment: The Challenge of Robinson Jeffers' 'Inhumanism,' " David Copland Morris writes that "as early as 1964, before the phrase 'environmental crisis' had gained currency, the poet James Dickey noted the disturbing quality of Jeffers' environmental prophecy..." He quotes Dickey from his book *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now*:

> One thinks, uneasily, that the prophetic tone may be more than just tone, remembering that Jeffers was telling us long before Hiroshima that the ultimate end of science, of knowledge, and of tool-using, is not comfort and convenience...but unrelieved tragedy. It is extraordinarily strange how the more awful and ludicrous aspects of the atomic age have come to resemble Jeffers' poems. In a film like *Mondo Cane*, for example, one sees the dying sea turtles, disoriented by the Bikini blasts, until they cannot even find the Pacific Ocean, crawling inland to die in the desert...and one thinks compulsively of Jeffers.

While Jeffers did in fact prophesy our rape of the earth, he did believe—wrongly, it now seems—that the Earth could, given time, retriumph. This is a logical outgrowth of his cyclical view of the world. Given the benefit of studies on nuclear winter, we now know a nuclear war will very likely end life on this planet. The greenhouse effect may not, but the consequences are so dire that nature doubtless cannot reclaim what could be lost.

A strange poem, even for Jeffers, "The Inquisitors" addresses the issue of nuclear holocaust. This quasi-surreal poem is not included in *Rock and Hawk*, but I want to discuss it briefly to illuminate this issue. In this poem a man named Azevedo (another two-dimensional Jeffers character) is riding a dark trail and stops, shocked to see not hills but three giants, gargantuan Indian-like primitives. They have gathered specimens and pick the human creatures apart, wondering out loud at our powers. Acknowledging that humans have "the power"—the nuclear bomb—they ultimately decide, " 'It is not likely they can destroy all life: the planet is capacious. Life would surely grow up again/From grubs in the soil, or the newt and toad level, and be

beautiful again. And again perhaps break its legs/On its own cleverness: who can forecast the future?' " Given Jeffers' training in science and medicine, this pronouncement seems naive. It is somewhat surprising that he saw the nuclear threat as just another throe in the cycle of existence and not, as some did in his day and as most do now, as the *end* of that cycle.

Despite this and other shortcomings, Jeffers is a poet whose greatness is now, I think, being acknowledged. Critical activity concerning Jeffers is on the rise. And Robert Hass has done a tremendous service to Jeffers' reputation, his poetry and his audience with *Rock and Hawk*. His introduction grapples with many issues, pointing out flaws and achievements, giving Jeffers a more balanced reading than he has perhaps ever received, as well as drawing a useful biographical sketch. *Rock and Hawk* is, in addition, a beautifully designed book, though lacking a title and first-line index, which is aggravating.

The poems Hass includes provide a good overview of Jeffers' controversial, meteoric career. Certainly one can find fault here and there with an inclusion ("Pearl Harbor," for example, seems a wasted choice) or an exclusion (why not the remarkable and visionary "The Torch-Bearers' Race"?). Finally, these are minor flaws and a matter of taste. For *Rock and Hawk* is the only substantial anthology of Jeffers to include poems from throughout his career. (A *Selected Poems* appeared not long after Jeffers died, but it was a very slim book.) *Rock and Hawk*, even with its few editing flaws—such as the defective reprinting of "Hungerfield"—is the perfect book to use in classrooms. It is the right size for a college text, and Hass's introduction is generous and enlightening.

As much as I welcome the possibility of Jeffers' permanent institution into the canon, I hope that Jeffers' audience expands beyond environmentalists and literary academe. Jeffers is, above all, a public poet. This is a liability perhaps only to academics who need a poet more difficult to crack. The language and strategy of Jeffers' poems are usually straightforward. The difficulty is with his ideas, his attitudes. This brings one to the realm of ethics and morality, and that can make a lot of people uncomfortable. It is hard to read a Jeffers poem without, ultimately, talking about *what* it says. One can agree or disagree with a Jeffers poem, or see points of agreement, points of disagreement. One always seems constrained to define a moral/ethical/philosopical response to Jeffers. Thankfully, Hass has made it easier to do that without overreacting one way or the other to this often thorny poet. It is a little odd to talk about agreeing or disagreeing with the philosophical stance of, for example, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." For one, you have to spend a lot of time figuring out *how*

to read it first. Not so with Jeffers. His relentless cultural critique is not couched in ambiguous language or a difficult style. Robert Hass, in the penetrating final sentences of his introduction, has this to say:

> We have lived in a catastrophic time. The redundancy of violence and suffering, the sheer immensity of the danger, always threatens to wither the imagination, to make us turn back to the purely personal, as if it were somehow more real because the mind can, at least, compass it, whereas the effort to think about the fate of the planet, about what man is that he has done to himself all the terrible things that he has done in this century, comes to us mostly as dark and private musings. And it is just this that Jeffers sought in the verse of his short poems, an art to speak those musings largely, to claim for the clear mind that needs to compass the madness the central voice of poetry.

Robinson Jeffers speaks to us in a time of spiritual and terrestrial drought, a "catastrophic time." He may yet emerge as one of the four or five most important American poets of this century. And if his audience can grow, he may yet exert an influence for change. Jeffers speaks directly to us about the beauty of the world and how it may save us. If we listen, we may relearn the respect we once had for that beauty. We could save it.

Butch

DAVID GALEF

The sun slanted down at an angle of four o'clock. The city had been baking for hours, and by this time of day a low, languorous heat emanated from the sidewalks. Taxis rode with their windows up in air-conditioned silence, and doormen stood under the shadows of awnings. On the rooftop of a Fifth Avenue apartment in the upper Eighties, an elderly man named Butch Donaldson sat stiffly in an orange deck chair. He was stripped to the waist and glaring off at a point on the horizon, the sun glaring back from the Hudson. His attitude suggested that he had come up to the roof not to tan his body but to show that he could take it.

Half an hour longer in the heat, and Butch decided it was enough. He got up, inhaled heavily, and began collapsing the chair. When he stood up, his chest sagged with age, and his arms were afflicted with a light palsy. Still, at one time he had been quite broad around the shoulders, and he maintained an oddly wasp-waisted appearance, his plaid bathing trunks hanging on to the last remnant of his former physique.

The chair took too long to fold, and he cursed at it, not in any one-word dismissal but in a muttered series of threats. He kicked at the chair, threatening to mangle its aluminum frame or cut off one of its legs. "Runty chair, you with a bad case of rickets, you rat, if you want to see another sunset, you'd better fold up." He spoke with a gangster's drawl but even slower, with the speed of a man in his seventies. He was half-joking, but then there was the other half. Once, Butch had been with Ed Hoffer's gang dealing liquor and dope during Prohibition. He had broken men's arms and was not to be stopped by an uncooperative piece of furniture. A grunt, a sudden exertion, and the chair collapsed. Butch bent down, shouldered it, and walked inside. He took the elevator down to the eighth floor, whistling "Meet Me in St. Louis." Butch was a man of parts.

He fiddled with the keys at the door of 8C and walked in. The only other person in the apartment was the black cleaning lady, who came in on Mondays and Thursdays. Her name was Mabel and she was just

putting the sheets on the double bed in the master bedroom after finishing with the smaller room down the hall. It was a cavernous apartment, with a kitchen, a scullery, two bedrooms, and a giant living room merging into a dining room under a chandelier. Butch had acquired the place from a late friend of his in the early 1950s when he thought it was time to settle down. His wife Dorothy had been twenty years his junior but had been fragile, like the chandelier in the dining room. She had tinkled and shone bright for guests and had died in her thirtieth year.

The Donaldsons had had one daughter, Samantha, who grew up in the small bedroom, going to private schools on the upper East Side and occasionally emerging from her room, all dressed up in lace, to be presented by Butch to his evening guests. Often there would be parties, elegant men in tuxedos and women in dangerously low evening gowns, and Samantha would watch the drinking and occasional fighting from her bedroom door. She was Daddy's little girl because Butch always told her so, but she dropped out of Bennington when she was nineteen and since then kept afloat on a tide of boyfriends. Occasionally, she came back home in tears, letting herself in late at night and sleeping in her old bedroom. By Butch's orders, Mabel was to leave everything in Samantha's bedroom absolutely alone.

Mabel came out from Butch's room with a sheet folded over her arm. She wore a black-on-white uniform and a permanent pout. "I'm almost finished with the beds, Mistah Donaldson. You wan' me to fix you something for your dinner before I go?" She stared painfully hard, as if it broke her heart to address him.

"What?" Butch had been thinking of Samantha, who was supposed to drop by tonight with a friend. That phrase "with a friend." He leaned the chair against the wall. "What did you say?"

"I *said*, would you like me to fix you something to eat before I leave? Some chicken, maybe, or some sand'ches?"

"No. No, don't bother. Samantha is coming over tonight, and I'll order something from Jimmy's." Jimmy's was a rather fashionable Italian restaurant off Madison Avenue where Butch knew the owner. He fixed Mabel with a dismissive gaze. "Just finish with the beds and go."

"All right." Mabel looked disapproving but tramped back to the bedroom. Butch wanted to take a nap—the sun had hollowed him out—but he had to wait for Mabel to finish.

In the meantime, he put away the chair in a closet and walked into the kitchen. There wasn't much in the cupboards or the refrigerator except for crackers and coffee, frozen vegetables, and a few jars and cans. There were lunch fixings for Mabel and whatever else she said

was needed. But mostly it was a kitchen of relics. Butch went out most nights or had food brought in. He had never learned to prepare food, and Dorothy had been too rare a creature to cook. The garlicky Italian dishes Butch liked were best enjoyed in a restaurant anyway. His doctor had recently cautioned him against too much oil and spices, so Butch had gone to another doctor. His heart was living faster than the rest of his body, or something.

He poured himself a glass of iced tea and wandered back into the living room to drink it. He sank into a deep wing-chair. A gilt-framed picture of Dorothy rested on a stand between two marble ashtrays, Dorothy in a strapless evening gown on New Year's Eve, 1959. She knew what she was marrying but was hopeful of reforming him. They had met halfway somewhere, with him wearing slippers around the apartment and her acquiring a taste for gin. She was never much of a mother but had stayed elegant to the end. Another picture in a silver oval frame, Samantha graduating from high school, looked down from the third shelf of a breakfront. Somewhat like her mother now. There was a light spot on the wall where a youthful picture of Butch had hung for years: snap-brim hat, double-breasted suit, and a suitably shady background, but Butch had taken it down when Samantha left. The whole apartment had been the same for years out of Butch's misplaced sense of inertia. Now he had nothing to compare himself to except the memory of the day before.

There was a full-length mirror in the hallway, and he was struck with the sudden urge to look himself over. He got up with a lurch—sitting out in the sun had made him woozy, or light-headed, or something. A green spot floated between him and the mirror.

As it faded away, he saw himself in the darkness of the hallway. He reached back to flick on the hall light. He snapped into clarity, the corners of his mouth tautening. In front of him was a tall, elderly man, slightly stooped, clad in bathing suit and sandals. He still had his straw pale hair, though it was wispy, and his blue eyes looked washed out. He had once stared a man named Gutsy Fagan into the ground with those eyes. Dorothy had said they were his best feature but could never hold his gaze. He concentrated, trying to intimidate the man in the mirror, but he blinked and then his eyes began to water. Hell. He looked away.

His own interior lighting was going bad, too many shadows. Living alone did it. Sometimes at night, seated in the wing-chair, he would lean back into the dim interior of a speakeasy, maybe Del Monico's that used to be on 49th Street, with its round checkered tables and a few dim shapes in back picking out "Ain't She Sweet?" And there he was, sitting at the table nearest the band with two other gentlemen.

None of them had taken off his hat; all smoked stogies, screening themselves in a protective blue cloud. Butch was obviously protection for the other two: he had those shoulders that made tailored suits a necessity, and even sitting down he bulked above the other two. They were the McHallan twins, or they looked like the McHallans, and they kept staring nervously toward the entrance. Twice, the black velvet curtain in place of a door parted, but once it was a woman in a silver lamé gown and the second time it was a tuxedo who didn't matter. Neither of the McHallans touched his drink; Butch blew a perfect smoke ring at the woman in the silver lamé gown.

The music from the band became almost audible, a dirty rope of jazz, twisting just out of range. Suddenly, one of the McHallans knocked over his drink. The brown liquid spilled onto the table, flowing into a puddle which grew larger and larger, flooding everything in clear brown as if the scene behind it were varnished. Everything froze like an old daguerrotype, then the image simply faded into nothingness.

"You want anything before I leave?"

Butch blinked, no longer in the picture. Mabel had changed to street clothes and was eyeing him narrowly. He gave her a look. "Repeat that."

"I *said*, I'm leaving now. Anything else before I go?"

"No. No, go ahead." He groped for his shirt sleeves, but of course he wasn't wearing a shirt, he had been sunbathing. Sleepy. He needed a nap. His sandals slapped against the floor as he walked into the bedroom and pulled down the blinds. The front door shut with a slam, and that was Mabel. He pulled down the bedcovers, the sheets still smelling of fresh bleach. The McHallan brothers hadn't died that night; they were shot months later, by which time Butch was working for a bootlegger named Corry Sullivan. Once he had resolved that point, his mind felt clearer. He lay back with his head against the pillow and promised himself no dreams.

He awoke to a darkened room, the clock on the night table faintly luminescent. He had never suffered that momentary confusion that others feel upon waking; he saw that it was 6:15 and got out of bed at once. For dizziness, take one, two, three deep breaths. He picked out a gray suit and a pencil-stripe shirt and started to dress. Samantha was supposed to come at 6:30, and though she was usually late, he would damn well be ready on time. His hands shook a bit when he selected his tie—his touch of palsy—but he could still tie a Windsor knot without benefit of a mirror. There had been a time when looking sharp was his business. He wondered about the friend Samanatha said she was bringing, probably another of the artist-bums she hung around with. Sincere gravy stains on the jeans, or was it paint, that had been the

last one. One day he would find out whether Samantha was acting this way on purpose, or maybe it was just that she was his daughter. Butch adjusted his tie with a precise yank and walked into the living room.

First, fill the ice bucket. Then call Jimmy's and order dinner for three, all the dishes that he liked, which he knew would be all right for Samantha, who at least shared his taste in food. If the man she was with didn't eat Italian food, he could be polite about it and eat it anyway. Butch recalled a meal he had forced himself through, it must have been over forty years ago, with three big Greeks who kept passing him a plate of something that looked like snails and tasted like soap. Everyone with a gat on his person, everyone grinning just like friends.

He grinned now as he emptied a tray of ice cubes into a polished oak bucket. This would be an occasion, no matter how it turned out. Nights alone he had never gotten used to, and though he had taught himself to read books, real books, and even enjoy some of them, he preferred company. Preferably female, and the women had better be smart enough not to treat him like an adorable grandpa. He had paid for a lot of women over the years, after Dorothy's death and before, too. They showed more skin these days, more brazen looks, impatient with the formalities. But without the old moves, the game skittered off into nonsense. Not that he practiced pursuit much these days, but flirting still pleased him, and he enjoyed the company of pretty women. If Samantha hadn't turned out gorgeous like Dorothy, he wouldn't have known what to do. And she could be attractive and calculating at the same time, a combination Butch was forced to respect.

He checked his watch, 6:30 already, and reached for the phone. He dialed and sat back in the wing-chair. Five rings: Jimmy's was busy tonight. The restaurant had outgrown its origins as a red-checkered tablecloth joint with cheap liquor. The location had been just right for the growing numbers of young professionals in the area, and now the menu was stiff cloth, the prices intimidating. Butch wasn't intimidated; it was never a good idea to be frightened. He had known the proprietor Louis D'Angelo, a tubby man prone to patterned vests and suspenders, since 1956, the birth of Samantha and the end of Butch's business enterprises.

He waited. On the sixth ring, a castrato voice answered, "Hello, this is Jimmy's."

"This is Butch Donaldson." He spoke into the phone with authority, fixing his gaze on a spot above his vanished living room photograph. "Listen, I'd like to order a dinner to be delivered to my apartment."

The voice simpered. "I'm sorry, but Jimmy's doesn't do take-out."

"So? Let me speak to Louis. Even better, let Louis speak to you, and tell him Butch Donaldson is on the line."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Butch Donaldson. You want me to spell it?"

"No, I don't think that will be necessary. Please hold the line."

Butch held on, grimly, while the voice disappeared for a few minutes and then came back, a little sulky.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Donaldson. What would you like to have?"

"That's better. To start with, I'll have the clams casino, three orders, and minestrone. Then veal pizzeola, two of those, and one shrimp scampi. Don't bother with dessert and coffee. We'll go out for that." This last comment was directed at the photograph of Dorothy, who always liked to go to a different café after the main course. Dorothy shrugged her bare shoulders adorably. She wanted to go to the Café Versailles for their eclairs, and Samantha, who was only two, had to be left behind with the nurse. She got a lot of sticky good night kisses and found desserts in paper bags on the breakfast table next morning.

"And when would you like it delivered?"

"Make it seven-thirty. I'll expect it then." And Butch broke the connection. Of course, Louis couldn't be blamed for hiring new people, but the old courtesy disappeared that way. And if the connections weren't there anymore, what good was it living past seventy? He had made a lot of money in the last of his transactions with a Brooklyn building contractor, and this time of life was supposed to be the reward. Sitting in a chair on a Saturday waiting for his daughter to come visit him.

He thought about mixing himself a drink but decided against it. No need to get back at rudeness with his own rudeness. He could wait. But where the hell was Samanatha? He looked at his watch. Close to 7:00, and what would be her excuse this time? She always offered some reason, as if she were trying to make it all logical. The train was late, the heel of her shoe broke, the taxicab had a flat and the cabbie had to get out and fix it. And tonight?

There was a key-turning sound at the door. Samantha letting herself in, never getting the three locks open on the first try. There was the sound of a high heel in an impatient tap, the mutter of a male voice. Butch got up from the chair and wrenched open the front door, pulling along the keys in the lock and Samantha's hand with them.

"Good evening." He grinned sourly at Samantha; he extracted the keys and gave her back her hand. She was wearing a red silk dress and black high heels. She had Dorothy's figure, which meant nice calves, a bosom, and the same black hair. But she wore too much make-up, possibly because she knew Butch didn't like it. At the gaze of inspection, she pulled back nervously, but she immediately recovered herself. Her lips broadened in a lipsticky smile, and she planted a kiss on his

cheek as he bent down to hug her. His Samantha—and someone else, always another man. She gestured backward to accommodate the figure behind her.

"Daddy, this is Albert." She stepped back to allow the two men to shake hands, and Butch got his first good look at the latest acquisition.

"How do you do?"

"Nice to meet ya." Albert was some find. The hand he proffered was like something from an aquarium, damp and fishy, his shirtcuff riding back to reveal several inches of hairy white arm. The cheap cut of his suit made him look slightly askew, his yellow-striped tie held by a big fake-jewel clasp. When he grinned, he showed too many teeth. He had a pencil mustache which looked chewed. Possibly he licked it when he was nervous; he disengaged his hand from Butch's firm grip as soon as he could.

The sleezy appearance didn't bother Butch so much, not compared with the men Samantha usually brought around. Faded jeans, loose white shirts, scraggly beards—he compromised his standards in favor of his daughter. With this one, though, there was an air that Butch couldn't place. It was damned familiar, all the same.

"Well, come in, both of you. Let me build you a drink." He walked to the bar in the far corner of the living room and upended three glasses. "What'll it be?"

"I'd like something cool. How about a gin and tonic?" In point of fact, Samantha always drank gin and tonic, no matter what the climate. She had inherited the taste from her mother, who used to give her a little sip from her own drink.

"Scotch, mine." Albert came over to the bar, watching as Butch measured out more gin than tonic, the way Samantha liked it. And a piece of lime. He filled another glass with ice and poured Johnny Walker Black Label into it, just past the halfway mark. Then he made a drink for himself, a rye highball, as Albert appraised the bottles on the shelf.

He gave a grudging nod. "Some good stuff here. No cheap alky in stock, heh."

Butch looked sharply at Samantha, who was looking at the portrait of her mother. The reference to cheap alcohol was a low shot at his bootleg days, if that was how it was intended. He wondered how much Samantha had been talking.

"Here's your drink." He handed the scotch to Albert, who took the glass in his left hand and took a healthy gulp. He swallowed, let out some air, and grinned through his yellow teeth. "That hits the spot, don't it."

"Samantha, here's yours." Samantha turned away from her mother

and put her hand on Albert's shoulder. With the other hand, she reached for her drink. Butch watched with narrowed eyes: Samantha usually wasn't so chummy with her pick-up acquaintances. Was she just touching Albert or actually leaning on him? Butch's glasses were in the bedroom and he didn't like wearing them for social occasions.

"Here's to cooler days," Samantha suggested, raising her right arm as in a pledge.

"I'll drink to that." Albert favored both of them with another knowing grin and raised his glass, but only part way. There was a tightness under Albert's left armpit, more like a bulge of some kind—and Butch froze with the drink halfway to his lips. Manners, manners, called a professional voice from some anterior part of his brain, and he took a sip of his rye without tasting it. Don't stare too hard; don't stare at all. Keep the conversation flowing and gradually edge toward the nearest exit.

But that would be inhospitable, even to a man with a gun. From the shape of the bulge—lousy tailoring, lousy concealment—it looked like one of those cheap .44s. Never trust a Saturday night special; it might go off accidentally. In which case Albert would have a neat hole somewhere in his side. In the meantime, the man was here with Samantha, and Butch owed it to her to be pleasant, though he deplored her taste. At least the artist types came without anything more dangerous than a cigarette lighter.

Albert continued to drink stiff-armed, Samantha oblivious. He finished the drink soon and held the empty glass in front of him.

"Care for another?"

"Sure, why not?"

Butch poured, thinking. In a pinch, he could throw the drink in Albert's face, but then what? Lacking the old speed, he had no follow-up. What should he do, what could he do—stop pouring scotch, for one. The glass was almost overflowing. Show a little suavity, damn it. He poured off an inch of scotch into the drain at the end of the bar and handed the glass back to Albert. People carry guns for any number of reasons, none of them good. Ignore it?

"I've ordered dinner from Jimmy's, should be here in about fifteen minutes." Samanatha nodded, smiling, and he addressed Albert. "I hope you like Italian food."

"Love it." Albert nodded several times for emphasis.

"Good." Butch advanced on Samantha, put his arm around her slim waist, and steered her to a chair. "Why don't we all sit down?"

"Daddy, your whole arm is shaking." Samantha pressed his hand, cool fingers against his. She actually looked concerned, blue eyes wide open.

"Comes with age—I'm all right." Butch disengaged his hand and gestured to another chair. "Siddown—uh, sit down, and we'll drink until dinner."

Albert nodded with a new grin, this one slanted upward left, with just enough room for a coffin-nail cigarette to poke out of the corner of his mouth. He sat down in Butch's wing-chair, which made Samantha shift uncomfortably and cross her legs. She knew propriety was being violated. Butch tried to catch her eye, but it was impossible.

"Mind if I smoke?" Albert had a pack of Luckies out, smacking the pack against his palm.

"Go ahead." Now he was staring at Albert. Get the eyes moving again.

"Like one?" A friendly paw offered one to father and daughter, sitting next to each other in two slat-backed chairs. Both declined with thanks, Samantha out of form's sake and Butch because of the one doctor's order he followed. Albert reached into his left jacket pocket and pulled out—Butch stiffened—a flashy metal lighter topped with a jewel. He set fire to his cigarette, sucked in, and puffed out a long stream of smoke. He crossed his legs; his pants leg rode up one white shin.

"Samantha said you used to be in the construction business."

"Yes." What else had she said? There had been no hiding any secrets from Samantha after a certain age. It hadn't seemed necessary. She had listened to him attentively, asked him a few questions—she wanted to know if he had ever killed anybody—and that was that. She wouldn't talk to him. The next year, she had gone off to college and soon dropped out. The first man she had brought home was named Ted and wrote poetry and lasted two months. Samantha had a similar attention span for all her men, who tended to resemble each other. But Albert stood out even when seated.

"I'm in the construction business myself, Brooklyn." Another jet of smoke. "It's a small circle, the construction business in New York. Maybe you knew Pete Heimel?"

Hands shaking again, stop it. Pete Heimel was dead, that was what Butch knew; he even knew who had done it. That was in 1960, after he had officially retired, but he still had contacts. He considered himself lucky to have quit when most of his enemies were out of the picture. Now who was this nobody in front of him, breathing his air? "I knew of him, yeah." No sense in keeping up a blown cover. He squinted at Albert, hard. "Why? Was he a friend of yours?"

"Nah, not him." Another puff: Albert was building himself a smoke screen. "I just figured we had to know some people in common."

Samantha was leaning forward, her elbows on her knees, Butch

noticed. It was hard to read her expression, though: absorbed or amused? She caught his gaze and favored him with the most innocent smile imaginable. Albert tapped one sharkskin shoe against the other.

Butch licked his lips nervously. He could make some comment about the weather, about the terrific heat these past few days. He got up from his chair. "It's getting cold in here. I'm going to turn the air-conditioning down." The adjustment panel was in the kitchen.

"Sure." Albert stuck a finger inside his collar and ran it around. Samantha said nothing, watching Albert.

On the way back from the kitchen, Butch heard the downstairs buzzer. Usually, it was like a one-minute warning; now it was a welcome sound. "Dinner's here, or it'll be here soon." He willed Samantha to rise, but she stayed seated until Albert got up, slapping down his trouser legs.

In a minute, the waiter from Jimmy's knocked at the door wheeling a trolley. He had been at Butch's before and knew where to set up. He winked at Butch, who slipped him a ten-spot in advance and called to his guests in the living room. Albert shambled in—that easy walk, as if he owned the place. At a time like this, the proper place for a daughter was by her father's side, Butch felt, and Samantha as if on cue promptly materialized on his left. She really did look attractive tonight in that red dress, and she must have known it. She may have had odd gaps in her education, but she had a thorough knowledge of her assets. She shrugged her smooth shoulders and let Butch pull out her chair. Albert knew well enough not to take Butch's chair at the head of the table and found his own seat across from Samantha.

The waiter was doing a professional job of laying the table: green tablecloth, green cloth napkins, and heavy silverware placed against china. There was a complimentary bottle of wine from Louis, with an apology for the rudeness of one of his employees. Butch nodded thoughtfully upon reading the note. He would have to drop in one night to thank him. Louis was really a good friend, from a vanishing stock.

The three of them sat in silence as the waiter poured the wine, served the soup, and left the other dishes on the table in covered trays.

"I hope you enjoy your meal. Please call the restaurant when you have finished, and we will send someone over to clean up." He bowed as he left the apartment.

Albert waved goodbye with a loose-jointed hand. He reached for his fork and stopped himself. "You people say grace?"

Samantha smiled sympathetically.

"No," said Butch shortly, and began the proceedings by picking up his soup spoon.

For a while, the activity of eating passed for communication among

them. Albert ate a lot of the Italian bread with his soup; he asked four times for the bread basket. Samantha took delicate sips of her soup until it was half-consumed and then sat with her hands folded in her lap. Inevitably, there was conversation, mostly about the hot spell, a nice safe topic as far as Butch was concerned. He still didn't like the way Samantha agreed with Albert, and even seemed to lean across to him during the meal. For once, the veal pizzeola seemed to be over-spiced, or maybe it was the company. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth.

They were almost finished with the meal when Albert intruded a different note into the conversation. He finished his veal and pushed away his plate. "That was great food." He grinned at Butch. "Food like that, a swell apartment—you must be pretty well fixed, right?"

Butch put down his fork. A light breeze from nowhere ran against his chest. "I have money, if that's what you mean."

"I think you know what I mean, and you can speak my language, too. I happen to know we're in the same line of business, only now you're retired. How do I know?" Albert rolled his eyes, looking everywhere but across from him. "A little bird told me."

There was a tender feeling growing in Butch's chest, as if the light breeze were blowing through Butch's sternum. Or boring a hole. There was danger here, but it was too late to avoid it. He was in the direct line of fire. Find a confederate. He looked at Samantha, who turned suddenly—and smiled. And kept smiling, the strength of it joined by Albert's grin.

The smile was pitying and said I know you, old man, and you're not what you think you are. If you ever were a big-time gangster, that's all over, it's been over for years, and maybe you can still impress doormen with it. The smile widened and said you've gotten feeble and boring, and I want life, see the man I brought tonight, he has a real gun, he showed it to me. Samantha's eyes flashed in scorn at Butch for just a second, then reasserted their pretty blueness.

His response was pain. The pain was so awful that Butch wondered if Albert hadn't shot him. There was a past to this, but it was consumed in a moment. His chest constricted as if pulled in by fiery threads. He grimaced and put out his hand. That made it worse.

"Are you all right, Daddy?" Neither she nor Albert made any move to get up.

The sudden pain was subsiding now, leveling into a chest-high ache. He remembered once when he had climbed seven flights of stairs with a bullet lodged in his shin—no, that was the man he had shot. He gritted his teeth. "I'm all right. Twinge—of something. I'll be okay in a minute." His own voice sounded funny to him. Could die laughing.

"You should take something for that. I got a friend who works in drugs."

Butch nodded, face set against the pain. If he got up, if he could just straighten himself out. . . he took hold of the armrests and pushed himself upwards, but when he was standing, another pain shot through his chest. A green and yellow pain, sparks under the skin. He groaned and held on to the table.

Samantha looked at him curiously. "I think we should call an ambulance."

"Yeah, good idea. You got the number?"

"870-6000." She got up and went to the phone in the kitchen. Butch could hear her voice but not the words. Sound was leaving him in a thin blue trail, like revolver smoke. It wasn't happening; he took a deep breath but exhaled onto the carpet. Or someone did, in excruciatingly slow motion. How had he gotten to the floor? He looked up and saw Albert watching him. Albert was joined by Samantha and they both watched him, the man with the purple face.

"Should we move him to the couch?" Albert cocked an eyebrow at Samantha.

Leave me alone! Butch shouted, but no one heard him.

"No, we might make it worse."

"Hah?"

"Worse than it is." She turned her back on the scene. "I'm going to wait in the living room."

"You're not running out, are you?" He took her hand.

"Of course not." She shook herself free, drew herself up straight, and looked right past the man on the floor. At least it looked that way from Butch's perspective. She spoke: "I'm Butch Donaldson's daughter."

Or maybe they said nothing at all.

A bookmaker in Butch's brain started offering odds for survival. Butch took a piece of the 5 to 3 against and roamed the ceiling with his eyes. The voices faded into a gentle buzz, then rose to a hum. Two men in white were walking on top of him, pushing a wheeled ambulance cot. They shimmered as if they were undersea. Reaching down, they levered him onto the cot, and he hardly felt the pain at all, they had surrounded his whole body with gauze. His head lolled to the right, and he got a view of the living room.

Samantha and Albert stood in view like two flat portraits, saying something inaudible. Albert buzzed and Samantha nodded. She moved towards the door.

I want the punk to come along, too, they're both in it, you hear me? A bubble of spit surfaced and broke on Butch's lips.

Samantha was nodding her head, the first man in white was nodding back, the whole procession moving towards the door. Samantha bent over and brushed her lips against his cheek. His last view as they wheeled him down the hall was of her, waving, retreating, shutting the door behind her. A double-cross, he should have known, he of all people should have been prepared. He lay back against the cot, trying to keep his features without expression. Bluff them and he might get out of it yet, there was still a chance. The attendants glided the cot to a halt in front of the elevator and pushed the DOWN button as Butch waited, looking for an out, figuring the odds, biding his time.

The Wild Boy

CATHERINE MELLETT

I'd never known anyone who drowned before, so I was disappointed that my mother wouldn't let me go to the funeral. She said we didn't know the family well enough.

She didn't know that ever since Paul Raymond Scarborough and his little sister Lily had moved to our neighborhood I'd been watching them. I thought I knew everything about them.

Their father was the policeman who walked the beat near Zale's Drugstore on Galveston. He went fishing on his thirtieth birthday. He took a new fishing pole, a gift from his wife, to the river around midnight, after his shift was over. The man who went with him said he turned around for just an instant—and turned back in time to see Paul Raymond's father grope for the fishing pole as it went floating by. Then he saw his friend slip off the barge into the black silk river.

Paul Raymond missed a week of school, and Sister Theresa warned us not to mention his father when he came back.

He returned with a new baseball mitt, all leather. We stared. No one was supposed to bring toys to school, but we all knew why Sister let him. "I don't care, I don't care," he said. "I have this." He bragged about his new mitt and pushed his fist into it as if his hand were a fly ball. He looked pale and nervous and thinner. He was not the same boy at all. I noticed how his long blond hair, streaked with brown, looked like a collie's fur, and that he always wore the same beige pants and frayed white shirts to school. It must have been then that I began to watch both of them to see how they might change.

Every Halloween, the school had a costume party. The morning before the party, Paul Raymond and Lily came into the schoolyard late, just as everyone was about to go in. Lily wore a black mask and carried a huge orange plastic pumpkin. The pumpkin had a black strap that was wound around Lily's wrist so she wouldn't lose it. She moved as if she were pretending she was a queen.

"What does she think she's doing?" one of the girls said.

"She thinks it's Halloween," another one said in a loud voice. "She thinks the party's today."

In a dull, uninterested voice, one girl said, "April fool, stupid. Nobody else is dressed up."

Lily crumpled onto the ground. She cried and her legs thrashed, as if she were trying to wake from a nightmare. The pumpkin, still wrapped around her wrist, went back and forth furiously. It sounded like a milk carton rolling on the ground.

Paul Raymond knelt down and said to her, "Mom made a mistake. You'll get candy tomorrow." But it didn't do any good.

One of the nuns came over. "What is it?" she said. "What's wrong with the child?"

"She thinks it's Halloween," someone said.

The nun bent over Lily, trying to comfort her, but Lily kicked her away.

I don't know why I thought of it, but I stepped forward. "Here's something she might like," I said. I pulled an apple out of my jacket pocket and held it out to her.

When her eyes focused on it, she reminded me of the way a baby looks at things. She sat up and took it and was quiet. The nun picked her up and carried her inside. Lily turned and watched me as she passed by, the apple still clutched in her hands.

That afternoon, I watched Paul Raymond as he collected his things from his desk and went to get Lily. I stayed behind, putting my books away slowly, only to catch up to Paul Raymond and Lily later.

They meandered their way around the streets, as if they didn't really want to go home, and I followed about half a block behind. The orange pumpkin bobbed from Lily's wrist like a beacon. They went around a corner quickly. Paul Raymond doubled back and caught me. He grabbed me by the collar and held me there, while Lily clutched her books and jiggled the pumpkin.

"Quit following us, Mattie," he said. "Or I'll tell your mother." When he released me, he ducked his head in that odd way he had, as if he were warding off a blow. He said, "Or *walk* with us, if you want to. But don't go sneaking up on us like that. You're scaring Lily."

From that day until they were gone, the three of us walked home from school together—the two of them in front and me, a few steps behind, stubbornly refusing to really walk with them.

It was exceptionally warm that year, clear into November when both Paul Raymond and Lily began missing school. Soon Paul Raymond wasn't coming at all. When I asked Lily where he was, she said, as if she had practiced it, "My mother says not to say."

When Sister Theresa took roll call in the morning, she said his name without looking up, as if she knew he wouldn't be there.

One night, my mother and I watched the local news. The announcer said that a boy from our area was missing. They showed a school photo of Paul Raymond.

"I know him!" I said, jumping off the couch. "He's in my class."

"I hope he's not a friend of yours," my mother said. She didn't like to talk about bad things. "His poor parents."

I explained that Paul Raymond was the boy whose father died—the funeral she wouldn't let me attend.

She looked back at the television, her mouth open wide. "Why, that poor child. I'm sure he'll come home soon."

But I didn't want him to. I wanted the mystery to last longer. Seeing his picture on TV, hearing him talked about, was better than seeing him in school every day. I thought that, finally, some of the excitement might touch me.

The next day I was in the schoolyard when Lily came out for the break. She sat down on a bench far away from the swings.

Everyone watched her. Then we surrounded her.

One of the other children said, "Somebody took Paul Raymond." Another one said, "Somebody took 'em and cooked 'em and ate 'em up good."

I wanted to sit next to Lily, but I didn't.

She looked up into their eyes and kept looking, and I was glad for her that she didn't back down.

She had two ponytails that ended in points, one on each side of her head. They barely touched her shoulders. The other children kept talking, but Lily stared straight ahead as if she didn't hear a thing. Her ponytails trembled. Then some of the children talked louder at her, trying to make her look at them.

Jimmy Dee Dodson looked at her. I admired Jimmy Dee because he was the best-looking black boy in our class and because when he played the piano I felt warm all over. He could play jazz and it sounded just like a record even though he couldn't even read music. The teachers let him be bad because they all loved the way he played. When Jimmy Dee said bad things or strutted like a chicken as he always did before a performance in the auditorium, the nuns just said, "Boys will be boys." And then they'd ask him to play. I wanted to play music like that, too, and I wanted Jimmy Dee to teach me.

Jimmy Dee walked up to Lily and stood there awhile. Then he snapped his fingers three times in a rhythm in front of her face, as if he was going to start to play. She didn't move.

"Ummmmm-mmmm-ummmm," he said. "That Paul Raymond sure tasted gooo-uuud." He made smacking noises with his lips. Then he pretended he had a long bone. He clamped his teeth down on it and

pulled and chewed and pulled. Then he licked it clean and threw it over his left shoulder for good luck.

"Your brother," he said to Lily. "He a *good* meal."

Lily missed school the following day, but she came back the next. She tried to stay inside at lunchtime but the nuns found her and put her out.

Jimmy Dee waited for her in the schoolyard. We were all waiting. Jimmy Dee started up again and this time when he was done, he walked his chicken walk back and forth in front of her. He arched his back and stretched out his legs long and slow. He moved his head forward this way and that.

Lily buried her head in her hands.

Jimmy Dee's sister, Arnetta, was a big chocolate brown girl known for picking fights when she was bored and winning them. She was the only person who scared Jimmy Dee. Arnetta walked up from the back of the crowd and shoved Jimmy Dee aside. She put a hand on top of Lily's head and left it there. For a moment, I was frightened.

"*Girl*, you so silly," Arnetta said. "Don't you listen to him. Ain't nobody eat your brother. He be back. You see."

Arnetta turned then to Jimmy Dee and gave him a look that leveled him. "You so *brazen*," she said.

Lily got up and ran back inside.

One day I was on my way back to school after lunch. A yellow dog with yellow eyes trailed after me with his head down and his yellow eyes on me like I was a bird. When I crossed the street, he crossed. Just as I passed the big lot where the trucking company was, behind Monument Hill, I heard screaming and yelping and laughing—children's voices, the way they act when they pretend they've seen a ghost.

The children came screaming across the top of Monument Hill and then down the long row of wooden city steps to the bottom. There were two or three girls, led by Jimmy Dee.

Jimmy Dee was the first one that reached me. He was out of breath. He stooped forward and held his ankles with his hands until he stopped laughing and got his breath.

"He's up there!" he said when he straightened up. He turned and pointed. I could barely see one of the old abandoned wooden houses through the trees.

"Paul Raymond is up there," he said.

The others reached us and some of them looked afraid, but they were all laughing.

A skinny girl from another class was there. She wore a wrinkled yellow dress. She held her hip way out when she talked. "I saw him,"

she said, jutting her hip out even more. "We went in there and he chased us away." She held two fingers to her nose. "It was nasty in there!"

"You go up there," Jimmy Dee said to me. "He look like a skeleton. It stink up there. That boy, he shit all over the place."

The other girls yelled, "Jimmy Dee said, 'Shit!' " over and over.

Just then, that yellow dog came over to me. He stood up on his hind legs and wrapped his front paws around my waist. He started humping. I couldn't get him off, and Jimmy Dee wouldn't help me. He thought it was funny. The girl in the yellow dress looked disgusted. "You're nasty now," she said to me. I struggled with the dog, trying to move his huge front paws off my waist, but he knocked me over onto the ground.

A man from the trucking company came outside. He had a silver pipe in his hand. He knocked the dog on the head with it. It cried and ran away. I thanked the man in a small voice. The others wouldn't let me walk with them, but they talked about what happened with the dog all the way to school. "I don't think he should have hit him," the girl in the yellow dress said to the others, who all agreed.

"I do," I said, but they turned their backs.

"Which house is he in?" I said, looking up to the top of Monument Hill, trying to pick out houses through the trees.

"Never you mind," Jimmy Dee said. He pinched me, hard on the arm. "We saw him, and he's *our* secret—not yours. And don't you tell anyone about him." He stopped and stood his ground in front of me, the way he did with Lily in the schoolyard. The other girls looked on, fixing loose braids and wayward socks. I saw the face of the one in the yellow dress turn away abruptly. Then Jimmy Dee did something that surprised me. He told the girls not to tell either. They all looked down at the ground for awhile as he talked, swinging his arms, walking his chicken walk, powerful again. I knew right then that even though they didn't need to, they would obey him. And then we all began walking.

All afternoon I thought about what Jimmy Dee and the others had done. On the way home from school, I went to look for Paul Raymond. I was afraid to go up the city steps, so I went the long way, up the cobblestone road that turned to dirt after the first few houses.

I came to the white house and listened at the door, but there weren't any sounds. Some of the windows had big planks of plywood over them. A plank had been pried off of one window to show the broken panes of glass. I looked in the front window but saw nothing, and then I went in. The house was cool and smelled like earth. There was a dark fireplace on the wall farthest from me. It had charred bits of wood still in it,

and mists of soot crept up the wall from the opening. The pink and grey speckled linoleum floor had been ripped up in places. There was a little room off to one side with a dry dirty toilet, a sink and a bed that was all rusted springs, no mattress.

That was where I found Paul Raymond. As if he were asleep standing, he looked out the gray window in that room, with his hands down at his sides. He didn't have a shirt on, just his beige pants which were wrinkled and dirty and his white high-top sneakers, as if he had decided to run away from home in the middle of getting ready for bed.

When he turned and saw me, he came across the room in an instant to where I was standing. He fell on me, touched my neck and my dress, put his hands all over me. His fingers felt like a tiny animal's or a baby's. He said, "Do you have anything? Do you have anything for me to eat?"

He opened the fasteners on my lunchbox while it was still in my hand. He touched the leftover wax paper and threw it on the floor as if it had burned him. He turned around quickly and walked toward the window, running his fingers through his blond hair, causing it to stand up in tufts like a rooster's crown. As he moved his hands, his shoulder blades looked like wings. I stood there with the open lunchbox dangling from my hand. Across his back were three long marks in a row like the shadows of windowslats on the floor when it's sunny.

Two tomatoes lay on the windowsill in front of him. Each had large black spots, sockets without eyes.

I went right home. There was a woman in our living room that my mother sewed for. She was an oddly shaped woman, straight up and down, no waist. My mother always complained about how many fittings the woman required. No sooner had they thought the job was complete than she gained more weight, and the whole thing had to be ripped out and done over. The woman wore a dress the color of fallen leaves, and my mother walked around her, pinning.

I went upstairs and changed into my after-school clothes. I came down and went into the kitchen and gathered what I needed. I took a few matches out of every box on the shelf over the stove and candles from the drawer. Finally, I took the chicken breast from my plate and wrapped it in two paper napkins, the heavy ones we used on Sundays, and scooped the mashed potatoes and peas over it. I got another napkin and cut two slices of chocolate cake off the roll in the breadbox.

I made a pouch out of all of it and stuffed it down into my slacks, pulling my blouse over.

I went past the living room door sideways.

"What have you got there, Mattie?" my mother said. She had pins in her mouth. "I hope you're not feeding some cat again."

"I'm *not*, Mom," I said. "Honest. I'm just in a hurry."

I prowled around the front of the hall for more things. I took my sweater from the hall closet and a little square of blanket that I found at the bottom of a box.

The woman was saying to my mother as I left, "Imagine. A child her age saying she's in a hurry. And that tone of voice. *My* daughter knows better than to..."

My mother stopped her cold. "When you work, like I do, you have to trust that you've put some sense into their brains not to get into trouble in the first place. Now let's step out of this."

When he saw the food, he fell on me again, snatching it up. And when he was done, so quickly, I realized it wasn't enough, and I felt ashamed, but neither of us said anything.

I saw several large planks at the back of the house and we propped them against the front window so that no one could see in.

Then I went out to gather sticks and paper for a fire. "I'll be the lookout," I said. "Stay in there so no one sees you."

His strained face looked so sure of me now, so certain, and he retreated into the house.

"Put the sweater on," I told him. I liked it that I had to tell him everything. It was as if he were mine now.

I gathered the newspapers that were strewn all over the hill. I went back in and piled the sticks and paper in the fireplace and set a match to it all. After awhile, the fire got big and we sat down in front of it. Soon his face filled with orange light, but lines of dirt made his thin chin appear to jut out even more. It became hot but he still shivered. When he saw me watching him, he buried his face in his hands. I gave him the jacket I was wearing. I moved next to him and put my arm around him, like I'd seen him do with Lily.

I went to school the next two days as if nothing had happened. I watched Lily even more than before. It was exciting to watch her, knowing that she still wondered where he was.

At night, as I fell asleep, I would think about Paul Raymond and Lily. I would imagine him falling asleep in his little house on Monument Hill. I wanted to tell Lily that he was safe, but I knew that meant he would be sent back home and that he didn't want to go. Somehow I think I also knew that if I told I might never see him again.

Once I went up to Lily and said, "You don't have to worry about Paul Raymond. *I* know he's all right." She looked at me. For an instant, her anger scared me, and then she pushed past me to go into her classroom. Her body seemed like a tree, so much stronger and more lasting than my own. I remember thinking, how interesting it was the

way bad things changed people.

In the meantime, I saved everything I had for him. I no longer felt hungry. I went into my mother's change purse because he said he had never had a milkshake. I went to the drugstore and bought him one, real business-like, and had them put it in a brown paper bag with a straw, and I took it up there.

We played 500 Rum and Fish and War. We played hide-and-seek around the house. I would motion to him to get back every time I thought I saw someone or heard a car.

That summer my friends and I had gotten old doors from abandoned houses around the hill and had made them into doors for our houses. We dug big holes in the ground and put the doors on top of them. When the doors were closed they looked as if they were just ordinary doors lying side by side on the ground, but when you opened them, there was a shallow dent inside shaped like a sugar spoon. Two children could lie down in one and talk.

I took him to see those houses in case he ever needed another place to hide. Once, when we were lying inside one, talking, Paul Raymond thought he heard someone walking on the earth above us. I started to sit up. He pushed me down, and clasped a hand over my mouth.

When he thought it was safe, he took his hand away and said, "She's in bed all day long like she's sick, but I know she isn't. I told her she should make dinner for us like she used to." He said proudly, "My father never hit us, and I'm not going back there to be hit by *her*. If they find me, I'll run away again and come back here."

"You can't stay here forever," I said. I could hear regret in my voice.

"Yes, I can," he said. "She's real stupid. She said that she sees herself in the kitchen cooking, as if she's really done it. She talks to me in a crazy way now." He tried to imitate his mother's voice, " '*Paul Raymond*,' she says, '*I get up and light the stove and get out the pots and pans and peel the potatoes for you kids just like I always did. I just came in here to lay down because I'm tired.*'

"One time I woke her up to get us something to eat. She just pointed toward the kitchen and said, '*Dinner's on the table. Go in there and take a look. It's time you kids did something for yourselves for a change.*' But there wasn't anything."

"You could live with us," I said.

"They don't just give you to anyone," he said, bitterly. "*She* told Lily and me."

"Someone else could take you," I said. "A rich lady." I thought of the woman my mother sewed for and figured even a woman like that would be better than no one.

"I told you," he said, angry now. "They don't take big boys like me. Only little babies. That's all they want."

He said to me, as if it were an insult, "*Your* father's dead, too. Did your mother act like that?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was a baby."

"They might take Lily," he said, as if he'd been considering this all along. I said nothing.

As we sat talking in the dark, pieces of earth slipped into my collar and down my back.

One night when I got home from school, my mother followed me into the kitchen.

"No," she said. "You're not taking anymore food out of this house. Either eat it here or don't eat it at all. I don't know *what* you're up to," she said. "I just know you've got a dog or cat somewhere. And you're staying home tonight for a change."

I protested, but nothing worked. She had me stay by her side all evening long while she worked on two customers.

Late that night when my mother and I watched the news together, the first story was about their finding Paul Raymond. I glanced sideways at my mother. She lay on the couch on the opposite side of the room. She sat up and gathered the crocheted quilt around her feet and then leaned forward to listen. The newscaster interviewed the woman who found him. She lived at the bottom of the hill and had noticed a lot of children going up there lately. She'd seen the boy going into one of her garbage cans.

A cigarette dangled from the woman's hand as she rubbed her chin with her palm. I thought she was going to cry. "It was awful," she said. "Just awful. . . Who would do that to a child? He'd been beaten. You could tell. He looked like a wild boy. Simply wild. He'd been eating what he could find, I guess. I gave him something before I called the police."

The reporter could not keep his voice steady. He described Paul Raymond's condition. He talked about how he and his sister were neglected, that Paul Raymond had been beaten by his mother for going into the refrigerator. They would both be placed in foster homes.

"Mattie," my mother said, severely. "Mattie, didn't you say you knew that boy? Didn't you?"

I sat looking straight ahead, just like I had seen Lily do in the schoolyard. Right then, I blamed myself for his being found.

They showed the front of the apartment building where Paul Raymond and Lily lived. A man in a suit carried Lily in his arms down the steps to a waiting police car, as if he were rescuing her from a

burning building. The neighbors jeered at a pale woman in a housedress who first clutched at Lily and then pulled herself away. Lily took no notice. She looked instead at the man who was carrying her, in the same dazed way she had looked at my apple.

All sense of excitement disappeared when a man in a baseball jacket threw a rock at their window and broke it. Excitement was replaced by the constant sound of my mother's voice calling my name, taming me, making me long for comfort again.

Stay. Please Stay

DUSTY SKLAR

I

The King of Husbands

You lie on the bed and you listen to this man whom you have loved ever since you first learned how—you listen to him telling you that there is something about him you do not know. Something dark. Something he says you will think is dark, though to him it is not dark at all. Something you have never suspected. You lie on the bed and you listen, and here is what you hear:

"I want to be open with you," he says. "I have always wanted that. You make it impossible. It is you who prevent it. If I am open with you, you will shut me down. You will cry. You will get upset."

You are already upset and ready to cry, but you do not because he has warned you, and because you do not want to shut him down. You lie on the queen-sized bed in your worn nightgown and he paces in front of you in the brightly lit room. You try to compose your face so that it hides the animal flinch you cannot avoid. He must see it because he refuses to go on, refuses to report this dark secret. You do not recall his ever saying the word "dark" before. Everything about him is light. There has always been a boycotting of the dark with him. And now this dark secret. Maybe he is testing you. Maybe he is trying to teach you something new, stupid girl.

You go right on lying there on the bed, letting yourself go rigid way inside your skin where he cannot see. You observe the pride in his face which he cannot hide. You squint at the light from the lamp on the night table. "Please," you say, trying to keep the tremor out of your voice. "I love you. You can tell me anything." You try to attend to the hiss of the radiator.

"I would do anything rather than hurt you," he says. "Anything. You know that. I love you too much. Maybe that's the trouble. We've loved each other too much. Too long. Guess," he says. "Guess what it is I want to tell you."

Of course you can guess it has to do with loving each other too much

and too long.

His hair still has some brown left in the grey, you notice, and it hits you that he has lost his paunch some time between now and the last time you looked at him. You remember the alarm clock ringing an hour earlier that morning. You remember the new sox he put on that morning.

"I don't want to guess," you say. "Tell me."

He tells you. Here is what he tells you:

"This does not have to hurt you," he says. "I know you think I have been faithful. I have not. In the past it has not meant a thing. Now it does," he says.

You hear the wail of an ambulance siren as it draws nearer.

There is only one steadfast friend to whom you want to turn in this confusion, but it is more confusing that he is the one friend causing the confusion.

You did not even know that this man liked women. You thought he was afraid of women because of that wild woman who wrecked his childhood. You thought you were the only woman he could ever love.

"Who is she?" you ask. You have heard there are very few men to go around and you have to share and you are probably lucky to have had this one as long as you have. Or thought you had. You pull the covers over your worn nightgown. Your shaking knees make the covers leap.

"Are you sure you want me to talk about it?" he asks. Your hands lie stiffly on the covers and he looks right at the swollen knuckle on the first joint of your index finger. Your throat is too tight to let out any sounds, so you nod with enthusiasm. You look at bruises, calluses, scabs on your hands you have failed to see before. Where did your hands collect all these scars? You wish you were a cloud which could float away. Yesterday you were seventeen; tomorrow, at this rate, you will be seventy. Time is going by too fast, and it does not seem to be taking you with it.

"She is someone you would really like," he says. "She is the most honest person I have ever met. That is why I want to be honest with you. She makes it seem so attractive to be open."

"Enough," you say. "Enough."

Part of what you hate about Sundays is sitting in the kitchen after breakfast with a cup of coffee while your king of husbands sees his new love. You resist the impulse to sweep the cup and saucer off the table. You spend the day trying not to look at the clock. You talk to friends on the telephone, and they tell you what you must do. They have done it, they say, and it works.

When it grows dark you hear his car in the driveway, then his key turning in the lock, but the door is open. He seems pleased to see you sitting at the kitchen table where he left you this morning.

"Well, hello," he says. "How nice to see you."

Nothing you thought to do could stop it now. It must run its course, like a disease, that's what your friends diagnosed.

"Did you see the moon out there?" he asks, as though he had invented it.

Later you wake in terror and loneliness. The house is so silent all around you. You put out your hand and he is there. He has not left you. Not yet. He wants you. A real treaty, mouth to mouth, is signed.

"I want you both," he says. "I want two lives."

You do not even want one life, it occurs to you.

On Monday night he tells you after dinner that he is leaving for an overnight business trip the next morning.

"Taking her with you," you say.

He reaches for your hand and squeezes it. "It is not a place you would like," he says. "You would hate it."

You withdraw your hand and cup it with your other hand. It feels as cold as if you were outdoors in ski country without gloves. "I hate you," you say.

"Please don't say that," he says. "I am not taking anything away from you. This is just an addition to my life. I love you as much as ever. I did not look for this. But now I want it."

"Enough," you say. "Enough."

You stay downstairs while he goes upstairs. When he comes downstairs later, you go upstairs without looking at him as you pass. You hunt for his packed suitcase and find it at last in his closet. It is the good leather one—the one you bought him years ago which he could never bring himself to use because it was too good. Maybe he thinks you are too good.

You go downstairs and see him sitting on the sofa with arms folded across his chest. He is wearing his old black sweater and baggy corduroy pants and he has not shaved. He is staring vacantly out the window. He is playing the Edith Piaf record.

"There is something about me you do not know," you shriek. "I want you to die. That is the only thing that could make me happy now."

He looks hurt, yet annoyed. "Why are you so upset?" he asks. "I am not going to leave you. Why don't you look at the positive side?"

You know that he will not leave you and that you will not leave him and that you will go on loving each other and that you will not ever, ever, ever look at the positive side and that you will never stop feeling this bereavement.

II.

Broken Wings

Her husband's affair with Shoshana Aron has lasted six months, and Etta Willis has asked him to leave. He is taking his time. Shoshana's apartment is too cramped, and they are looking for a larger one in her sons' school district.

It is Saturday, and Preston is supposed to be out scouting a place, but when Etta's date arrives and she seats him in the living room with a *kir* on the rocks and is getting ready to answer his question about why she put a personals ad in the *New York Review of Books*, she spies, out of the living-room window, Preston's car racing up the driveway. She breaks off in midsentence to rush into the kitchen and catch him. He bursts through the kitchen door and moves to hug Etta, as he always does when he comes from Shoshana, but Etta extends a stiff arm and hisses, "There's someone here, damn it."

His eager, friendly look turns to bewilderment. "Who?"

"A date."

"You didn't tell me."

"I don't have to tell you anything any more. You were supposed to be gone all weekend."

"I got a terrible toothache and had to come back for root canal. I don't have to be at Shoshana's until five. I had hoped to see you."

"Well, isn't that just too ducky for words? What am I supposed to do? You should have called. You can't just come walking in here whenever you like."

Preston is still living in the house with Etta, and even though he is limp with love for Shoshana, he is taking his time about moving out.

Etta cautions Preston not to dare set foot out of the kitchen. Sheepish, he agrees. He looks apologetic. "I'm sorry, Et." His face is pale and puffy and he acts like an intruder, which he is.

Etta rejoins her date, a sorrowful-looking young man all in black who struggled out to the suburbs on a bus which took him to the wrong part of town, then walked over a mile rather than call her for a lift. She is surprised by the roses he brought, even more surprised by his youth. He is younger than her eldest son, divorced, with a child as old as her grandchild. Even though he has brought roses and struggled out on the bus to spend the day with Etta, he does not seem romantic in the least, and Etta wonders if he is disappointed in her appearance. He knows her age from the ad, so it could not be that. But maybe he did not expect her to look so much like a high school principal, which is what she is often told she resembles. She does not perceive herself that way. She imagines she looks elfin. Even looking elfin, she cannot

imagine an involvement with this young man, cannot even imagine how she will get through the afternoon, especially with Preston in the kitchen. On the phone the day before, the young man had sounded middle-aged, sprinkling his speech with "perhaps" and "viable." The roses are still lying on the piano, wrapped in wax paper, near the photograph of Etta and Preston locked in each others' arms beside the Thames, but Etta will not go back into the kitchen to get a vase and water.

"Do you mind my asking, Jason" (Jason is also the name of her eldest son, and she should have realized that no one of her generation was named Jason), "why you want to see an older woman?"

"I don't even know myself. Maybe because I don't get along with people my own age. I have nothing to say to them, and they have nothing to say to me."

Having something to say is one of the greatest problems of dating, Etta is learning. This is her tenth date since she asked Preston to leave, and on every one of them she has recounted her tragedy: how her husband, after 37 wonderful years, was captivated by Shoshana. Every guy she has been with has been grateful that Etta had something to say and could say it in a lively way. It puts them at ease. Some of her friends warn her she should not be talking about her husband at all, but she has already developed enough savvy to know the thing was just to hold their attention in as spirited a way as possible. And don't, of course, act depressed. Just melancholy enough to play out what radio psychologists called the broken-wing syndrome.

There is noise from the kitchen. "You may as well know," Etta tells Jason, "that's my husband in there. He had to have root canal and came unexpectedly. Maybe we should go out."

"Fine with me," says Jason. "Whatever you like."

Etta never tells her dates that Preston is still living at home. She declares herself to be "newly separated." Newly separated and with a broken wing, but on the mend and looking forward to amorous adventure. It seems to go down well. Amazing how quickly she has developed a breezy manner. She attributes it to a competitive spirit, which drives her to find a companion with whom to make a better life than Preston could ever hope to have with Shoshana and her two wretched sons. Etta is driven, too, by the need to have her dates assure her that Preston is a crazy fool to dump such a great lady.

Jason has not yet given such assurance. He seems in need of reassurance himself. His wing is at least as broken as hers, from the look of him. Etta coaxes him into his jean jacket and out the front door, which locks behind them before she remembers that Jason does not have a car.

"Wait here," she orders, leaving him standing on the sidewalk in

a slight drizzle while she goes around to the kitchen door to get her car keys. Preston is not in the kitchen. He comes in from the living room, where he has probably been trying to catch a glimpse of Jason out the window, but he tactfully does not refer to him.

"Et, I'm real sorry to screw you up this way," he says. "Forgive me?"

She will not give him the satisfaction of chatting, and almost runs down Jason in her haste to back the car out of the driveway, but he is so sorrowful-looking that he does not appear to notice. She regrets that she must drive, because her concentration is not great.

She takes him to Louie's Charcoal Pit, where she has gone with every date so far, and only now, because of Jason's youth, does she pause to reflect how this might seem to Louie and his brassy trio of waitresses, who have known her for years as part of an inviolable family. It seems to her that everyone in the diner is staring at her. They might think she has become the town whore. As far as she knows, the role is unoccupied. But then, as far as she knew, Preston had never eyed another woman.

Etta and Jason sit facing each other in the cracked red vinyl booth of the diner, exactly where Etta sat with Preston and the kids the night they celebrated his going to work for Donald Trump. She remembers the taste of the broiled salmon she had that night. She remembers being afraid that she will never be able to live up to the glamour of Trump Tower. She has tried, Lord knows, she has tried to be worthy of Trump Tower, taking greater pains with her appearance and clothing, but she knows she never came close to approaching the elegance of the other women she had seen in the atrium.

She wonders what Jason would think if he knew he was dining with the wife of the vice president of the Trump Organization. Jason looks as though he has never even heard of Donald Trump. Jason is trying hard to make up his mind whether to have lasagne or meat loaf. Etta figures she may as well attend to him and forget about Preston.

"The chopped sirloin is better than either the lasagne or the meat loaf, if you want my opinion," she says. "I have it all the time. In fact, I'm going to have it now; what do you think of that?"

Jason does not seem to think anything. Etta craves a cigarette so badly. She asks Jason if it would bother him if she begs one from the woman across the aisle.

"Go ahead," he says.

The smoke stills the thrumming in Etta's abdomen, and she tries not to blow it in Jason's direction, for she can see his eyes moisten and his nose start to run.

"Why did you leave your wife?" she asks. "Do you mind telling

me?"

He coughs slightly. "I don't know, to tell you the truth. To this day, I don't know."

"You don't know? Really?"

"Even my therapist can't figure it out." The idea of such a quiet man having a therapist surprises her. Preston was a quiet man, too, when they married. He had been an unemployed errand boy, she a sophisticated stenographer when they married.

"Were you in therapy before your divorce?" She has heard of therapists coming between husband and wife.

"I have been in therapy almost since the day I was born."

"How come?"

"I don't feel at home in the world."

"Who does?"

"I don't know who does, but I know I don't and never did."

One of the brassy waitresses brings their dinners and gives Etta a wink of recognition as she sets down her plate.

Etta is about to say something motherly to try to cheer up Jason, but remembers just in time that she is no longer a nurturer, that she is now on her way to being a single woman.

"Is your wife—your ex-wife I mean—is she still angry at you?"

"Of course."

They eat in silence, Etta plotting how to divest herself of Jason in time to catch Preston before he leaves for Shoshana's house. Etta does not know why she wants to do this. She tells herself it is because she wants to see as much as she can of Preston before he moves out. It is a compulsion she cannot argue herself out of, and she just goes with it.

She insists on splitting the bill with Jason and then, even though only an hour-and-a-half has passed since he came, she offers to drive him to the bus stop.

"I'll have to stop back at your house," he says. "I left my sunglasses there."

She makes him wait in the car in front of her house while she dashes in to get the sunglasses. Preston is sitting in the den in front of the TV with a beer in his hand and looks ready to start a friendly conversation, but Etta whizzes past him with Jason's sunglasses.

When she drops Jason at the bus stop, neither one says anything about how good it was to meet or about how much they hope to see each other again soon.

Etta races back to the house just in time to see Preston pull his car down the driveway. She honks him, and he stops. He gets out of his car and she gets out of hers and they stand in the driveway between their cars.

"Don't leave," she is dismayed to hear herself beg. "Please don't leave, oh Preston, please please please don't leave."

He hugs her for a long time and then kisses her forehead and then leaves.

III.

Family Romance

I was angry when I arrived at my father's new house and saw its large arched windows overlooking a graceful garden. I compared it to the old house, now deeded to my mother, with its stingy backyard and dark, narrow kitchen.

"We lived so meanly. I wish I'd bought this years ago," my father said, forgetting that years ago there was neither the cash nor the motivation. He never had been any good at saying what he meant. Maybe he was regretting something more precious. Besides, he never would have bought this house years ago even if he did have the cash and the motivation. Years ago he was under the spell of Plato and Spinoza. Apparently he was over them now.

I wondered aloud if he compared wives. My sister and mother insisted his new one was rumored to have been on the prowl for an American millionaire. Wives were on my mind. I was thinking of getting one of my own. They made it easier to ignore your own deficiencies. All it took to get a decent wife was a decent career, but that was more than I could manage.

"That's different," he said. "There's no comparison."

Which I doubted. Just the other day he'd praised my mother, once taken for granted, for being good, smart, and calm. Now he made much of Shoshana's abundant lack of these qualities, and it wasn't clear if he was distressed or proud. He'd lived long with those virtues. Now he wanted others.

"Rafe," he waved at my shirt, pants, and shoes, "do me a favor, get yourself a new wardrobe. Nobody wears these." As if I needed a further reminder I was out of step.

He looked younger than I. It was the clothes. Shoshana had him dressed in skintight jeans and a blue denim shirt with buttons carefully opened. I could see his pale, soft, hairless chest. She'd taught him how to eat, or abstain, so he was lean again, as lean as when I was a boy. Even his sneakers were elegant. She'd done a thorough remodelling job. He wasn't eating meat. He was eating vegetables. He had given up reading. But he was smoking and drinking. His teeth were green when he smiled. Maybe they'd always been. I hadn't seen him smile much.

"Take off your shoes," he said.

The living room he took me into was neat and tidy in a way ours had never been: white carpeting, a large powder-blue sofa, down-filled, a long wall of books, the weightiest ones brought from the old house, a piano, hi-fi equipment. The walls were bare except for a life-sized portrait of Shoshana. Beyond the cushioned window seats I could see the pool. I looked around and thought, this is how I will never live.

I didn't completely understand as yet what my father was doing here, or how desperate I was for his recognition, and why.

I sank into one end of the sofa, he into the other end, and we regarded each other. He soon looked away. He didn't seem happy so much as excited, like a child at the circus.

"How's your mother?" He almost whispered it.

"She's hurting. Are you surprised?"

He shook his head, looked embarrassed. "I guess I've hurt you all," he said. "I guess I'm the culprit. I guess you're all mad at me."

"Do you really think this will last?" I asked in a parental tone. "Didn't you rush it?" He'd not yet remarried, but divorce was in the works. I had orders to talk him out of it. We had all expected it would wear thin after six months.

"I don't have much time, Rafe."

"You're not sick, are you?"

He gave a triumphant laugh, patting his flat stomach. "Never better. But I'm fifty-seven."

I hadn't lost track. It was much discussed at our house. Fifty-seven and mooning like a virgin adolescent.

"By the way, don't tell Shoshana," he added. "She thinks I'm fifty-three. How many years do I have left to enjoy myself?"

"You looked like you were enjoying yourself with Mom."

Even just before he moved out, he was always hugging her.

"We were together thirty-seven years, don't forget. That's a long time. It was different. I can't compare."

"Try. I'm really curious."

"You'll be hurt."

I assured him I wouldn't be.

"You won't tell your mother?"

I promised.

My mother was a great lady, he told me. She had given him a lot. A lot. Only it wasn't nearly enough and he hadn't realized it until he met Shoshana and was reborn. I waited for him to say more, but he didn't. This was already more than I'd ever gotten out of him about his own feelings. My mother or sister had been a conduit. My father and I had never been alone together since Little League days.

I studied Shoshana's portrait. Artificial curly blonde locks around a middle-aged gamin face, pleased with itself yet vulnerable. Maybe my father had felt death breathing in his ear. Maybe it was like a conversion experience. Maybe falling in love was always that. I wouldn't know.

"I want you to listen to this," my father said, and put on a record.

And there she was, Shoshana, singing a Carmen Miranda song in Hebrew. This fan was the same man who had introduced me to Plato and Spinoza. I was sure he believed he was now passing from a lesser to a greater perfection.

"What do you think?" he asked.

I thought maybe he was having a nervous breakdown. "Nothing special," I shrugged. I couldn't stand the voice. It irritated me.

"In Israel she was as big as Barbra Streisand," he said.

"It's a small country," I said.

Now Shoshana was the conduit. She was singing another song, one she had written herself, he boasted. He had always loved to boast, and my mother had never been able to break him of the habit. The song was called "Love Is Shit," which delighted him. He had never allowed us to say *shit* in his presence, I reminded him, and he said he was thrilled to behave against type. It tickled him.

"Love Is Shit" was even more unpleasant than the Carmen Miranda song. I pictured lovers railing, clawing at each other. The thin voice soared unperturbed, indifferent to the havoc it had caused my family. The songs were turning me against Israel, a frivolous country, judging by its stars.

"Dad," I said, "I've heard enough. I don't want to hear any more." My mother had warned me that if you let him he would play the records for you all day long. In his last few weeks with her, he had insisted on playing them for her friends, who were too polite to leave the room.

"You haven't heard the best ones," he said.

"I want to hear you," I said. "I want to hear why you left Mom, why you've rushed into buying this house."

"I told you."

"I still don't understand."

"There's nothing more to tell."

There had to be more. There was always more.

"All right," he said. "First let me play you three more songs and then I'll tell you."

My father liked to share his discoveries, philosophical or cultural, with everyone. Everyone had to love what he loved. Even my mother, he insisted, had to love Shoshana if she would only get past her ego wound.

I watched him as the voice throbbed on. He lay outstretched on the sofa, his gorgeous sneakers resting on my thigh. He gazed at the freshly painted ceiling, eyes moist with emotion. He muttered something appreciatively when at last the noise ended, and pulled himself up. Behind him, the sky in the window held the twilight, but darkness had fully possessed the garden. It was the moment in the day when you can smell the faint bitterness of eternity. The room itself had grown dark. His distant air conveyed an awful solitariness and the question of what to do with it, nudging me into my own isolation. He did not light the lamp and seemed content to sit in the dark. I had never seen him so preoccupied.

"You weren't listening," he said at last.

Of course I listened. How could I avoid listening?

"Why are you so taken with her?" I asked.

He gave some flimsy account of her exuberance, her past fame, all the adoring friends, her unpredictable feelings which gave his life drama.

I had hoped for something better from him. His explanation irked me. I realized that I would have to make my peace with it as best as I could. There would never be more. As there would never be, with him, a time to kick around my horror of the void.

It had all come to this: he was madly in love and had to go all the way. I'd seen this intensity before: at the dinner table when he read to us from Plato or Spinoza.

His attention seemed fixed so firmly on what was going on inside him that the outside world could be dark. It was humiliating, sitting here with him in the room he probably didn't even notice was dark, and watching him swoon over mediocrity.

I tried once more to bring him back to reality. "Look, Dad," I said. "There's nothing here. The empress has no clothes. This is a case of demonic possession."

He looked impatient. The annoyance of authority quibbled with. "Ask anyone who's seen her perform," he said. "She's a dazzling presence. She magnetizes people, not just with her voice, with her movements, with her personality. And not just me. Everyone's in love with her. She's fabulous."

"No," I said. "Absolutely not. I'm sorry. You're wrong, for once. I know more about music than you do. You're a musical illiterate. You're not in a position to judge. You're in the hands of a practiced seducer. I don't know what she does to you. Is it sex, is that what it is? Does she know some tricks?"

He shook his head violently. "It's not sex. The sex is good, but it's not great. She's just a terrific person. You'll see."

I couldn't validate his feelings. It was insane of him, asking his son

to let himself be captivated by his mother's successor.

"Dad," I said, "Dad, what are you doing? Do you know what you're doing?"

His face was empty of any understanding.

I went over to the bookshelf and pulled out Spinoza's *Ethics*. I turned to the part he had gone over with me many times in adolescence when I thought I would perish from a crush, when he had been convinced that reason could conquer any emotion. It had actually helped me every time.

I played the words back to him.

"I guess I'm just crazy," he said, pleased to be crazy for once in his life. "I guess there's more to me than you all thought. All I know is, Rafe, I hope you get to feel what I'm feeling before you're an old man. This beats philosophy, let me tell you. If Spinoza had felt this way I doubt he would have bothered to write and he probably would have lived a lot longer."

I didn't know about poor old Spinoza, but for once I didn't want to be in my father's sneakers.

"You won't need this any more, Dad," I said. "I'll take it back with me," and I left with Spinoza under my arm.

The Piano Lady

MAX WESTBROOK

Mrs. Finley was looking outside through the venetian blinds, watching the underleaves of a long, high limb dip down into the glow of the corner streetlight. When the lazy summer breeze let up, the leaves would vanish into the darkness above the arch of the streetlight. When the breeze returned, the leaves would dip down into the top edge of the light and dance, then vanish for a moment, then back again and gone again. The tea in her China teapot must be getting cold, she thought, but still she did not move.

This used to be such a nice neighborhood. She spoke the words in the silence of imagination. "This used to be such a nice neighborhood." She did not speak them out loud, the Lord be praised. She was not yet reduced to that pitiful defense against the loneliness of the world.

Sixty-three was not old, and her health was just fine thank you very much for asking, as if you thought me so old and decrepit I might kick off any day now.

Young people! Almost as cantankerous as old people, me for example.

Across the street the "car family" was returning from somewhere. Mrs. Finley had never seen so many cars in one family. She tried to count the number of adults in the family and the number of cars. There were three adults, maybe. With all the coming and going, it was hard to tell.

Something banged lightly in the kitchen. The ice maker? Banging ice cubes into the ice bucket? The thing had gone crazy. It was flinging ice cubes all over the freezer compartment, but why should that make her nervous? She was certainly used to it by now.

The whole house in fact was filled with odd noises. The air conditioning unit in the dining room hummed like an ancient, tuneless symphony played from far away in space, but picked up in the attic and played through that silly window fan. When Cody was a child he would sleep on his stomach and kick the bed with his right foot, always the right and never the left. Some nights she would hear him yet, Cody a grown man now and long since married and gone away, but the slap-

ping of his foot was still alive in the house. The house was full of old noises it was best not to talk about, certainly not with strangers, and that's about all she had to talk to these days.

Rock and roll music was thumping outside from the dark. It sounded like it came from across the street at the Hudson house.

How many cars, she wondered, did the "car family" have? With three adults coming and going, there seemed to be four cars that "lived" there. Sometimes a tall young man and his half-naked wife came to live in the Hudsons' house, and then there were *six* automobiles jammed into their driveway and crowding the street.

Only it wasn't the Hudson house anymore. It was where the car people lived, slept over, and all the Hudsons were dead — Ed and Sarah, the best bridge partners they ever had, though Ed smoked those awful cigars, Ed's father, who fell twice and hurt himself so terribly that second time, and even Jody, always on a diet and never lost a pound, dead from cancer and her not quite thirty, poor thing.

They were all dead. And Herbert. If his heart by-pass had held together for just two more months they could have celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary. Herbert.

She had not touched his "stamp room," and it was six months now, almost seven. One more week and it would be seven months. What on earth must she do with all those old stamps?

It was no good dwelling on the dead. She had told herself that a thousand times.

Mrs. Finley had a thought that upset her. She stepped back from the window. The blind she had been holding up with her thumb and index finger made a little clicking sound when she dropped it back in place. She was more than upset. She was frightened. Her lips had moved. When she thought "It's no good dwelling on the dead," her lips had moved. There was no sound, thank goodness, but she had definitely shaped the words with her lips.

Mrs. Finley determined to calm down. She must not let herself get so upset.

She would take it as a warning. Talking to yourself was one of the many little steps so many of her friends had taken into old age and senility, and the next step took you right to the cemetery. Yet she felt an allegiance to old friends, both the dead and the dying. Was she pledging allegiance to death? Were the dead tugging at her skirt? Was she under their spell?

Stuff and nonsense!

That's easy to say. "Stuff and nonsense" is easy to say, but I had better watch it.

I had better straighten up fast and get ahold of myself.

Mrs. Finley turned busily to her teapot. The tea was cold. She could warm it up. That meant going into the kitchen. She did not want to go into the kitchen. It was dark back there.

Dark. What time was it? How long had she been at the window looking out into the night?

Good heavens! It was almost nine o'clock. *Cagney and Lacey* would be on in four minutes. She had almost missed it.

With the TV on and the footstool in just the right place, Mrs. Finley looked about for something to do. There was her poor neglected knitting basket, all fancied up and sitting on top of the piano like a bowl of artificial flowers bought for an occasion no one now could remember. She used to knit while they watched TV. It had started when Herbert—the most unathletic of men—had become a fan of football on television. She had never enjoyed knitting, one of those endless chores a woman was supposed to enjoy, but it did enable her to be a good companion during football season without going absolutely insane.

Then the headaches started. Knitting was close work. It began to strain her eyes. She had to give it up, as she had to give up so much. Or it was taken away, as Herbert was taken away. Or it went away, as Cody had gone away to California.

Sweet, darling Cody. He *would* become a librarian specializing in computers. It was a good career, and they were proud of him, but it was such a specialized field. His best job offer was at the University of California at Davis. So he took it, and who could blame him?

Mrs. Finley's dream was that Cody would get on at U.T. Bless him, he did keep in touch with the Personnel Office at U.T., alert for any possible opening in his field. He and Melinda would come back to Austin if they could. What a joy it would be to take her own grandchildren to Zilker Park and push them in the swings and take them for a ride on the little train.

There was another noise in the kitchen. It was definitely not the icemaker. It was a clicking noise, the noise made by the magnets coming together when you close a cabinet door.

Someone was in the kitchen!

Mrs. Finley was terrified. Her legs and arms froze stiff. Her lungs were paralyzed. Her skull locked in place. Only her eyes were moving.

What must she do? Turn the sound off on the TV so she could hear him better? But then he would know he was discovered, and he could certainly hear better and run faster than she could. She could leave the sound on, tiptoe to the front door, and run. Where would she run to? Once in the street, what would she do then? Ask the "car family" for refuge? Seek assistance from the drunken couple who lived next door in the Chandlers' house and whose garbage cans were always knocked

over by dogs, beer cans, and wine bottles spilling out all over their driveway?

Mrs. Finley—at least in this one moment of horror—feared her neighbors almost as much as she feared the intruder in her kitchen.

Leave the sound up. The thought occurred in her head. Leave the sound up, and maybe he won't hear you calling the police.

Mrs. Finley was moving. She was pleased to see her finger dialing 911 with hardly any trembling at all.

"This is Mrs. Herbert Finley, 1819 East Berkshire Lane. There's someone in my kitchen."

The officer on the other end of the line was courteous and efficient. Mrs. Finley appreciated that.

Even more comforting was the fact that a police officer arrived so quickly. He must have been close by when she put in her call. She must remember to ask him.

The officer was a very nice looking young man with a neat mustache and a fresh haircut. He was so courteous! Mrs. Finley felt half of herself split off and fly away in a time warp. She stared at the young officer while hearing the echoes of courteous young men from long ago, men she had met at church back when she was first dating Herbert. Too many young men these days were rude and thoughtless, saying "Excuse me" to mean "Get out of my way."

He even introduced himself.

"Officer Thompson, ma'am."

When she told him her name, he cared enough to hear it and to remember it.

"Is there a light for the back porch, Mrs. Finley?"

And he explained everything so nicely. He didn't just swell around doing his job and ignoring her the way repairmen did when they came into her home.

"If you'll just wait right here, ma'am, I'm going to check out the back bedroom....

"That's Officer Hernandez in the side yard, Mrs. Finley. He's my backup."

And he was so thorough! He checked every inch of the house, and he spoke with Officer Hernandez to make certain there was no one in the yard.

But when you meet a really nice person, however briefly, there's always something more than words and actions. There is a quality. When Officer Thompson asked questions about her home, he didn't seem to be asking for information about anonymous places and things. He was clearly asking about her *home*. He didn't say "this room" and "that room." He said "the stamp room," "the breakfast nook."

Whatever she named, he picked up instantly, even "the broom closet," "the cedar closet." Oh, the quickness of youth!

In spite of his courtesy, in spite of his careful attention to details, Officer Thompson was keyed up. He exuded energy. His eyes were positively wild. His arms and legs were taut. He was a slender young man, but there were springs in his muscles. And those eyes! She had seen that look on the television faces of soldiers actually engaged in combat in Vietnam.

The wild eyes of the courteous and efficient young officer might have frightened Mrs. Finley on another occasion, but his gentle voice and thoughtful manners were absolutely convincing. She rather liked his wild eyes. They proved he was alert. If the intruder sprang from his hiding place, Officer Thompson would be ready. He would not be caught unprepared.

And yet there was more.

When the two officers found no intruder and no sign of an intruder, Officer Hernandez returned to other duties—got "back on the street" they called it—and young Thompson sat down with Mrs. Finley and gave her a full report.

There were no signs of breaking and entering, he explained. Each window had been checked, every door. All locks were secure.

Now you know what most young men would say next, most men of any age. Next would come the flat insult—there *was* no intruder—or worse, nasty little innuendoes about "elderly" people, especially "women," who jump at shadows in the night.

Not Officer Thompson.

With him, there was understanding.

"He might have tested the screen door on the back porch and found it latched tight. Jerking the door handle could have made a light metallic sound like the one you heard."

And confidence, filling her in from the viewpoint of the Police Department.

"It's probably a Peeping Tom we've been having trouble with. That's very upsetting of course, and he's definitely somebody we want to get off the street, but I can tell you he's never hurt anybody or even stolen anything."

Plus the good advice she should have thought of herself.

"Let's leave the porch lights on, both the front porch and the back porch. Plenty of outside lights, that's one of the best things you can do to make your home more secure."

And the lovely, thoughtful, manly promise!

"I'll be checking back by between calls. Whenever I'm clear, I'll drive by at a walking pace and check, just to be on the safe side."

Mrs. Finley was overcome.

She had to do something in return, to give him something, not tea and cookies, which she knew was no longer the custom, but something of herself.

"Do you like music?"

"Yes, ma'am. I used to play alto sax in the high school band."

Mrs. Finley was thrilled.

Feeling light on her feet, she moved quickly and gracefully to the piano. She struck a few chords. Her fingers were limber and alive.

"What would you like to hear?"

He was standing up, ready to leave.

"That's real nice of you, Mrs. Finley, but I have to—"

"Please! Sit down for just a minute and let me play something for you. It will only take a minute."

Officer Thompson, with suddenly a charming little-boy touch of shyness, smiled and sat back down again.

"I've always liked folk music."

She was flipping through whatever music happened to be on the stand. "How about 'Lord Randall'?"

"That's one of my favorites."

Mrs. Finley played "Lord Randall." She found "Turtle Dove" and played it and would have played a dozen more, but Officer Thompson said he had to leave. He said he had really enjoyed it. She really had a nice touch. But if he didn't "get back on the street," other officers would have to take his calls, and that wouldn't be fair.

Feeling that the evening had ended as it should have ended, Mrs. Finley released him.

After he was gone, she turned the television on, with the sound off, and stood by the piano, silently brushing the keys with one finger. She had neglected her piano. She must play it more often. It was one of the few supposedly woman's things she thoroughly enjoyed. She flipped through the sheets of music on the stand. She opened the piano bench and lifted out stacks of music. Nothing was in order. It was all ajumble.

Mrs. Finley began sorting the music into categories — church music, classical, semi-classical, popular (meaning 1940s popular), children's, Christmas, folk music.

If it happens again, she thought, I'll be able to give him a choice. He doesn't have time to thumb through the whole mess. This way he can easily find what he wants me to play for him.

Cagney and Lacey—you could tell by their faces—were having an argument, but Mrs. Finley did not stop to wonder what they were arguing about.

Edgar's Journey: Shame, Anger, and Maturity in *King Lear*

ANDREW DILLON

I

Edgar is the one character in *King Lear* about whose motivations we may continue to wonder; his brother Edmund's boiling envy and anger are easily understood from Shakespeare's lines both at the play's very beginning (1.1.1-33) and in the famous soliloquy at the beginning of 1.2. About Lear and Gloucester there is little to question; they are presented as men who are used to power and expect unhesitating obedience. Both judge rashly and suffer hugely for their lack of judgment. Cordelia appears both sweet and strong in her refusal to flatter Lear; her sisters show themselves full of bitter possessiveness, and are shamelessly able to lie to get what they feel should be theirs. Their husbands, Albany and Cornwall, while different in character, leave us little sense of mystery. Kent and the fool share a great love for Lear, and they both suffer for him with a clear loyalty that matches Cordelia's. Edgar, however, is mysterious as to the roots of his motivations as is no other character in the play; even the tiny role of the servant of Cornwall is instantly understandable to us as he tries to save his master from enacting a shameful evil.

This paper responds to the question that is naturally raised as to why Edgar does not simply find his father and try to clear up what Edmund tells him has put the old man in a great "rage" against Edgar (1.2.162-67). In Acts I and II, Edgar believes Edmund's lies too easily and responds to him in a series of breathless single lines that make the audience wonder at his credulity (1.2.138-77; 2.1.27-32). Thus, the weight of the Gloucester family sub-plot is founded on a mysteriously successful fraternal deception. Edgar's brief, one-line responses, as he is manipulated by his Iago-like brother, make us want to question both Edgar's faith in Edmund and his seeming fear of Gloucester, for the foundations of Edmund's feelings about his father have been most clearly substantiated.

Gloucester treats his illegitimate son with heavy barracks-room

jocosity: "there was good sport at his making" (1.1.24). Gloucester speaks even more cruelly shortly before when he refers to Edmund's mother as having "a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed" (1.1.15-16). With Edmund's soliloquy at the beginning of 1.2, we have all we could need to know of his anger at being illegitimate, of his not inheriting as Edgar will, and perhaps of his resentment at having been sent away from Gloucester for nine years—and possibly at being about to be sent away again (1.1.32-33). Shakespeare has located Edmund clearly as a man whose motives we can easily understand. However, Shakespeare uses him as a manipulative figure to be destroyed at the play's end without our serious notice, for Edmund is partially absorbed into the plot of the play. Although he is a leader of the evil daughters' forces at the final battle, he is largely lost to any sympathetic consideration.

A review of some of the criticism of the play presents a variety of opinions about Edgar's character. Julian C. Rice says Edgar "assumes a passive role, emphatically feeling the intense suffering of his elders" (59). However, Rice also suggests that "the shell of the ego is broken" (59) in Edgar, yet S. L. Goldberg sees Edgar as having "an instinctive skill in the arts of psychic self-preservation" (115). Russell A. Peck emphasizes that "Edgar's chief end in the play is to set off the growth of Lear's insights into the human condition" (223). Peck also sees Edgar as a maturing figure (233-34), but he does not study that development from a family-oriented point of view, which is this paper's emphasis. William R. Elton presents a "loquacious and ubiquitous" Edgar, who has "a trust which arises more from nobility than credulousness" (84). Finally, D. G. James suggests yet another possibility: that the character of Edgar, among others, is "controlled by the plot," that Shakespeare means to show "the forcing apart. . . of character from circumstance, of virtue from happiness." This is designed so that Shakespeare can "exhibit suffering and helpless virtue" (111).

The opinions gathered above suggest how varied views of Edgar have been. My view is that Edgar is not passive, and is surely not "controlled by the plot." Edgar is not at all above ego, and he does preserve himself. Moreover, Edgar is a believable person who grows from fear and shame to chastened power at the end of the play. He is not so much a tool used by Shakespeare as he is an expression of a counter-movement in the play that balances the tragic excesses of Lear and Gloucester. He evidences a journey to maturity that governs his actions in the drama. Indeed, he may be seen as one who has learned how to govern both himself and, ultimately, the realm. Moreover, Edgar has been associated with the old king; we are told he is Lear's godson, and Lear clearly identifies with Edgar in the latter's Poor Tom role in Act III.

II

After having elicited an unthinking condemnation of Edgar from Gloucester, "I'll apprehend him" (1.2.77-78), Edmund proceeds to warn Edgar of his father's anger, adding a heightened picture of Gloucester's "displeasure, which at this instant so rageth in him" (1.2.162). Edgar merely says that someone had done him wrong. He is almost speechless. Edmund says he should go armed; Edgar asks him, "Arm'd, brother?" (1.2.171), and, seeking to hear more from Edmund later, Edgar leaves the stage! This is too concise even for dramatic economy; it is mysteriously brief. It may bear a message about Edgar's own lack of daring, of self-assuredness, of virile directness. A son who felt both secure and innocent would probably seek such a father out. We must question Edgar's behavior both now and in Act II, when he is hurried off stage before his father's entrance; for, in these few lines, he is fooled out of his home, out of his inheritance, and almost out of his life.

In their second meeting in Act II, Edmund refers to oncoming divisions between Cornwall and Albany. Edgar says he has not said anything about either side: Albany or Cornwall (Goneril and Regan's husbands respectively). Edmund draws his sword to look innocent before his father, Gloucester, comes on stage. Edgar draws to play a part in a sort of brotherly defense of Edmund's good opinion in Gloucester's mind—and then runs off. That is the sum of Edgar's self-help so far. Gloucester believes all of Edmund's lies, and goes so far as to say that if Edgar is "found—dispatch" (2.1.58). G. K. Hunter's edition of *King Lear* glosses this line, "presumably the pause is filled in by some gesture, such as drawing his hand across his throat" (221).

We meet Edgar again as he delivers a soliloquy that makes up the third scene of Act II. He has heard himself "proclaim'd," perhaps with a death sentence attached. Indeed, Edgar later says he had to escape a "bloody proclamation. . .That follow'd me so near" (5.3.184-85); now he has "Escap'd the hunt" (2.3.1-3). This son will disguise himself very oddly, yet, from his behavior up to this point, some suppositions can be drawn.

Why does Edgar go so far in his painful disguise?—why near nakedness, the thorns in the flesh, the filth on face and body? A ready supposition drawn from the above seemingly cowardly retreat from Gloucester may suggest that Edgar has always felt an implicit injustice in his situation. He is to inherit both land and earldom; Edmund seems promised nothing (see 1.2.4,16,21). Edgar's later language that criticizes sexual adventures (3.4.85-96) suggests he may feel some shame about his father's cavortings as well as an irrational sense of guilt that

somehow home was not good enough for Gloucester, who chose to philander. Whatever the causes are—and they are deeply pertinent to the mystery of Edgar's motivations and actions in the play—they must remain logical suppositions, since there is little concrete evidence given us by Shakespeare, whose usually generous imaginings flesh out even very minor characters.

When Edgar takes the "poorest shape" he may enact his own personal judgment of what he feels he is worth to his rash father (2.3.1-21). He may have suffered from a bad self-opinion before—though there is nothing in the play to suggest this; it may be derived from what we know of how parents shape children. Now he is "near to beast" (9), filthy, naked (except for a blanket): a bedlam beggar. Edgar has become a metaphor of what he feels: outcast, stripped, like a kicked dog. Yet he tells us he would be like beggars who will "enforce their charity" (20). This forecasts the firm will that he exercises when he leads Gloucester to Dover, kills Oswald and Edmund, and, having ruled himself, comes to rule Britain.

At the end of this soliloquy in 3.2, he says, "Edgar I nothing am" (21). This "nothing" is charged with meaning as the term is when Lear and Cordelia use it early in the first act (1.1.87-90). Here it suggests devastation of personality yet a curious rebirth—a renewal of harmed humanity on a journey towards wholeness. This son will grow to manhood alone. The nails of penitence in his arms, the pain from the wooden pricks, the sprigs of rosemary all mortify the arms of one who so inflicts himself, either in true psychic self-punishment, or, a cunning need to shame others into giving charity. The picture is of critical suffering—possibly also directed at the expiation of his guilt over his soft life in comparison with the harsher one of Edmund.

Edgar appears from the hovel when Lear sends in the fool. The old king expresses some of his guilt about being a bad magistrate and a selfish ruler:

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic pomp,
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just (3.4.28-36).

Edgar, of course, seems a manifest example of this "window'd raggedness," this poverty. Moreover, as the old king, in recognition, is beginning to break open, the future king (Edgar) may overhear (though still

inside the hovel) this most terrible basic wisdom for any ruling person: that justice is love on the broad level of governance. Indeed, love can't exist on the political plane without its power-holding manifestation: justice. Later, Edgar will hear similar ideas on the need to feel from Gloucester (4.1.67-71).

These lines of Lear and the later parallel lines of Gloucester may be seen as love in its public or extra-familial guise, for here is the philosophical heart of the play. A kinetic application follows almost immediately in Lear's moment of sanest seeing: that Edgar as Poor Tom is, "the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, fork'd animal as thou art" (3.4.106-08). Readers may feel this is the moment of clearest sight in the play, for the mad insights of 4.6 are more metaphorical, more clouded with surreal vision: "Ha! Goneril with a white beard?" (4.6.96). Edgar himself must know the truth of his situation like a personal epiphany, a light for a future king who will not forget the feelings of everyman and beggar in his future time. Now, nearly naked like a baby, he must begin a new life among almost incomprehensible leaders.

His mad talk in this scene abounds with self-reference: he says "Tom's a-cold" often and feels it in different ways. He speaks of servants who do the deed of darkness with their mistresses, possibly an oblique reference to what Gloucester may have done in the begetting of Edmund. He says one should not allow the creaking of shoes or the rustling of silks to betray the heart to women (3.4.86-96) as his father seems to have done. When Gloucester comes on with a torch, Edgar sees him as a foul fiend who, among other warpings, hurts the poor creature of earth (115-19)—surely a momentary touch of his own feelings about Gloucester now and in earlier times we may only guess at. When Gloucester refers obliquely to Edgar as one who hates him, Edgar as Tom can only cry again, "Poor Tom's a-cold" (147). The fit between role and self is too poignant for more than a few brief words.

Since Lear is on the edge of hallucinations, he is narrowing in vision and understanding. He calls Edgar "my philosopher" (176) because he is a visible metaphor of what becomes of a man who is stripped of the order of civilization. Nevertheless, in a sense, Lear is directing our attention to the philosopher king-to-be.

III

When Gloucester, already betrayed by Edmund for having aided Lear, warns Kent to take the King to Dover, where Cordelia's French forces await, Edgar—now alone on stage—speaks freely for a moment (3.6.104-13). He reverts to his early self, the Hamlet-like, well-bred

young man of sensibility, "Who alone suffers, suffers most i' th' mind." Edgar certainly may touch on his own situation in past time as well as on the main issue in his mind now: seeing the King as an exile makes his own pain less fierce. "He childed as I fathered!"—but Edgar decides that he will be faithful to his seemingly new-born self, and nothing will make him reveal himself until he has proved his innocence. "False opinion" will have to bow only to "just proof"—that alone will reconcile him—especially to Gloucester. It is a lonely statement, and has extraordinary effect in Acts IV and V.

Edgar saves his father by taking the blinded, shattered man to Dover, contrives to seem to aid in Gloucester's suicide attempt, saves him from being murdered by Oswald, and hides him during the final, Armageddon-like battle between good and evil. He only tells Gloucester that he is Edgar a little later, long after he has proved his true sonhood and manliness in a combat by saving his father from Oswald (as Hal saves Henry IV from the Douglas). Edgar keeps his terrible resolution and allows Gloucester hours of pain that he might well have spared him, yet the need to recreate and re-establish himself is stronger than pity. In fact, his questionable refusal to tell his freshly blinded father who he really is does suggest that Edgar has a new independence. It may be energized by an anger at his father, who never gave him a chance. Gloucester's fathering of Edmund may have posed serious problems to Edgar as to personal worth, the sanctity of marriage, and even in dealing with Edmund himself.

After Gloucester is blinded, he learns of Edmund's treachery, "Edgar was abus'd" (3.7.91). Thus Gloucester is made parallel to Lear who early says, "I did her [Cordelia] wrong" (1.5.24). It is a newly mutilated Gloucester, who now knows his error and feels his guilt openly, that comes on stage in 4.1, where he interrupts more Hamlet-like musings by Edgar (4.1.1-9).

Edgar is accepting that he now knows he is despised rather than "still contemn'd [despised] and flatter'd" (4.1.2). This suggests he now feels that in all the former years his father's love was only partial, only a mask for real feelings of impatience or disgust. Edgar goes on to say "the worst returns to laughter." This last idea is stoic, and it is certainly admirable—but it is more redolent of Seneca's *Moral Essays* than it is pertinent to the bleakness of what he sees next: the freshly blinded Gloucester.

Earlier, Lear has spoken wildly of the storm's power to harm and cure: "When the mind's free/ The body's delicate" (3.4.11-12). Now Edgar is forced to see what must destroy his in-house philosophy: his newly blinded father, Gloucester, is led on by a loyal old tenant. In a moment of horror, Edgar sees the "strange mutations" (4.1.11) that

ultimately force us to grow old and die. Clinging less to a philosophical, balanced mode of thought, Edgar gasps, "the worst is not/ So long as we can say, 'This is the worst' " (4.1.27-28). Gloucester speaks of his wrong to Edgar (21-22), and says he would feel he had his eyes again if he could touch his son (24). Nevertheless, Edgar, who leads Gloucester to Dover, will not break his resolve. His need to be independently established is stronger than his great pity (52-54).

At the second major stressing of the deep power of feeling in human justice and relationship, Gloucester gives a purse of money to Edgar, who is to lead him. As has been often noted, his lines are parallel to Lear's words on feeling in Act III. It is the second time Edgar has heard the paternal figures of Lear and Gloucester evoke this idea:

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
> That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
> Because he does not feel, feel your pow'r quickly;
> So distribution should undo excess,
> And each man have enough (4.1.67-71).

Gloucester seeks the release of death in 4.6; it is the central scene of the play's mind-expanding presentation of both blind possessiveness and the stripped condition of man as he is: able only to love, and, really, never free to merely own. In the same scene, Lear sums up his sins and the sins done against him in wonderfully symbolic insights. Earlier, Edgar was present to aid his father in a suicide attempt yet also to help him recover from his supposed leap from the cliffs of Dover. Now, Edgar watches and learns in horror from the great confrontation between Lear and Gloucester. Lear is madly sightful while Gloucester musically tries to calm Lear's mind. Lear asks Gloucester to read an illusory challenge that the old King seems to hold before the blind man. Gloucester responds musically, "Were all thy letters suns, I could not see." It is structurally powerful that Edgar is there to absorb every moment of this colloquy, to hear the pun on suns/sons, the great statements on being a good leader, and the condemnation of sexuality, which suggests Lear can no longer trust any love.

Edgar's learning as Poor Tom is confined to Act III and the first scene of Act IV. Later in IV, Edgar's moment of killing Oswald is really a sort of "fleshing" of a new man, for he is no longer the shockingly easily duped brother of Act I. He assumes a power in self not discoverable in the early, credulous Edgar who believed his brother's lies after breathless, one-line responses. That sterner quality that allowed him not to betray who he was until he felt he was fully himself is an aspect of governance like that of a state, for Edgar now has come to exercise a harsh justice in love. He has shown himself a needed father-

ing during the long walk with Gloucester from his castle to Dover, while he nurtures and saves his father's life. After his father's death, when he kills Edmund, Edgar only finalizes his new maturity, power, and self-control. He has become justice burnished by love, and he forgives his brother.

At the beginning of 4.6, Edgar has said that he trifles with his father's despair to cure him (4.6.33-34), and we must partially believe that. However, Edgar may also feel some grim anger towards his father, which is bent now to serve his own integrity as one who must grow up by himself. He must never fall into the charms of letting a parent validate him again, no matter how attractive it would be to tell his father, at almost any point before he finally does, who he really is. Edgar's need to be finally his own man strengthens him as he cares for his father, but the renovation of his own shattered sense of worth is his main object. In fact, Edgar's journey is a *bildungsshauspiel* (a play of growing-up); it is curiously matched by Lear's journey from childish rashness to dislocation in the storm, which is an impotence as futile as Edgar's dithering with Edmund. Lear continues through real madness in Act IV to a reconciliation with Cordelia, when he asks forgiveness and when he later suggests that jail with her is a form of freedom in an evil world. Edgar also comes from an amazing inability through a cover of madness that serves as a learning time up to the encounters with Oswald and Edmund.

In Acts IV and V, Edgar does begin a series of changes: he is given new clothes by a loyal old man who serves Gloucester. His father notes a change in Edgar's manner of speaking—and Edgar's denial is a curious, almost playful endorsing of his father's question, "Y'are much deceiv'd. In nothing am I chang'd/ But in my garments" (4.6.9-10). This music is far from his free-association, mad language of Act III. From now on Edgar climbs the levels of society. He assumes a new accent on awakening Gloucester after the old man has been deceived into thinking he could throw himself off the cliffs of Dover. Edgar kills Oswald (Goneril's servant) with a sureness, precision, and speed which he could have used to good effect in dealing with Edmund at the play's beginning.

In Act V, Edgar and Edmund are neck and neck as to who will ultimately rule. Although this is not a central aspect of the play, the drama between the two brothers mirrors the whole world of evil and virtue that has been so often seen in the long pageant of Lear's distraction, madness, recovery, and stunned death. It also reflects that other path of instant learning and welling pain that Gloucester endures until his heart bursts with a mix of joy and sorrow.

Edgar starts out far younger than his younger brother in worldly

strength, but he ends in conquering him in hand to hand combat. Moreover, he moves far beyond Edmund's hate and twisted grasping for power by saving his father. Edgar also gives Albany the chance to reverse the evil destiny of the victory of his British forces against Cordelia's French soldiers by taking command from Edmund and standing by as a sort of judge while the combat between the brothers goes on. Had Edgar lost, Albany has Goneril's letter to bring the evil to justice. But Edgar almost cannot lose: he is new in the power of his earned virtue—Edmund is bowed down by the weight of the sour agility of only envy. In a psychologically pitched battle such as this, Edgar wins because, in the interim, he has truly become the older, justly inheriting brother. He wins because he has won! He may feel this in combat; it is part of the drive that brings him to the fullest possible manhood and a readiness for a crown, which, in primitive times, always meant the more superior in mind and body.

At the loss of the general battle and before the fraternal battle, Edgar comes directly to save his father, who responds with the dour, "a man may rot even here" (5.2.8). Almost in response to Lear's mad, "We came crying hither./ Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air/ We wawl and cry" (4.6.178-80), Edgar says that, "men must endure/ Their going hence even as their coming hither,/ Ripeness is all" (5.2.9-11).[1] This aptly sums up Lear's wild saying and Gloucester's use of the term "rot," but the idea Edgar holds now is one of kingly preservation and reconciliation. He sees this as the route to the real prize—not the "rot" of despair, but the "ripeness" of spiritual victory. For Edgar, the phrase "ripeness is all" may also have the almost joyful power of a deeply personal illumination.

While the evil sisters squabble over Edmund, Albany stirs at last with a new control inspired in him by the all-revealing letter that Edgar has seized from Oswald and presented to Albany. Albany calls up the challenger to fight Edmund, which challenger we know to be Edgar. The armor he wears is certainly another step up in the class levels of society. Now Edgar will both vindicate himself in battle and earn the right to be considered as the necessary man at the play's end, when he is the only strong candidate to fill the role of King.

Since Edmund has been conquered, Edgar has earned his earldom, yet he must now tell of Gloucester's poignant death off-stage. In doing this, Edgar shows he is no callous victor but a true son come into his power. Edgar speaks of the heart twice in the speech, and, in a third reference, he describes how his father's heart "burst smilingly" (5.3.200). Edgar wants his heart to be split by sorrow (178); he wishes his heart would burst (183), yet the music of his words predicts a whole and sensitive life ahead of him—sensing a "fault" in not telling his

father who he was earlier—but also savoring the ineluctable conditions of his own necessary growth: going it alone.

The lines show sensitivity and Cordelia-like feeling as if a modest proclamation of a finer, inner self interrupted the public self's flow of words, "O, our lives' sweetness!" (185). This balanced assessment of feeling in the midst of his story is what the later King Edgar will be: supremely able to feel as well as to discern causes. Feeling has been the main weight of what Lear learned in III and Gloucester in IV; it is what Edgar stresses in the final speech of the play. He now has a true, just, self-accepting ability to feel (which would certainly have prevented Lear from his rash decisions and slender self-knowledge and would have saved Gloucester too).

IV

When Kent suggests that he hears his master call him (that he senses his own death approach), Edgar can't know why he has been sent so rudely into this tough world, but he does know how he can use his experience. He says:

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say:
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much, nor live so long (5.3.324-27)[2].

In this final, brief speech, the audience can be sure that both Edgar and his shattered world are whole again. He immediately uses the royal "we" as Hamlet has done in Act V of that drama, when he first becomes king of himself and then, briefly, a fit King of Denmark. So Edgar, mentally kin to Hamlet, is now toughened yet enlighted to be able to speak as the spirits of Lear and Gloucester would now want: to "speak what we feel"—not mere policy, or statecraft, or time-serving platitudes. Edgar senses that the whole journey of the play has been the resolution of pain into understanding. The oldest have borne that learning, now the young will never see so much because they will not let disorder rule: they will never be so thoughtlessly rash. Finally, they will not need to live so long—as if to remedy their errors.

Edgar's choice of nakedness and pretended madness, the "filth" on his face and body, and his penitential thorns can partially be seen as a compensation for an inner guilt about the landless Edmund. These elements also suggest that Edgar performs a self-punishing enactment on his helpless flesh of his father's hostility towards him. It is a cruel yet clever disguise, which affords him time to grow. Moreover, the penitential elements may also suggest a shame about his father's former liaisons (5.3.173-74). However, by a descent into classlessness, Edgar

surely earns his family rights at last; he then transcends class to become the new king. He becomes a final fruition of the play's main theme: that the problem of justice is ultimately a problem of love.

Notes

[1]The relation between Lear's "crying hither" and Edgar's "coming hither" as a "cognate theme" was noted by Mark Van Doren (206).

[2]In the Quarto text of *Lear*, these lines are assigned to Albany, but the 1623 Folio gives them to Edgar, where they seem most fitting. Albany has just resigned his "absolute power" (5.3.301) to Lear, who is on the edge of death. In both the Quarto and the Folio, the Duke of Albany says shortly later to both Kent and Edgar, "Friends of my soul, you twain/ Rule in this realm" (320-21). Since Kent suggests that he, himself, won't live long (5.3.322-23), the final lines would seem to have to be Edgar's. The Folio assigns them to him. G. K. Hunter suggests, "The history of modern texts of *King Lear* is (with some exceptions) a history of drift from Quarto to Folio" (322). In *Shakespeare's Revision of King Lear*, Steven Urkowitz argues that the Folio text is Shakespeare's final revision of *King Lear*.

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A Kinship of the Fields: Farming in the Poetry of R.S. Thomas and Wendell Berry

JEFFERY ALAN TRIGGS

Nature has been an important subject of poets since the time of the ancients, and since the romantics a central one. Poetry about farming, however, is much more rare; only odd acres of the many set aside in the poetic landscape for Arcadian contemplation have actually been tilled. There are few compatriots of Hardy's "man harrowing clods / In a slow silent walk" ("In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations' "). In recent years, however, this imbalance of poetic ambition has been redressed to some extent by the work of two very different poets, R. S. Thomas in Wales and Wendell Berry in Kentucky. Thomas, who spent his career as a country priest, has written many poems about the peasants among whom he conducted his ministry. Berry has gone even further, leaving a promising academic career to devote himself to farming and making farming the central theme of his mature work. While they share many assumptions, however, about the centrality of the experience of working as opposed to contemplating the land, Thomas and Berry approach farming from different perspectives and treat it in differing ways that reflect their very different cultural matrices.

For one thing, Thomas has always considered farming from the point of view of an outsider, who may or may not always empathize with his subjects. The calling of priest separates him distinctly and irrefragably from the lives of the peasants, to whose spiritual needs he officially ministers. Thomas makes no attempt to romanticize these peasants, but presents them in the fullness of their imperfections. They are likely to appear like Walter Llywarch, "Born in Wales of approved parents, / Well goitred, round in the bum, / Sure prey of the slow virus / Bred in quarries of grey rain" ("Walter Llywarch," *Selected Poems* 60). Thomas presents Walter as a sort of Welsh Everyman, one of many "who waited in the long queue / Of life that wound through a Welsh valley," whose life is characterized by its bleakness and banality. Like

his parents, everything else about his life is "approved" and determined. Walter has taken

> as others had done
> Before, a wife from the back pews
> In chapel, rather to share the rain
> Of winter evenings, than to intrude
> On her pale body; and yet we lay
> For warmth together and laughed to hear
> Each new child's cry of despair.

The conditions of Welsh society oppress Walter, his wife, and his children with the sort of fearful determinism that characterizes Blake's "London."

Walter is not the only peasant locked in a miserable cycle of events. In "On the Farm," Thomas presents a portrait of the Puw family:

> There was Dai Puw. He was no good.
> They put him in the fields to dock swedes,
> And took the knife from him, when he came home
> At late evening with a grin
> Like the slash of a knife on his face.
>
> There was Llew Puw, and he was no good.
> Every evening after the plowing
> With the big tractor he would sit in his chair,
> And stare into the tangled fire garden,
> Opening his slow lips like a snail.
>
> There was Huw Puw, too. What shall I say?
> I have heard him whistling in the hedges
> On and on, as though winter
> Would never again leave those fields,
> And all the trees were deformed.
>
> And lastly there was the girl:
> Beauty under some spell of the beast.
> Her pale face was the lantern
> By which they read in life's dark book
> The shrill sentence: God is love.
> (*Selected Poems* 82)

Like Walter Llywarch, the Puws seem hopelessly mired in a claustrophobic tragedy of rural life in Wales: Dai Puw with his sinister grin, Llew Puw sitting in catatonic stillness after his work, Huw Puw whistling senselessly like an idiot in his bleak surroundings, and the girl whose "pale face" turns religious solace into a shrill joke. They are as desolate as Wordsworth's leech gatherer, only with nothing to teach the poet of the virtues of cheerfulness in the face of adversity. Indeed, Thomas' peasants typically suffer their adversity in unroman-

tic fashion. The Puws represent a society dominated by hard, soul-wearing work (readers of Thomas Hardy will remember his description of swede docking in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*), in which religion is known negatively when at all. Even then it is mostly excluded from the male world. Thomas seems aware, however, that his portrait is absurdly bleak to the point of parody. He suggests this with the nursery-rhyme repetitions in the first lines of the stanzas, which hint at the unreal and the fabulous, as well as the jingling rhymes of the names ("Huw Puw, too"), though the rest of the description is realistic enough. The life of the Puws, certainly, cannot be all there is to life? Perhaps there is a suggestion of affection for them, a pathetic sense that the Puws are victims of the anonymous "they" of the first stanza, but it remains a suggestion only. Life's book is dark, not only in the sense of bleakness, but in its obscurity also, and the peasants are the keepers of this obscurity. This mystery, rather than some sense of them as "holy fools," is the product of their witlessness.

In another poem entitled "Meet the Family" (*Selected Poems* 54), Thomas offers a dry litany of peasant types: John One, whose "eyes are dry as a dead leaf," John Two standing "in the door / Dumb," John Three "Drooling where the daylight died / On the wet stones," and finally John All's "lean wife, / Whose forced complicity gave life / To each loathed foetus." It is easy to see why a critic like Marie Peel can argue that Thomas' "incapacity to see himself with others and to share in a common natural humanity seems to have brought him to a point of hating and denying life itself" (66). Yet the case does not seem as simple as Peel makes out. Like Tolstoy, Thomas is well aware of the stubborn recalcitrance of the peasantry, what he has called their "mute beast-like endurance" (Lethbridge 38), but at the same time he claims that he "wanted to propagandize, on behalf of the small farmer in his fields" (Lethbridge 42). Thomas is interested in the paradox of the farmer, for whom the beauty of nature (as the romantics have conceived it) "doesn't seem to mean much," but whose "figure is human" and "casts a human shadow across the landscape," and who "may be just as close to the truth as anybody else" (Lethbridge 42). Calvin Bedient has spoken of Thomas' somewhat eccentric Anglicanism as "a badgering compassion" whose atmosphere "is continually present—asserting the human, brightening when it finds it, darkening when it does not" (60-61). Thomas is compelled to take a difficult look at the peasant whose life he wants to propagandize, even when, as with John One, to "Look at him" is to "learn grief."

Thus, even Iago Prytherch, who appears in a number of poems, is described as having "a half-witted grin / Of satisfaction" as he churns

"the crude earth / To a stiff sea of clods" ("A Peasant," *Selected Poems* 11). Thomas would have us see Iago

> fixed in his chair
> Motionless, except when he leans to gob in the fire.
> There is something frightening in the vacancy of his mind.
> His clothes, sour with years of sweat
> And animal contact, shock the refined,
> But affected, sense with their stark naturalness.

"A Peasant" gives clear expression to the ambiguous feelings aroused in Thomas by the Welsh peasantry. Thomas is indeed frightened by Iago's half-wittedness, "the vacancy of his mind," the frustrating lack of concern for the spiritual problems that occupy the refined poet himself. And yet the refined sensibilities of the poet and his literate readers (Iago, we may assume, is not among Thomas' readers) are treated with a certain irony. These sensibilities are not only "refined" but "affected," and as A. E. Dyson has pointed out, in the context of Thomas' poem these words become "near synonyms"(9). The effect is subtly to convert Iago's crude naturalness from a quality eliciting the readers' contempt to a quality challenging the readers' and poet's artificiality. After this "turn" in the poem, Thomas goes on to present Iago as our

> prototype, who, season by season
> Against siege of rain and the wind's attrition,
> Preserves his stock, an impregnable fortress
> Not to be stormed even in death's confusion.
> Remember him, then, for he, too, is a winner of wars,
> Enduring like a tree under the curious stars.

Exactly what kind of "prototype" Iago is remains subject to question. He is certainly not an idealized "noble savage," nor is he in any sense an inspiration for one's spiritual life, as we shall see Berry's farmers are. Thomas' farmer experiences life at its barest, in the absence of God, and indeed in the absence of any but a physical dimension. What appears to claim Thomas' admiration is Iago's gaunt stoicism, his ability to hold out against the "siege" of nature, to endure "like a tree" in the vast and questionable universe suggested by the "curious stars." They are curious in the sense that they excite our speculation (though not Iago's) and remain, like Thomas' God, silent and unknowable.

What threatens his stoicism is not nature but the modern world, which Thomas considers basically villainous and emblematizes with tourism and the machine. Unlike some of Berry's farmers who have left the world behind in a mystical return to the soil and the natural techniques of farming (the chief threat to the farm culture in the United

States, according to Berry, is agribusiness), Thomas' peasants are radically innocent and thus helpless before the corruptions of the modern world. Theirs is not a vitalizing reform culture, but the vestige of ancient custom, surviving because it is as yet untouched or overlooked. In a poem called "Invasion of the Farm" (*Selected Poems* 37), Iago Prytherch addresses the curious tourists who have come to gaze at what they consider a picturesque Welsh scene:

> I am Prytherch. Forgive me. I don't know
> What you are talking about; your thoughts flow
> Too swiftly for me; I cannot dawdle
> Along their banks and fish in their quick stream
> With crude fingers. I am alone, exposed
> In my own fields with no place to run
> From your sharp eyes. I, who a moment back
> Paddled in the bright grass, the old farm
> Warm as a sack about me, feel the cold
> Winds of the world blowing. The patched gate
> You left open will never be shut again.

As in "A Peasant," Thomas' irony here seems to be directed not at the ignorant Iago, but at the cultivated tourists with their "quick stream" of thoughts. Iago himself is pathetic in his modesty and helplessness, the protection of his "old farm" lost forever. What there is of protection (salvation, of course, is not in question here) seems to lie in avoidance if possible of the contamination of the modern world, a kind of physical and secular equivalent of asceticism. As Thomas notes in his affectionate portrait of eighty-five year old Job Davies ("Lore," *Selected Poems* 68):

> Rhythm of the long scythe
> Kept this tall frame lithe.
>
> What to do? Stay green.
> Never mind the machine,
> Whose fuel is human souls.
> Live large, man, and dream small.

The advice is anti-romantic and indeed anti-modern, asserting, as it does, that our grasp should exceed our reach, but there is a stern sanity about it that recalls similar statements by Wendell Berry.

At times—one might almost say in certain moods, for Thomas has confessed himself a creature of changeable moods (Lethbridge 39)—he can come very close to Berry's sort of farm mysticism. An early poem entitled "Soil" (*Selected Poems* 17) presents a dignified portrait of a peasant working "A field tall with hedges,. . . slowly astride the rows / Of red mangolds and green swedes / Plying mechanically his cold

blade." Having set this scene out of Millet, Thomas penetrates what one might call its mystical basis:

> This is his world, the hedge defines
> The mind's limits; only the sky
> Is boundless, and he never looks up;
> His gaze is deep in the dark soil,
> As are his feet. The soil is all;
> His hands fondle it, and his bones
> Are formed out of it with the swedes.
> And if sometimes the knife errs,
> Burying itself in his shocked flesh,
> Then out of the wound the blood seeps home
> To the warm soil from which it came.

In many ways this beautiful poem sums up Thomas' paradoxical view of the farmer. His mind, as the present civilized society would define it, is limited by the hedged enclosure of his field. The boundless sky, suggestive of spiritual aspiration (one remembers Coleridge's assertion that the blue of the sky is nature's fittest emblem of pure feeling), is of no interest to him. To the farmer the dirt is all. Yet Thomas modulates our attitude with a word more positive than dirt, the "soil." The farmer's "gaze is deep in the dark soil," suggesting a mystical experience of the mystery of nurturing earth, surely nature's "poetry" in its most sublime manifestation. Thomas' farmer, unlike those who watch him (including the poet himself), is something completely natural like the mangolds and the swedes. And as these crops suggest (consider the association of mangold, or mangel, with *Wurzel*), he is something rooted, in intimate contact with the source of life itself. His blood, which he spills for our nurture, is at home in the "warm soil." Thomas will not romanticize the farmers' dreary existence, nor is he quick, in the vein of Seamus Heaney, to equate digging with a "cold blade" and "digging" with a pen; his own life and concerns are quite different. But in poems like "Soil" he celebrates a fundamental tragedy and glory of human life emblematized in the figure casting "a human shadow across the landscape."

Wendell Berry's farmers are very much of a newer world than Thomas' peasants, though their ways, as he celebrates them, seem traditional enough. In the context of modern America, however, traditional, organic farming constitutes a form of spiritual rebellion against the deracinated modern world and the soul- and soil-destroying machinery of agribusiness. (One of Berry's frequent *personae*, characterized, as he puts it, by "contrariness" toward the modern world, is known as "the mad farmer.") Unlike Thomas, whose work he admires, Berry

has not contented himself with observation, but has made farming his way of life, and indeed has written numerous polemical essays on the theoretical and practical aspects of farming as he would practice it in the modern world. Traditional farming is for Berry nothing short of a revolutionary calling, and his treatment of it in poetry is filled with mystical fervor. In a volume with the ironically practical and American title, *Farming: A Hand Book*, Berry presents a farmer whose joyful mysticism mitigates and renders meaningful his intimate experience of death:

> The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,
> whose hands reach into the ground and sprout,
> to him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death
> yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie down
> in a dung heap, and rise again in corn.
> His thought passes along the row ends like a mole.
> What miraculous seed has he swallowed
> that the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth
> like a vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water
> descending in the dark?
> ("The Man Born to Farming," *Collected Poems* 103)

Whereas Thomas' religious concerns and his social concern for the peasantry tend scrupulously to be kept distinct, Berry's farmer is the keeper and carrier of the mystical intuition that lies at the center of his religious thought. "The man born to farming" is born also to an understanding of the cyclical dying and reviving of the earth, the delicate balance of death and life that informs and underlies our existence. Far from being ignorant, picturesque, or peripheral, he tends the paradoxical knowledge that according to Berry is of central importance to us as human beings: that "without death and rot there can be no new life" (*The Unsettling of America* 193). The passage about the light rising in the corn subtly echoes one of Berry's favorite biblical passages about "the corn of wheat" that falls into the earth and dies and thus "bringeth forth much fruit." The farmer's hands reach into the earth not simply to fondle it, but to "sprout" with new life. For Berry "the soil is a divine drug," in which the mystery of existence, ready to burst out in an "unending sentence of. . .love," is maintained.

Unlike Thomas, Berry writes not as an outsider but from the perspective of the farmer. In "Sowing" (*Collected Poems* 104-05), the act of sowing new seed to reclaim a neglected piece of land involves the speaker in the history of the place and indeed in the fate of the world as it unfolds there:

> In the stilled place that was once a road going down
> from the town to the river, and where the lives of marriages grew

a house, cistern and barn, flowers, the tilted stones of borders,
and the deeds of their lives ran to neglect, and honeysuckle
and then fire overgrew it all, I walk heavy
with seed, spreading on the cleared hill the beginnings
of green, clover and grass to be pasture. Between
history's death upon the place and the trees that would have come
I claim, and act, and am mingled in the fate of the world.

For Berry, no place is an imprisoning backwater, as Thomas' Wales may sometimes seem to be. The farmer reads intimately the history of his place, and even where history has decreed "death upon the place," he may "claim" and "act" to revitalize it, spreading the "beginnings" of new life.

The establishment of roots, of a connection with place, is of central importance to Berry's philosophy. This is quite possibly a result of Berry's being American. Where Thomas is certain of his "place in the world" and his relations to others (his colleagues, his parishioners, the businessmen and literati of the outside world with whom he sometimes has contact), Berry seems relatively uncertain of his place, and is constantly in need of reaffirming such a place. Indeed, the fundamental act of his career was his decision to leave a teaching post in New York and return to a farm in Kentucky where he was born. Berry refuses the much bandied about notion that "you can't go home again," and his efforts as a man and thinker have been to be rerooted in place, community, agriculture, nature—what he has called the "system of nested systems" (*Standing by Words* 46). The calling of the farmer and the quasi-mystical involvement in place which it entails are central to his enterprise. In "The Current" (*Collected Poems* 119), Berry writes that

Having once put his hand into the ground,
seeding there what he hopes will outlast him,
a man has made a marriage with his place,
and if he leaves it his flesh will ache to go back.
His hand has given up its birdlife in the air.
It has reached into the dark like a root
and begun to wake, quick and mortal, in timelessness.

This paradoxical state of connection with the land, "quick and mortal, in timelessness," establishes the farmer as the mediator of past and future, the bearer of "The current flowing to him through the earth." It is a mystical state enabling him to witness his ancestors, "the bearers of his own blood," as well as "one descended from him, / a young man who has reached into the ground, / his hand held in the dark as by a hand." Unlike Thomas' peasants, who seem sometimes to pass a curse of the land from generation to generation, Berry's farmers of-

fer each other a mystical communion of place, the "current" flowing through the generations and redeeming them from the tragedy of time.

In a poem entitled "On the Hill Late at Night" (*Collected Poems* 113), he describes his own sense of willing rootedness:

> I am wholly willing to be here
> between the bright silent thousands of stars
> and the life of the grass pouring out of the ground.
> The hill has grown to me like a foot.
> Until I lift the earth I cannot move.

These lines compare interestingly with Thomas' description of the peasant in "Soil." Thomas' tragic determinism is quite alien to Berry and absent from his poem. Though the hill has grown to him "like a foot," he insists on his willingness to be there and expresses what amounts to a mystical delight in his position as a farmer "between the bright silent thousands of stars / and the life of the grass." And this delight remains with Berry even when his position involves knowledge of the darkest aspects of life.

Farming, with its intimate experience of death, provides Berry with the rich system of metaphors that informs his work. The putting of hands into the ground, for instance, becomes for Berry something more than a simple act of farming. It suggests not only the communion with past and future generations, the mystical handshake in the dark that Berry would achieve, but the acceptance of death as a natural and even a desirable part of life. "Song in a Year of Catastrophe" (*Collected Poems* 117-18) treats the necessity of accepting the death of "the things that you love" as well as one's own death. Written in 1968, it is perhaps haunted by the circumstances of the Vietnam War, but its concerns are at once more personal and more general than those of the mass of "protest" poems of the period. Berry's response to international catastrophe (interestingly like Thomas Hardy's during another war) is the age-old response of the nurturing farmer:

> And I went and put my hands
> into the ground, and they took root
> and grew into a season's harvest.
> I looked behind the veil
> of the leaves, and heard voices
> that I knew had been dead
> in my tongue years before my birth.
> I learned the dark.
>
> * * * * *
>
> I let go all holds then, and sank
> like a hopeless swimmer into the earth,
> and at last came fully into the ease

and the joy of that place,
all my lost ones returning.

Berry has argued, in what can be taken as a gloss on these lines, that "because death is inescapable, a biological and ecological necessity, its acceptance becomes a spiritual obligation, the only means of making life whole" (*Recollected Essays* 199).

This insight, the cynosure of Berry's thought, is essentially an agricultural one, which parallels in farming cultures as diverse as those of the Winnebago Indians, the Bible, and Virgilian Rome. Berry has been taken to task by Richard Pevear for his unorthodox religious views, for making, as Pevear puts it, "A 'religion' of his cause" (346), but this view seems, in a bad sense, churchly, limiting, and wrong-headed. A more serious criticism might be that Berry romanticizes farming and farmers in the service of a theoretical and personal ideal, and that in doing so he neglects what is really dark, uncommunicative, and socially limiting in modern agricultural life, aspects Thomas, with his stern but relatively traditional sense of the Christian mission, focuses on with compassionate penetration. Yet Berry's agricultural mysticism enables him to do what Thomas' Anglicanism cannot: to find in the ordinary activity of farming a living and deeply religious significance. For Berry, there is no separation of religious aspiration and the reality of working the land. This is a profoundly optimistic and perhaps an essentially American notion, and it lends to Berry's farmers a spiritual dignity denied Thomas' peasants, who must reveal their human centrality and importance in a spiritual vacuum. It is significant that in his later books, as he begins to deal more insistently with religious themes, Thomas recurs with surprising infrequency to the peasant characters who played so important a role in his early poetry.

Berry, meanwhile, has continued to make farming and farmers the philosophical and metaphorical center of his work. Among the most moving poems in his recent book, *The Wheel*, are a series of elegies for his friend and mentor, Owen Flood. Flood is presented as perhaps Berry's ideal of a farmer, though it should be pointed out that he seems ordinary and real enough. In "Rising" (*Collected Poems* 241-44) we see him at work:

a man well known by his back
in those fields in those days.
He led me though long rows
of misery, moving like a dancer
ahead of me, so elated
he was, and able, filled
with desire for the ground's growth.

Owen Flood teaches the young Berry how to transmute the "misery"

of his labor into a "desire" with spiritual as well as physical implications. He is Berry's perfect cyclical man, the model nurturer. His life may be "a journey back and forth / in rows, and in the rounds / of years," but in his fields "past and potency are one," and "many-lived," he may "reach / through ages with the seed."

Thomas and Berry have produced very different and to some degree complementary bodies of work about a subject little treated but of tremendous importance in the history and continued presence of man. Thomas' poetry about farming is characterized by its control, objectivity, and basically tragic persuasion. Berry's poetry is freer in form, subjective (as any writing suggesting mystical experience must be), and essentially optimistic. Thomas' characters endure in a world where traditional life is punishing, the changes wrought by industrialism are equally if not more painful, and God (as we can know Him) is silent or uncaring. The peasant, as Thomas sees him, is a lonely figure on the landscape, "endlessly ploughing. . . . wrestling with the angel / Of no name," his face "Unglorified, but stern like the soil" ("The Face," *Selected Poems* 93). Berry's farmers, on the other hand, find meaning and solace in a tradition they seek out, and a kind of spiritual ecstasy in their work. Far from being helpless against the intrusions of the modern world, they are prophets of an alternative life, and far from being lonely, they establish "a kinship of the fields" ("Rising"), a convivial communion with the dead of nature's past and the unborn of her future.

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Landscape of the Whirling Dust

DUANE NIATUM

I try sleeping on
a tule mat to see if the dream will show
who was the last Klallam grandmother
to weave such bulrush grass. I drop a wreath
of red cedar into the river
and chant its myths to put my family ghosts
to bed. They often come to witness the dark
that opens the hours of alarm at the life
yoked to the years-wheel,
what holds together the shaman board of my
nomadic pantomime. How do I speak to these
women in bark-capes who dance like a wedding
on fire, who are less ghosts
than the words being caught in the sunstone's net,
at the long pauses of the short notes? They
clack humor-rattles to switch the lights
back on, burn a few cedar
cones, call an enemy to life. They hum weeping
to laughter on Trickster's mirror. They say in
their own snow-water voices—those which night
saves for the next moon, day
plucks on the heart's guitar. O these women
in Thunderbird-capes let me know when I'm up
to my neck in rapids, I'm at home and a son
of their tribe as mutilated as earth,
but a tribe with an eye still half osprey
and half salmon.
So every bone that wants to sing—sings;
every nerve that wants to burn—burns.

Henry James, Meet Spider Woman: A Study of Narrative Form in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*

MARY SLOWIK

Yellow butterflies accompany Mauricio Babilonia wherever he goes. Babies are occasionally born with pig's tails. Remedios the Beautiful ascends body and soul into heaven. Yet, Gabriel García Márquez has staunchly maintained that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is solidly realistic: "All that's based on reality."[1] In his interviews, Márquez frequently describes the careful attention he gives to the details of everyday life rendered with accuracy and consistency. The weather, women hanging out clothes, the precise smell of specific flowers are all his subject matter. How, then, does he account for the strange events in the purportedly realistic *One Hundred Years of Solitude*? Is Latin American life simply more extravagant than our own? In part, Márquez believes so:

> European rationalism prevents [us from] seeing that reality isn't limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs. Everyday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things. . . . I know very ordinary people who've read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* carefully and with lots of pleasure, but with no surprise at all because, when all is said and done, I'm telling them nothing that hasn't happened in their own lives.[2]

Indeed, a good deal of the extraordinary Márquez describes is plausible coincidence which could happen in anyone's life—the circus swept into the southern Argentine sea one day, the fishermen catching lions and giraffes in their nets the next; his grandmother always shooing a yellow butterfly when a certain electrician came into the house.[3] In the case of Remedios' ascension, however, Márquez talks about something more than coincidence:

> I'd originally planned that she would disappear while in the house embroidering with Rebecca and Amaranta. But this almost cinematographic trick didn't seem viable. I was still going to have

> Remedios around. Then I thought of making her ascend to heaven, body and soul. The fact behind it? A woman whose granddaughter had run away from home in the early hours of the morning, and who tried to hide the fact by putting the word around that she had gone up to heaven."[4]

Here, the neighborhood story allows the miracle to happen, or more precisely makes possible the ease and good humor with which the story is accepted.

So, too, in the case of the butterflies:

> When I was about five, one day an electrician came to our house in Aracataca to change the meter. I remember it as if it were yesterday because I was fascinated by the leather belt he used to strap himself on to the poles to stop himself falling. He came several times. On one of these occasions, I found my grandmother trying to shoo away a butterfly with a duster, saying, "Whenever this man comes to the house, that yellow butterfly follows him." That was Mauricio Babilonia in embryo.[5]

The young Márquez is more interested in the electrician's enormous belt, but his grandmother begins a story when she claims that the yellow butterfly always follows the electrician into the house. The older Márquez carries that tale one step further in creating Mauricio Babilonia, the man forever surrounded by butterflies. Reality becomes extravagant when seen as a story such as this one. In the tale, magic and realism are not contradictory. The tale tells us what there is to see in the reality and the reality inspires and then sustains the tale during all its retellings.

The good-humored tolerance for the unverifiable event and yet the insistence on realism which characterizes Márquez typifies all good magical realist writing. " 'Magical realism,' " Young and Hollaman explain in *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*,

> is a kind of pleasant joke on "realism," suggesting as it does a new kind of fiction, produced in reaction to the confining assumptions of realism, a hybrid that somehow manages to combine the "truthful" and "verifiable" aspects of realism with the "magical effects" we associate with myth, folktale, tall story, and that being in all of us—our childhood self, perhaps—who loves the spell that narrative casts even when it is perfectly implausible.[6]

What distinguishes this "easy or uneasy 'amalgamation,' " is that both narrative modes, magical and real, are held in suspension without one dominating the other. Even more remarkably, magical realism lures us away from our faith in rationalist verification and in conceptual structures towards a more "primitive" understanding of everyday life as a fabric of interwoven stories. Not at the expense of our modernity,

however. Gabriel García Márquez and Leslie Silko and Toni Morrison are as much twentieth century modern and post-modern Western as Colombian, Native American, and Black. They are self-conscious and psychologically sophisticated writers. Yet the counterpoint between the primitive and the modern which they achieve allows us to simultaneously suspend and not suspend our disbelief. Magical realism lets us have faith without assaulting our basic skepticism. Butterflies can and do accompany electricians on their rounds.

The power and paradox of this response should indeed make us rethink realism in the novel. Magical realism has been a supreme act of diplomacy and connection in this regard. It has reintroduced the traditional plotted story form into the matrix of the unplotted and structurally complex modern novel. It has taken what we have learned from modernism about reading novels one step further. Modernism honed our ability to hold many fragments of plot, image, and character in an aesthetic foreground in order to discover for ourselves the patterns within them, albeit ironic, even self-destructive. Magical realism teaches us how to hold entire narrative modes in the same polyphonic suspension. In a magical realist novel we can listen to both traditional primitive story-telling and the tortured self-conscious first-person speaker simultaneously. And in so doing, we learn we are not culturally nor historically homogeneous. Rather we live within a conversation of peoples, each with its own distinctive narrative voice. We are profoundly multi-narrative and multi-ethnic.

The purpose of this essay is to examine the way the two narrative modes intersect in magical realism. I have chosen Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* for this study because the primitive and realist stories are structurally separated, with the Indian tales inserted as independent chapters into the realist text. In the first half of the book, these tales interrupt the narrative line at crucial points subtly remaking our expectations. In the last half of the book, the narrative modes overlap, playing off each other and then eventually shaping each other. By allowing us to read two distinct, sometimes contradictory narrative modes simultaneously, *Ceremony* ultimately educates us, its skeptical readers, to accept the marvelous as readily and easily as Márquez.

There are two distinct story lines in *Ceremony*. The one is the psychologically realist story of Tayo, a profoundly troubled Pueblo Indian shattered by his experience in World War II. The other is the story of the gods dealing with the problems of witchery. During the first half of the book, the god sections interrupt the realist story line at moments of suspense where the story is pushing strongly toward a certain outcome that we as readers familiar with psychological drama fully expect. The god sections jar these expectations and subtly set the story

on a different course. Let us examine three such interruptions.

The first interruption of the realist story by an interpolated god chapter is particularly jarring in tone. Tayo is confessionally reliving his life story in disjointed leaps in time. Patterns of association confuse his present and past. He has been unable to save his brother during the war, and by cursing the jungle rain he feels guilty for bringing on a prolonged New Mexican drought. At the point in his narrative reflection where he utters again the desperate curse (he is carrying his dying brother's stretcher through the monsoons), the whimsical tale of two peevish women gods, Reed Woman and Corn Woman, interrupts. The tone is all wrong. Reed Woman sits all day in the bathtub "splashing down/ the summer rain" while Corn Woman works hard "sweating in the sun/ getting sore hands." When Corn Woman complains and scolds, Reed Woman goes back "to the original place/ down below" and the world suffers a drought.[7] Next to Tayo's crazed desperation Reed Woman's spite seems particularly capricious and the narrator insensitive.

Yet, the discordant tone in a subtle way begins to revise our understanding of nature and of curses. The bickering between the gods prevents us from taking Tayo too seriously. If nature goes into cycles of rain or drought because of the spite of gods, it certainly will not be responsive to the self-projections of a human being. Corn and Reed Woman are not sensitive to people. If anything, they suggest a drama quite independent of human history. Ultimately, nature seems capricious and unpredictible in human terms.

If the Indian tale undermines the seriousness with which Tayo believes he is affecting nature by cursing it, it likewise questions our own realist assumptions as well. Certainly we do not believe Tayo's curse either. Cursing does relieve anxiety and anger and helps compose us at moments of helplessness, but curses have no causal effect on the world.

When the realist narrative is resumed after the interruption, there is a brief moment, however, when the curse seems to hold some power: "So he had prayed the rain away, and for the sixth year it was dry; the grass turned yellow and it did not grow. Wherever he looked, Tayo could see the consequences of his praying" (*C* 13). The story is not firmly established back in Tayo's mind or in the realist narrative until the second sentence which names him and literally reestablishes his point of view, his looking and seeing. The transition "so," however, seems to hover between the god's story and Tayo's story, as if nature could respond to a curse. Reed Woman would not be interested in the particulars of Tayo's personal life nor would she note the degree of his desperation, but she would not ignore his lack of regard. There are causal connections here, but they are not empirical nor psychological

nor are they on the grounds Tayo believes them to be. For a moment the story seems to be on two tracks at once, magical and realist, though neither clearly one or the other. Once his point of view is reestablished, however, Tayo continues his confession as before.

When the gods' tales interrupt again, Tayo's story and the Indian tales are separated by more than tone. Tayo has been released from the Veteran's Hospital barely functional. He returns to his aunt's house where he remains bedridden, vomiting and crying over the losses of his brother, Rocky, and his Uncle Josiah who died while he was away at war. The Indian tale interrupts at the point where Tayo recognizes the inadequacy of the medicine man his grandmother has sent for. Old Ku'oosh would never understand the enormity and impersonality of twentieth century warfare. Although Tayo is moved by the old man's chants, they ultimately seem impotent to him and to us too. We are not only impressed as Tayo is by the scale of world war, we also expect the psychological narrative to take a more predictable turn. When twentieth century protagonists reach their nadir, they can succumb to self-destruction. Anne Sexton's and Sylvia Plath's poetry, for instance, is driven by the appeal of death. Twentieth century writers can also make an art out of their despair, finding, as Robert Lowell does, in the demands and structures of aesthetic form the moral and psychological order their lives deny them. Although Tayo himself has struck a dead-end, the confessional impulse which drives the story thus far could well turn back on itself with the retelling and restructuring that make art out of despair. Tayo, however, seems more drawn to the first alternative, violence and death.

The Indian tales intervene at this point and subtly displace the narrative at its base. In place of a struggling, isolated first-person voice as grounds for the story's telling, they introduce the "Scalp Society" "for warriors/who killed/ or touched/dead enemies" (*C* 38). The Society must perform rituals to prevent haunting by K'oo'ho. The tormentor is not a self-flagellating ego, but rather a god outside the self. "Haunting" replaces "guilt." And the prescribed rituals, "the flutes and dancing/blue cornmeal and/hairwashing" are not personal exorcisms—the fruitless vomiting and crying in Tayo's case. Rather, they are social, even celebratory. The activity is physical not psychological and is as much the responsibility of the tribe as the victim. And a moral imperative of global proportions drives the Indian rituals forward. Without them, the entire world is threatened. Three times the imperative is repeated: "they had things they must do" (*C* 38).

Because the tales constitute separate, interpolated chapters, it is difficult to know how much of this story Ku'oosh shares with Tayo. We suspect that Tayo generally knows about the Scalp Society. He refuses,

however, to reinterpret his predicament. Instead he uses the Indian language and social perspective only to confirm his own guilt. He is the man "of monstrous dreams" who "cursed the rainclouds" (*C* 40). The cornmeal Ku'oosh prescribes does settle Tayo's stomach, but only enough for him to join his war buddies in bouts of violent and self-destructive drinking. The Indian tales, however, begin to develop in us an ironic perspective. We see more than Tayo does. We become gradually prepared for another ending the book could take.

The third time the Indian stories interrupt, however, the realist narrative seems much closer to the possibilities suggested by the primitive tales. Tayo is experiencing a moment of hope:

> Tayo knelt on the edge of the pool and let the dampness soak into the knees of his jeans. He closed his eyes and swallowed the water slowly. He tasted the deep heartrock of the earth where the water came from and he thought maybe this wasn't the end after all. (*C* 47)

The water is both physical and symbolic. It reawakens and purifies Tayo's senses and connects him to primitive sources of life. It also quenches his thirst and provides a respite from drought. At this moment Tayo's story becomes another version of the solitary renewal celebrated from Wordsworth to Gary Snyder. But again, the Indian narrative interrupts to foil our expectations. If it questions realist alternatives, the Indian tales also question romantic ones.

In the Indian story which interrupts at this point, the people are taken in by a magician whose hocus-pocus magic makes water flow from the rock. The people think that with his incantations they can make and control life. The Corn god becomes angry over her neglected altar and takes plants, baby animals, and rainclouds away. Again the spiteful tone of the Corn god and the facetious character of the tale suggests a version of nature which is different from the nineteenth century Western tradition. Not so readily does nature bestow life on man. Even if he undergoes the careful cultivation of solitude and spiritual receptiveness that characterizes the Romantic hero, it is doubtful that Corn Woman would respond. Her quarrel is with a community of people, not with an isolated person. And the breach is one of public, and to some extent a priori, ritual which cannot be repaired by an act of private or idiosyncratic imagination. Even the elaborate words with which the Romantic poet evokes nature could indeed come dangerously close to the manipulation which is at the heart of the sin angering the Corn God. Tayo is right in recognizing water as sign and symbol, but the Indian tale renders it as yet inactive and him as yet impotent.

Although the Indian tales have interrupted the realist narrative up

to this point and questioned our expectations, Tayo, nonetheless, bleakly continues nurturing his private guilt. He almost kills another Indian, Emo, who becomes a perverse focus for the deaths wrought by war. At this lowest point in Tayo's story, the Indian tales interrupt again to introduce Fly and Hummingbird, two messengers who take it upon themselves to go to the underworld and save the People. The counterpoint between Indian tale and psychological narrative seems strongest here. Tayo has hit another deadend; salvation seems lost to him. Yet, the Indian story, with the tales of Corn God, has completed its version of the Fall and now is pursuing the Resurrection. From now on it stays one step ahead of Tayo's own redemptive journey, as if mythically establishing the focus and tone for the psychological narrative. What is required, at this point, however, is a more direct connection between the two narratives. Betonie, the medicine man whom Tayo's aunt's hired hand takes Tayo to see as a last resort, becomes both the mediator between the primitive and modern worlds and Tayo's mentor as well.

Betonie lives in a hut overlooking Gallup, New Mexico, where, as he says, he protects cultural and historical transitions. He collects old phone books, calendars, symbolic refuse of Western culture and places them in ritualistic patterns within his hut. He listens to Tayo's story and then performs over Tayo rites of transition, purification, and healing, all of which have a salutory effect on Tayo. He then sends Tayo on a mission meant to heal him and at the same time restore the Indian people. Now the relation between Indian and realist narratives becomes more complex. Instead of interruption, there is overlap and interplay. Not only are our expectations shifted, our understanding of narrative itself is remade. Although old Betonie is a character anchored in the realist story, he shifts Tayo's narrative function, thereby changing the entire nature of the realist story. During the first half of the book, Tayo is the psychological and narrative center. He is the "organizing consciousness" which recalls its past through associate leaps. The events in his story are by and large understood as his own private history. His guilt, although tied to his inability to save his brother and uncle, seems to extend in existential waves to the social hopelessness of his birth as a Mexican Indian and to a natural world fated by his curse against him. His psyche encircles that predicament and claims it for itself.

Despite its acts of recollection and its moments of lyricism, there seems to be no future for this essentially first-person voice. No avenues usually taken by psychological realist protagonists seem open to his basic reticence. There are no innate psychological structures to save Tayo, no pieces of personality to discover and fit together. When he is forced into the recesses of his own mind, Tayo finds nothing. He is as shapeless as a ghost. He is the "unburied dead":

> For a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of the doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke. He had seen outlines of gray steel tables, outlines of the food they pushed into his mouth, which was only an outline too, like all the outlines he saw. They saw his outlines but they did not realize it was hollow inside. (*C* 14)

Tayo also seems incapable of any acts of existential will. He cannot even describe the nauseousness of his world. He only vomits. Except for the confession which constitutes the novel, Tayo also cannot create a world within which the imagination could provide solace or escape. If anything, the realist narrative seems to offer Tayo only the compulsive and fruitless retelling of his story. Confined to his cot in his aunt's house or the half-sleep at the sheep outpost or the violent drunks with his Indian war buddies, Tayo seems beyond such confessional possibilities also. Death seems his only alternative.

Betonie, however, changes Tayo's narrative position in the novel. No longer is Tayo an organizing consciousness. Rather, he becomes the protagonist of an adventure story resembling the Indian folktales. At Betonie's, Tayo realizes he must recover his Uncle Josiah's lost Mexican cattle. Betonie also sends him on an undefined mission against Witchery, the greatest evil of all. Three clues will guide him: a certain configuration of stars, the presence of a mountain, and a woman. Most importantly, Betonie tells Tayo that his is not the total story. Rather, he is part of a narrative larger than himself. The source of Evil is no longer located at the center of a fragile ego, but rather is a cosmic force. Witchery encompasses all people and all time. Like the hero of medieval romances, Tayo must overcome a series of obstacles and perform a number of physical feats to overcome Witchery, find his cattle, and save his people. Plot, not point of view, now dominates. As adventure and detective story, the narrative does not keep winding back towards its origins but, rather, pushes forward with growing suspense towards its ending: Will the cattle be found? Will Tayo defeat Witchery?

The plots of the realist story and the Indian tales become joined at this point. In the land of Fly and Hummingbird, there has been a bad ritual performed which has unleashed Witchery upon the world. Although Fly and Hummingbird successfully journey to the underworld to appease the Corn God, the Indian stories interpolated into the text do not solve the Witchery problem. It is Tayo in the realist narrative who is called upon to perform the good ritual which can undo the evil. What is demanded of Tayo now is not introspection as cleverness and physical resourcefulness. He must have practical knowledge and

physical stamina. Like Fly and Hummingbird, he must deal with the whimsical and unpredictable nature of the world. He must not only deflect the resentment of Corn Woman, the good god, but also unravel the evil of the witches, the bad "gods." Following Tayo's story educates us to the nature and function of primitive storytelling even while we remain within the context of a twentieth-century psychological realist narrative.

The narrative shift from psychological tale to adventure story externalizes the drama. Betonie returns Tayo to a world where physical prowess and practical knowledge determine success. No longer does Tayo use the fragments of Indian tales he remembers to spur reminiscence and nurture his guilt. Rather, the tales become for him a manual for physical survival. They tell him how to use things and how things have been successfully used in the past. They constitute an education, a "hands-on" knowledge about everyday life. Tayo, for instance, recalls Josiah telling him the story of Fly when as a child he spent the morning killing and piling up flies by his screen door. The memory prompts him to avoid stepping on grasshoppers as he walks along the roadside. Josiah's stories also help him remember his precise location. He experiences the cold and is not afraid of it. He remembers how to eat pine nuts. Ultimately, Tayo carries out his uncle's instruction, not simply to remember stories, but to remember them as situations require them. "Next time," Josiah had said, "just remember the story." Stories thus are used pragmatically. Tayo's memories continually return Tayo to a context of immediate experience and possibility.

Not only does the shift from psychological to adventure story externalize the narrative, it also places Tayo at the center of a web of communal storytelling. Stories are not the products of idiosyncratic imaginations, but rather come from many fathers instructing their sons, those sons passing on the instructions as mentors and teachers to their own sons. Thus, the tales really do not exist as separate "set pieces" as the book's physical organization suggests, but rather are woven into the fabric of everyday life by many speakers recalling and reapplying the stories they have heard. The most abstract and transcendent desire is attainable through the practical knowledge of community history relayed by stories.: ". . . distance and days existed in themselves then; they all had a story. They were not barriers. If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone" (*C*, 19). Space and time are not abstract categories of mind, but physical realities known through practical knowledge passed on by many speakers to many listeners.

The displacement of Tayo as organizing consciousness, however, does not preclude the essential realism of the book. Tayo remains the

complex psychological character traveling through the New Mexican high desert country. And the realist narrative does not lose its focus on physical detail nor its attention to Tayo's psychological restoration. Furthermore, self-consciousness does not leave the book. It is simply shifted from the interior movements of a first-person speaker to the narrative structure itself. Witchery is not only a cosmic force; it is also a narrative force because it originates in a bad ritual. As his adventure unfolds, Tayo gradually realizes that the healing rite is actually the enactment of a good story of which he is the main character. Now the fear is not that the ego will collapse but that the good story will collapse because Tayo will not enact the right ending. The obstacles are not primarily personal, but are subversions to the plot line.

Thus, the nature of the psychological realist narrative becomes radically altered. Tayo is the supremely primitive and simultaneously the supremely modern character. His action is ritualized and yet, like a Bertolt Brecht protagonist, he is continually reminded of his fictional status; that is, as a character he must supply us with the right ending. But such reminders do not call the world into question as they do in Brecht. Rather, they confirm the world's actual presence because for the Indian and for Silko narrative is ontology. That is, stories reveal the structure and the nature of the world, not the structure and nature of the mind. Not simply do we know things through stories, things are their stories. When, for instance, Tayo notices the corn leaves and the grasshoppers are faded yellow, he is really noticing that both corn and grasshoppers enact the seasonal changes of fall. The Mexican woman's blue flowers are the color of water and also indicate water's presence because they can survive only in a wet habitat. Deer entrails look like storm clouds and, in fact, indicate rain since deer come out of the mountains only in the fall. Thus, aesthetic perception, that is, seeing relationships of shape and color in things, can reveal their actual nature, their habits and habitat and not only the organizing power of the mind.

Furthermore, confusions in time and place may not result from disintegration of the mind, but rather may reveal the plural, but nonetheless orderly, nature of the world. At the beginning of the book, Tayo is terrified by the way things collapse into each other. When he aims his rifle at the Japanese, they suddenly become his brother, Rocky, and then his Uncle Josiah. The intent to kill in war becomes for him the willful murder of those dearest to him. Out of his guilt for the deaths of Rocky, Josiah, and the Japanese, he cries out in the first part of the book at "how the world has come undone, how thousands of miles, high ocean waves and green jungles could not hold people in their place. Years and months had become weak and people could now push against them and wander back and forth in time" (*C* 18). Since most of the

first part of the book takes place within his mind, Tayo seems to be describing a mental state where memory moves so quickly distinctions are lost.

Betonie suggests, however, that the collapse of things, one into another, is not the result of a disintegrating consciousness, but rather is a revelation of the world as it really is:

> "The Japanese," the medicine man went on as though he were trying to remember something. "It isn't surprising you saw him [Josiah] with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done; you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world." (*C* 130)

Simultaneously, Tayo is seeing both sides of the Fall—the world of friends before Witchery, the world of enemies after Witchery. And since the evil is ritual and narrative, everyone is joined as victims and protagonists in the Manichean drama. Thus, the Japanese, Rocky, Josiah, and Tayo are one, holding the same narrative position within the same story—albeit different versions of the same story. Within this story, no identity is singular or autonomous. Thus, Betonie does not speak of structures requiring boundaries, but of change requiring transitions. And within the cosmic outlines of the Witchery story, transition seems to describe a state of being rather than a characteristic of time. That is, transition is as much a metaphor for multiple identity as it is a metaphor for transience or change. At the point of metamorphosis, two creatures exist at once without canceling each other out. We see two things that are normally separate joined together. The tadpole is fish and frog. Thus, Tayo at the end of the book authenticates the confusions of the first part of the book: "he was not crazy, he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distance and time" (*C* 258).

Ultimately, it is the power of transition that gives the story its greatest ontological force. If the narrative can reveal the multiple identity of the world, so, too, the narrative's power resides in the multiplicity of its own nature. Like a Bach fugue, a story can have more than one independent melodic line, even more than one narrative mode operating simultaneously. And as in the fugue the lines can run in opposition or in unison, so too, the primitive and the modern stories diverge and converge. It is when both modes are running in unison that narrative seems to get its greatest ontological force. When characters from the different narrative modes become almost interchangeable and incidents from both forms coexist, coincidence and seemingly gratuitous happenings occur. Betonie's clues point out the moments when the primitive and modern

stories most nearly intersect. The first such time is when the clues are established as part of Betonie's sand-painting ritual. The presence of Betonie's assistant, a boy who is mute and animal-like, coincides with the interpolated tale of the Indian who refuses to leave the company of bears to become human again, that story overlapping Betonie's brief disquisition on the nature of the world as transition addressed to Tayo, physically present but psychologically remote, returning from the world of the "unburied dead"—all seem to represent a transition being made, all aspects of that transition present simultaneously. It is not just that the Indian tale or the boy serve as a gloss for Tayo, but that one story explains and yet develops within the frame of another, and ultimately points not to the intricate play of the imagination, but to the contrapuntal nature of the world.

A single sentence perhaps more clearly demonstrates this polyphonic understanding of narrative: "there were transitions that had to be made in order to become whole again, in order to be the People our Mother would remember, transitions, like the boy walking in bear country being called back softly" (*C* 178). The first "in order" represents the intellectually abstract Tayo; the second "in order" echoes Fly and Hummingbird; the third recalls Betonie and the immediate mission to which Tayo is called. With its adventure-story suspense and the focus on plot/action, the fabric of tales while enlightening each other also provides the clues to the immediate situation. We read them as pragmatically as Tayo. They provide the clues he must understand. Thus, as readers, we no longer follow the stories sequentially, that is, as the Indian tales interrupt the realist story. We now read contrapuntally; that is, as the weave of one story crosses the weave of another. Likewise, we no longer read for the discovery of an abstract or aesthetic system that will put Tayo's psyche in order, but rather pragmatically to discover the story's ending: Will Tayo get the cattle? Will Witchery be defeated?

Such contrapuntal reading changes our sense of narrative as a self-contained form and our sense of what ontology is as well. Characters, for instance, are no longer autonomous, self-contained psychological units. Rather, they can slide into and out of their ancestors, or move easily between the magic and the real. The Mexican Woman, for instance, who appears when Tayo needs to drive the cattle off the ridge, has a history which is plausible enough. She is a Mexican-Indian outcast who has survived through her knowledge of herbs and plants. She knows the old ways of cornering semi-wild cattle in the canyons off the ridge. Her love for Tayo restores him psychologically, filling in the void left when guilt is gone. She, thus, is firmly established in the realist narrative. But as the embodiment of one of Betonie's clues, she becomes another point where the primitive and modern stories intersect, for we

do not understand her history as we would a psychologically realist character's, that is, as developing causally and sequentially from a distinct birth and from childhood events. Rather, the Mexican Woman seems to appear "ready-made" and intact as another appearance of the semi-goddess who has rejuvenated Josiah and who also mothered Betonie. We know her not by a series of events, but by a series of earlier apparitions. She does not change or develop but rather reappears in different environments.

The Mexican Woman is also connected to the mysterious hunter who seems to slide out of the identity of the mountain lion that Tayo meets on the ridge. Reality seems to take the shape of the primitive fiction, ministering to Tayo's spirit even as it actually helps him to secure real cattle. There is no voodoo magic here, but rather characters from real and magical life slide into each other, not in the presence of incantations but in the attempt to treat the natural world correctly.

Not only do characters in the novel take on both realist and magical forms simultaneously, but also Tayo must take on that multiple identity too. At the climax of the novel Tayo wills himself into the myth. Emo and Pinky have set Tayo up for capture by the police, but Harley has allowed him to get away before the set-up. From behind a rock in the heart of the New Mexican nuclear reservation, Tayo witnesses Emo brutalizing and eventually murdering Harley in revenge, but also in an attempt to flush out Tayo. Tayo's first and strongest impulse is to rush to Harley's aid and kill Emo in an act of hatred, vengeance, and loyalty to his dying friend. But the configuration of stars reminds him that he is in the center of a mythic as well as a personal drama. In fact, the venting of personal emotion fulfills the Indians most self-destructive instincts. By killing Emo and getting himself jailed or killed in the process, Tayo becomes another instance of Indians killing and destroying each other, another emanation of Witchery. Instead, he must give up his first-person prerogatives and understand the event as a critical chapter in communal history, for the climax of his story is also the culmination of another episode of the Witchery story. Leaving Tayo alone in the truck was not an act of carelessness on Harley's part but a conscious sacrifice. Harley let Tayo escape knowing he himself would die in his place. By refraining from saving Harley, Tayo not only foils Emo but in effect accepts Harley's death and lets it become an exorcism, an undoing of Witchery. Tayo also remembers at this point that an evil rite is rendered ineffective if it is witnessed by an outsider. He chooses to be that witness, thus foiling Witchery at the mythic level and stopping a chain of self-destruction on the realist level. Tayo has enacted the right ending. The final pages of the story confirm the rightness of Tayo's decision. Emo and Pinky disappear to California.

Tayo returns to his home; the Mexican cattle thrive. But to the extent that the book is an episode in mythic and communal history, Tayo's story is incomplete. It is not the whole of history by any means. And *Ceremony* makes provisions for its reenactment not only by some other "Tayo," but also more importantly by the very retelling of the tale itself.

Early in the book Tayo describes language using the familiar modern metaphor of web:

> "But you know, grandson," [Ku'oosh said] "this world is fragile."
>
> The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. That was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love. (*C* 36-37)

Although webs of meaning for the modernist have pointed to the inadequacies of language, the circumlocutions of Ku'oosh are very different. Repeating and remaking stories reveal the precision the language of multiple storytellers is capable of. The effort to "get it right" is to tell the story in all its versions with all its corrections, additions, and refinements. It is an exercise in history and in community. Thus, no story can be considered apart from the polyphony of storytelling—where many stories hold the floor simultaneously, playing off and interacting with each other. Nor is any story the product of a single organizing consciousness. As Tayo is displaced from the center of his story, who then takes up his story-telling role? What multiple voice are we listening to when we read *Ceremony*?

Ceremony introduces its own speakers in the three poems which serve as prologue, introduction, and ultimate frame (*C* 1-3). The first poem describes Thought Woman who creates things by naming them, but who also requires someone to overhear and tell the story she is thinking. Although she is like the Emersonian creator who in naming things brings them to be, she is not a self-sufficient speaker. Whatever she thinks comes into existence, but creation requires someone to tell what that story is. In this case, the mediator is the "I" introduced in the poem's final stanza: "She is sitting in her room/thinking of a story now/ I'm telling you the story/ she is thinking."

It would seem that Thought Woman's mediator is the speaker of

the second poem which takes up where the first poem left off: "I will tell you something about stories..." But the next lines introduce another mediator, someone who is overhearing Spider Woman's spokesman and is turning the first-person address into a third-person report. The "he" intimately and comically points to his own belly filled with stories and invites us, as a mother invites her children, to feel the fetal movement within: "I keep them [stories] here/ [he said]/ Here, put your hand on it/ See, it is moving./ There is life here/ for the people." We, too, are asked to listen for and then speak stories.

What becomes apparent in these first two poems is that there is no such thing as direct speech, that is, a speaker in a poem addressing an audience. Rather, all language is mediated. Thought Woman requires someone to overhear her, an "I" requires a "he" to enclose the lines in quotes, a response is not direct, but is reported. The self-consciousness of primitive storytelling, unlike the self-consciousness celebrated by structuralists, however, does not contradict the birth and survival of meaning it celebrates. Spider Woman names things and they appear. The story's belly grows those rituals and ceremonies which are a defense against the evil that "can't stand up to our stories." The birth of meaning, however, is not a singular event over and done with at the beginning of time, but rather is plural and ongoing, requiring the participation of many listeners and reporters/interpreters. Furthermore, words themselves are not clearly attributable to a single speaker. The first two poems, for instance, do not name the speakers, but rather identify them and their subject matter by personal pronouns which slide across each other and their referents. Note how all six personal pronouns are the subjects of sentences or clauses within the first five lines of the second poem: "I will tell you something about stories,/ [he said]/ They aren't just entertainment./ Don't be fooled./ They are all we have, you see...." The "I" becomes the "he" becomes the "we," that "we" shaded into "us," the audience, the "you" "he" is addressing. The frames of reference also slide across each other. There is an easy interchangeability of identity and boundaries: one moment the story is held in "his" belly which we are invited to touch; the next moment we are within the belly itself, and the next moment the story itself has become the belly: "He rubbed his belly./ I keep them [the stories] here/ [he said]/ Here, put your hand on it/ See, it is moving./ There is life here/ for the people.// And in the belly of this story/ the rituals and the ceremony/ are still growing." Such an easy interchangeability of identity and boundaries suggest that it is the motions of the interchange itself which governs the movements of the poem, not the identity of the speaker nor the self-enclosed structure of the images or frames of reference. Also, stories are contained within the frames of other stories,

and we ourselves are living within the "belly" of a story.

Of all the poems, the third poem establishes most clearly the nature of storytelling. "What She Said" starts in the middle of a conversation as a response to someone who has a serious problem. The party in trouble is silent as are the listeners in the previous poems, Spider Woman's mediator in the first poem, the children listening to the teacher/father of the second poem. Yet, somehow the listeners have conveyed their message and "she" is offering the remedy: "The only cure/I know/ is a good ceremony. . . ." The offer is modest, reported by someone else as "what she said," and because of its nature as response seems to make of the other two poems a kind of round table at which all the she's, he's, and I's have been sitting conversing, or perhaps more precisely, an inner round table surrounded by outer circles of mediators, reporting and participating in the discussion. Somewhere in the outer rings we, the readers of the book, have been sitting overhearing parts of the conversation, piecing them together as I have been reporting, listening and piecing in this essay. Not all of the conversation is heard, but what is unheard can be assumed by the response. Certainly, to some extent the unspoken evil "she" is finding the cure for is the evil the pregnant father speaks of; surely "she" is connected to Spider Woman, and thus the cure had ontological significance.

But more importantly, what the circle of conversation establishes for us is a context of kind and profoundly serious responsiveness and also in that responsiveness a speaking of the story which is the cure. *Ceremony* is that story spoken ultimately not by Tayo or the third-person speaker limited omniscience which stands behind Tayo, but rather by that group of gods in conversation established by the book's opening poems. And as the book had moved us from hearing Tayo's solitary voice interrupted by the voices of Indian tales to a polyphonic listening of both modernist and primitive stories simultaneously, we have finally been invited into the presence of those gods and educated enough to listen to them and retell their story.

Notes

[1]Gabriel García Márquez and Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava*, trans. Ann Wright (London: Verso Editions, 1983) 36.

[2]Márquez, 35.

[3]Márquez, 36.

[4]Márquez, 37.

[5]Márquez, 36.

[6]David Young and Keith Hollaman, Introd., *Magical Realist Fiction: An Anthology*, ed. Young and Hollaman (New York: Longman Inc., 1984) 2.

[7]Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: The New American Library, 1977) 13. (Henceforth cited in the text as *C*.)

[8]Although Tayo's story is told in the third person, its limited omniscience and persistent self-probing give it the character of the first-person confessional voice. Tayo, by nature, is not particularly verbal. Use of the third person allows for the exploration of his complex interior life without violating his basic reticence.

The Scientist As Storyteller: Storytelling As Science

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At first glance it would seem that a quaint Zuni myth about strange creatures emerging from under the ground along the stem of a cane plant would have little to do with modern theories about the origin of the universe, or that such a story should concern scientists as well as literary scholars. But an ancient connection might apply in a way surprising to both groups especially since those who do science and those who study literature are conditioned to believe that as members of two different cultures they have little in common.

The story begins when *A'wonawil'ona*, the primary god of the Zunis personified in the sun, observes a soft, barren world whose primeval inhabitants do not make the proper offerings to him. Dismayed by that, he summons from inside the young earth two successive groups of creatures; and in each instance they too fail to provide the homage he seeks. Before he calls forth yet another group he stops to consider how he might at last fill the world with people who revere him properly. As he ponders, it rains, and rivulets gather into rushing streams from whose foamy water two brothers sprout. These are the *Ahayuuta* twins—the legendary Zuni war gods considered to be the sun's offspring. When *A'wonawil'ona* sees them he instructs them to venture back into the earth and bring from below all who remain to the surface. If they are thus led out of the dark ground to live on this world, he reasons, perhaps those subterranean creatures will know how to make the proper offerings of prayer meal and prayer sticks once they settle here. So like growing roots the *Ahayuuta* twins descend and venture forth in all four directions. To each of the various groups living in the darkness below, the brothers explain their mission and summon them all back through the labyrinthine passageways they have charted in their descent (Tedlock, *Finding the Center* 223-72; Tyler 86; see also Cushing 379-84).

In a story like this one, it is easy to overlook certain implications relevant alike to science and poetics. Scientists as well as critics have

never learned fully to respect the oral traditions of peoples like the Zunis, let alone wonder whether scientific and poetic creativity alike might reside in a preliterate tale about origins. Overlooked as well is the possibility that those who have traditionally told such stories might ultimately be raising issues that our modern society usually associates with scientists. Yet just as preliterate storytelling incorporates a distinct poetic artistry, so too does it represent a studied effort to understand and explain how and why the world works the way it does.

It is too long and too involved to summarize briefly here, but the narrative involving *A'wonawil'ona* and the *Ahayuuta* twins employs its smaller details in a way that reinforces the impression that some cogent observation has gone into its making. The underground "villagers" whom the brothers coax to the surface dwell along subterranean oceans, which suggests an awareness of aquafers, however crudely. When those creatures agree to venture upward they bring bundles with them containing both "wild seeds" and "garden seeds," which reflects not only a grasp of the principles of germination and an understanding that some plants reseed themselves while others are domestic, but an attempt to engage in the kind of speculation that scientists practice. We find here an unexpectedly advanced sense of plant reproduction which incorporates but also supercedes the fundamental intuition that sunlight and moisture combine to make things grow. All this suggests that "primitive" storytelling is more than mere superstitious diversion. In fact, the more we look the more we realize that stories like this one indicate a genuine capacity for curiosity and investigation.

Frank Cushing, a nineteenth-century anthropologist who recorded Zuni myths, provides a cogent illustration of the neglected link between science and storytelling. In their legendary account of the origin of corn, he writes, the Zunis recite how "a youth and a maiden, continent and pure," grasped opposite broad and fluted blades of tall "spring grass or pigeon grass" which are suspended above them. As each pulled at the grass in opposite directions, they walked or danced around it, grasping the blades firmly "to draw themselves upward until they had rapidly grown to the tallness of themselves," and then they embraced each other. As a result, the twin interwoven blades were jointed four times or six depending on the height of the participants; "yea, and marked with the thumb-marks of those who grasped them, twisted by their grasp while circling around them and leaved with plume-like blades and tassled with green-like spikes at the tops" (Cushing 377). In other words, wild grass has been transformed into domestic corn by a young male and a female consort who braid it as they dance around it.

Taken only at face value, that account may seem no more than a fanciful tale of transformation. However, the story should be careful-

ly matched with what those who originally composed it observed. In his commentary to the narrative, Cushing writes that the Zunis had noticed that unlike the tall grasses, "the corn plant is jointed; that its leaves spring from those joints not regularly, but spirally; that stripped of its leaves the stalk is found to be indented, not regularly at opposite sides, but also spirally; that the matured plant is characterized, as no other plant is, by two sets of seeds, sometimes earlets, at the top; also that these tassels resemble the seed-spikes of the spring-grass or pigeon-grass; that the leaves themselves while like broad blades of grass are fluted like plumes; and that amongst the ears of corn ever and anon are found bunches of soot..." (372).

Never mind for the moment that the prototypical corn plant could not possibly have been created by a young female and her male counterpart dancing around a tuft of grass that way. Just notice that the narrative describes some carefully distinguished features of a mature corn plant, with its peculiar configuration of a jointed stalk and its leaves spiralling irregularly out of those joints. Before that story could have been assembled, some so-called primitive spinner of tales had to strip the stalk of its leaves and discover the indentations. Moreover, the leaves of that plant had to be contrasted with the fluted leaves of at least two varieties of wild grass. In other words, the narrative did not spring willy-nilly out of someone's half-developed imagination. It exhibits careful study and reflection instead, and it actually promotes the inference that at some distant prehistoric point in early tribal life someone pondered what might be called the riddle of corn: What is the nature of that plant and how did it originate? And in the process of wondering, that individual took a long, hard look at more than one specimen. If the answer is wrong, the impulse to ask such questions deserves the respect of any scientist who has struggled to formulate a hypothesis. The more we study the Zuni corn myth, in fact, the more we are moved to acknowledge that whoever is responsible for first articulating it is likely to have spent a long time indeed scrutinizing cornstalks. Put in that perspective, the resulting narrative does attest that some careful speculative reasoning preceded by close observation has taken place.

Nor are the corn myth that Cushing relays or the Zuni story of *A'wonawil'ona* and the *Ahayuuta* twins the only such Native American narratives. The Navajo creation story also testifies to the same kind of careful observation. Perhaps the most comprehensive Native American origin cycle available in print, that narrative explains a great deal about the Navajo world and its surroundings, from how the cosmos acquired its visible features to the origin of the tribe itself, accounting both for widely recognized gross features and for minute details that few but scientists would bother to notice.

It tells, for example, that the milky way was formed in the sky when the trickster Coyote impatiently threw a blanket full of mica flakes into the air instead of waiting patiently for the constellations to be arranged in the heavens according to a premeditated plan (Zolbrod 93-94). Early inhabitants of the earth placed a sun and a moon in the heavens to provide warmth and brightness by day so that people could conduct their affairs; to give nocturnal creatures a bit of light during the dark night while others slept; and, most importantly, to allow for the measurement of time in terms of days, months, seasons, and years (Wyman 369-83). Here on the earth's surface, meanwhile, the matching spiracles on both sides of the thorax of Archididae exist because two loons challenged *Wóóneeshch'ii̯dii* the Locust to pass an arrow from side to side through his heart before they would permit him to enter their primeval world (Zolbrod 76-78). Similarly, there are red streaks on the face of the ground squirrel because *Hazéétsoh* the Squirrel smeared his cheeks with the blood of a slain monster to improve his looks (Zolbrod 229).

All fanciful explanations to be sure. But consider at least that at some very early prehistoric point an Athabascan or Puebloan forerunner to the Navajos wondered about the array of stars in the heavens and observed the lunar and solar cycles. Someone took the trouble to inspect the markings on small animals and still smaller insects. Nor did they do so casually or accidentally. One does not merely happen to see the spiracles on a locust or the minute coloration in a squirrel's face. A process of deliberate and systematic observation has obviously been at work here, leading to well-developed, accurate generalizations. The Navajo creation story thus accounts for the precise thickness of a gopher's hide, the grayish-brown streak above a swallow's eye, the exact shape of the female bat's vulva, the texture of a mountain sheep's horns—all features which few people other than scientists would bother to observe and record.

Washington Matthews, an army surgeon and an amateur naturalist who gained considerable standing in the scientific community in the late nineteenth century, praised the Navajos for their curiosity and the precision of their observations. His major achievement while working among them was a comprehensive translation of their creation story, which he acquired over a period of a dozen years or so. To gather it he attended their ceremonies, cooperated with their medicine men whenever he was called upon to treat Navajo patients, and communicated open-mindedly with his Navajo companions. Unlike many of his contemporaries who saw Native Americans as savages, he recognized that the Navajos were careful information-gatherers who used their stories to convey from generation to generation what they

had learned. Moreover, in "Natural Naturalists," a fascinating essay which deserves far more attention than it has received, he argues that Native Americans in general were capable of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, and could do so with accuracy which might surprise many of us.

Other tribes, too, Matthews demonstrates, exhibit the same propensity for curiosity and observation and the same compulsion to seek explanations that Western tradition boasts of. "Everywhere in Indian folk-lore," he writes, "the lower animals are characters of the greatest interest, and wherever they appear they always present themselves in proper shape." While they speak like people and "exhibit the possession of human reason," their behavior in the stories shows "a close and discriminating study of nature on the part of their authors." One story, for example, tells how the wood-rat once raced so far and fast to return to his home before sunrise that he blistered his feet, which "accounts for the callosities we see on the feet of the rat now." Another tells how, because the black bear did not manage to reach his dwelling before dawn, "the rays of the rising sun shone on the tips of his hairs and thus it is that the coat of the bear is tipped with hairs of a ruddy hue" (in Poor 133). There are many Navajo stories which similarly account that way for traits of various animals and insects, some of whom are very small and hard to capture to say nothing of examining closely. And while the explanation for the markings on the underside of a black widow spider or the way a coyote buries his food may be inaccurate, the traits themselves have been accurately observed and are recorded in oft-told stories that, when you think about it, resemble hypothetical explanations.

Nor are the observations limited to the traits of animals. Matthews gives some striking examples of the way Navajos could observe and classify plant life as well, which "has been a cause of special surprise to me" (135). Virtually every adult Navajo, he writes, could name every species of the family of grasses native to the Southwest which scientists at that time were at a loss to recognize. He tells of once discovering a "small, low plant of unattractive appearance" which he identifies as *commandra pallida*, "rare in the Navajo country, growing sparsely on the mountains among grasses and under wood which almost hides it from sight." When he asked an Indian what it was, "little supposing...that he knew anything of such an obscure rare and useless object," his friend replied, "I know it well, it has a blue root," and proceeded to name it. Challenging that answer, Matthews then presented a specimen to his friend to show him that the root was white, whereupon the Navajo took it "from my hand, scraped the root stock with his thumb-nail, handed it back to me and bade me observe it for a mo-

ment. In a few seconds to my great surprise, the denuded root changed from white to a delicate cerulean tint'' (136).

There is ample evidence, too, that Native American storytelling reflects a long tradition of precise astronomical observation. When he examined a set of petroglyphs or rock carvings at what had been identified as an ancient solstice marker employed more than five centuries ago by the Anasazi forerunners to today's Puebloan tribes at the Wijiji site in New Mexico's Chaco Canyon, archaeoastronomer Ray A. Williamson recognized the more recently placed effigy of the Navajo culture hero *Tó bájísh chíní* or Born For Water, twin brother and partner to the legendary *Naayéé' neizghání*, or Monster Slayer, who in the Navajo creation story rid the newly created world of a band of ravaging monsters. Nearby is a painted likeness or petrograph of the Navajo sun god, *Jóhonaa'éí*, Monster Slayer's real father and titular father to both of the warrior twins. The image of Born For Water had been superimposed upon a solar likeness carved earlier by prehistoric Anasazi skywatchers whose traditions were adapted to Navajo storytelling practice when that group entered the region sometime during the fifteenth or sixteenth century. According to the Navajo creation story, settlement there could not begin until the monsters were destroyed and human life could safely be installed. A few meters to the north of the petrographs can be found several petroglyph patterns of recognized Navajo constellations duplicated on ceremonial rattles and sandpaintings. Those constellations have been identified as Revolving Male (Ursa Major plus the polestar), Revolving Female (part of Cassiopeia or of Ursa Minor), and Slender First One (part of Orion) (Williamson 168-72).

While the sedentary Pueblo Indians are more likely to use features of the landscape as fixed horizontal solstice markers to determine when to plant, to harvest, to hunt certain types of game, and to conduct their ceremonies, the more nomadic Navajos originally relied on the constellations calendrically because they migrated seasonally. But both groups obviously watched celestial phenomena with great care and have incorporated the resulting observations fully into their narrative traditions. The Navajos know that planting can begin, for example, when Revolving Male lies along the horizon early in the evening, which by our calendar occurs late in May or early in June. His position is also used to mark other seasons and to indicate when various animals mate and bear offspring. Thus he is a harbinger of life and fecundity, which helps to explain why the Navajos have learned to track his movement, just as they have learned to chart the course of other constellations to conduct their hunting and their agriculture (Williamson 163-64). Because it is insinuated in the creation story that Revolving Male and Revolving Female are the celestial parents of *Asdzą́ą́ nádleehé* the Changing

Woman and *Yołgai asdzą́ą* the White Shell Woman, mothers respectively of *Naayéé neizghání* and *Tó bájísh chíní*, Revolving Male is also a figurehead of procreation (Zolbrod 171-79; Wyman 139-46, 407-14, 509-16). Thus, as the Navajos monitor such constellations as guideposts for living their lives, they see in effect the yearly reenactment of a life-giving drama, just as their stories serve as benchmarks for what they observe.

As for the Pueblos of the region and their Anasazi ancestors, their architecture sometimes reveals how for them storytelling and accurate skywatching merge, and the buildings they constructed reflect their capacity to watch and calculate. In his discussion of Casa Rinconada, the giant ceremonial kiva located on the south bank of the Chaco Canyon wash, Williamson (132-44) demonstrates that "its builders had paid considerable attention to" its form and structure and to its precise directional orientation when they erected it in the eleventh century. It is a carefully made circular structure containing 28 evenly spaced wall niches, with negligibly small errors in their distribution. The polar and equatorial axes are in almost perfectly symmetrical alignment with the four cardinal points. The center line describes doorways pointing respectively due north and south to the true poles. In addition to the cardinal alignments of the axes, which Williamson demonstrates were determined astronomically, the structure contains four post holes which once held beams that supported its roof. They too fall along cardinal lines, and they form a square whose center virtually coincides with the center of the kiva's shell, which is an almost perfect circle. Taken as a whole, he suggests, Casa Rinconada "is a metaphor of the cosmos in stone, adobe, and wood—an image of time and space as seen by the Anasazi."

In its way, that image is as exact as a precisely made map. It finds verbal expression in a remarkably well-matched passage found in the emergence myth told at the Pueblo village of Acoma only sixty miles south. In that story, when the first kiva on the earth's surface was built, beams were erected out "of four different trees" each planted in the four cardinal directions deep in the underworld for the people to climb up on. "The walls represent the sky, the beams of the roof (made of the wood of the first four trees) represent the Milky Way. The sky looks like a circle, hence the round shape of the Kiva" (Stirling 19, quoted in Williamson 138).

As the seasons pass the sun creates precise configurations of light and shadow in Casa Rinconada, and Williamson argues that the kiva was constructed that way so that its users could keep track of time. He singles out the alignment of the sun's rays through one particular opening as a summer solstice marker, which, he argues, appears to be closely related to various Puebloan myths that describe the origin of

twin culture heroes like the Navajo *Naayéé neizghání* and *Tó bájísh chíní*, or the Zuni *Ahayuuta* twins (Williamson 171).

Other traditional Native American myths have likewise been linked with skywatching, even though the tribes who composed them did not necessarily "illustrate" them with massive structures like those found in the ruins of Chaco Canyon. The Blackfeet of Montana account for the North Star and the Big Dipper with a story about a maiden and her seven brothers who are orphaned when their elder sister takes a bear as her lover, learns witchcraft from him, and kills everyone in her tribe. Having no relatives in this world, the survivors decide to live in the sky, where the youngest brother becomes the North Star because he is the one who suggests that they go there to dwell, and the little sister along with the eldest brother become the Pointer Stars. She settles closest to the North Star because she had carried her brother on her back. By assuming their respective places in the sky, the sister and her brothers help mark the passing of time—an inference which can be made only by people who have learned to watch the heavens carefully, know how to use constellations calendrically, and have come to wonder about the origin of those stellar configurations to begin with (Wissler and Duvall; see also Williamson 31).

All over the Americas there are numerous stories like that which account for the cyclical movement of celestial features. Thus the sky becomes a living calendar, so to speak, conjoining the actions of primeval myths, the verifiable movement of heavenly objects, and precise units of time—all reflecting a measure of reliable observation we have not fully learned to attribute to so-called primitives. For the Native American storyteller-observer, then, sky and earth provide an animate re-enactment of life-giving creation stories which explain all things. The Zunis, in fact, have a special term for such a narrative. They call it a *chimiky'ana'kowa*, or that which tells of beginnings. Set in the *inoote* or long ago, when the world was still "soft," or in other words when swift, drastic change was perceived to have occurred, those stories are considered true because they account for the appearance of the known world and the universe which surrounds it (Tedlock, "Pueblo Literature: Style and Verisimilitude" 223). They thus express speculation on everything from the position of the sun and the movement of the stars to the placement of rivers and peaks and even the organization of tribes and clans. Nor could such stories have been composed without a careful look at all that could be seen and examined or without thoughtful speculation.

Painstaking observation and speculation were apparently practiced among ancient peoples worldwide and it bears a closer relationship to storytelling than we have commonly supposed. Archaelogical sites

everywhere indicate that "naked-eye astronomers" carefully watched the sun, the moon, and other celestial phenomena to foretell when to plant and to harvest, where game might be found, and even when eclipses would occur (see Aveni). And such observation can be linked to stories in a complex web of human curiosity and creativity. Man is by nature a questioning creature with an innate capacity to answer riddles. Often those answers are stored compulsively in the collective memory by means of what the Zuni call *chimiky'ana'kowa*. Going back to the dawn of virtually every literary tradition, we find, in fact, that one of the oldest forms of self-conscious verbalizing is the riddle—a tap root of poetic activity everywhere and a distinct indication that curiosity is an early human attribute (see Preminger 711, Welsh 25-46).

Riddles often describe one thing in terms of something else, and like storytelling, riddle-making can all too easily be shrugged off as a simple-minded word play or a childish joke. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* associates the earliest riddles with magic but says nothing about the way they reflect observation (711). Yet a riddle displays the human compulsion to look deeply at an object or a phenomenon and then to generalize about the relationships and processes that it suggests. Contemplating the forces responsible for creation, for example, a characteristic riddle from one of the Rio Grande Pueblos sees the earth as mother, the sky as father, and humankind as their natural offspring, all of whom are presented as characters in an elaborate narrative. Earth and sky are thus envisioned as weaving partners who create an entire world with their handiwork. The warp of their tapestry is seen as "the white light of morning," while the weft becomes "the red light of evening." Its fringes are "the falling rain," and its border "the standing rainbow" (see Spinden "Song of the Sky Loom" 94). That analogy represents the kind of speculation whereby riddles result in complex storytelling. Nor is that an isolated instance of how seemingly simple, contemplative riddle-making gives way to insightful narrative or a kind of crude "model."

In the Navajo creation story, for example, when the war god *Naayee' neizghání*, sets out to destroy the few remaining monsters yet to be vanquished before the world can be safe for humankind, he seeks out *Sa* the Old Age Woman, who eventually brings death to all. "Old grandmother," he tells her, it does not please me to tell you so, but I have come here to kill you." She then replies, "Very well, then grandson. But think it over before you kill me. For once the people discover that *Sa* will no longer slowly sap their strength with the passing of the years and finally devour them, they will have no incentive to beget offspring" (Zolbrod 264). Thus, in puzzling over the universality of death, the ancient Navajo composers of this episode gleaned a basic ecological

understanding. They obviously saw human life as cyclical, just as they acquired an awareness of how the seasons work. Deciding to spare *Są́*, *Naayéé' neizghání* goes on to threaten *Hak'az asdzą́ą́*, the Cold Woman, who "each year... freezes the earth," and "puts the animals to flight or sends them into hiding" as "she covers the streams with ice" and "dries up the leaves" on the trees. When he announces that he intends to kill her, she answers, "Whatever you wish, grandson.... You may kill me or you may let me live. Either way, I do not care, for I am wretched up here where I dwell. But if you really care for those who are to inhabit this world in the future, you will mind well the consequences. Once I am dead it will always be hot on the earth. Once I am dead the land will eventually dry up from exhaustion, having no season to rest itself each year. The springs will cease to flow once all snow melts and the waters diminish. The aspens and the cedars will have nowhere to deposit their seeds safely in the ground each autumn. Over the years the people will perish, since they will have no melons and no corn to eat" (Zolbrod 265-66).

Thus we see in the Navajo response to the riddle of human mortality and the annual arrival of winter a perceptive awareness of nature's patterns and an effort to articulate a comprehensive explanation of human life in its broad natural setting. With the verifiable understanding that modern science provides, we today are apt to overlook the deeper implications of such early efforts at confronting fundamental questions about the world and its surrounding cosmos by assembling such a seemingly crude cosmology. But every culture including our own has had an early creation story. What is the *Book of Genesis*, after all, if not a "primeval history," which, as the *Interpreter's Commentary on the Bible* states, "poses the perennial riddles of human life" (Layman 3)? And when we look at the creation myths of other peoples, in case after case we find evidence of thoughtful speculation about ultimate questions. How was the cosmos formed? Where did the Milky Way come from? What is the source of all life? Why is the landscape the way it is? The answers are recorded in the form of narratives—myths and stories deemed so essential that they had to be voiced in that special language called poetry—which we define here as that art form whose primary medium is language—so as to remain etched in the collective memory by being told and retold over the span of generations, even without the help of print. Hence the appropriateness of the Zuni custom of employing the term *chimiky'ana'kowa* to designate a special kind of story about the beginning of things seems appropriate to all civilizations. For wherever we look we find origin stories which more or less account for the manifest givens in a world fully created and somehow demanding reasoned explanation. Which puts the Old Testa-

ment in the same category as the Zuni story about the origin of life on earth or the Navajo creation story.

A *chimiky'ana'kowa*, then, can actually be considered a protoscientific tale which anticipates features of scientific writing. For example, it is worth noticing that today's scientists and science writers employ questions in attempting to explain basic issues, especially when they seek to explain their refined conceptions to non-scientists and thus function somewhat like storytellers striving to impart knowledge so that it can be readily grasped. "What was it like at the start of the universe?" asks astrophysicist Eric Chaisson in *Cosmic Dawn*, one popular contemporary book on the origin of our cosmos (38); likewise, Carl Sagan confesses in *Cosmos*, "All my life I have wondered about the possibility of life elsewhere. What would it be like? Of what would it be made?" Then, musing about our own earth, he continues to question in a manner not really different from the earliest riddle-making cosmological storytellers. Recognizing that "our world is now overflowing with life," he goes on to ask, "How did it come about? How, in the absence of life, were carbon-based organic molecules made? How did the first living things arise?" (24).

Such questions are really common rhetorical devices used by storytellers either implicitly or explicitly, but used as well by scientists in a variety of works intended alike for lay readers and sometimes even for fellow scientists. "How it all began and how it will all end—those are the cosmological questions that stir men's minds most deeply," writes Kenneth Weaver in a *National Geographic* essay on Cosmic Evolution (625). Asks William K. Hartman in his essay, "The Early History of the Planet Earth," which appears in the periodical, *Astronomy:* "How did Earth get its core of metallic nickel-iron, its mantle of dense rock, and the crust of lower density rock?" (10). And Cyril Ponnamperuma asks in an article for chemistry students, "Does life belong to what we know as matter, or is it an independent principle inserted into matter at some suitable epoch. . .?" (6). Questions like that appear often in scientific journals and popular science books and magazines. *Science Digest* devotes much of its October, 1985, issue to "The Twenty Greatest Unanswered Questions of Science." "How Did Life Begin?" it asks. "What Happened to the Dinosaurs?" "Is There a Balance of Nature?" On and on its adds to the list until it becomes perfectly clear that these are the riddles that stories are made of and not just the stuff of hypotheses. So it would actually seem that modern scientists are carrying on the ancient tradition of posing riddles and then trying to answer them, often in narrative form.

Indeed, early storytelling might bear a closer relationship with modern science than its specialized practitioners realize. Efforts to refine

the "Big Bang" theory, for example, really carry on the age-old impulse to ask how the universe began; and those who try to explain the results sometimes inadvertently posit a "soft," rapidly changing cosmos where matter and energy cannot yet be distinguished and where the subsequent condensation of matter (such as hydrogen and helium atoms) from energy is telescoped into a relatively brief description when the process actually took billions of years. Photographs of nebulae and young galaxies common in texts and popular books on the history of the universe inevitably project images of fluid celestial configurations, as do paintings and other kinds of graphics used to illustrate the earliest formation of the Milky Way or of our solar system. What's more, the contemporary scientific community includes a growing number of cosmologists or modern-day storytellers like Carl Sagan or Owen Gingerich who write about the origin of the universe as empirical investigation enables it to be more and more verifiably perceived. Their productions can be called popularizations, to be sure, but we would urge researchers to be slow in dismissing them as such. Granted, a video project like *Cosmos* or a book like *Cosmic Dawn* has more to do with telling the public about science than showing how it really happens, but it does serve to impart an awareness of what science yields.

One of those storytellers, Eric Chaisson, comes close to mythologizing or perhaps even deifying the primal substance out of which the whole universe arose by calling it a "bare singularity" (124), implying the existence of an ultimately unfathomable force residing beyond the reach of any current technique of observation. Meanwhile, Carl Sagan employs numerous time-honored storytelling conventions reminiscent of the oldest known *chimiky'ana'kowa*. He quotes from an array of other cosmic storytellers, for example, as he begins each chapter of *Cosmos*. Like the traditional narrators of such poetic works he is well-versed in what those who have recited before him have said. He appeals to Lucretius or Seneca or to a passage from the *Popul Vuh*, the Quiche Maya creation story traceable to pre-Columbian times. In passage after passage he uses similes and metaphors—some of them worthy of comparison with those of Homer or Vergil. Attempting to describe in everyday terms what is too vast to be envisioned easily, he writes in one passage that resonates with the oceangoing spirit of Homer's *Odyssey*, "The surface of the Earth is the shore of the cosmic ocean.... Recently, we have waded a little out to sea, enough to dampen our toes or, at most, wet our ankles" (5). In the videotaped edition, his narrator's voice is full of the measured cadence characteristic of the way *chimiky'ana'kowa* may sound when it is presented orally in preliterate cultures like those of the Zuni or the Navajo, and the way one is likely to have sounded when it was recited in ancient Greece.

The *Cosmos* tapes, in fact, represent an interesting electronic advance in the long history of cosmogenic storytelling, where the television screen has replaced the fireside and the graphics now do much of what oral storytellers once achieved with gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, and figures of speech in their efforts to make audiences "see." Indeed, *Cosmos* would stand up well under conventional literary analysis and ought to be recognized as a viable poetic work which adds video and cinemagraphic techniques to the established procedures of oral recitation and literary narrative in the formulation of an up-to-date, scientific *chimiky'ana'kowa*, complete with its requisite account of a soft, rapidly changing world that describes events which took place as far in the past as the human intellect can possibly grasp. In one segment of the series, for example, the concept of biological evolution is compressed into a two-minute animated interlude during which the simplest one-celled organism originating in the *inoote* or long ago is transformed phase by phase into an upright human, while in the background is heard a passage from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, subtly indicating that time passes cyclically as evolutionary change occurs. Meanwhile, voice-overs explain the principle of evolution with the steady, measured rhythm of blank verse—the favored metrical pattern of writers like Milton and Wordsworth in their long narrative poems. What is this but an example of modern day cosmogeny—an electronic *chimiky'ana'kowa* which "softens" the world by compressing time to dramatize a change which took place over an immensely long span?

In the broad sense, then, the modern cosmologist can fill the role of a special kind of poet—a spinner of *chimiky'ana'kowa* performing a function as old as humankind and as necessary to the human spirit as eating and breathing are to the human body. But what is the difference between the ancient *chimiky'ana'kowa* and the more verifiable cosmogeny that modern science yields? The answer seems to be that the ancient stories, once set, are unchangeable, indeed are sacred, whereas modern stories must change to reflect the new, more precise methods of observation. Thus, the mythical element remains at the forefront of the traditional creation story while it recedes in the scientific account. Having become very complex in the way it is used, myth is not an easy term to define. To be all too brief and broad, it tends to be applied in two different ways. At one extreme it is now seen as a kind of elementary knowledge or a basic and overly simplistic way of envisioning experience. At the opposite extreme stands the view that it is simply a story—at best a kind of primal legend not to be believed. Superficially defined, myth can be associated with narrative, full of story elements which express or symbolize certain deep-lying aspects of human and trans-human experience within a chronological

framework (see Preminger 538-41).

We locate the essentially mythical element at the point in a *chimiky'ana'kowa* where observation fails and imagination or intuition must take over as curiosity intensifies. Myth, then, becomes a postulation about the unseen on the basis of what can be seen. In that regard it bears a resemblance to the answer to a riddle. In a subtle but distinct way it even resembles a hypothesis, although we must remember that a hypothesis prompts a scientist to make additional observations under controlled circumstances while for the traditional storyteller further investigation is curtailed if not impossible, and religious belief grows stronger. Even so, observation is alike the foundation of science and of storytelling; we do not believe as some scientists do that myths are, as one has put it, "buncomb," or that it is totally "bunk" that "eclipses of the sun come about because the two ravening wolves Hati and Skoll, which hunt the daily sun across the sky, occasionally take a bite out of it" (Medawar 89). Rather, we prefer to emphasize the degree of celestial observation that compels an explanation for the sun's periodic eclipse. Modern science merely prompts a more carefully verifiable explanation and refines the process of recognizing riddles and constructing answers to them. Therefore, the distinction between science and storytelling is slighter than supposed. Science, like poetry, in its broadest function responds to the same eternal questions: Who are we? How did we get here? What is the ultimate cause? These questions are always impelled by observation, and when answers are attempted they prompt an even closer look, which in turn generates new questions. Science, however, incorporates a methodology for replacing one question with another more rapidly and with a greater relentlessness which, if you will, can be called skepticism. But the two activities both originate in the human impulse to know by watching and to communicate what is learned.

If the relationship between scientist and storyteller has come to seem remote in post-Renaissance times and challenges the credulity of today's specialists, it remains fossilized in the history of the words "story" and "theory," two key terms crucial respectively to the literary critic and the scientist. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "story" comes via the French *histoire* and the Latin *historia* from the Greek verb *historiā* which mean to learn or to know by inquiry, by narrative, or by history, derived from the noun *histōr*, a learned or knowing wise man or a judge. The chronological base of that word is *eidenai*, meaning to know. Its probable Indo-European source is the noun *fidtōr*, from the root *fid-*, to know, whence also derives the Sanskrit *vedas*, or knowledge; the Greek *idris*, or knowing; and the Latin *videre*, to see.

"Theory," meanwhile, comes into English via the Latin term

theoria, from the Greek noun *thēoriā*, meaning contemplation, and the verb *theâsthai*, to look upon or contemplate, which is the common base for the Greek noun *thēatron*, or place for viewing; the Latin *theatrum*, meaning the same thing; and the English word, *theater*. Significantly, the Indo-European root for both sets of terms—one related to story and the other related to theory—could be *dhau*, to see. Incidentally, it is also significant that in his discussion of the *mythos* or plot of an epic narrative or a tragedy, Aristotle in his *Poetics* is talking primarily about drama, which is surprisingly like much laboratory science since both activities require planning and tightly controlled production, called "staging" by the literary critic and "experimentation" by the scientist.

Is it too extravagant to speculate that the ancient storyteller saw the broad vistas of the open air as an arena or a giant stage wherein the forces of nature might lay out their roles in revealing secrets about the way things are, at least to a wise and patient observer? Or that the same primeval poet saw any of the earth's smaller features as a more tightly confirmed "stage" open to careful attention and observation? Likewise, the modern laboratory is a kind of theater where the agents can be carefully controlled and repeated the way a director coordinates the words and deeds of actors in rehearsal or production. Once understood, those secrets could be preserved in the careful telling and retelling that poetry allows. Today's scientist enjoys the benefits of well-equipped labs and finely honed techniques, to say nothing of a highly specialized language, but he or she nonetheless observes in very much the way the poet always has. Perhaps scientists have been drawn away from the poet's manner of putting language to work, just as the poet may feel alien in the laboratory. But the activities of both can ultimately be traced back to a singular human trait of driving curiosity with an intensely felt need to know and to transmit all that could be learned and understood.

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Of Anthologies, Translations, and Theory: A Self-Interview

ARNOLD KRUPAT and BRIAN SWANN

In the years we worked on *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (University of California Press, 1987) and *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers* (University of Nebraska Press, 1987), we were in regular communication with a number of the best critics of Indian literatures as well as a number of the best contemporary writers. It is what that experience taught us that we propose as justification for this self-interview.*

Question: What do you see as your main contribution to *Recovering the Word*.

Brian Swann: Probably the emphasis on translation—in fact I would like to see a separate volume devoted to the whole problem of translation—but that is to anticipate another question, no doubt. Given certain assumptions and parameters, I think that translation within families—the Indo-European, say—is possible. There are cultural

*The self-interview was conducted during the summer of 1987 on the eve of the publication of the two collections edited by Swann and Krupat. Some of the work mentioned as "in progress" or projected in 1987 has been completed or is well on the way. In particular, please note the following:

Brumble, H. David. *American Indian Autobiography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1988.

Krupat, Arnold. "Anthropology in the Ironic Mode: The Work of Franz Boas," *Social Text* 19/20: 105-18.

_____. *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*. Berkeley: U of California P, forthcoming.

Rice, Julian. *Lakota Storytelling*. New York: Peter Lang, 1988.

Swann, Brian. Collecting essays for a volume devoted to a translation of Native American literatures for 1990 publication.

Vizenor, Gerald, ed. *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literature*. U of New Mexico P, 1989.

Wiget, Andrew. *Simon Ortiz*. Boise: Western Writers Series, 1988.

equivalents and linguistic structures which enable one to make real contacts. I'm not qualified to comment on the translation of Indian languages into English, but from my reading I know that they are miles apart structurally. Which doesn't mean that translations can't be made, only that given the small number of scholars fluent in a native language, scholars whose interests are not primarily literary but rather linguistic or anthropological, the way to translate, at least in the immediate future, might be to team up a poet and a scholar (in the same way that William Arrowsmith has teamed up poets and scholars for the Oxford Greek plays). The aim will be to present not "versions," such as W. S. Merwin's Crow "poems" or my own in *Song of the Sky*, but translations we can term "reliable" (which doesn't mean to say they don't exist in an acute ironic field). In *Recovering* I worked with Joel Sherzer on a Kuna "Hot Pepper" story (the accompanying essay includes comments and observations on the process of collaboration). I also worked with Don Bahr on a series of Piman "Heaven Songs" and am now working with him on Papago "Deer Songs" and "Oriole Songs" with the aim of publishing them, not in specialized magazines, but in literary magazines; we've had some success, but on the whole literary magazines seem to assume every translation should somehow sound the same; should be written in a smooth colloquial late twentieth century American English, no matter what the source. I first came upon this requirement some years ago when I sent Robert Bly's "The Sixties" magazine some translations of the aristocratic Sicilian poet Lucio Piccolo (he was first cousin to Lampedusa, who wrote *The Leopard*). His style was hieratic, aristocratic, "baroque"—as a young man he had been in correspondence with Yeats. Bly turned them down, saying that the translations weren't colloquially American. Thus, for the first time, the question of *difference* arose. How does one keep difference without writing translatorese or even gibberish? This is *the* technical problem when translating from a Native American language—it has moral and political implications as well as stylistic. One way is to do what Don insisted we do: publish "the full translation apparatus" (non-free versions, "literal" versions, original word-order versions, syllable-count versions, and so on, as well as my "free" version—which I tried to make as unfree as possible!) It's something I haven't solved yet. Maybe it's unsolvable. (The whole of our project is collaborative. The Papago "Deer Songs," for instance, were recorded some years earlier by Don Bahr from the Papago singer Manuel Havier. In work we're engaged in now, Don has to keep making trips to his informant out in the desert.)

Question: And what was your part in the *Recovering* project?

Arnold Krupat: What I thought I could do most usefully was to urge the book in the direction of greater theoretical coherence. For me,

this always means, first and most of all, a certain acute self-awareness, a sense that an anthology can be more than just a collection, that it can serve to comment on its field of reference through its principles of selection and organization. Thus, a paper on a Coyote story could be placed in a particular context of concern to point up its general implications for further study, beyond any conclusions it might reach on the particular tale examined. Dell Hymes, for example, ostensibly wrote about only a single recent anthology of Native tales. But to see his work as limited *only* to the Ortiz-Erdoes volume would be a great mistake—*obviously* a great mistake, I am tempted to say, on the strength of the paper in itself. But more obviously, I hope in the context of Hymes's article in the volume as a whole.

I worked with the idea, not always fully conscious or focused, of trying to aid in the production of an overview of a field that has grown enormously, and so to suggest (I voice, here, only my own personal wish) that the study of Indian literatures *as* literatures has now come to the point where anything less than a fully informed and sophisticated criticism—at least so far as the production of books and articles goes—is simply inadequate.

Question: Nonetheless, your insistence on theory has not always been taken kindly by people who have worked long and hard in this field. Objections seem to range from, "Who needs all this fuss?" to "It's just fashionable nonsense," to various substantive criticisms. What would you say to this?

Krupat: First, some disclaimers. I am not, myself, primarily what I would consider a theorist, nor do I aspire to that status. Fredric Jameson is a theorist (the most formidable of them among the Americans in my estimate) and so are people like Jonathan Culler and Stanley Fish (whom I like somewhat less and not at all, respectively). Nor do I think that every commentator has to "have" *a* "theory." This is a stance—the positing of a false opposition, I mean, between those who "have" theory, and those who "have not"—that has, unfortunately, polarized recent work in the criticism of Afro-American literature in the United States, and I would not like to see the same thing happen to the study of Native literatures. For myself, I certainly don't have or espouse any particular theory; rather, my position has been that of the practical critic who turns to theory only when it seems impossible to proceed in good conscience without it—when, for example, I find it hard to go on about such things as "tradition" or "authorship," "originality" or "anonymity" or "orality" without inquiring further (and "further" always means broadly, historically, generally, theoretically) into just what those terms might cover. Now there is no doubt that I have, again and again, found it impossible thus to pro-

ceed where some have happily gone right on—and others will have to determine whether those who persist in what the late Paul de Man in quite another context called the "resistance to theory" do or don't suffer for that resistance. I think they do, for the most part, and I would like to give an illustration, more or less representative, of the sort of thing I mean.

As some readers may be aware, a good deal of my own work has focused particularly on Native American autobiography, a genre of writing I have found it useful to bifurcate into Indian autobiographies which are compositely produced, and autobiographies by Indians, written solely by "civilized" and/or Christianized Natives. Now, for all my labors to distinguish variants and types, there is one rather well known American critic who persists in calling Indian autobiographies "as told to" autobiographies. The point, if I can understand it, is to suggest that there is no need for all the fussing, for, after all, these are life stories *told to* an editor who just simply writes the whole thing down. On the face of it, perhaps this seems reasonable enough. It is not so reasonable if one is willing to think the matter through a bit. To settle on "as told to" as an adequate categorical description, that is to say, is to valorize a term that is strictly Western, indeed—let me admit to not having researched this point—probably strictly twentieth-century, and, moreover, that has connotations of the degraded "popular": movie stars and sports figures produce "as told to" autobiographies, so that anything called by this name is almost automatically consigned to the subliterary—exactly what this critic, a long-time proponent of the excellence of Native work, would not want to have happen! And, of course, *how* these were told, *why* they were told, and most of all the *effects* of a given procedure of telling: all these areas of potential interest are obscured by the insistence on blanketing these texts as "as told to" autobiographies. Here, I suggest, may be some of the price of resisting theory.

Question: You said you'd like to see a whole volume devoted to the topic of translation from Native languages.

Swann: Yes. One of the reviews of *Smoothing the Ground* made a plea for a volume of Native American translations, "utilizing the most recent discoveries and approaches." I think it probably has to be done some time or other. Our field of Native American studies is still young and operates on a number of assumptions that should be tested further. In fact, there's so much work to be done it's hard to know where to start. I'm glad that the *Native American Dictionary* is finally launched. Andy Wiget is a perfect choice to edit it. But he needs all our help. (We might note here, by the way, that we have a very interesting contribution from the German scholar, Rudolf Kaiser, in

Recovering. It is entitled "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception.") It might also be noted that we intended *Recovering* to present some of the best work being done by scholars on two continents. (Unfortunately, we had to omit work sent to us by two English scholars.)

Question: You just mentioned *Smoothing the Ground*. What is the relationship between *Smoothing* and *Recovering*? How did one lead to the other?

Swann: It almost didn't! It's hard work editing a large book such as *Smoothing*. I didn't want to go through it all again. But then I met Arnold—he'd been a contributor to *Smoothing*, and we discovered we lived only a few blocks from each other. As we talked, the outline of a new collection emerged. The success of *Smoothing* gave me the courage and energy to continue, and talks with Arnold opened up areas I hadn't known much about—I set about collecting essays for *Smoothing* in the first place because I was new to the field and found myself wishing that such a volume existed. I wanted essays in the book which would help someone new to the discipline, or someone who wanted to teach the subject. I also wanted very sophisticated, state-of-the-art essays to show what the discipline was capable of. One reviewer said this led to a certain schism, and it probably did. But I think *Recovering* makes an advance on *Smoothing* by being more focused, and having for a main theme the necessity for humanists and social scientists to come together. I think the scope is broader and the focus more intense. *Smoothing* led naturally to *Recovering*.

Question: Let's switch to *I Tell You Now*. How did it get started?

Swann: Arnold was general editor, with David Brumble, of the Nebraska Native American autobiography series. They'd brought out Paul Radin's *Crashing Thunder*. We were chatting in my office one day about the series when it struck me that *contemporary* lives should be represented, and he agreed. Unfortunately, when we'd begun collecting essays, editorship of the series changed, and we had to submit the manuscript through the official channels. Luckily, the readers for the Press were as enthusiastic about it as we were. It's a very moving document—I wish we could have obtained essays from everyone we approached, but those we did obtain are very special. Here again, I would really like to see a second volume in time, edited perhaps by one of the writers in *I Tell You Now*, and including new writers, as well as those we omitted. What I found moving is that the essays show the vital link between art and life, politics and being. There is no luxury of art for art's sake, though the accompanying poems or fiction are fine art. And this, I think, points up an important fact for Native American studies: it is impossible to avoid "political" positions. The

nature of Native American life forces one to open up, to see American history a certain way; nothing can be taken for granted. It has become an imperative for me to tell people what I know and encourage them to find out more. (I'm lucky that I have a ready-made student audience and don't have to traipse around like the Ancient Mariner.) *I Tell You Now* is a vital tool for me. It is not a history book, but a living, pulsing series of lives, written from within, as it were, by skilled artists.

Question: What are your thoughts about the collection of autobiographies?

Krupat: I've said that, for better or worse, I urged *Recovering* in the direction of conceptual generalizability, if I may put it that way. For *I Tell You Now*, it wasn't reasonable to think that way. For that book, it was only in my contribution to the introduction and the bibliographical essay that I could try to work "theoretically" in some degree. The chronological organization we decided on—a decision in favor of something quite simple that took a lot of complicated thinking, let me say!—is one I'm very happy with. Given the contributions our authors provided, it would have been false and misleading to try to work out some complex set of generalizations—to go by geographical region, for example, or to replicate the hackneyed sentimentalism of an organization by fixed theme: "Nature," "Culture," "Childhood," "Tradition," or whatever.

I find *I Tell You Now* an extraordinarily moving book. Perhaps, as one of its editors, I am prejudiced. But I hope readers will feel as I do. Brian and I began soliciting autobiographical essays for the book, and then, of course, pieces arrived, well, any which way—in no particular order. We read them, to be sure, as they came in; and, no doubt, each of us had his particular favorites. Such was the process of gathering materials for the book, and I suspect it is a process most editors of anthologies know well. Once we arranged the essays chronologically, however, and once I read them through, one after the other, from start to finish, there was a kind of instant sense of historical and thematic (not formal) coherence to the book *as* a book that I just hadn't recognized before. A coherence that simply was there, not one that we imposed. It suddenly became possible to trace certain recurring themes through time (rather than to insist on them as organizational principle), to see which experiences seemed to be common to Native people and which were quite unusual. What was or was not a function of gender also seemed something of considerable interest, because so many of our authors are women. (This is not the case, as anyone may have noticed, in the critical book; short of a detailed account, I would say only that we did indeed ask a number of women for essays which, for a variety of reasons, either weren't—couldn't be—completed in time

or somehow didn't fit well.) I think the book achieves a wonderful combination in that it should be a work for study and teaching (Introduction, Bibliographic Essay, Press List) and also for sheer pleasure and excitement. So, obviously, I'm very pleased with *I Tell You Now.*

Question: Will there be a successor to *Recovering*?

Swann: Only if someone else does it! I would really like to see a Native American scholar edit a volume, and people like myself phased out. (Alfonso Ortiz would be perfect!) I'm really an amateur. Well, I don't mean phased out, exactly, but center stage should be occupied by people who know a native language and participate in the culture—comparative literature would be in a parlous state if 90% of its practitioners didn't know the language of the literature they specialized in. I'd also like to see more of a liaison established between scholars working on *all* Americas. Maybe a book on this. And while we're on a wish list, I'd like to see more rigor in our field, especially in connection with contemporary Native American literature in English. I don't think anybody, least of all the author, is helped by the kind of puffery which greets every volume published by a Native American poet or fiction writer. A friend, a distinguished literary critic, once made a remark that stung. I hadn't seen him for some time, and when we met he asked what I was working on. Native American literature, I told him. Oh, is that because there are no standards? he replied, somewhat in jest (I hope). We have to ask hard questions, and if we reject certain "white" aesthetic criteria, then we have to establish others.

Question: What needs do you see for future anthologies?

Krupat: I would second what Brian has said and, for myself, add that it may even be useful, at this historical moment in the development of this sort of work, to refrain from specifying "needs and opportunities for study" too exactly. What I mean is that anthropologists and linguists who have detailed expertise where I have no more than general information are no doubt currently at work on aspects of Native American literature that will help determine what does and doesn't need to be done. Still, I would guess that we may at last be ready for specialized collections—exactly what we decided against for *Recovering*. Following on Paula Allen's work, there may well be room for an anthology of essays on feminist themes and subjects. Gerald Vizenor has put together a volume of "postmodernist" essays on Indian literature, and, although I think the postmodern critical turn is very much a mistake for this body of work, still, the idea (for someone like Vizenor) is fascinating to pursue; I look forward to the book. Brian, and I guess it was Larry Evers, had an idea for a book of essays focused specifically on the question of transcription and translation practices. I think, for one thing, a good essay or book needs to be done on the history

of that subject from, maybe, Lieutenant Henry Timberlake in the eighteenth century, to Schoolcraft in the middle of the nineteenth, and then on to the enormous—but possibly "unscientific"—developments of the later nineteenth century. I mean here Natalie Curtis and James Mooney but also such people as Frank Cushing whose contribution to southwestern ethnography is only beginning to be understood, and others like Pliny Earle Goddard and Washington Matthews. The next wave here, of course, comes with Boas and his students, on up through Melville Jacobs; then we have the great successors, our contemporaries, Dell Hymes, in particular, and Dennis Tedlock among others—and there are others, many others, working on transcription and translation at this moment. There is need, I think, for a systematic critical history of this area. And, to be sure, maybe a good collection of essays to illustrate it.

What I'd like to mention for what interest it may have is work I know of by some of the contributors to *Recovering*—work which doesn't necessarily focus on translation problems. I am aware of some of this work, of course, because of my association with these scholars in the compilation of the anthology—one of the rewards, let me say, of editorship. Brian has mentioned the long-projected *Dictionary of Native American Literature* which has now been placed under the editorship of Andrew Wiget. Wiget has also just done a study of Simon Ortiz for the Western Writers series that is a solid piece of work. In the area of native American autobiography David Brumble has a book scheduled to appear from the University of California Press in the Spring of 1988. It is full and sophisticated—and does not have the kind of overt theorizing that annoys some people about my own work. Julian Rice has completed a long manuscript on Lakota literature that will soon be published by Peter Lang. What is interesting here is Rice's particular concern that his book be useful not only to academics and scholars but to any Lakota people who might be interested. His attempt to find a style and a method that would manage both to indicate the fullest scholarly sophistication, without thereby excluding generally concerned readers, is, I believe, an important development to watch.

Swann: If I may interrupt for a second. I just received a letter from Julian which shows some of the difficulties of working in a new interdisciplinary field. His manuscript was rejected by one press, mainly it seems, on the report of a reader who identified him or herself as "coming from outside the field of literary criticism" and who was incensed at Julian's inability or refusal "to find system in narrative." The reader admitted he (or she) did not understand the terms "new critic" and "reader-response," and apparently did not believe that an individual oral narrative merits detailed interpretation of itself—it has value only

if it fits into a monolithic theory which it must demonstrate clearly. As Julian noted (referring to John Bierhorst's essay "American Indian Verbal Art and the Role of the Literary Critic" in *Smoothing The Ground*) the reader would clearly dismiss the view that criticism is primarily explicative and "cannot flourish unless it is rooted in a firm understanding of the individual work" (Bierhorst). Julian says that this reader feels that one should look to everything but the individual work in order to discuss it. He quotes the reader: "Interpretation, to be ethnographically valid . . . would benefit from discussion with contemporary Lakota speakers." As we know, Julian knows the language, and is a frequent visitor to the Lakotas—he has audio and video tapes of storytelling which he has used in his writing (notably in his Meadowlark essay in *Recovering*). But he's a literary critic and not an anthropologist. We have to smile when he asks us to imagine applying this criterion to a European language: "I stopped an English speaker on the street in Lordsburg and showed him the following page from *Ceremony*. 'I don't know if I could get into that,' he said. 'I'm a L' Amour fan myself.' " And this is not the first time this very interesting manuscript has been rejected. The reader for a second press turned it down because Julian wasn't a linguistics scholar! Let's hope that soon someone will see what his manuscript *is*, not what it isn't; someone who is more interested in expanding the field of Native American studies than in guarding turf.

Krupat: Anyhow, to continue . . . Anthony Mattina, whose translation of a sort of fairy tale (I suppose it might be called), *The Golden Woman*, by the late Peter Seymour, a Colville speaker, appeared just a little before *Recovering*, has taken on the formidable task of discriminating the esthetic effectiveness of various traditional narrators and versions of traditional tales. His *point de depart*, that many of the stories we have are simply not (likely to be) the best told stories available, opens an issue that has been neglected so far—or perhaps I should say one that, until now, it was premature to emphasize. Donald Bahr continues his work with contemporary Papago singers. He has only begun recording songs of one singer, Albert Carillo, whose material promises to be particularly interesting—traditional songs, to be sure, but longer and in some ways more personal than we usually imagine, less fixed generically than other Papago song types. Brian has already mentioned his work with Bahr.

Question: What other projects are you currently working on?

Swann: A project that relates to my Native American work is a novel I'm researching right now—it's a very long term project. It's set in 17th century England and New England and concerns the Puritans and the Indians. As far as a more immediate project . . . well, Arnold just men-

tioned my work with Don Bahr. And I like to think of myself as a facilitator, a resource person. For instance, I spent a good part of this summer in Taos, New Mexico, and became friendly with the Native and Anglo people who have created a wonderful children's theater in which all the child actors are drawn from the pueblo—it is called the Taos Pueblo Children's Theater, and their drama is called "Tiwa Tales," based on Taos stories. I'm now trying to see how we can bring it to the East Coast. Actually, my biggest project is to educate myself on Native America, North, Central, and South. It is just too vast for one lifetime. I read anything and everything I can get my hands on. I'm very unsystematic! Oh yes! I recently wrote the introduction to *Harper's Anthology of Twentieth Century Native American Poetry* edited by Duane Niatum.

Question: And your current work?

Krupat: I've mostly been interested in the past couple of years in what I suppose I might call modes of social science. I tend to think of literary criticism in social scientific terms rather than in terms of the traditional humanities, so my reference to social science here hardly signals a turn from literary interests. I've just put finishing touches on a paper on the anthropology of Franz Boas, an anthropology that I've tried to show is carried out in the ironic mode—irony meaning what one might understand from the general history of the term, from Northrop Frye, and most particularly from Hayden White. Related to this is a rather long paper I completed recently called "Criticism and the Canon: Cross Relations." The critical modes I examine here are types of formalism (the New Criticism and deconstruction, both of which, I should say, in their strictest forms seem to be essentially ironic enterprises) and historicism (in particular the humanist historicism of Roy Harvey Pearce and its relation to so-called New Historicism and parallel contemporary developments), their bearing on our understanding of the canon (of American literature), and so of the likelihood of Native literary production becoming visible to and possibly incorporated into the canon. If things go well, this latter will be part of a short book of related essays essentially focussed on Native American literature, critical method, and the canon of American literature. But this is—it has been for awhile—still very much work in progress.

Question: And what for the future?

Krupat: Well, for one thing, I am interested in Fredric Jameson's recent attempts to theorize a "third world literature." I've been much impressed, I should say, too, with the recent critique of Jameson's account by Aijaz Ahmad,—and disappointed that Jameson never mentions Native American literature even in passing. Still, I think Native American literature might well be placed in an international context,

one beyond, I mean to say, the concerns of a book such as *Recovering*. I think of the work of the Cherokee poet and artist Jimmie Durham (who has written movingly for *I Tell You Now*) with the United Nations in regard to indigenous peoples worldwide: and I wonder whether one might not modify the notion of "third world literatures" by reference to—perhaps—"indigenous literatures." This is certainly to enter upon political questions, as Brian has noted in only a slightly different context. But most commentators have wished to avoid the political so far. I find my own work increasingly concerned with political implications and possibilities.

Question: Is there anything else we should mention in closing?

Swann: Well, I've just finished reading a new (1987) collection of essays by various people (including Scott Momaday and Gerald Vizenor, as well as professional historians), which is edited by Calvin Martin and entitled *The American Indian and the Problem of History*. While some essays (including Martin's) may romanticize the Indians—and you tell me that Roy Harvey Pearce's postscript to the reissue of *Savagism* rebuts this aspect of the book—I think the book's appearance is a sign that American history is being reassessed, and that the possibility of a cross-fertilization exists between our own discipline and American history (not that they were ever exclusive, anyhow). As the area of knowledge widens, and interpretation becomes more subtle, this will create the need for more scholars. More and even better—and this will create the strongest rebuttal to people like my friend who (I mentioned earlier) made a sly remark about our field.

Writing As an Indian Woman: An Interview with Paula Gunn Allen

KATHARYN MACHAN AAL

Paula Gunn Allen, with a Laguna mother, a Lakota grandfather, and a Lebanese father, is one of the foremost Native American writers publishing today. As poet, fiction writer, and essayist, she has won grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation. Her Laguna Pueblo/Sioux heritage informs her writing and her teaching of Native American studies at the University of California at Berkeley. In this interview by Katharyn Machan Aal, former Director of the Feminist Women's Writing Workshops in Central New York State, Paula Gunn Allen speaks of her art as a writer who publishes not only in print but in performance.

Katharyn Machan Aal: I wonder if you could tell me about your history as a writer and what poetry and fiction and nonfiction—because I know you do nonfiction readings as well—how that is tied into your career as a writer.

Paula Gunn Allen: When I first started writing, which was back in—when was it?—'63, somewhere in there, I was taking a class from Robert Creeley. And Creeley talked a lot about the voice and breath. I read Olson's article on projective verse and the line as breath and sound, emotion being connected to the way the voice worked and so therefore the writer had to work a poem breaking the lines in terms of the breath so that the reader would know what the emotional content of the poem was. Terribly exciting idea. And that year he played a tape of Allen Ginsberg reading "Kaddish," I believe it was. So one of the first poems I wrote was a poem responding to "Kaddish" and attempting to get that amazing sound that I imagined one of the old prophets would have as they were out in the desert going out of their minds or whatever it was that they did when they were on a fast. "To Ginsberg" won me an undergraduate poetry prize from the English Department at the University of New Mexico. Then I heard Denise Levertov read and that was somewhere that same year. And I heard Robert Duncan read. And what I understood was that reading was very

important and that presentation styles were very important. That's all I understood. Then later I was in Oregon at the University of Eugene and I was taking writing classes and I was a writer, and I heard Ginsberg. I was simply stunned. Because what was important was that he performed those poems. His *self* didn't matter. It was very clear that what mattered was the poem. And so whether he felt foolish or wonderful or if he felt arrogant or intimidated, none of that mattered. What mattered was that he get that poem *out* there. Usually white poets mumble—you know, when they read, the white poet sort of sits there and reads a poem. I do kind of halfway between what white poets do, particularly "establishment" "literary" mainstream poets, and ethnic poets—Black, Chicano, and to some extent Asian poets—who really perform.

Aal: What do you mean when you say the word *perform*?

Allen: The poem is delivered with knowledge of the intentions behind the poem. They don't "read" it, they *do* it—sometimes with large gestures, always with facial and vocal expression, sometimes walking, strutting, dancing, or, as in Ginsberg's case, using finger cymbals, drums, etc., and/or "props."

Let me go back to what Olson said. What Olson said was the writer takes the energy from wherever it came from—and there will be some several places—and carries it over, all the way over *to* the audience. Those lines are just engraved in my brain, because energy after all is a physical function and the voice is a physical thing. Now, putting stuff on paper is very removed from a physical act. What I notice with ethnic poets or with Ginsberg is that they were—they are very busy transferring that energy over. So that when we write—those who think of ourselves as oral poets first and then as poets—when we write we attempt to convey on the page what our *voice* does when we read, rather than writing the poem and then attempting to read from the page in a way that will please an audience or that will be comprehensible to an audience. We're doing it the exact opposite way. And that, of course, comes out of the oral tradition, for an Indian writer. And for Black writers, I think it comes out of an oral tradition out of the churches, the delivery style of the ministers and the preachers, and out of the music styles. I think they're combining those. What the Hispanic-Chicanos are plugging into I'm not entirely sure. Except certainly they have a cultural basis for a kind of openness of performance when they do anything, when they do any kind of conversing. So I imagine that that's what they're pulling from, but I don't know. That's what I mean. I mean, too, it isn't to have a play, it isn't to produce something, as a performance in the technical sense of the word *performance*. But rather it is to enact, particularly with the use of the voice and to a much

lesser extent the use of the body. The voice and the face. Exactly what it is that's being conveyed, in terms of meaning and in terms of emotion.

I'm always *very* aware of the audience. To some extent I even watch the expressions on their face. But to a larger extent I'm listening, somehow. You know, you just sort of *feel* whether they're with you or not. You just *know* it. So last night at the [Women's Writing Workshops] reading I *knew*—I'd look around and people were listening. They were looking at me, or perhaps they weren't looking at me but there was an intentness on their face. Their faces mirrored the emotion that I was conveying at the moment. Or their body did. The way they were sitting. The way they were holding their hands. Whatever. And it's a group impression. It's not really person by person in the audience. But you look up and you get this whole group shot in your head. I do. And I can tell whether they're with me or not. I hate to read in darkened auditoriums for that reason. It drives me crazy. Because if I can't see my audience, I'm in trouble. Because I can't keep that connection. It's a visual connection.

Aal: Why do you perform?

Allen: Well, when I was little I lived in Cubero. And Cubero's a very small town and there's not much to do. And I had two sisters. And my oldest sister, Carol Lee, was—for some reason she was always putting on plays. And of course we were always *in* the plays. And, of course, my folks were very good about applauding and saying, "Gee, that's nice." When I was very small—I had just learned how to talk—a couple of my aunts were quite taken with the idea that I would memorize anything. So they would get me to say nursery rhymes, and they taught me "The Gettysburg Address." I was two and a half years old and I would say this. And then they took me to school to show the older children that this two-and-a-half-year-old could recite "The Gettysburg Address." So, you know, I mean, I had this *in* me, from the time I was very small, that performing was something that people liked. And I've always liked to do what people like. I like attention. I like to please people. I have that kind of a personality. I'm comfortable as an actress because I'm perfectly able to take on whatever's around me. Performing makes it possible for me to do that comfortably and safely.

Aal: I believe you said that you started giving readings before your work appeared in print.

Allen: Yeah, but that's not quite accurate. I'd had a few things published in—Well, that prize-winning poem got published in the undergraduate literary magazine.

Aal: Right.

Allen: And I had, oh, I think a couple other things. Not a lot. Very

little. And I started reading. But, you know, in San Francisco at the time there were a number of open-mike readings and I used to go down to the Coffee Gallery every Wednesday night, which was poetry night. And so I almost always got to read and I did that for a number of years, every chance I got.

Aal: And was that generally reading with other people in the same evening?

Allen: Yeah. In a bar. You know, with all this racket going on. They had a little room but the room had just a partition that was ten feet high but the ceiling was fifteen feet high. And so all the folks were drinkin' and carrying on in the other room. And they'd come into this room where the reading was going on because there were no more seats in the bar so they'd come in there, and you had drunks and you had dopeheads and you had people hassling you. It was a really scrungy bar in North Beach. A very old one. It's gone now. But it was one of the oldest left over from Beat times. And so you learned to read with a microphone, over loud voices. The jukebox was on and people are yelling and talking and carrying on. And that's where I learned how to read. And if you *didn't* work really hard with your voice and your face—and I moved around more then—if you didn't, you just lost attention just like that [snaps fingers]. It was a very hard place to read and a *good* place to learn.

Aal: Have you been giving readings steadily since then?

Allen: Steadily since then until I moved back to Albuquerque in the late '70s—there's not a lot of places to read—so then I started focusing on getting work published and—which was good, because I really needed to do that and I wasn't doing that. And so I got *Coyote's Daylight Trip* out [La Confluencia, 1978], I got poems published in various places. I'm still not very good about it, about sending work out. And I still write as though I've got a reading coming up next week. That's the other thing readings taught me was to write a lot. I couldn't bear to get up on the stage and read the same damn stuff week after week. So what I would do is write new material, every week, for the next poetry reading coming up.

Aal: So you read every week.

Allen: Every week. And the point was to get their attention. That was the entire point. You had to say something, of course, but you do *that* all by yourself in your notebook or your journal. What I was really after was getting their attention, and that's my notion of performance.

Aal: Why did you want their attention? Why did you go up there and give those readings?

Allen: They were poets. They were important poets. And they were

following the tradition established by the "rolling Renaissance" and Ginsberg and the gang. I mean, this is North Beach, San Francisco.

The beatniks, you know. When Ginsberg got tired of the East and he headed out West, he ganged up with Gary Snyder and I don't recall who all—Ferlinghetti—Kerouac, but Kerouac stayed back East here. And a group of them—oh, Kenneth Rexroth, Lew Welch, Gregory Corso, there're a couple of others—they had a poetry reading one night in a firehouse (that wasn't used as a firehouse anymore) in San Francisco. And it was the beginning of not only the Beat Revolution but of poetry as it's practiced by large numbers of poets in America today. But this was the first time.

They got together and they did this performance. I mean, they hollered and they hooted and they yelled and they chanted and they did not stand behind a podium and quietly and somewhat neurotically, tentatively deliver their, you know, "lines," which is what poets usually *do*.

What they *did*, their whole point was to knock poetry loose from the tube that it was being slowly hardened in, to get it out there. And they were headed for the streets. Years later a group of us in San Francisco did hit the streets, and that was like in the seventies so it was almost twenty years later. We were reading in pubs and on the trolleys and on street corners, literally doing poetry festivals in the streets. But it took all of that time to do that, so those people, they started it. And what they were after was to get people's attention. Not to write poetry. They were writing poetry; that wasn't the problem. The problem was that nobody was listening. And what's the point in writing a poem if nobody cares? And they were also using poetry as a revolutionary tool, as a way of changing society, or of at least pointing out to it—in their case, they were standing there throwing rocks at society. That's basically what the Beats did. But they did it in a way that people paid attention. And poetry in the Bay Area just took off. I mean, at one point [in the early 1980s] there was something like three thousand ongoing poetry readings in that town. And that's because of the Ginsberg/beatnik revolution.

Aal: Has that been going on steadily since the fifties then?

Allen: It's never stopped. And the area attracts poets. And of course mostly you're reading to poets. But there's a lot of poets there. So any given reading will attract anywhere from three to nine hundred people. And most of the people in that audience will be themselves writers. So you're pushed to a level of production performance quality, competence, knowledge, consciousness. You're constantly pushed because you're trying to keep the attention of people who already know it. You know, you don't get to go out and talk to the rubes, 'cause there aren't

any rubes that come to these things.

Aal: That's a very interesting point then. Because you said that the Beats started these readings—

Allen: Um-hmm.

Aal: —to get attention—

Allen: Um-hmm.

Aal: —to throw rocks at society, to—I would assume—make some sort of change. If their audiences were writers doing the same thing, what was the point?

Allen: I think what the point was is that it validated for writers their own existence. I honestly think that. It's the same point as all other endeavors—subgroups are always hustling each other, playing to each other, communicating with each other, correcting each other, etc. I think that a lot of people who were closet poets—wrote little stuff and stuck it in their drawer—began to feel cool. You know, "I'm a poet." And so it gave that kind of stamp of hipness to poetry that young folks in general wanted. So what happened was it drew lots more people into the poetry community. It expanded the "in" group to where it was including large numbers of people who wouldn't otherwise have been in that "in" group. But, yeah, we wind up talking to each other. But the number of "each others" is very large—across the country it must be 20,000-30,000 people—maybe more. Three thousand poetry readings must have included as *audience* around 30,000—maybe 50,000! The poets/writers community is very large.

The exception I would make [to the "writers talking to each other"] is the women's community. It functions in a whole other way from the countercultural community. If I'm gonna do a reading for something that's billed as a woman's reading, I know that a large number of people in the audience, perhaps the majority of people in the audience, are not writers. They *might* be musicians. They *might* possibly do some stage work. But that's not why they came to the reading. They came to the reading to support women's culture. It's a *different* thing. When I read to a woman's audience, I know that I'm dealing with some reasonably radicalized feminists, because that's why it's called a "woman's reading." And when it says "woman's reading," that's a signal to anybody seeing the flyer that what they're going to have to do is go support their sisters. And so *those* are the kind of people I'm gonna have in the audience. When Adrienne [Rich] reads, she'll pull five hundred, nine hundred, twelve hundred people, most of whom are not writers.

They came because she's very important to them as a symbol and because they love her. And they may or may not be knowledgeable about poetry, but they are *quite* knowledgeable about feminist issues

and woman's concerns, and so they come to hear her. They do the same thing with Judy [Grahn]. That's exactly what they're doing. They're not coming because of the writing itself. They're coming because of the issue of woman's literature and of woman's rights and of praising women and celebrating women. And along the way they get to hear good poetry and they know they'll hear good poetry. They know that Judy's good, they know that Adrienne's good, and that kind of thing. But there's something quite different going on than simply the art itself. It isn't about art. It's about politics and it's about Movement cohesion and it's about community, which is quite different from the other thing I'm describing.

Aal: What effect do you think poetry readings have had and are having on the Women's Movement?

Allen: Huge effects. It just stuns me. Poets like Judy Grahn have probably done as much to shape the Women's Movement as anyone else has done. And that's peculiar in America.

Aal: How?

Allen: In America poets don't count. We've never counted. Except in this peculiar case. And this *is* a peculiar case.

Aal: How have poets done it?

Allen: Well, Judy's an example. While she is talking to and about working class identities, she's also talking to and about community. And she's saying, "This is a community that has been forbidden, and here we are." She's talking about a very specific political point that large numbers of people are groping around for. What she does as a poet is focus that groping. And they spot it, they being all these people who probably don't even know each other. They don't have to know each other. They know what they're looking for. And so this poet takes that that's inarticulate and articulates it, but more: she directs it, shapes it, and carries it further. And because they recognize what they want, they also learn what they don't know.

So she's forming the community's consciousness itself, which is very different from what poets in the West have done for a very long time. It's what Ginsberg was trying to do.

Aal: Has he done it?

Allen: I don't think he's done it. But I think he made it possible for Judy to do it. You know, if there hadn't been a Ginsberg, there couldn't be a Grahn. 'Cause nobody would have known what she was talking about. I mean, we all build on each other.

Aal: If you had to make a choice, which would you prefer: giving a reading or having a group of poems published in print?

Allen: Oh, I'd much rather do a reading.

Aal: Why?

Allen: Poetry is about connections. Writing is about connections. I've always believed that. If I just want to—If I just want to know something or other for my own knowing, for my own satisfaction, just for me, I can't even see any reason to write it down. I mean, I can *think* it. And my thoughts are familiar enough to me that I can think them over and over if it's just for me. When I write it down, then what I'm saying is I want someone to hear. And if I want someone to hear them, by golly I love having them there so I can *see* what they hear, so that I have an exchange going on. It's a lot like sending a present to someone. Giving somebody a present is fun and the reason it's fun is to watch their reaction to the present. It's like that. It's not too much fun to just *publish* things. You do it—You do it because you're supposed to, you do it because a professional publishes, you do it because it's part of your work. That's why *I* do it. I love to see my work in print, I love to see my name there.

That's nice. But if I do a *reading*, then I get faces and names, and I get warmth, and I get maybe some hostility, I get puzzlement, I get a whole range of things that tell me what I'm doing. And I know whether what I'm doing is anything or not. And that's what I'm after. I'm after an exchange with people. So of course I'd much rather do the reading.

Aal: Tell me about the best reading experience you've ever had.

Allen: I think the very best one I ever did was [in the late 1970s] in New York City at MLA. It was a woman's reading that was sponsored by the Gay Caucus of the Modern Language Association. It was all women readers. There must have been two hundred people there, maybe more. Almost all women. There were two or three men whom I'd seen at other Gay Caucus meetings who had come to this. And I read, Judy Grahn read, Joan Larkin read, Monique Wittig from France read, and Maureen Brady read. I had never read to a woman's audience before. The audiences I had read to had generally been composed of poets and had been to a greater or lesser degree trying, very trying. It's always hard to get men's attention. It's always hard to read to an audience of poets. And it's very difficult to read to people who are out front in competition with you. They really torture you as an audience. They don't pay attention, they don't look at you, they spit on the floor. They're really difficult. And that was by and large what I had read to for . . . ten years? fifteen years? I don't know how long. So here I am in New York City at this reading. And it was my turn to read and I read. I was very frightened. I think I was the second person to read. If I'd had to follow Judy I think I probably would have fallen through the floor. I had never met any of these people before. I knew not a soul there. Anyway, I got up and read, and what was

so wonderful about it was that I could tell that the audience was listening to me *and* that they understood me. It was the most amazing thing that had ever happened in my life. I didn't know that I could make—that I could make sense at all. I wrote pretty incoherent poetry for a long time because I was trying frantically to make sense to an audience who couldn't listen to me, who just couldn't. And so I was, you know, shoving my work around, my thoughts around, my language around, my structure around, trying to find a way to get this group of people to hear me; but of course they couldn't. Anyway, *that* probably was the very best experience, and after the reading people were just really great. Very nice and very warm and very supportive. And the next day I went over to Womanbooks because Mary Daly was signing books or something and I wanted to see what she looked like. And they were opening up the lesbian herstory archives and I wanted to go to that, which was right next to the bookstore. So I went over. And several people came up to me in the bookstore and said hi and they'd been at the reading. Two of those people were Adrienne Rich and Michelle Cliff, which was so splendid.

Aal: Does it take courage for you to get up in front of an audience?

Allen: Every time.

Aal: Does it get easier?

Allen: [Pause] I think it *is* getting easier. I think I'm getting accustomed to having audiences that actually understand me or that will actually make a real effort to understand me. I mean, I'm getting better, too, as a writer. But the two go together. If I get that support then I get better—then I'm better so I get support and, you know, it works that way. I like to read. I do. I've read and read and read and read, and I'm not particularly well-known. I'm a major Indian poet, but I'm a minor poet in America. It's because you just don't get "fame" from reading. All of that stuff about fame and big budgets and nice presses and so on, you don't get from community poetry, from oral poetry. The spoken word doesn't count; the performance, the performed word doesn't count. The community interaction that goes with the performance doesn't count.

Aal: You're using the word *oral* and I assume you're spelling it *o-r-a-l*. Can you give a definition of *oral* poet?

Allen: A person who's developing sense because of how it sounds out loud rather than sense because of how it looks on a page.

Aal: As you know, this is a great interest of mine and I've come up with the term *aural—a-u-r-a-l*—for people who combine literacy with an anticipation of performance, those who write for the spoken voice.

Allen: I like that term. Yeah. The truth is that that's what most of us are doing. Most of the poets who read a lot, who perform a lot,

that is what they're doing. And when we write a poem we're paying attention to what it's going to sound like when we say it out loud. We're always paying attention to that. I'd estimate some three to five percent of the people writing today are really paying attention to performance, to going to a poetry reading and performing this stuff, or *reading* this stuff, whatever you want to call it.

I'm pretty picky about who I'll go hear, because after seven or eight years in the Bay Area, going at least once a week if not two or three times a week, I got really burned out *listening* to poets. And I got burned out because so many poets didn't have a *blooming* thing to say that hadn't been said nine million times that same week in exactly the same words, and they had no delivery style at all. And I like style. I expect style. And when a reader isn't a good reader I'm real inclined not to stay. Because it's not hard to be a good reader. You can learn that. But I tend to expect people to stand around and mumble and be very obscure and very hard to understand and be trying to impress their fans or whoever their group is. I did this series of poetry readings in Albuquerque, a woman's poetry series, and it was utterly fascinating. The difference, the range of styles, for one thing, was fascinating. It tended to fall along ethnic-political lines. I could pretty well count on any of the women of color to be very good readers. Not necessarily good writers, but good readers. And I could generally count on the white women to not be good performers. And if those white women were primarily poets and very little involved in anything else, they would be *lousy* readers. If the white women were feminists or otherwise Movement-involved, they would be better readers. I think that there's a community orientation on the part of people who are engaged in social movements, and so when they read they are connecting with their community because their life is about connections and it's about networks and it's about communication. So they exert themselves to connect and to communicate. Their lives are also about leadership. That's why they're involved. Because they see themselves as in some sense a leader. And so those writers tend to see their work as something that shapes consciousness of other people, so they *work* at doing that. And they work at communicating that to the people who come to hear them. And that'll be true for feminists, for lesbians, for people of color.

I was at a poetry reading recently of ethnic writers. It was an ethnic writers' conference in Sacramento last May. And what fascinated me there was the difference among four ethnic groups. There were Asian-American, Chicano, Black, and Indians. And what always happened was the Indians were always quieter, always spoke less, always read for shorter lengths of time. It was really funny. And were *never* as militant, *never* as radical as any other group in the room. And Indians in

general tend to sound more like white people than like other people of color. They are more inclined to *read* rather than perform. (Maurice Kenny is an exception.) They tend to have a fairly militant perspective if they're writers. Almost every Indian writer I've ever read has a militant perspective. (But it is not the same militancy as the Marxist militancy adhered to in large part by poets in the Other Third World groups in the U.S.) But they have a quiet style. And so it was just fascinating watching it. The Black readers, in general, were the most performance-oriented. Everybody was performance-oriented to some extent. Nobody stood up there and mumbled. So there was always that aspect, of using the voice and the body to create a setting in people's minds. Even with the Indians that would happen. And there was no standardized way of delivering the lines and pausing at breaks and that kind of thing, so you had some performance aspects going on. Maurice Kenny read. He's Mohawk and he's—as I said earlier, he's completely performance-oriented. But compared to a Black reader who is *as* performance-oriented as he is, he is still *reading*, compared to the Black readers. It was just fascinating to watch. There was a lot of cultural distinctions in the room.

Aal: How did the audience react?

Allen: They stomped and yelled and whistled and carried on when the performing performers were performing-reading, and they were quite quiet and not entirely sure what to do with themselves when the Indians were reading. The Indians tended to bring up spiritual and traditional stuff a lot, about the earth, about the spirits, about customs and rituals, and nobody else did that.

What was just fascinating was watching these subtle distinctions that are there. The Asians were the next quietest. And the Hispanics and the Blacks sort of equally divided the spectrum from relatively quiet to very, very performing, very flamboyant readers. And the audience loved them, of course. Audiences love that kind of thing. They love a good performance. In general we'd all be a lot better off if we learned how to be really good performers. I think audiences love rock stars because they get up there and they shake it and they talk and they act.

Aal: Why do we like that?

Allen: I think somehow it releases something in us, the audience. We can sort of imagine that *we* have the freedom to do that, and that's nice, that feels good. It's entertaining and we love to be entertained. There's probably a sort of an exhibitionism in all of us that by and large we don't get to act out. So our performers can act it out for us. And for radical people or for politically aware people, that kind of thing matters a lot, because in a way my poet is giving me permission to go do that in my own life. And they're making fun of things and they're

making large of things and they're making small of things and they're changing perspectives and the whole time they're out there doing is a really daring kind of thing. It's a scary kind of thing, because performing poetry doesn't have the rules around it that drama has. I mean, an actor on a stage is in a very regulated role. And a poet on a stage is a completely unregulated role in this culture. And to a large extent rock musicians are unregulated. They're pretty much free—Within the confines of their microphones and amplifiers, they're pretty much free to do whatever comes to their minds. And we like it. Maybe it's because it appeals to some childhood need for joy and celebration and largeness, magnitude of behavior that's usually not allowed in this culture.

This culture encourages passive listening. A passive listener is less involved with the proceedings than an active listener is (this affects performance styles, by the way). Black poets come from a subculture that teaches and encourages active listening and active interplay between speaker/singer and audience. So they are performing, *active* presenters of their work because they either have *active* audiences or they have the clear image and expectation of active listeners in their minds as part of the poem itself (when they write it). For most audiences what the poet has to do or the storyteller has to do is keep their attention, because, really, literate people's attention span is about two and a half minutes. At *most*. We don't know how to concentrate when we're listening. And there's a lot of reasons for that.

One that I've heard is that listening in this culture is punitive. When you're listening to someone they tend to be telling you something you don't want to hear. "Wash your face." "You tore your dress." "Come inside." "Go to bed." "Quit making a mess." "Straighten up." "Be quiet." All these kinds of things.

And very seldom do they hear, "You're wonderful," "I love you," "Aren't you having fun?" "Isn't this great?" Or very seldom do they hear stories. Very seldom do we convey complex information with our voices. We usually say, "Read this book." Or "Watch that show." Which at least is a little better. At least you're *listening* to television. You're also visualizing it, but there is that listening dimension. We write down notes to people, we write recipes down. We do everything that we intend to do with information transference by writing it. As a result people can't listen.

Aal: How often do you write fiction, thinking about oral publication of it? You mentioned publishing a novel. What is it like for you to read fiction?

Allen: I *love* to read fiction.

Aal: More than poetry?

Allen: Yeah. Well, with the poetry I'm aware of performing more.

I'm aware of the importance of the voice on every syllable. I'm aware of the importance of when I look up and what expression is in my eyes and on my face. And I'm aware of subtle head movements. When I'm reading a story, then what I can do is I can engage myself in the characters so I can change my voice here and there, change my expression, and I'm so busy reading it that way as though I were reading a script, I'm *less* aware of my audience. I'm less aware of single words because I'm reading now for meaning, for overall thought, and I can read faster. That's how it feels to me. There's also—There's something about a story that keeps people's attention, so I know I can count on those people to keep listening to me, because we all like narratives, we all like stories. We know how to follow a narrative line. It's easy for us. And so if I hook the audience in the first three minutes or two minutes or something, they'll stay with me, just because it's the nature of a story for people to pay attention to it. So I don't have to work them like I have to work when I'm doing poetry. You have to *work* a poetry audience every second. You can't leave them alone for a minute. You lose 'em. They'll go to sleep. But a story audience—And I'm the same way as a listener. If the poet doesn't keep *at* me, I'll go to sleep. I'll trip on a line and off I am into Never-Never Land. And I'll come back three minutes later or five minutes later or a minute and a half later, but I've missed something. But stories—I never space out during a story. Even if I don't like the story I'll listen to it [laughter].

Aal: Do you feel different reading your dramatic monologues than you do reading your lyric poems?

Allen: Yeah. See, those aren't me at all. I *like* doing them. *They*'re like acting.

Aal: The monologues.

Allen: Yeah. They're like taking somebody's script and memorizing it and going and performing it. In a way I don't feel like I wrote 'em. I know I *did*, but because they're in someone else's voice and they're characterizing someone else's personality, it's not me at all. A *lot* of my poetry is very personal. I write *really* personal poetry, so reading my poetry, not to mention performing my poetry, is always scary. Because I'm puttin' *me* right out there. I'm moving in the other direction. I'm learning to write poems that are—Well, I wrote the Pocahontas one in '79 and it sat there in a book. It was on a piece of computer paper, a class list or something, and it sat in a book for two or three years, and one day I opened the book and there was the poem. And I typed it and it came out almost exactly like the original draft. It's just one of those kinds of poems. *Those* I love doing. I don't have anything at stake. I have *ideas* at stake and I have my acting ability at stake and that's great fun. You know, they're a real relief to read.

Aal: Back to the lyric poem. You said that you feel a lot at stake in reading those. But before you'd said that there's a difference between the performance self and the real person. When you are performing a lyric poem, is that the Paula who goes home and goes to bed or is that a performance self?

Allen: I'm always confused about which one it is when I'm reading them and when I'm writing them. Somehow I seem to have knitted the personal and the public and then turned them upside down in some peculiar way that *I* don't understand. Trying to perform your own self is what this boils down to. Taking my "me" and making my "me" "her," and then performing "her" as though I weren't "she," keeping the meaning that I know is "me" clear [laughter].

Anglo-Welsh Poetry: A Selection

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Contents

James Ballowe	1	Introduction
Raymond Garlick	3	A Preface to Anglo-Welsh Poetry
Tony Curtis	9	Anglo-Welsh Poetry: Dylan and After
Gwyn Williams	15	Pelagius Under Orion Easter Poem
Glyn Jones	17	The Common Path You, Taliesin Swifts
R.S. Thomas	21	Welsh Landscape Reservoirs The Empty Church The White Tiger Good The Small Country
Roland Mathias	25	Porth Cwyfan Brechfa Chapel Laus Deo
Harri Webb	29	Synopsis of the Great Welsh Novel Thanks in Winter Epil y Filiast
Leslie Norris	32	Water Early Frost Elegy for David Beynon
Ruth Bidgood	38	Chimneys Lighting Candles Tourists
Dannie Abse	41	Return to Cardiff Last Words Peachstone

John Ormond	44	Ancient Monuments My Grandfather & His Apple Tree Definition of a Waterfall
Raymond Garlick	49	Explanatory Note Matters Arising Gors Goch
Tony Conran	52	Elegy for the Welsh Dead in the Falkland Islands, 1982 Research
Jon Dressel	55	You, Benjamin Jones Thursday
Sally Roberts Jones	58	Tryweryn Ann Griffiths
Gillian Clarke	60	Blaen Cwrt Harvest at Mynachlog The Hare
John Davies	64	Port Talbot How to Write Anglo-Welsh Poetry
Tony Curtis	67	Preparations Soup Return to the Headland
Robert Minhinnick	70	Eelers The Coast
Mike Jenkins	72	Chartist Meeting Survivor
Contributors	75	

Introduction

This selection is of the poetry of eighteen contemporary writers whose work has been affected by their having lived in Wales. Not all were born there; not all live there now. They differ widely in background, education, and livelihood. What they share, however, links them together as writers of Welsh verse in the English language. They are aware that the Mediterranean heritage of Wales is more than vestigial. They each know what it means to live in a country whose history predates that of England and whose natives are Brythonic Celts. These writers also know what it is to be dominated if not condescended to by the English in whose language they write. All of these Anglo-Welsh poets—as they have come to be known in this century—have witnessed the curious relationship Wales has had with its neighbor to the east. They also have experienced life in a country of just over two and one-half million people of whom about twenty percent still converse in their native language. This is a fact not easily lost on writers who interpret life through language. Most of all, they have shared the pleasure and responsibility of being poets in a country where poetry is an indigenous profession. Raymond Garlick and Roland Mathias asserted in their introduction to *Anglo-Welsh Poetry* just how important poetry is to the Welsh when they wrote,

> What opera is to Italy, ballet to Russia, theatre to England, symphonic music to Germany, painting to the Netherlands, poetry is to Wales: the supreme and defining art form.

In his preface to this selection, Raymond Garlick suggests a number of books which provide introductions to Anglo-Welsh poetry. From a less formal perspective than these useful scholarly treatments and anthologies, Dannie Abse in a brief essay entitled "Under the Influence Of" (*Journals from the Ant-Heap*, Hutchinson 1986) reflects on Garlick and Mathias's explanation of influences:

> No matter that the Anglo-Welsh poet cannot read the old language, that real thing strange; or that he does not even know translations of Welsh poetry despite the efforts of those like Gwyn Jones; the influence of it on his creativity, though he may deny it, is still active. 'Seepage' is the word our scholarly critics bandy about. The seepage 'on all cultural levels between the two language-groups of Wales' as Tony Conran puts it. [Garlick and Mathias cite Con-

ran's volume of essays on Anglo-Welsh poets entitled *The Cost of Strangeness*, 1982.]

A descendant of a prominent Welsh-Jewish family from Cardiff, Abse observes that at least in poetry of praise—a prominent characteristic of Anglo-Welsh poetry—"the literary tradition of David and Dafydd are not separate entities. Simply, the older tradition permeates the younger, there is a dialectic, a development. A seepage!"

It is not the purpose of this collection to make a case for an Anglo-Welsh poetry. The case has been made elsewhere and often. The editors have focused on selecting what they believe to be some of the best poetry of writers who have published a substantial body of work. Some of these writers, most notably R. S. Thomas, have international reputations. Raymond Garlick's "Preface to Anglo-Welsh Poetry" and Tony Curtis's "Anglo-Welsh Poetry: Dylan and After" serve well the purpose of introducing the reader to the selected poems and the literary and social context in which they were written. Garlick's "Preface" concentrates on the historical background of present-day Anglo-Welsh writing and discusses in some detail the work of R. S. Thomas. And Tony Curtis's essay places all of the writers selected for this volume within a contemporary context.

When the possibility of this collection was conceived, I asked my friends Raymond Garlick and Tony Curtis to work with me on bringing it to fruition. It could not have been done without them. They represent two generations of Anglo-Welsh poets. More than that, they have been personally committed to the task of promoting Welsh literature in English at home and abroad. This selection is but a continuation of their generous sharing of their minds and energies. The decision to make this a collection of proven writers and of previously published works was a collective one, made by Garlick, Curtis, and me. Over a period of two and one-half years we collaborated by letter and at meetings in Carmarthen, Cardiff, and Barry on editorial decisions about poems, photographs, and other matters that go into such a project. They were always guided by the interest of their fellow poets and the quality of the presentation.

We are grateful to many individuals, especially the poets and their publishers, for contributing to the successful completion of this selection. Robert Lewis, the editor of the *North Dakota Quarterly*, deserves special recognition for his acceptance of the idea, for his useful suggestions as the work has moved along, and for his service in obtaining the generous support of the University of North Dakota for this transatlantic project.

James Ballowe
Oak Park, Illinois, 1988

A Preface to Anglo-Welsh Poetry

Wales, Scotland, England are the three constituent countries of the island of Britain. Ethnically, linguistically, and culturally, Wales is the westernmost representative of the Roman-Celtic world (Ireland lay outside the Roman Empire), and to this day its residual characteristics as legatee of that world distinguish it from England and other neighbouring countries.

The most obvious of these characteristics is the Welsh language, which belongs to the Brythonic branch of the Celtic family of Indo-European languages. Spoken by some half a million people in Wales, one fifth of the population, it is more widely present as a language of education at all levels, road signs, government forms, public notices, radio, television, theatre, and, more recently, film. In a sense which is not true of the other national communities of Britain, Wales is thus a bilingual country.

Another of its residual characteristics as legatee of Romano-Celtic civilization is the primacy its bilingual culture has given down the ages to poetry, which Roman writers identified as a characteristic of the Celts. Welsh-language poetry begins in the sixth century with Taliesin, and Aneirin's great poem *The Gododdin* about the battle of Catraeth, and continues to flourish in the twentieth. Though it is the smallest of the countries of Britain, Wales has made one outstanding contribution to the western imagination—the Romano-Celtic cavalry leader of the early sixth century, Arthur, whose first appearances are in Welsh literature.

To the extent that its splendours and complexities are susceptible to translation, they may be savoured in the publications of Professor Joseph Clancy of Marymount Manhattan College, New York: *Medieval Welsh Lyrics* (1965), *The Earliest Welsh Poetry* (1970)—both now out of print—and *Twentieth Century Welsh Poems* (Gomer, 1982). Welsh-language literature also produced some of the earliest European prose, and this has been most readably translated by Dr. Jeffrey Gantz of Harvard in *The Mabinogion* (Penguin, 1976). The oldest European festival of literature, the National Eisteddfod of Wales, can be traced back to 1176. It takes place annually, now lasting for over a week in early August, and attracts many thousands of people—besides being exten-

sively televised. During its proceedings a Crown and a Chair are awarded for the two most successful poems on a given theme, and there are prizes for the novel, drama, short story, and other literary forms.

All the literary activity touched upon up to this point takes place in the Welsh language—now a minority language and literature, though accorded a primacy of honour. For as has been said, Wales is a bilingual country, and for a variety of reasons some Welsh people chose—from at least the early Middle Ages onwards—to use both Welsh and English. That tendency accelerated as the twentieth century approached, until at the present time four-fifths of the population of Wales is monoglot English-speaking.

In his recent *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Poetry Wales Press, 1987) Dr. Roland Mathias observes that "Those for whom English was the natural language in which to write. . . cannot, until after 1850, have comprised even ten percent of the population." Nevertheless, from the late Middle Ages on, some Welshmen began writing poetry in English. Mr. Meic Stephens, Literature Director of the Welsh Arts Council, has recently suggested (in *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, 1986) that the earliest such was Sir John Clanvow (1341-1391). Certainly about 1470 Ieuan ap Hywel Swrdwal wrote a remarkable hundred-line poem in English, heavily under the influence of Welsh, generally referred to as *The Hymn to the Virgin*. Poems by some forty Welsh poets in English between that time and 1900 are represented in the anthology *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980* (Poetry Wales Press, 1984) compiled by the present writer and Dr. Roland Mathias, but twice as many poets represent the twentieth century—and poets aged under thirty, of whom there are a considerable number, were precluded from representation by limitations of space. It is, in short, a literature whose fullest flowering is in our own time, when English has replaced Welsh as the majority language.

The co-existence of two literatures in one small country can lead to great confusion of terminology. Various solutions have been attempted, but in most informed literary and critical discussion today it may be assumed that "Welsh literature" means Welsh-medium literature. The literature of Wales in English has come to be called Anglo-Welsh literature—the first element of the compound simply indicating the language in which it is written, and nothing more. Some Anglo-Welsh poetry has in fact been politically and culturally hostile to England.

The case and evidence for a Welsh literature in English extending back to the late Middle Ages was perhaps first assembled in *An Introduction to Anglo-Welsh Literature* (University of Wales Press, 1972) by the present writer. The best known Anglo-Welsh poets of the past

are probably George Herbert (1593-1633), who was called in his own century the "Phoenix of Wales," and the bilingual Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), though English anthologists also seem to have heard of John Dyer (1699-1757). In the twentieth century the major voices are David Jones (1895-1974), Vernon Watkins (1906-1967), Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), Alun Lewis (1915-1944), and R. S. Thomas (b. 1913).

The selection that follows has been chosen from the poetry of contemporary Anglo-Welsh writers who have published extensively and may be thought to have built up a reasonably substantial body of work: for that reason younger poets are not represented. Of these eighteen writers at lease five are fluent Welsh-speakers, and a further five have a reading knowledge, or more, of Welsh. The poets include a former professor at the University of Istanbul (the robustly earthy Gwyn Williams), a medical consultant of Welsh-Jewish family (Dannie Abse), and a film-maker (John Ormond). Gwyn Williams is also a distinguished translator of Welsh-language poetry, and it was his work which inspired Professor Clancy to labour in the same field. Tony Conran too is widely respected as a translator from the Welsh, and his recent volume *Welsh Verse* (Poetry Wales Press, 1986) with its long and stimulating Introduction is probably the best guide for those who do not read Welsh.

Like Vernon Watkins before him, Leslie Norris has frequently been a Visiting Professor at American universities. Roland Mathias holds an honorary doctorate of Georgetown University for his work in the Anglo-Welsh field, and like several younger poets represented here he has lectured and given readings in the United States. One of them, Jon Dressel, is a third generation American of Welsh descent who for years has commuted regularly between St. Louis and Wales.

Several of these poets are also writers of prose. Glyn Jones, doyen of contemporary Anglo-Welsh writers, awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Wales, is a distinguished short story writer and novelist, and in *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (Dent, 1968) has presented a vivid personal record of twentieth century Anglo-Welsh writers he has known. Roland Mathias (*A Ride Through the Wood*, Poetry Wales Press, 1985) and Tony Conran (*The Cost of Strangeness*, Gomer, 1982) have produced important volumes of Anglo-Welsh criticism, and Tony Curtis is the author of a study of Dannie Abse and editor of *Wales: The Imagined Nation* (Poetry Wales Press, 1986), a volume of essays in cultural and national identity. Dannie Abse himself has published a memorable autobiographical novel, *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve* (Hutchinson, 1954, now a King Penguin). A number of the poets have published short stories.

It is probable that many of the poems in the selection that follows first appeared in one of the English-medium periodicals of Wales: *The*

Anglo-Welsh Review, founded in 1949 and edited successively by three of the poets—Raymond Garlick, Roland Mathias, Gillian Clarke; *Poetry Wales*, founded in 1965 by Meic Stephens; *Planet*, founded in 1970 by Ned Thomas. Few of the books referred to could have appeared without the support of the Welsh Arts Council, of whose Literature Committee a number of the poets have at various times been members. The books themselves, like the poets' individual volumes and all Welsh and Anglo-Welsh publications in print, are available from the Welsh Arts Council's bookshop—Oriel, at 53 Charles Street, Cardiff CF1 4ED.

One of the most distinguished living poets in English anywhere at the present time is emphatically a poet of Wales, R. S. Thomas. Paradoxically, he is much admired in England — a country of which he has not been uncritical—and the fullest extent of that admiration is perhaps reflected in the title of a book by the English scholar A. E. Dyson: *Yeats, Eliot and R. S. Thomas* (Macmillan, 1981). It must also be said that, side by side with this English appreciation of R. S. Thomas's poetry, there have been some misreadings of it—arising from a curious ignorance of the Welsh language and the mythology, history, and literatures of Wales; perhaps even of their very existence. To the degree that R. S. Thomas's work is a poetry of Wales—a very considerable degree so far as the earlier poems are concerned (and the whole body of his work is the product of a Welsh sensibility)—there are pitfalls for the reader who is unaware of or unequipped for this.

Now in his mid-seventies, R. S. Thomas continues to be one of the most prolific of modern poets—having published some twenty volumes of verse from 1946 onwards. A number of these are now out of print, but many of the poems are available in *Selected Poems* (Hart-Davis, 1973) and *Later Poems* (Macmillan, 1983). Many of the earlier poems about Wales have been reprinted in *Welsh Airs* (Poetry Wales Press, 1987).

He emerged as a fully-fledged poet: there is no apprentice work, though of course there is development and change of emphasis. It might be argued that the whole poet, with his distinctive style and imagery and all his themes—Wales, rural life, nature, solitude, the portrait poem, political comment, religion, mysticism—are present in his longest poem, an early but major work, *The Minister* (1953). Certainly from the early 1950s even the rather self-regarding London poetry establishment recognized, with some confusion and dismay, that a new and authentic voice was speaking. The confusion was because the voice was austere, unsentimental, formidable, authoritative, and in no way supportive of the amused London image of Wales and Welshness; the dismay because it remained implacably and impressively Welsh, total-

ly indifferent to attempted London patronage and naive advice. This was not at all what was expected in the aftermath of Dylan Thomas.

R. S. Thomas's only concession to London was in being published there, since at that time and for long after there was in effect no English-medium publishing house in Wales. Nonetheless his new London publishers felt that a well-known English poet was needed to introduce and help sell the first volume. To his credit it must be said that the poet in question—John Betjeman, shortly to become the English Poet Laureate—concluded his Introduction by observing that "The 'name' which has the honour to introduce this fine poet to a wider public will be forgotten long before that of R. S. Thomas."

The Wales of his poetry is the countryside of north and mid Wales, not the great industrial valleys and conurbations of the south, or the capital itself—where he was born. It is the land and landscape of Wales that he particularly celebrates—anciently textured by history and prehistory, despoiled by the flooding of valleys and communities to make reservoirs for English cities, by afforestation and tourism. It is a measure of the power of the poetry and the personality of R. S. Thomas—grave, reserved, retiring, uncompromising—that he can sometimes disturb some of his fellow-countrymen by his unflinching view of Wales not as a province or a region but a nation, and the implication of this. It is in this Welsh Republic of the mind and heart—for those who give allegiance to it, and work for its peaceful realization—that his poetry is firmly located: as he observes sardonically in one poem—

> Not British; certainly
> Not English. Welsh
> With all the associations,
> Black hair and black heart.

If the matter of Wales is much less explicitly apparent in R. S. Thomas's later poems, the opposite is true of his life. He has mastered Welsh, which he now speaks fluently, preferring so far as possible to live his life in the older tongue. He has published an autobiography in Welsh — *Neb* (Gwasg Gwynedd, 1985), whose characteristic title may be translated as Anyone/Nobody. About the language of poetry, however, there is no choice; it is the language that chooses the poet. Thus however much he might have preferred to be a Welsh-language poet, it is in his mother-tongue, the second language of Wales, that all his poetry must be written.

Asked more than forty years ago for whom he wrote, R. S. Thomas replied with the words of Yeats: "for my own race/ and the reality." At first this was the reality (not always attractive) of Wales and his

fellow-countrymen, of the natural world of things that "exist rooted in the flesh,/ Stone, tree and flower." Until his retirement he was an Anglican country parson, so for him there was also that other reality of "The marginal land where flesh meets spirit." Yet in a film about himself (made by the Anglo-Welsh poet John Ormond) R. S. Thomas said: "I'm a solitary, I'm a nature mystic; and silence and slowness and bareness have always appealed." This order of reality was always present in his poetry and, as the reality of Wales receded as an overt theme, the metaphysical and mystical have come to the fore. This has led to such magnificent poems as "The Empty Church," a little reminiscent of that earlier Welsh parson poet George Herbert, and "The White Tiger," surely not unworthy to set beside Blake's poem.

Some of the admirers of R. S. Thomas's earlier poetry have found the austerity and asceticism of the later poetry too hard for them. He has been accused of undue gloom, bitterness, pessimism. There are few contemporary poets, however, who can so satisfyingly evoke the felt reality of existence (as in "Good"), and in one of his recent poems ("Arrival") he describes himself as a traveller—

> who has arrived
> after long journeying where he
> began, catching this
> one truth by surprise
> that there is everything to look forward to.

Raymond Garlick
Carmarthen, Wales, 1988

Anglo-Welsh Poetry: Dylan and After

Dylan is like the great mountain of north Wales, Snowdon; he's there and you can go over him, through him or, making a great detour, around him, but you can't ignore him. That's one of the facts of poetry in post-war Wales, and in the wake of Dylan Thomas's international fame through the Forties and his equally dramatic loss in the early Fifties, a number of people began to write poetry with a voice approximating his. Or at least with a voice which they thought echoed his. Dannie Abse, one of our strongest poets, one of the most significant in Britain, I would argue, talks of such a feeling at the time of his first collection *After Every Green Thing* (1948).

> Yes, they are immature. I was immature. I caught like an infection, the neo-romantic mode of the time.
> ...Dylan Thomas...Whatever individual voice I owned had to make itself heard above such noisy echoes.

Both Abse and his contemporary, John Ormond, began as poets very much under the influence of Dylan, but both, like Dylan, moved away from Wales to pursue careers and this, together with their wider reading, opened up their work to more varied influences. Dannie Abse, as a doctor, wears "the white coat" as well as "the purple cloak" of the poet/maker/magician. John Ormond's career has included journalism—he joined the legendary *Picture Post* in 1946—and, later, many productive years as a documentary film-maker in Cardiff with the B.B.C.

The American reader searching for Dylanisms in the work of these writers will find none in the present selection, for we have chosen work that represents each writer at his or her best. We believe that these poems, whilst exhibiting the range of styles and concerns in contemporary English poetry in Wales, stand as notable pieces in their own right. The example of Dylan Thomas has, for a younger generation of writers, been countered by their admiration for the achievements of Abse, Ormond, Glyn Jones, and, most profoundly, "R.S.," the other Thomas, who is generally acknowledged, with Dylan, as the outstanding poet from Wales in this century.

Perhaps the point should be made that poetry in English from Wales is, almost undoubtedly, a phenomenon of the present century. Ray-

mond Garlick will have dealt with this fact in some detail. I would stress the importance for contemporary writers in Wales of the realisation that their tradition is very much a living one; it is a situation which could be said to neatly reinforce the thesis of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Wales, dramatically transformed by the Industrial Revolution, constantly subject to a form of cultural imperialism by its proximity to its powerful neighbour, England, needing to express the nature of its newly emerging identity, that Wales was bound to produce writers who could react by encoding both a challenging present and a compelling past. There is a sense in which any small country, any threatened nation will be compelled to define and justify itself to itself. How more complex then will be the task for that writer who may be claimed to be rejecting their identity by the very act of writing in the language of their imperialistic neighbour? R. S. Thomas, who was born in the anglicised south-east of Wales, but who has conducted himself as a Church in Wales priest in rural and Welsh-speaking west and north Wales for the last fifty years, embodies this dilemma. He constantly castigates the Welsh for the neglect of their language and with it their integrity as a nation, discrete, resisting the incursions of a bland internationalism that results from the commercialisation of the landscape and traditional ways of life.

> ...And an impotent people,
> Sick with inbreeding
> Worrying the carcase of an old song.

He sees the English and English-speaking tourist, the holiday-home owners drawn to the beauty of the landscape, all as intruders threatening that landscape, that language, that integrity. And he underlines the irony that it is the Welsh themselves who, by their lack of vigilance, their greed, their indifference and naivety, have collaborated in the deconstruction of everything that makes their country worthwhile.

R. S. Thomas has characterised Wales as a microcosm of the original garden. On a personal, spiritual level, he and his poems work towards the confirmation of his Christian faith, if not the manifestation of God in the landscape. On a political level, he sees Wales as a model for the central challenges of the twentieth century. A traditional rural community wrenched asunder and re-formed by industrialisation, subject to the media pressures of the Global Village, colonised by the forces of technology as characterised by "the Machine"; we resist, we preserve and redefine ourselves or we disappear from our "Small Country."

By the example of his commitment and the power of his writing to accommodate a wide range of concerns, R. S. Thomas has informed the work of many younger poets in Wales. Harri Webb, the late John

Tripp, Sally Jones, and Gillian Clarke seem to me to be directly influenced by Thomas. In 1974 his pamphlet of political poems *What Is a Welshman?* clearly announced a more directly polemical thrust to his verse, reactive to current developments as the Welsh Language Society intensified its direct action against the Westminster-led government of Wales. The Seventies saw a number of poets—Tripp, Webb, and Raymond Garlick especially—writing and performing poetry, songs, sketches and verse, which addressed the issue of self-government. Garlick's "Matters Arising" is a passionate comparison of the state of Wales at that time with the Ireland which Yeats sought to establish. His "Explanatory Note" stands as one of the more lasting emblematic pieces of that period.

In 1979 a vote on the Devolution issue in Wales saw the population choose (some would argue that they were duped) to reject the chance to set up a form of representative government in Wales itself. The effect that this had on those writers and activists who had worked for such a state was traumatic indeed. In a sense the cause was pulled from under their feet. Such manifest indifference certainly justified the continuing anger firing some of the prose and poetry of R. S. Thomas. In truth, there were notable writers who had never embraced Welsh nationalism with that degree of commitment—Dannie Abse, for example, is informed by his Jewish heritage as much as his Welsh. Leslie Norris's poetry is some of the finest to have been written about the countryside, but his treatment of Wales is essentially a personal remembrance of the Valleys. (His short stories also deal memorably with this background and many have appeared in *New Yorker* magazine). Gillian Clarke and Ruth Bidgood both evoke a rural Wales which is imbued with values threatened by an accelerating world. Gillian Clarke's "Blaen Cwrt," a cottage in Dyfed in which she has settled,

> . . .has all the first
> Necessities for a high standard
> Of civilised living: silence inside
> A circle of sound, water and fire,
> Light on uncountable miles of mountain
> From a big, unpredictable sky,
> Two rooms, waking and sleeping,
> Two languages, two centuries of past
> To ponder on, and the basic need
> To work hard in order to survive.

Gillian Clarke began to publish when into her thirties when encouraged by the editor of a new poetry magazine *Poetry Wales* edited by Meic Stephens. In 1967 he was to become director of literature for the newly-established Welsh Arts Council. From that point the arts were

to be grant-aided from Wales, and literature especially was to benefit from the change. With the encouragement and development of publishing in Wales and the supporting framework of bursaries, festivals, foreign exchanges, and the setting up of the Welsh Academy as an organisation which could represent writers, the strength and variety of writing in Wales was enhanced. In the Eighties the establishment of Poetry Wales Press has secured a healthier publishing climate: writers of the "second wave" of Anglo-Welsh literature—Roland Mathias, Glyn Jones, Raymond Garlick, Leslie Norris, and John Ormond—have Selected Poems or Collected Poems appearing, and the list has a number of new collections from younger writers. Gillian Clarke herself has clearly provided a stimulus to women poets in Wales. Her reputation throughout Britain and her high profile as a reader and a broadcaster must surely have been seen as an encouragement to others. Several of the most promising and exciting newer poets are women—Sheenagh Pugh, Christine Evans, and an older poet who has just emerged as an individual voice, Jean Earle; these are all names central to the PWP list. Hilary Llewellyn-Williams, who won the Cardiff Festival Prize in 1987, is the latest poet of obvious quality to publish with the press.

It is no longer a trek to London and distant publishing houses for Wales's poets. That fact is having a real effect on the nature of the poetry being produced. When Iolo Morganwg (1747-1826) established the Druidic order and the *Eisteddfodau* he was encoding notions of Wales and Welshness for an essentially external, expatriate audience. This need to identify a sense of nationality seems incumbent on any people sharing a common landscape and socio-political experiences: the stars and stripes, the red dragon; the leek and daffodil—apple-pie and Thanksgiving turkey. One of the most profound influences on contemporary poetry in Wales has been the more authoritative researches of historians such as Gwyn A. Williams and Dai Smith, both in turn Professor of Welsh History at Cardiff University. Gwyn A. Williams has summarised the situation thus: "Wales is a process. Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce. The Welsh make and re-make Wales day by day, year by year, generation by generation, if they want to." Those insights inform the poetry of many of the newer poets. To the wit of Harri Webb's marvellously incisive "Synopsis of the Great Welsh Novel" may now be added John Davies's "How to write Anglo-Welsh Poetry" and Peter Finch's lovely spoof of R. S. Thomas, "Welsh Wordscape."

> To live in Wales,
>
> Is to be mumbled at
> by re-incarnations of Dylan Thomas
> in numerous disguises...

And the sheep, the sheep
the bloody flea-bitten Welsh sheep,
chased over the same hills
by a thousand poetic phrases
all saying the same things.

Now, there is a healthy cynicism displayed by poets. However, there remains the problem of responding to the new circumstances in Wales: a country divided by the schism of its languages; a country politically welded into a pan-national "United Kingdom" increasingly determined by Thatcherite Conservatism, whilst owing its political radicalism to a proud socialist tradition. Robert Minhinnick's newest collection *The Dinosaur Park* and Mike Jenkins's *Empire of Smoke* and *Invisible Times* are notable attempts to do this. Mike Jenkins has deliberately moved to teach in Merthyr Tydfil, the coal and iron centre of the Industrial Revolution in Wales. Like so much of industrial south Wales, the town is now depressed by unemployment and scarred by the leavings of those rapacious centuries of exploitation. Jenkins interestingly involves historical detail in his contemporary argument. A member of *Cymru Goch*, the socialist republican party to the left of everyone else in Wales, is bound to employ his poetry in a politically committed way, as his "Chartist Meeting (Heolgerrig, 1842)" illustrates.

That sort of anger will, no doubt, burn on as Wales re-shapes itself for the challenge of the twenty-first century. Informed more by the example of R. S. Thomas than Dylan, and the miner-poet Idris Davies whose remembrance of the 1926 national strike and lock-out T.S. Eliot published at Faber in the Forties and Fifties; with a more secure prospect of publication and an established reading and workshop circuit, the current crop of English-language poets in Wales have no excuse for not addressing themselves to that challenge. Reading Dylan Thomas, one might be forgiven for thinking Wales a quiet backwater of a country, all homely towns and villages set in a mythopoeic landscape, circled by an eternal sea. There is no treatment of the social and political upheavals which characterised the period 1914 - 1953. The present generation of poets are unlikely to adopt that stance.

In a recent poem of my own (see *New England Review/Bread Loaf Quarterly*, Summer 1988) addressed to the late John Tripp, a marvellous performer of his work, a witty, infurating genius of a man, I sit myself in the new Holiday Inn in the centre of Cardiff and address John's spirit:

...We do no more than blow upon the embers,
We scribblers who'd want to claim
That everything in Wales for praise or blame
Is brought to life and fact and mythical creation
By that writerly mix of ego and the grasp of a tradition.

What use we prove, the weight the world gives us, if any,
Is likely to be cheap and grudging, no more than a blunt
penny
Flung to shut our mannered, metred whining,
Then, later, taken up again shining
From the rubbing our tongues and lives impart
I hear you answer, John, 'It's a start, boy, some sort of
bloody start.'

"Thoughts from the Holiday Inn"

The achievements of English-language poetry in Wales this century are at least "some sort of a bloody start."

Tony Curtis
Barry, Wales, 1988

Gwyn Williams
(b. 1904)

Pelagius

Tough traveller with your Celtic view
of Christ more as man than god,
rough, bearded and trousered,
did they scoff at you in Rome
when you found the centre of your world

soft, cruel, rotten and doomed
and told them so? Jewelled
reliquaries already in the churches
whilst the togaed or tattered mob
howled for blood over the arches

of the Colosseum. So you left the city
to the cleansing Goths and went
your way, arguing your humane sign
of man's responsibility, denying
the equality of evil, original sin,

to towered Jerusalem, to be
condemned at shining Ephesus
and ruined Carthage, though no doctrine
of yours ever presumed to order
your clear sight of man's condition.

Celtic monk who never took holy
orders, I, a heretic
in every faith I've been tempted by,
fifteen centuries after your stand
now greet you and your heresy.

Under Orion
— For D.

Pissing under starlight I envy Orion's
bright erection as he now strides
over the dark humped warmth of Earth,

swinging across the sky to remind us
of the Boeotian hunter, killer of beasts,
one who at night's end lay in the bed

of dawn, made Eos blush, was killed
by Artemis, who wouldn't have him;
a mountain man who some say

was born of urine spirted on a bull's hide;
who now for us in frozen uprightness
pursues the sailing dove-girls in the moving

frieze of night's altering significances;
and as he still appears to veer
westwards away from Wales let me,

having sprayed this piece of mountain for my relief,
think of those things in my less violent life
which shamelessly make emblem sparkling Orion,

who also took an eye of day to wife.

Easter Poem

It's night. I stroke the cotoneaster
above my head in the hedge
as I used to stroke a girl's hair.
Am I falling in love with the earth
I'll be mated with before long
or is it an easy urge to belong
more to the things about me? From birth
we drift away from the lair
of rank nature, cadge
a brief freedom, but this Easter
catches me with its quick switch
from sun to snow. Earth, you bitch!

Glyn Jones
(b. 1905)

The Common Path

On one side the hedge, on the other the brook:
  Each afternoon I passed, unnoticed,
The middle-aged schoolmistress, grey-haired,
  Gay, loving, who went home along the path.

That spring she walked briskly, carrying her bag
  With the long ledger, the ruler, the catkin twigs,
Two excited little girls from her class
  Chattering around their smiling teacher.

Summer returned, each day then she approached slowly,
  Alone, wholly absorbed, as though in defeat
Between water and hazels, her eyes heedless,
  Her grey face deeply cast down. Could it be
Grief at the great universal agony had begun
  To feed upon her heart — war, imbecility,
Old age, starving, children's deaths, deformities?
  I, free, white, gentile, born neither
Dwarf nor idiot, passed her by, drawing in
  The skirts of my satisfaction, on the other side.

One day, at the last instant of our passing,
  She became, suddenly, aware of me
And, as her withdrawn glance met my eyes,
  Her whole face kindled into life, I heard
From large brown eyes a blare of terror, anguished
  Supplication, her cry of doom, death, despair.
And in the warmth of that path's sunshine
  And of my small and manageable success
I felt at once repelled, affronted by her suffering,
  The naked shamelessness of that wild despair.

Troubled, I avoided the common until I heard
  Soon, very soon, the schoolmistress, not from
Any agony of remote and universal suffering
  Or unendurable grief for others, but
Private, middle-aged, rectal cancer, was dead.

What I remember, and in twenty years have
  Never expiated, is that my impatience,
That one glance of my intolerance,
  Rejected her, and so rejected all
The sufferings of wars, imprisonments,
  Deformities, starvation, idiocy, old age—
Because fortune, sunlight, meaningless success,
  Comforted an instant what must not be comforted.

You, Taliesin

You, Taliesin, in the great *Addwynau*[1]
  Of your elaborate praise,
Called over a hundred things beautiful—
  Long-maned stallions at stud,
    Silver bracelets and necklaces,
      The age of innocence,
        Charlock in young corn.

I ought perhaps to feel a little shame-faced
  At bringing into my own droned fragment of celebration
Such words and ideas as—
  Beautiful the sawn-off girder seen in the Valleys,
    Rusty, sticking sun-plastered out of the
    coke-ovens' brickwork;
Or, beautiful the staring old collier,
  Silent by the coal fire, too old,
    His hands on his knees,
      Cared-for and yet abandoned;
Or, beautiful the drab mining town,
  Its roofs fishskin under endless drizzle,
Where, young, I saw that politics
  Is about power, and people, and dreams.

[1]*Addwynau*: Pleasant Things

But beautiful to me also the sea,
Which no doubt you intended to praise
Although you didn't;
Beautiful to watch her waters hurled,
A struggling mass, into a corner of the rocks;
Or to see her great waves crawling their whitewash
Up the plastered cliff—
Withdrawing, she hangs delicately
Along the ledges of the black rock-wall
The milky vines of her foam.

Beautiful the sky, too, as you describe it,
The hot sun high at mid-day, or glowing large at
his setting;
And the smouldering of his long beams in the sultry
afternoons,
His shafts leaning up off the meadows, rigid
into the summer thunder-clouds,
Entering into some great funnel opening in those
heavens,
Sloping up in thick bundles of rods, golden and
vaporous, or flat, sliced into oblique sheets
of radiant whale-bone, or sombrely lined,
diagonal, smoky, with the black slant of
brilliant rigging.

Beautiful the night sky also,
The clouds blown about gusty as woodsmoke
Before the beam of the moon's open doorway;
Beautiful in some tranquil nightfall of autumn
A large wet star.

You, Taliesin, you did not proclaim—
Any more than that the sea is beautiful—
Beautiful to be free, to be forgiven, to create.
I sense your understanding, your expert
concurrence.

Swifts

Shut-winged fish, brown as mushroom,
The sweet, hedge-hurdling swifts, zoom
Over waterfalls of wind.
I salute all those lick-finned,
Dusky-bladed air-cutters.
Could you weave words as taut, sirs,
As those swifts', great *cywydd*[1] kings,
Swart basketry of swoopings?

[1]cywydd: a poem composed of seven-syllabled couplets, having one masculine and one feminine rhyme

R. S. Thomas
(b. 1913)

Welsh Landscape

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went to the making of the wild sky,
Dyeing the immaculate rivers
In all their courses.
It is to be aware,
Above the noisy tractor
And hum of the machine
Of strife in the strung woods,
Vibrant with sped arrows.
You cannot live in the present,
At least not in Wales.
There is the language for instance,
The soft consonants
Strange to the ear.
There are cries in the dark at night
As owls answer the moon,
And thick ambush of shadows,
Hushed at the fields' corners
There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcase of an old song.

Reservoirs

There are places in Wales I don't go:
Reservoirs that are the subconscious
Of a people, troubled far down
With gravestones, chapels, villages even;
The serenity of their expression
Revolts me, it is a pose
For strangers, a watercolour's appeal
To the mass, instead of the poem's
Harsher conditions. There are the hills,
Too; gardens gone under the scum
Of the forests; and the smashed faces
Of the farms with the stone trickle
Of their tears down the hills' side.

Where can I go, then, from the smell
Of decay, from the putrefying of a dead
Nation? I have walked the shore
For an hour and seen the English
Scavenging among the remains
Of our culture, covering the sand
Like the tide and, with the roughness
Of the tide, elbowing our language
Into the grave that we have dug for it.

The Empty Church

They laid this stone trap
for him, enticing him with candles,
as though he would come like some huge moth
out of the darkness to beat there.
Ah, he had burned himself
before in the human flame
and escaped, leaving the reason
torn. He will not come any more

to our lure. Why, then, do I kneel still
striking my prayers on a stone
heart? Is it in hope one
of them will ignite yet and throw
on its illumined walls the shadow
of someone greater than I can understand?

The White Tiger

It was beautiful as God
must be beautiful; glacial
eyes that had looked on
violence and come to terms

with it; a body too huge
and majestic for the cage in which
it had been put; up
and down in the shadow

of its own bulk it went,
lifting, as it turned,
the crumpled flower of its face
to look into my own

face without seeing me. It
was the colour of the moonlight
on snow and as quiet
as moonlight, but breathing

as you can imagine that
God breathes within the confines
of our definition of him, agonising
over immensities that will not return

Good

The old man comes out on the hill
and looks down to recall earlier days
in the valley. He sees the stream shine,
the church stand, hears the litter of
children's voices. A chill in the flesh
tells him that death is not far off
now: it is the shadow under the great boughs
of life. His garden has herbs growing.
The kestrel goes by with fresh prey
in its claws. The wind scatters the scent
of wild beans. The tractor operates
on the earth's body. His grandson is there
ploughing; his young wife fetches him
cakes and tea and a dark smile. It is well.

The Small Country

Did I confuse the categories?
Was I blind?
Was I afraid of hubris
in identifying this land
with the kingdom? Those stories
about the far journeys, when it was here
at my door; the object
of my contempt that became
the toad with the jewel in its head!
Was a population so small
enough to be called, too many
to be chosen? I called it
an old man, ignoring the April
message proclaiming: Behold,
I make all things new.

The dinosaurs have gone their way
into the dark. The time-span
of their human counterparts
is shortened; everything
on this shrinking planet favours the survival
of the small people, whose horizons
are large only because they are content to look at them
from their own hills.
I grow old,
bending to enter the promised
land that was here all the time,
happy to eat the bread that was baked
in the poets' oven, breaking my speech
from the perennial tree
of my people and holding it in my blind hand.

Roland Mathias
(b. 1915)

Porth Cwyfan

June, but the morning's cold, the wind
Bluffing occasional rain. I am clear
What brings me here across the stone
Spit to the island, but not what I shall find
When the dried fribbles of seaweed
Are passed, the black worked into the sandgrains
By the tide's mouthing. I can call nothing my own.

A closed-in, comfortless bay, the branchy
Shifts of voyage everywhere. On a slope
Of sand reaching up to the hidden
Field or stretch of marram, a tipwhite, paunchy
Terrier sits pat on his marker, yapping me
Bodily out of range. What in God's name is he
Guarding that he thinks I want of a sudden?

To the left is the island, granite-hulled
Against froth, the chapel's roof acute
As Cwyfan put it when the finer
Passions ruled, convergent answers belled
Wetherlike towards God. Ahead is the cliff
Eaten by sand. On the quaking field beyond
Low huts, ordered and menacing. Porth China.

Once on the island those last shingle
Feet I came by seem in threat.
Can you, like Beuno,[1] knit me back severed
Heads, Cwyfan, bond men to single
Living? Your nave has a few wild settles
And phantasmagoric dust. And Roger Parry,

[1]Beuno: 6th century Welsh saint credited with this miracle

Agent to Owen Bold, has a stone skew-whiff in the yard.

Doubling back again is a small
Inevitable tragedy, the umpteenth
In a sinuous month. Now I avoid
The violent pitch of the dog, with all
And nothing to guard, remark his croup,
The hysteric note in the bark. Two dunlin,
Huffing on long legs, pick in and out of the tide.

A man on the beach, a woman
And child with a red woollen cap,
Hummock and stop within earshot,
Eyeing my blundering walk. 'Can
We get to the island?' he asks, Lancashire
Accent humble, dark curls broad. And I
Am suddenly angry. But how is my tripright sounder,
Save that I know Roger Parry and he does not?

Brechfa Chapel

Not a shank of the long lane upwards
Prepared our wits for the myth, the slimed
Substantiation of the elements. And the coot
With his off-white blaze and queasy paddle
Was an old alarm, the timid in flight
From the ignorant. The lowered shoulder
Of mountain it is, dabbled within the collar,
That shallows and darkens the eye, the first
Slack agent losing the light as bitterly
As the blackened water treads and nibbles
The reeds and bushes afloat in the new
Pool's centre. Beyond, a surviving ray
Points and fondles a reed-knot, the swan
That dreams on it taking no note of stumps
Or visitations. Nearer, however, and shifting
Like pillagers from weed to shore, settling
And starting raucously, hundreds of testy
Black-backs utter their true society, bankrupt
Hatred of strangers and bully unrest whichever
Marge they think themselves forced to. It
Is a militant brabble, staked out by wind

To the cropped-down pasture. Mud and the tricky
Green of the edge contrivingly clap it round
What's left of this latish day that began with love.

Opposite, to the west of the harsh lagoon,
Stands a chapel, shut in its kindred wall
With a score of graves. Legend on one
Cries a minister, dead of the heats in Newport
Before he came twenty-eight, his wife
Rambling on to her eighties. On another a woman
Loosens at thirty, her man afield on the mission
Ploughing till dark. O these stones trouble
The spirit, give look for look! A light from this
Tiny cell brisked in far corners once, the hand held
Steady. But now the black half-world comes at it,
Bleaks by its very doors. Is the old witness done?
The farmers, separate in their lands, hedge,
Ditch, no doubt, and keep tight pasture. Uphill
They trudge on seventh days, singly, putting
Their heads to the pews as habit bids them to,
And keep counsel. The books, in pyramid, sit tidy
On the pulpit. The back gallery looks
Swept. But the old iron gate to the common,
Rusted a little, affords not a glimpse
Of the swan in her dream on the reed-knot
Nor of the anxious coot enquiring of the grasses.
The hellish noise it is appals, the intolerable shilly-
Shally of birds quitting the nearer mud
For the farther, harrying the conversation
Of faith. Each on his own must stand and conjure
The strong remembered words, the unanswerable
Texts against chaos.

Laus Deo

(No. X of the sequence 'Tide-Reach')

The water is hard in the well
But it never fails:
The clifftop fields are infinite salt
When the gales flock and pummel
Roof and farmstack and holt:
But the worm speaks well
Of the earth, the pheasant
Is heavy with praise in the lane:
The sea-birds, for all their grieving,
Gamble and dive at the nape of the storm:
And man embroiders his tales.
Hard hands have not kept it, this puissant
And sacred endeavour, nor high
Heads either this old domain.
It is one engrossing work, this frail
Commerce of souls in a corner,
Its coming and going, and the mark
Of the temporal on it. It is one
Coherent work, this Wales
And the seaway of Wales, its Maker
As careful of strength as
Of weakness, its quirk and cognomen
And trumpet allowed for
The whole peninsula's length.
It is one affirmative work, this Wales
And the seaway of Wales.

Harri Webb
(b. 1920)

Synopsis of the Great Welsh Novel

Dai K lives at the end of a valley. One is not quite sure
Whether it has been drowned or not. His Mam
Loves him too much and his Dada drinks.
As for his girlfriend Blodwen, she's pregnant. So
Are all the other girls in the village—there's been a Revival.
After a performance of Elijah, the mad preacher
Davies the Doom has burnt the chapel down.
One Saturday night after the dance at the Con Club,
With the Free Wales Army up to no good in the back lanes,
A stranger comes to the village; he is, of course,
God, the well known television personality. He succeeds
In confusing the issue, whatever it is, and departs
On the last train before the line is closed.
The colliery blows up, there is a financial scandal
Involving all the most respected citizens; the Choir
Wins at the National.[1] It is all seen, naturally,
Through the eyes of a sensitive boy who never grows up.
The men emigrate to America, Cardiff and the moon. The girls
Find rich and foolish English husbands. Only daft Ianto
Is left to recite the Complete Works of Sir Lewis Morris[2]
To puzzled sheep, before throwing himself over
The edge of the abandoned quarry. One is not quite sure
Whether it is fiction or not.

[1]The National: The National Eisteddfod
[2]Sir Lewis Morris: a minor and prolific Anglo-Welsh poet (1833-1907)

Thanks in Winter

The day that Eliot died I stood
By Dafydd's[1] grave in Ystrad Fflur,[2]
It was the depth of winter,
A day for an old man to die.
The dark memorial stone,
Chiselled in marble of Latin
And the soft intricate gold
Of the old language
Echoed the weather's colour
A slate vault over Ffair Rhos
Pontrhydfendigaid, Pumlumon,
The sheep runs, the rough pasture
And the lonely whitewashed houses
Scattered like frost, the dwellings
Of country poets, last inheritors
To the prince of song who lies
Among princes, among ruins.
A pilgrim under the yew at Ystrad Fflur
I kept my vow, prayed for my country,
Cursed England, came away

And home to the gas fire and television
News. Caught between two languages,
Both dying, I thanked the long-dead
Minstrel of May and the newly silent
Voice of the bad weather, the precise
Accent of our own time, taught
To the disinherited, offering
Iron for gold.

[1]Dafydd: Dafydd ap Gwilym (fl. 1320-1370), the greatest Welsh-language poet
[2]Ystrad Fflur: the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida, Dafydd's reputed burial place

Epil y Filiast[1]

Already something of a stranger now
A spry old man is walking his milgi out
Of a Sunday morning when the nineteenth century
Is in chapel and the twentieth is in bed.
But his morning is centuries younger than these
As he steps it out and the lean dog lopes beside him
To fields where it will flash and pounce and double
As once in Glyn Cuch Woods.[2]
And the old man stands in his grubby mackintosh
With a jaunty set to his shoulders,
A clean white scarf around his withered throat
And his cap on one side—ticyn slic.[3]
His whistle carries further than the rotting pitheads,
The grass-grown tips, the flashy, flimsy estates.
He is a gambler, a drinker, a doggy-boy,
Better at drawing the dole than earning a wage.
The supermarket rises where Calfaria[4] stood,
To him it is all one, he is older than any of it.
Mark him well, he is the last of his kind,
The last heir of Cadwaladr, Caswallon
And all our dead princes.

[1]Epil y Filiast: son of a bitch
[2]Glyn Cuch Woods: where the Prince of Dyfed, out with his hunting dogs, encounters the King of the Celtic Underworld, in the opening scene of the early Welsh Tales, *The Mabinogion*
[3]ticyn slic: a bit smooth/smart/sly
[4]Calfaria: a Welsh Nonconformist chapel

Leslie Norris
(b. 1921)

Water

On hot summer mornings my aunt set glasses
On a low wall outside the farmhouse,
With some jugs of cold water.
I would sit in the dark hall, or
Behind the dairy window,
Waiting for children to come from the town.

They came in small groups, serious, steady,
And I could see them, black in the heat,
Long before they turned in at our gate
To march up the soft, dirt road.
They would stand by the wall,
Drinking water with an engrossed thirst. The dog

Did not bother them, knowing them responsible
Travellers. They held in quiet hands their bags
Of jam sandwiches, and bottles of yellow fizz.
Sometimes they waved a gratitude to the house,
But they never looked at us.
Their eyes were full of the mountain, lifting

Their measuring faces above our long hedge.
When they had gone I would climb the wall,
Looking for them among the thin sheep runs.
Their heads were a resolute darkness among ferns,
They climbed with unsteady certainty.
I wondered what it was they knew the mountain had.

They would pass the last house, Lambert's, where
A violent gander, too old by many a Christmas,
Blared evil warning from his bitten moor,
Then it was open world, too high and clear

For clouds even, where over heather
The free hare cleanly ran, and the summer sheep.

I knew this; and I knew all summer long
Those visionary gangs passed through our lanes,
Coming down at evening, their arms full
Of cowslips, moon daisies, whinberries, nuts,
All fruits of the sliding seasons,
And the enormous experience of the mountain

That I who loved it did not understand.
In the summer, dust filled our winter ruts
With a level softness, and children walked
At evening through golden curtains scuffed
From the road by their trailing feet.
They would drink tiredly at our wall, talking

Softly, leaning, their sleepy faces warm for home.
We would see them murmur slowly through our stiff
Gate, their shy heads gilded by the last sun.
One by one we would gather up the used jugs,
The glasses. We would pour away
A little water. It would lie on the thick dust, gleaming.

Early Frost

We were warned about frost, yet all day the summer
Has wavered its heat above the empty stubble. Late
Bees hung their blunt weight,
Plump drops between those simplest wings, their leisure
An ignorance of frost.
My mind is full of the images of summer
And a liquid curlew calls from alps of air;

But the frost has come. Already under trees
Pockets of summer are dying, wide paths
Of the cold glow clean through the stricken thickets
And again I feel on my cheek the cut of winters
Dead. Once I awoke in a dark beyond moths
To a world still with freezing,
Hearing my father go to the yard for his ponies,

His hands full of frostnails to point their sliding
To a safe haul. I went to school,
Socks pulled over shoes for the streets' clear glass,
The early shops cautious, the tall
Classroom windows engraved by winter's chisel,
Fern, feather and flower that would not let the pale
Day through. We wrote in a cold fever for the morning

Play. Then boys in the exulting yard, ringing
Boots hard on winter, slapped with their polishing
Caps the arrows of their gliding, in steaming lines
Ran till they launched one by one
On the skills of ice their frail balance,
Sliding through life with not a fall in mind,
Their voices crying freely through such shouting

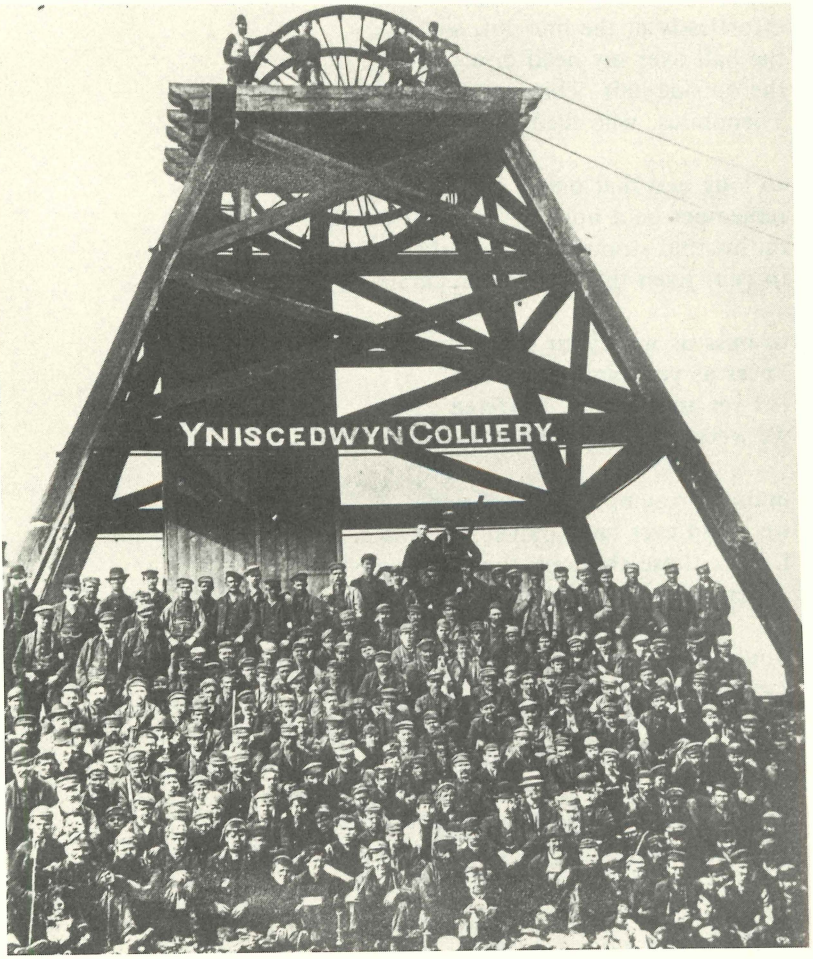
As the cold divided. I slid in the depth
Of the season till the swung bell sang us in.
Now insidious frost, its parched grains rubbing
At crannies, moved on our skin.
Our fingers died. Not the warmth
Of all my eight wide summers could keep me smiling.
The circle of the popping stove fell still
And we were early sped through the hurrying dark.

I ran through the bitterness on legs
That might have been brittle, my breath
Solid, grasping at stabs of bleak
Pain to gasp on. Winter branched in me, ice cracked
In my bleeding. When I fell through the teeth
Of the cold at my haven door I could not see

For locked tears, I could not feel the spent
Plenty of flames banked at the range,
Nor my father's hands as they roughed the blue
Of my knees. But I knew what he meant
With the love of his rueful laugh, and my true
World unfroze in a flood of happy crying,
As hot on my cheek as the sting of this present

Frost. I have stood too long in the orderly
Cold of the garden. I would not have again the death
Of that day come unasked as the comfortless dusk

Past the stakes of my fences. Yet these are my
Ghosts, they do not need to ask
For housing when the early frost comes down.
I take them in, all, to the settled warmth.



Yniscedwyn Colliery, Swansea Valley, c. 1900

Elegy for David Beynon

David, we must have looked comic, sitting
there at next desks, your legs stretched
half-way down the classroom, while
my feet hung a free inch above

the floor. I remember, too, down
at The Gwynne's Field, at the side
of the little Taff,[1] dancing with
laughing fury as you caught

effortlessly at the line-out, sliding
the ball over my head direct to
the outside-half. That was Cyril
Theophilus, who died in his quiet

so long ago that only I, perhaps,
remember he'd hold the ball one-handed
on his thin stomach as he turned
to run. Even there you were careful

to miss us with your scattering
knees as you bumped through
for yet another try. Buffeted
we were, but cheered too by our

unhurt presumption in believing
we could ever have pulled you down.
I think those children, those who died
under your arms in the crushed school,

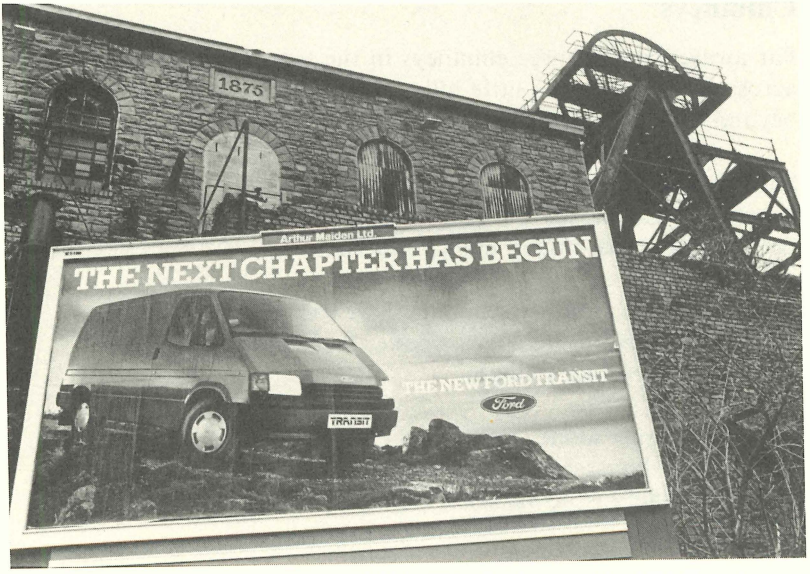
would understand that I make this
your elegy. I know the face you had,
have walked with you enough mornings
under the fallen leaves. Theirs is

the great anonymous tragedy one word
will summarise. Aberfan,[2] I write it

[1]Taff: the river on which Cardiff stands
[2]Aberfan: a village where in 1966 a coal-tip slid on to the school killing 116 children and 28 adults

for them here, knowing we've paid to it
our shabby pence, and now it can be stored

with whatever names there are where
children end their briefest pilgrimage.
I cannot find the words for you, David. These
are too long, too many; and not enough.



"The Next Chapter Has Begun"

Ruth Bidgood
(b. 1922)

Chimneys

Far away, we saw three chimneys in the trees
across the valley, on a little hill
beyond the first hill's shoulder.

Shading our eyes from the sidelong evening sun,
we gazed and guessed till we could almost see
the roofs of beast-house, stable and barn.

No smoke rose from the chimneys, we said at first,
but soon we swore there was smoke, so alive the house
seemed in the dying sunlight.

And afterwards, alone, I searched on maps
to make the house more mine by knowing its name—
and found there is no farm on the hill,

no house of any kind, not even a ruin.
What trick of sun and shade put chimneys there
for us to find and talk about?

And is the evening more real than the house?
Now both are gone, it seems a fine distinction
that one was and the other was not.

Remembering, I build the evening again,
the plunging valley and the little hill,
and look! there are chimneys in the trees.

Lighting Candles

Tonight, after storm, lighting candles,
I remember a picture I have seen
of Indian women at night
launching candles on leaf-boats
to float away downstream
carrying prayers into the dark.

Tonight, lighting candles, I think
of the dark faces, the dwindling lights,
night closing back, the water
black again, reflections gone,
boats all sailed away, and the prayers
now rising from some further reach
of the sacred river. Out of sight
the dancing end of the little flames.

Tonight I light candles.
What prayers were waiting
for these new bodies of fire?
Standing outside, I see
upon a dark and turbulent sky
my house launched, with a freight of light.

Tourists

Warner, setting out eagerly from Bath
at five on a lively morning
for the inspiring rigours of Wales
with obliging C_____, equipped himself for adventure
with a rusty but respectable spencer
(good enough for North Wales, he said).
The travellers' huge pockets bulged with clothes,
maps, and little comforts; their heads were full
of Ossian, whose horrendous glooms
they were gratified to recognise
one evening on the road to Rhayader
(though Ossian had not prepared them
for the state of the road, or the shortage
of bedchambers at the 'Lion').
Romantic tourists, no doubt, perpetual
outsiders, but willing to love,
and finding much 'singular, striking
and indescribable'. They were comic
(embarrassed at being spotted,
with their pedlars' pockets, by fashionable females),
but worked hard for their exaltations,
plodding twenty-five miles to Machynlleth
north over boggy mountains, or stumbling
two hours across rocks to find a guide
to Dolbadarn ruins. They were uncomplaining
on Snowdon in a thick mist (they drank milk
gratefully, but longed for brandy), and did not grumble
when, at Aberglaslyn, salmon failed to leap
(only two would even try). Who can say
that at the end of August, leaving Chepstow
for flood-tide at the ferry, they were taking
nothing real away, or that their naive and scholarly wonder
had given nothing in return?

Dannie Abse
(b. 1923)

Return to Cardiff

'Hometown'; well, most admit an affection for a city:
grey, tangled streets I cycled on to school, my first
cigarette
in the back lane, and, fool, my first botched love affair.
First everything. Faded torments; self-indulgent pity.

The journey to Cardiff seemed less a return than a raid
on mislaid identities. Of course the whole locus smaller:
the mile-wide Taff now a stream, the castle not as in
some black,
gothic dream, but a decent sprawl, a joker's toy facade.

Unfocused voices in the wind, associations, clues,
odds and ends, fringes caught, as when, after the doctor
quit,
a door opened and I glimpsed the white, enormous face
of my grandfather, suddenly aghast with certain news.

Unable to define anything I can hardly speak,
and still I love the place for what I wanted it to be
as much as for what it unashamedly is
now for me, a city of strangers, alien and bleak.

Unable to communicate I'm easily betrayed,
uneasily diverted by mere sense reflections
like those anchored waterscapes that wander, alter, in
the Taff,
hour by hour, as light slants down a different shade.

Illusory, too, that lost dark playground after rain,
the noise of trams, gunshots in what they once called
Tiger Bay.

Only real this smell of ripe, damp earth when the sun
comes out,
a mixture of pungencies, half exquisite and half plain.

No sooner than I'd arrived the other Cardiff had gone,
smoke in the memory, these but tinned resemblances,
where the boy I was not and the man I am not
met, hesitated, left double footsteps, then walked on.

Last Words

Splendidly, Shakespeare's heroes,
Shakespeare's heroines, once the spotlight's on,
enact every night, with such grace, their verbose deaths.
Then great plush curtains, then smiling resurrection
to applause—and never their good looks gone.

The last recorded words too
of real kings, real queens, all the famous dead,
are but pithy pretences, quotable fictions
composed by anonymous men decades later,
never with ready notebooks at the bed.

Most do not know who they are
when they die or where they are, country or town,
nor which hand on their brow. Some clapped-out actor may
imagine distant clapping, bow, but no real queen
will sigh, 'Give me my robe, put on my crown.'

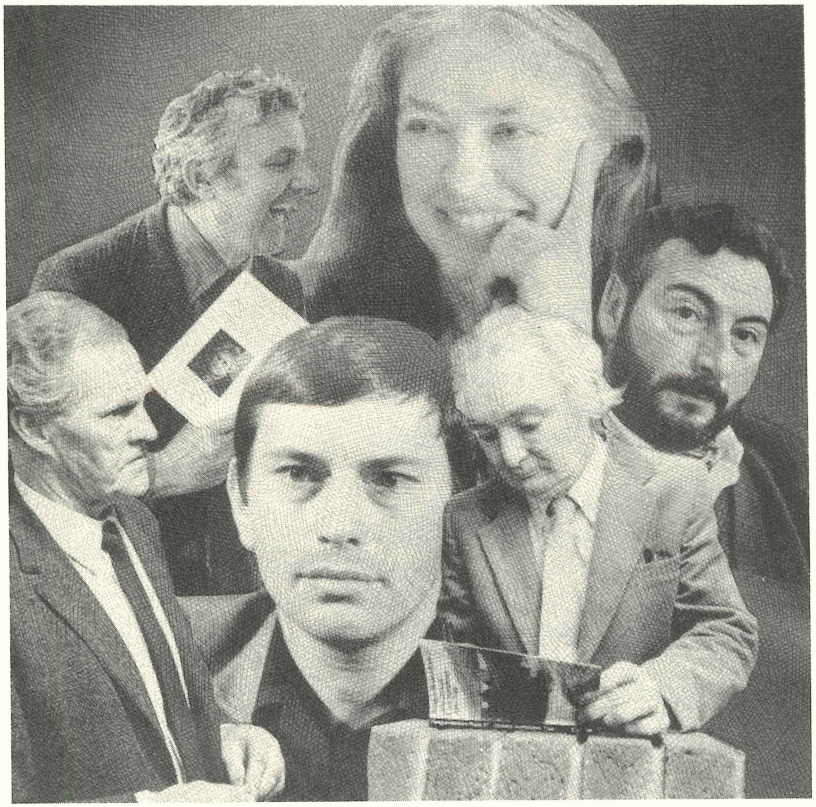
Death scenes not life-enhancing,
death scenes not beautiful nor with breeding;
yet bravely Sydney Carton, bravo Duc de Chavost
who, euphoric beside the guillotine, turned down
the corner of the page he was reading.

And how would I wish to go?
Not as in opera—that would offend—
nor like a blue-eyed cowboy shot and short of words,
but finger-tapping still our private morse, '...love you,'
before the last flowers and flies descend.

Peachstone

I do not visit his grave. He is not there.
Out of hearing, out of reach. I miss him here,
seeing hair grease at the back of a chair
near a firegrate where his spit sizzled,
or noting, in the cut-glass bowl, a peach.

For that night his wife brought him a peach,
his favourite fruit, while the sick light glowed,
and his slack, dry mouth sucked, sucked, sucked,
with dying eyes closed—perhaps for her sake—
till bright as blood the peachstone showed.



Clockwise: Gillian Clarke, Raymond Garlick, John Ormond, Tony Curtis, R. S. Thomas, and Dannie Abse

John Ormond
(b. 1923)

Ancient Monuments

—for Alexander Thom

They bide their time off serpentine
Green lanes, in fields, with railings
Round them and black cows; tall, pocked
And pitted stones, grey, ochre-patched
With moss, lodgings for lost spirits.

Sometimes you have to ask their
Whereabouts. A bent figure, in a hamlet
Of three houses and a barn, will point
Towards the moor. You find them there,
Aloof lean markers, erect in mud.

Long Meg, Five Kings, Nine Maidens,
Twelve Apostles: with such familiar names
We make them part of ordinary lives.
On callow pasture-land
The Shearers and The Hurlers stand.

Sometimes they keep their privacy
In public places: nameless, slender slabs
Disguised as gate-posts in a hedge; and some,
For centuries on duty as scratching-posts,
Are screened by ponies on blank uplands.

Search out the farthest ones, slog on
Through bog, bracken, bramble: arrive
At short granite footings in a plan
Vaguely elliptical, alignments sunk
In turf strewn with sheep's droppings;

And wonder whether it was this shrunk place

The guide-book meant, or whether
Over the next ridge the real chamber,
Accurate by the stars, begins its secret
At once to those who find it.

Turn and look back. You'll see horizons
Much like the ones that they saw,
The tomb-builders, milleniums ago;
The channel scutched by rain, the same old
Sediment of dusk, winter returning.

Dolerite, porphyry, gabbro fired
At the earth's young heart: how those men
Handled them. Set on back-breaking
Geometry, the symmetries of solstice,
What they awaited we, too, still await.

Looking for something else, I came once
To a cromlech in a field of barley.
Whoever farmed that field had true
Priorities. He sowed good grain
To the tomb's doorstep. No path

Led to the ancient death. The capstone,
Set like a cauldron on three legs,
Was marooned by the swimming crop.
A gust and the cromlech floated,
Motionless at time's moorings.

Hissing dry sibilance, chafing
Loquacious thrust of seed
This way and that, in time and out
Of it, would have capsized
The tomb. It stayed becalmed.

The bearded foam, rummaged
By wind from the westerly sea-track,
Broke short not over it. Skirted
By squalls of that year's harvest,
That tomb belonged in that field.

The racing barley, erratically-bleached
Bronze, cross-hatched with gold

And yellow, did not stop short its tide
In deference. It was the barley's
World. Some monuments move.

My Grandfather and His Apple Tree

Life sometimes held such sweetness for him
As to engender guilt. From the night vein he'd come,
From working in water wrestling the coal,
Up the pit slant. Every morning hit him
Like a journey of trams between the eyes;
A wild and drinking farmboy sobered by love
Of a miller's daughter and a whitewashed cottage
Suddenly to pay rent for. So he'd left the farm
For dark under the fields six days a week
With mandrel and shovel and different stalls.
All light was beckoning. Soon his hands
Untangled a brown garden into neat greens.

There was an apple tree he limed, made sturdy;
The fruit was sweet and crisp upon the tongue
Until it budded temptation in his mouth.
Now he had given up whistling on Sundays,
Attended prayer-meetings, added a concordance
To his wedding Bible and ten children
To the village population. He nudged the line,
Clean-pinafored and collared, glazed with soap,
Every seventh day of rest in Ebenezer;
Shaved on a Saturday night to escape the devil.

The sweetness of the apples worried him.
He took a branch of cooker from a neighbour
When he became a deacon, wanting
The best of both his worlds. Clay from the colliery
He thumbed about the bole one afternoon
Grafting the sour to sweetness, bound up
The bleeding white of junction with broad strips
Of working flannel-shirt and belly-bands
To join the two in union. For a time
After the wound healed the sweetness held,
The balance tilted towards an old delight.

But in the time that I remember him
(His wife had long since died, I never saw her)
The sour half took over. Every single apple
Grew—across twenty Augusts—bitter as wormwood.
He'd sit under the box tree, his pink gums
(Between the white moustache and goatee beard)
Grinding thin slices that his jack-knife cut,
Sucking for sweetness vainly. It had gone,
Gone. I heard him mutter
Quiet Welsh oaths as he spat the gall-juice
Into the seeding onion-bed, watched him toss
The big core into the spreading nettles.



Bards on a Bus

Definition of a Waterfall

Not stitched to air or water but to both
A veil hangs broken in concealing truth

And flies in vague exactitude, a dove
Born diving between rivers out of love

In drums' crescendo beat its waters grow
Conceding thunder's pianissimo

Transfixing ancient time and legend where
A future ghost steams in the present air:

From ledge to pool breakneck across rocks
Wild calm, calm chaos skein their paradox

So that excited poise is fiercely dressed
In a long instant's constant flow of rest,

So that this bridegroom and his bride in white
Parting together headlong reunite

Among her trailing braids. The inconstancy
Is reconciled to fall, falls and falls free

Raymond Garlick
(b. 1926)

Explanatory Note

For some of us, you see,
Wales is another word for peace.
The changing of the guard
is not our national frontispiece.
We like our castles ruined.
Mountains green as the verdigris

overlaying old armour
are our image—in millpond lakes.
Wales is a word for life
without kings and lords, and the cakes
of living expertly sliced
into great wedges, slender flakes.

Wales is two languages,
not one: and both of them invoke
a ritual dragon
trampling a meadow green as oak
in one half; but the other
white as Gandhi's cloak.

Matters Arising

No doubt what you say is right.
In Wales we shall never see
a terrible beauty born.
No rose of tragedy,
petalled in crimson and black,
will sway on this post office roof.
Swansea gaol will receive
no heroes, unshaven, aloof,
for the cells' chill liturgy
and the rites of the firing-squad.
Whatever beauty's in blood
will not bloom here, thank God.

I met an Easter man
in Dublin long ago,
Senator, Minister now,
who told me: 'You will know
when you find yourself picking off,
like roses whose day is done,
from behind a garden wall
the soldiers of Albion—
you'll know as you see them fall,
and you feel the frost of fear
icing your ambushed spine,
that what you hope for is near.'

I have lived where blood
had flooded down men's hands.
Though I look for a Wales
free as the Netherlands,
a freedom hacked out here
is a freedom without worth,
a terror without beauty.
Here it must come to birth
not as a pterodactyl
flailing archaic wings,
but the dove that broods on chaos—
wise as a thousand springs.

Gors Goch

A tawny day in August.
I stroll on the great marsh
confronting Ynys Uchaf.
The drought has sapped its harsh
fangs, shrivelled its venom.
Hard to believe that here
the village midwife vanished
long ago; was found last year,
agony turned ivory:
that this baked, scruffy heath
can spit out tapered axe-heads
like fossil dragons' teeth.

Today it's stretched out supine
in the sun's barbecue
like a sprawled, mangy beast
in an open-air zoo—
all danger drained away,
reduced to a mere flop
of innocent inertia
by the heat.
I stop.
Like high-tension cables
stockinged in tiger skin,
flexing in an ecstasy
among hot quartz and thin
scrub grass, their volted coils
sizzling before my feet
(which rock back on their heels)
the vipers drink the heat.

Tony Conran

(b. 1931)

Elegy for the Welsh Dead, in the Falkland Islands, 1982

Gwyr a aeth Gatraeth oedd ffraeth eu llu.
Glasfedd eu hancwyn, a gwenwyn fu.

—*Y Gododdin* (6th century)

Men went to Catraeth, keen was their company.
They were fed on fresh mead, and it proved poison.

Men went to Catraeth.[1] The luxury liner
For three weeks feasted them.
They remembered easy ovations,
Our boys, splendid in courage.
For three weeks the albatross roads,
Passwords of dolphin and petrel,
Practised their obedience
Where the killer whales gathered,
Where the monotonous seas yelped.
Though they went to church with their standards
Raw death has them garnished.

Men went to Catraeth. The Malvinas
Of their destiny greeted them strangely.
Instead of affection there was coldness,
Splintering iron and the icy sea,
Mud and the wind's malevolent satire.
They stood nonplussed in the bomb's indictment.

Malcolm Wigley of Connah's Quay. Did his helm

[1]Catraeth: Catterick, now in England, the site in about AD 600 of a disastrous battle which is the subject of the early Welsh poem *Y Goddoddin* by Aneirin

Ride high in the war-line?
Did he drink enough mead for that journey?
The desolated shores of Tegeingl,
Did they pig this steel that destroyed him?
The Dee runs silent beside empty foundries.
The way of the wind and the rain is adamant.

Clifford Elley of Pontypridd. Doubtless he feasted.
He went to Catraeth with a bold heart.
He was used to valleys. The shadow held him.
The staff and the fasces of tribunes betrayed him.
With the oil of our virtue we have anointed
His head, in the presence of foes.

Phillip Sweet of Cwmbach. Was he shy before girls?
He exposes himself now to the hags, the glance
Of the loose-fleshed whores, the deaths
That congregate like gulls on garbage.
His sword flahed in the wastes of nightmare.

Russell Carlisle of Rhuthun. Men of the North
Mourn Rheged's son in the castellated vale.
His nodding charger neighed for the battle.
Uplifted hooves pawed at the lightning.
Now he lies down. Under the air he is dead.

Men went to Catraeth. Of the forty-three
Certainly Tony Jones of Carmarthen was brave.
What did it matter, steel in the heart?
Shrapnel is faithful now. His shroud is frost.

With the dawn men went. Those forty-three,
Gentlemen all, from the streets and byways of Wales,
Dragons of Aberdare, Denbigh and Neath—
Figment of empire, whore's honour, held them.
Forty-three at Catraeth died for our dregs.

Research

In tasteful, inconspicuous buildings
Set about with shrubs and looking out
On ploughed fields, villages and woodlands,
Equitably they plot how to kill my children,
Marged and little Alys, six and three.

Those intelligent young men in the Ukraine
Would, if we met, show me photos
Of round-eyed daughters. They have nightmares—
Tasteful, inconspicuous buildings that
Cotoneasters and mock-orange decorate

Where people I pay arrive at nine most mornings
Busy to think out how to murder those
Ukrainian darlings all the livelong day,
From time to time resting their eyes
On fields and woods of Powys[1] or Hertfordshire.

[1]Powys: formerly a princedom, now a county in mid-Wales

Jon Dressel
(b. 1934)

You, Benjamin Jones

You, Benjamin Jones, dead seventeen
years of a weak chest and mill-dust
before I was born, known by me

through the passioned prisms of your
wife and daughter, my 'mamgu' and
mother; I could never pronounce the

Welsh, she became 'Mimi'...imagine, a
Puccini heroine from Llanelli, and her,
from middle years on, always close

to fifteen stone, though in the small gilt
wedding picture on my wall she is
lovely as Olwen[1] resurrected

Victorian...and you, dashing as all
get-out in that wing-collar and brave
moustache; why in God's name did you

come to America, why did you come
to Pennsylvania to discover greed, get
mad, join the union, grub through strikes,

get scabbed, hymn your way west, losing
jobs, leading choirs, fathering eisteddfodau?[2]
why? I found your trunk in Illinois, in a

[1]Olwen: one of the heroines of *The Mabinogion*; where she trod, white flowers sprang up
[2]eisteddfodau: festivals of poetry and music

cellar, the ivory baton, the warped books, the
Welsh words, strange beneath floodstains;
what drove you there, to the prairie, the

Mississippi, to die in 1918, forty-seven,
your cariad,[3] your mortgage, five children at
your side? you sang The Star-Spangled Banner

as your eyes glazed, they said; God, no, Duw,
Arglwydd Dduw,[4] I say, at dusk in this house
in Llansteffan's green October, what do I

know of you, of ash-brown grief, Benjamin Jones?

[3]cariad: sweetheart
[4]Arglwydd Dduw: Lord God

Thursday[1]

Everything closes in. The wind from sea
whips the rain across the fields and down
the grey corridors and pavements of the town.
In the tawdry cafe, I am close
to my people and the smell of wet wool.
They are like wet sheep. In the morning,
before the rain came, I saw horses
in the fields, solitary, heads erect,
immobile in the wind. They were grand,
and for a moment seemed of stone.
The rain must ripple down their brawn
and sinew now. Here the people
smell of wet wool. I must not dwell on it.
Peoples have been great with sheep,
and had the horse as well. These people
smell like sheep. I cannot help it.
They are sheep. They bleat. The cafe owner,
an Italian, does not notice. He drags
on his cigar. I rise and go out.
The street is rained vacant. I force
myself to think of horses, strain
to hear the clean thunder of hooves.
The rain streaks my glasses. The soft wet
houses huddle together. I hear them,
I swear it. I hear the huddled houses bleat.

[1]Thursday: the day of the week in 1979 when the majority of the voters in Wales voted in a referendum against the devolution issue, which would have given them a modest degree of self-government

Sally Roberts Jones
(b. 1935)

Tryweryn[1]

"Nothing's gone that matters — a dozen farms,
A hollow of no great beauty, scabby sheep,
A gloomy Bethel and a field where sleep
A few dead peasants. There are finer charms
Observed in rising water, as its arms
Circle and meet above the walls; in cheap
Power and growing profits. Who could reap
Harvests as rich as this in ploughmen's palms?
All's for the best—rehoused, these natives, too,
Should bless us for sanitation and good health.
Later, from English cities, see the view
Misty with hiraeth—and their new-built wealth."

"All of our wealth's in men—and their life's blood
Drawn from the land this water drowns in mud."

[1]Tryweryn: a valley and village drowned in the early 1960s to make a reservoir to supply water to England

Ann Griffiths[1]

In little time I stake my claim
To all the panoply of fame.
My words are air, their manuscript
Forgetful flesh, a bony crypt
To lay these stillborn creatures in.

This foolishness of light intent
I turn to praise, my patterns meant,
Poor gift, for Him by whose free gift
My life is bought; the seasons sift
Away my youth, my fear, my sin.

The fire upon my hearth is tame,
God's gentle creature; now my name
Is signed in polished oak and brass,
My soul is singing, clear as glass,
Pure as this babe I bear within.

My songs as light as ash are spent;
My hope's elsewhere, a long descent
In flesh and land — and yet the air
Stirs with fresh music, calls me where
Intricate webs of words begin.

Lord, let me not be silent till
All earth is grinding in Your mill!

[1]Ann Griffiths: Welsh-language mystic and hymn-writer (1776-1805)

Gillian Clarke

(b. 1937)

Blaen Cwrt

You ask how it is. I will tell you.
There is no glass. The air spins in
The stone rectangle. We warm our hands
With apple wood. Some of the smoke
Rises against the ploughed, brown field
As a sign to our neighbours in the
Four folds of the valley that we are in.
Some of the smoke seeps through the stones
Into the barn where it curls like fern
On the walls. Holding a thick root
I press my bucket through the surface
Of the water, lift it brimming and skim
The leaves away. Our fingers curl on
Enamel mugs of tea, like ploughmen.
The stones clear in the rain
Giving their colours. It's not easy.
There are no brochure blues or boiled sweet
Reds. All is ochre and earth and cloud-green
Nettles tasting sour and the smells of moist
Earth and sheep's wool. The wattle and daub
Chimney hood has decayed away, slowly
Creeping to dust, chalking the slate
Floor with stories. It has all the first
Necessities for a high standard
Of civilised living: silence inside
A circle of sound, water and fire,
Light on uncountable miles of mountain
From a big, unpredictable sky,
Two rooms, waking and sleeping,
Two languages, two centuries of past
To ponder on, and the basic need
To work hard in order to survive.

Harvest at Mynachlog

At last the women come with baskets,
The older one in flowered apron.
A daisied cloth covering the bread
And dappled china, sweet tea
In a vast can. The women stoop
Spreading their cups in the clover.

The engines stop. A buzzard watches
From the fence. We bury our wounds
In the deep grass: sunburnt shoulders,
Bodies scratched with straw, wrists bruised
From the weight of the bales, blood beating.

For hours the baler has been moulding
Golden bricks from the spread straw,
Spewing them at random in the stubble.
I followed the slow load, heaved each
Hot burden, feeling the sun contained.

And unseen over me a man leaned,
Taking the weight to make the toppling
Load. Then the women came, friendly
And cool as patches of flowers at the far
Field edge, mothy and blurred in the heat.

We are soon recovered and roll over
In the grass to take our tea. We talk
Of other harvests. They remember
How a boy, flying his plane so low
Over the cut fields that his father

Straightened from his work to wave his hat
At the boasting sky, died minutes later
On an English cliff, in such a year
As this, the barns brimming gold.

We are quiet again, holding our cups
In turn for the tilting milk, sad, hearing
The sun roar like a rush of grain
Engulfing all winged things that live
One moment in the eclipsing light.

The Hare

(i. m. Frances Horovitz 1938-1983)

That March night I remember how we heard
a baby crying in a neighbouring room
but found him sleeping quietly in his cot.

The others went to bed and we sat late
talking of children and the men we loved.
You thought you'd like another child. "Too late"

you said. And we fell silent, thought a while
of yours with his copper hair and mine,
a grown daughter and sons.

Then, that joke we shared, our phases of the moon.
"Sisterly lunacy" I said. You liked
the phrase. It became ours. Different

as earth and air, yet in one trace that week
we towed the calends like boats reining
the oceans of the world at the full moon.

Suddenly from the fields we heard again
a baby cry, and standing at the door
listened for minutes, ears and eyes soon used

to the night. It was cold. In the east
the river made a breath of shining sound.
The cattle in the field were shadow black.

A cow coughed. Some slept, and some pulled grass.
I could smell blossom from the blackthorn
and see their thorny crowns against the sky.

And then again, a sharp cry from the hill.
"A hare," we said together, not speaking
of fox or trap that held it in a lock

of terrible darkness. Both admitted
next day to lying guilty hours awake
at the crying of the hare. You told me

of sleeping at last in the jaws of a bad dream.
"I saw all the suffering of the world
in a single moment. Then I heard

a voice say 'But this is nothing, nothing
to the mental pain.' " I couldn't speak of it.
I thought about your dream when you lay ill.

In the last heavy nights before full moon,
when its face seems sorrowful and broken,
I look through binoculars. Its seas flower

like clouds over water, it wears its craters
like silver rings. Even in dying you
menstruated as a woman in health

considering to have a child or no.
When they hand me insults or little hurts
and I'm on fire with my arguments

at your great distance you can calm me still.
Your dream, my sleeplessness, the cattle
asleep under a full moon,

and out there
the dumb and stiffening body of the hare.

John Davies
(b. 1944)

Port Talbot

The breakers' jumbled yard: valley,
hills, strewn plain, reflect back
undulations of the sea.

Where steel and tidal water meet,
not turbulence and steam
but rust, what's left of heat,

is breaking down crisp ore
almost to the heart, the heart's
still beating core.

Mist's rolling-mills in sheets
send rain. There's sun. But night
alone here alters what it meets—

even when, silent, a furnace-flare
will flatter all the sleeping sky
like a dream of what was here,

three glimmering decades outstared
now by a ghost—and only
rust is eager and red-haired

in no-man's land, this town,
my town, whose thunder's the sound
of thunder running down.

How to Write Anglo-Welsh Poetry

It's not too late I suppose...
You could sound a Last Post or two,
and if you can get away with saying
what's been said, then do.

First, apologise for not being able
to speak Welsh. Go on: apologise.
Being Anglo-anything is really tough;
any gaps you can fill with sighs.

And get some roots, juggle names like
Taliesin and ap Gwilym, weave
a Cymric web. It doesn't matter what
they wrote. Look, let's not be naive.

Now you can go on about the past
being more real than the present—
you've read your early R. S. Thomas,
you know where Welsh Wales went.

Spray place-names around. Caernarfon.
Cwmtwrch. Have, perhaps, a Swansea
sun marooned in Glamorgan's troubled
skies; even the weather's Welsh, see.

But a mining town is best, of course,
for impact, and you'll know what to say
about Valley Characters, the heart's dust
and the rest. Read it all up anyway.

A quick reference to cynghanedd[1]
always goes down well; girls are cariad;
myth is in; exile, defeat, hills...
almost anything Welsh and sad.

Style now. Nothing fancy: write
all your messages as prose then chop
them up—it's how deeply red and green
they bleed that counts. Right, stop.

[1]cynghanedd: patternings of alliteration and assonance

That's it, you've finished for now—
just brush your poems down: dead, fluffed
things but your own almost. Get
them mounted in magazines. Or stuffed.

Tony Curtis
(b. 1946)

Preparations

In the valley there is an order to these things:
Chapel suits and the morning shift called off.
She takes the bus to Pontypridd to buy black,
But the men alone proceed to the grave,
Neighbours, his butties, and the funeral regulars.
The women are left in the house; they bustle
Around the window with a hushed, furious
Energy that keeps grief out of the hour.

She holds to the kitchen, concerned with sandwiches.
It is a ham-bone big as a man's arm and the meat
Folds over richly from her knife. A daughter sits
Watching butter swim in its dish before the fire.
The best china laid precisely across the new tablecloth:
They wait. They count the places over and over like a rosary.

Soup

One night our block leader set a competition:
two bowls of soup to the best teller of a tale.
The whole evening the hut filled with words—
tales from the old countries
of wolves and children
potions and love-sick herders
stupid woodsmen and crafty villagers.
Apple-blossom snowed from blue skies,
orphans discovered themselves royal.
Tales of greed and heroes and cunning survival,
soldiers of the Empires, the Church, the Reich.

And when they turned to me
I could not speak,
sunk in the horror of that place,
my throat a corridor of bones, my eyes
and nostrils clogged with self-pity.
"Speak," they said, "everyone has a story to tell."
And so I closed my eyes and said:
I have no hunger for your bowls of soup, you see
I have just risen from the Shabbat meal—
my father has filled our glasses with wine,
bread has been broken, the maid has served fish.
Grandfather has sung, tears in his eyes, the old songs.
My mother holds her glass by the stem, lifts
it to her mouth, the red glow reflecting on her throat.
I go to her side and she kisses me for bed.
My grandfather's kiss is rough and soft like an apricot.
The sheets on my bed are crisp and flat
like the leaves of a book...

I carried my prizes back to my bunk: one bowl
I hid, the other I stirred
and smelt a long time, so long
that it filled the cauldron of my head,
drowning a family of memories.

Return to the Headland

There seems no point in angels
or ogres. Now I have no need
for the cartoons of guilt or shame.
The dead go where we send them.
At the crematorium I read *Do Not Go Gentle*
before the vicar's book freed
your soul or whatever it be that soars
from the husk of flesh.
The curtains purred to their close.
Outside, the long summer of rain,
grey and grey and grey blurred
over Narberth's sodden hills.

It would be easy to construct a myth.
The box jammed under
the baby-seat in the back of the car,
bumping our way up to the Headland.
Early evening. The sea green and flat,
moving and murmuring in the hollows beneath
our feet. Not a cloud shaped, though the horizon
east across Wales is dimming into grey.
The urn is some sort of alloy
like a child's toy, light and wrapped around
what we're told are your ashes.

Not in the sea—says my mother—
He was never a man for the sea—
I step off the path to the slope of rocks
and two rabbits break for cover
from the startled grass.
The stuff shakes out and falls free:
dust, ash on the stones, my shoes.
Stiff-armed, I send the empty tin
over the edge right down to the water.
A jet chalks its line high above the ocean,
pushing steadily away from night.
We turn our backs on a sky that goes on forever.

Robert Minhinnick
(b. 1952)

Eelers

Around the wrecks the congers weave
Their convoluted shapes through decks and cabins,
The sea-invaded rooms of unmarked ships.

Oozing, mottled like orchids,
They are appetite in a sheath of muscle,
Ragged as sleeves pulled inside out.

So ceaseless eels haunt colliers and smacks,
The silt-encrusted cargoes of the sea bottom
Until they take the barb, the reel's arrow.

Then each gill is a flower, a pulse amongst
The wounds. Jack-knives and lump-hammers
The eelers' armoury, gaffs and shovels

Rise against the instinct of their rage.
And the mouths of eels twist like the mouths of dogs,
Their bodies are branches, bits of hose

Beneath the oilskin of the conger fishermen.
I've seen those crowd the greasy flags
Of harbours when a motor-launch comes in:

Men high-booted, zipped against the wind,
Their catch preserved in melting ice—mackerels'
Blue tortoiseshell like fishermens' tattoos

A sudden drift of bodies over the dock,
And the congers hung on chains, ferociously torn,
Their mouths agape like beaten, senile men.

The Coast

By single grains it slowly filled their lives.
Everything that stood against it
Was covered by the thin gold web of sand.

Under the door its drifting gauze, and through
The barley. Along shelves and into the privy
Rushed sand, ceaseless and mercurial.

A teeming of aphids over the leaves,
The passing of a whisper at the door
Was sand, building against useless iron.

Now out of the dune comes the remnant of that life.
A needle's eye packed with golden silt
And a polished edge of broken pottery.

Down a hundred feet, or one, the fields
Are ready for the plough. The plastics lie
Not quite as deep, are dimly mauve and cream

Like winter bulbs. Our ground is blurring,
Losing its angles, but the brand-names push
Out of the sand their familiar epitaphs,

And a shattered bottle reassures that our claim
Was made. Here a tidy rank of caravans
Floats axle-deep upon the creeping tide.

Mike Jenkins
(b. 1953)

Chartist[1] Meeting
(Heolgerrig,[2] 1842)

The people came to listen
looking down valley as they tramped;
the iron track was a ladder
from a loft to the open sea—
salt filling the air like pollen.

Each wheel was held fast
as you would grip a coin;
yet everything went away from them.
The black kernel of the mountains
seemed endless, but still in their stomachs
a furnace-fire roared,
and their children's eyes hammered
and turned and hollowed out a cannon.

Steam was like a spiral of wool
threaded straight down the valley,
lost past a colliery.
The tramways held the slope
as though they were wood of a pen.
Wives and children were miniatures
of the hill, the coal engrained
in enclosures on their skin.

They shook hands with the sky,
an old friend; there, at the field,

[1]Chartist: a 19th century mass movement for social and political reform on the basis of a six-point Charter
[2]Heolgerrig: a place-name

oak trees turned to crosses
their trunks bent with the weight
of cloud and wind, and harsh grass
from marshes that Morgan Williams,
the weaver, could raise into a pulpit.

A thousand listened, as way below them
Cyfarthfa Castle was set like a diamond
in a ring of green,
and the stalks of chimneys
bloomed continuous smoke and flame.

The Welsh that was spoken
chuckled with streams, plucked bare rock,
and men like Morgan Williams
saw in the burnt hands a harvest of votes.

Survivor

They came from the arterial streets
of Dowlais, to the pill-box estate
wired to the hillside. Married
too young, for their bodies' sake.

You were, at first, a novelty
won at a fair. Then you cried
every night, dragging them from calm
of a deep sleep like a premature
birth again and again...
until he learnt to slumber and snore
nailed by bottles to his marriage-bed.
You grew up doing the opposite
of all the examples they set.

Now you smile survival at me,
like one of those old Dowlais buildings:
the Library propped by scaffolding
(friends hold you steady).
If I looked long enough
into the archives of your mind
perhaps I'd find the reason.

The time your father's bayonet-case
came down like a truncheon
onto your mother, you couldn't hide
behind their smoke or fan the fire
any longer. You hit his helmet-head,
so he struck out and you lay
like an imitation of the dead.

Tracey—the common name belies you.
You have reclaimed the black hills
of night with your boys on stolen bikes.
The sound of their engines
worries round and round your mother
as she sits and knits alone.
Your father's in a cot
crazily shaking its bars.

Contributors

Dannie Abse comes from a distinguished Welsh Jewish family and is a medical consultant whose books include *Collected Poems* (Pittsburgh 1977), *One-Legged on Ice* (Georgia 1982), and his autobiography, *A Poet in the Family* (London 1974).

James Ballowe has published a book of poetry and edited a collection of George Santayana's essays on America. He is a Professor of English and Dean of the College of Communications and Fine Arts at Bradley University.

Ruth Bidgood began writing after her return to Wales during the 1960s. Her poetry, a celebration of mid-Wales, includes *Lighting Candles: New and Selected Poems* (Bridgend 1982).

Gillian Clarke, former editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, is the most active poet in Wales. She travels in the U.K. specializing in school poetry workshops. *Selected Poems* appeared in 1985. She has read widely in North America.

Anthony Conran, formerly tutor at University College North Wales, Bangor, is editor of the essential collection of Welsh language poetry in translation, *Welsh Verse*, and a critical work on the Anglo-Welsh, *The Cost of Strangeness*.

Tony Curtis, senior Lecturer in English at the Polytechnic of Wales, won the U.K. National Poetry Prize in 1984. *Selected Poems* was published in 1986. A new collection *The Last Candles* has just appeared. He has read widely in the U.S.A. and has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *The New England Review*.

John Davies is a school teacher in north Wales who has taught in the U.S.A. His collection *The Visitor's Book* was joint winner of the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award.

Jon Dressel, born in St. Louis, Missouri, is the grandson of immigrants from Carmarthenshire. He spends much time in Wales as Director of American Studies at Trinity College, Carmarthen, and regularly publishes in Wales.

Raymond Garlick contributed the entry on Welsh literature in English to *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York/St. Louis 1967). He has written *An Introduction to Anglo-Welsh Literature* (Cardiff 1972) and

Collected Poems, 1946-1986 (Llandysul 1987).

Mike Jenkins, a school teacher in Merthyr Tydfil, is currently editor of *Poetry Wales*. He has published four collections. He is co-editor (with John Davies) of *The Valleys* anthology.

Glyn Jones is a poet, short-story writer, novelist, critic, and formerly a schoolmaster. His work includes *The Blue Bed* (New York 1937), *The Island of Apples* (New York 1965), *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (London 1968), and *Selected Poems, Fragments, and Fictions* (Bridgend 1988).

Sally Jones is a former librarian. She runs *Alun Books*, a press publishing fiction, prose, and poetry, and a children's imprint, *Barn Owl Press*. She's published four collections of poems, the latest being *Relative Values*.

Roland Mathias is a poet, critic, historian, and formerly a headmaster. He has published *Burning Brambles: Selected Poems, 1944-1979* (Llandysul 1983), *A Ride through the Wood* (Bridgend 1985), and *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Bridgend 1987).

Robert Minhinnick, active in Friends of the Earth, has had four collections published and critically acclaimed. A new collection is appearing in 1989. He performs all over the U.K. and has read in Canada and the U.S.A.

Leslie Norris has recently been appointed professor of poetry at Brigham Young University, Utah. His American publications include *Island Off Maine* (1975), *Sliding and Other Stories* (1976), *Walking the White Field* (1980), and *Norris's Ark* (1988).

John Ormond has directed and produced films for BBC Wales on other Anglo-Welsh poets, notably Dylan Thomas, Alun Lewis, and R. S. Thomas. He has written *Definition of a Waterfall* (Oxford 1973) and *Selected Poems* (Bridgend 1987).

R. S. Thomas, formerly an Anglican country clergyman, has published some twenty books, most of them poetry. They include *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (Arkansas 1985), *Welsh Airs* (Bridgend 1987), and *The Echoes Return Slow* (London 1988).

Harri Webb is a poet, journalist, script-writer, and formerly a public librarian. He has written *The Green Desert* (Llandysul 1969) and *A Crown for Branwen* (Llandysul 1974).

Gwyn Williams taught at the Universities of Cairo, Alexandria, Libya, and Istanbul. He has written *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry* (New York 1970), *Welsh Poems* (California 1974), and *Collected Poems, 1936-1986* (Llandysul 1987).

Reviews

Hasan Javadi, *Satire in Persian Literature*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988, 333 pp., $39.50 hb.

It is quite likely that specialists in Persian literature who read this book will say, "Why didn't I think of writing it?" So far as this reviewer knows, no one has done it before in English, and no one has done it so thoroughly in Persian.

The result of Professor Javadi's exhaustive research is presented in ten chapters. The first three are taken with definition, forms, and techniques of satire. The remainder of the book deals with satire and religion, socio-political satire in classical and modern Persian literature, poets who contributed to satirical newspapers, women and satire, and satire in modern Persian fiction and drama. A postscript describes the growth of satirical literature after the Islamic revolution in 1979, especially by writers outside of Iran. A glossary, a detailed bibliography of Persian, Turkish, and Western sources, and an index complete the book.

Throughout the long history of Iran it is readily seen that whenever the Persians were free from repression, their genius, ability and imagination have taken wings and flown to great heights. Unfortunately, however, periods of freedom in the history of Iran have been very short, very few, and very far in between. Consequently, satire in all its forms is quite rare in classical literature, and whenever it appears it is usually a personal contest of wit among poets, and sometimes it is against a rival prince of the poet's patron.

An exception to the general rule is the 14th century writer, Obeyd-e Zakani, whose wit, satire, and sarcasm attacked the ethics of the nobility and the socio-political situation of his time. His story of the struggle between the mouse (the have-nots) and the cat (the haves) (110), is very popular in Iran and has been produced and illustrated in different editions. Not so well known is his *Definitions* in which "Sheikh = devil; Nonsense = what he says about philosophy; . . . Sufi = freeloader; Haji = one who swears falsely by the Ka'ba. . . " (74). "Constable = he who robs by night and demands payment by day; . . . Bribery = the helper

of the helpless" (112).

Perhaps because of the Islamic Revolution and the rule of the clergy in Iran, the chapter on "Satire and Religion" will seem quite contemporaneous. To many, the statement of the 11th century writer Naser Khosrow,

> Going from the king to the priest was as if
> For fear of the snake I ended up in the dragon's mouth (59),

is prophetic! This chapter and indeed the whole book is full of poems by poets, among them Omar Khayam (d.1124) (61), whose quatrains are familiar to western readers; by Sa'di (d.1291):

> They teach the people to abandon the world
> while they themselves hoard silver and gold (60);

by Sa'eb (d.1660):

> If hugeness of turban is an indication of learning, the dome of the Shah's mosque would be the greatest scholar" (76);

by Behruz (d.1971) who ridicules the ascension of Muhammad (40); and by the present-day satirist Hadi Khorsandi who writes about the revolution of the "Mullatariat" (286).

From the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and the intermittent very short periods of freedom which followed, until this day, satire came into vogue in poetry, prose, drama, fiction, and cartoons. Some of the popular satirists wrote folk poetry, like Ashraf Gilani (151); some in fiction, like Jamalzadeh (230) and Hedayat (235); and some in drama, like Behruz (266) and Chubak (268). This period saw also the growth of humorous weeklies with cartoons.

The following words of criticism are not meant to diminish the value of the book nor belittle the meticulous scholarship of the author:

(1) One would wish that the glossary had included the unfamiliar words of the book rather than deal exclusively with the different genre of Persian poetry.

(2) Ali Shari'ati was not a satirist and does not belong in this book, unless his disagreement with some of the interpretations of the Qor'an constitutes satire. I would have devoted the space to Behruz who is the leading satirist of religion in our time.

(3) I was so engrossed in reading the book that I forgot to look for typographic and other mistakes, but the following caught my eye: p. 45, read *Shah* for *Shali*; p. 95, the Persian word "akhteh" in the cartoon means castrated, not Jinni; p. 140, Malkum Khan was not converted to Islam, his father was; p. 241, read *theme* for *them*; p. 248, Fereshtegan-e Siyah means black angels, not black stars; p. 97, the an-

nouncement in the cartoon says, "All sorts of documents are speedily written," not "revealed."

Yahya Armajani
Macalester College (Emeritus)

Robert F. Gish, *Frontier's End: The Life and Literature of Harvey Fergusson*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988, xv + 363 pp., $35.00 hb.

Robert Gish writes that this book is intended as a literary biography of Fergusson, not as a biography of its author. This implies an objective attitude which he very carefully maintains as he sets forth his findings.

Fergusson was born January 28, 1890, in Albuquerque, Territory of New Mexico, the same year that the Census Bureau proclaimed the closing of the American frontier. In a bulletin issued by the Superintendent of the Census for 1890, it was stated that due to the presence of isolated settlements all through the West there could hardly be said to be a frontier line, marking the advance, so such a line would no longer have a place in the Census Reports.

Any mention of the closing of the frontier brings to mind Frederick Jackson Turner's famous paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," read at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, July 12, 1893, in which he set forth his thesis that the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advancement of the American settlement westward explain American development. He went on to say that each recurrent frontier went through a primitive stage before achieving social maturity. This western "escape route" contributed to fostering democracy and freeing the individual from Eastern and Old World influences and restrictions.

Turner's thesis was published and aroused much debate. The eastern historians tended to reject it, the midwestern ones to accept it, the thoughtful ones to see virtue in it, but also to maintain that it did not account for all the influences that shaped America's development. The validity of the thesis was still being debated in the 1920s and '30s when Harvey Fergusson began writing. It is obvious from his writing that he knew about it and had his own interpretation and modifications. He believed that the frontier advanced in waves, with each wave influenced by geographical conditions, opposing cultures, and the stage of industrialization at the time. He also thought the waves had a reverse

undertow with influences filtering back. He especially noted that Turner did not give due consideration to the problems arising when the frontiersmen met older civilizations, as the Southwest Native Americans and the old Spanish settlements.

Gish joins the slowly expanding group of literary scholars who think that Fergusson should be reassessed, that he should be moved from the "regional western writer" category to the mainstream of Western literature, alongside A. B. Guthrie, Frederick Manfred, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, Vardis Fisher, Wallace Stegner, and others. His *Wolf Song* is said by many to be the best fictional portrayal of the mountain men. His novels with a New Mexico setting catch the transition period when the Spanish influence was giving way to the advancing Anglo influence.

This reassessment idea could be said to have been started by Lorene Pearson's seminal article, "Harvey Fergusson and the Crossroads," *New Mexico Quarterly* (Autumn 1951), pp. 334-55. Other critics followed: Cecil Robinson, John R. Milton, Saul Cohen, James K. Folsom, and especially William T. Pilkington who wrote a biography of Fergusson (1975) and also supplied appreciative introductions for the reissue in 1978 of Fergusson's *Wolf Song*, *In Those Days*, and *The Blood of the Conquerors*.

Gish draws on these previous studies but also makes use of interviews with the surviving members of the family and friends, and the Fergusson papers in the Bancroft Library as he formulates his own presentation of the man and his works. He attributes his interest in Fergusson to his having grown up in Albuquerque, attended kindergarten in Castle Huning in 1945, and read Paul Horgan's stories. (Castle Huning, which has since been razed, was built in the elaborate manner of a German castle by Franz Huning, Fergusson's maternal grandfather, who had migrated from Germany, bullwhacked on the Santa Fé Trail, and later become a successful merchant and leading citizen in Albuquerque. He, as well as Fergusson's father, is used as a prototype for the main character in several of Fergusson's novels.)

In brief, Fergusson grew up in Albuquerque but lived most of his adult life elsewhere, returning for frequent vacations or visits. In 1911 he graduated from Washington and Lee University (Lexington, VA), his father's school, became a journalist in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York, and was befriended by H. L. Mencken. He spent some time in Texas, Louisiana, Mexico, Panama, and the West Indies, and finally ended up on the West Coast as a screen writer. He died in 1971 at his home in Berkeley, California. But always he was drawn in his mind to New Mexico, Albuquerque, and the Rio Grande valley which supply the setting for most of his novels. He was never

able to forget that both sides of his family had been prominent in the early days of New Mexico. His father, an attorney and a rebel son from a Southern plantation family came West right after the Civil War. He rose to prominence, serving in the New Mexico legislature, and making his mark in the political and social life of the region, before his declining fortunes and suicide.

Fergusson belongs in the group of writers who represent literary realism and naturalism. His early and long friendship with Mencken may have reinforced his natural tendencies in that direction. Also, the influence of Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis can be seen in his portrayal of the narrowness and sterility of small towns. He romanticized the part his family had played in the early days, at the same time that he satirized small towns. His ambivalence shows in his writing and his general restlessness. He seemed to be seeking the romance and freedom his forebears had had on the early frontier and finding it only in his writing, his recreation of the times. Gish calls him a "romantic realist" and thinks his major male characters face the same ambivalence that Fergusson did.

Fergusson published fourteen full-length works as well as countless magazine and newspaper stories and articles. The greater number of the books were novels dealing with the Southwest. Two works, *Modern Man: His Belief and Behavior* (1936) and *People and Power: A Study of Political Behavior in America* (1947), set forth his own definitely formulated theory of human and social behavior. He classified man into three main categories: Primitive, Medieval-Christian, and Modern. His main characters in his novels tend to follow these preconceived behavioral patterns, with "Destiny" playing a major role. He portrays sympathetically the declining fortunes of the old aristocratic Spanish families, the warm voluptuousness of Mexican-American women, and the disruption caused by the coming of the railroad when hard-driving Yankee businessmen took over.

Gish gives a full account of Fergusson's family background and shows how he made use of it in his writing. Since Fergusson uses this material over and over again, in one form or another, Gish's analysis, book by book, begins to be repetitious. He probably was aware of it and saw no better way to make his points. It is generally agreed that Fergusson's best books are the novels, *Wolf Song*, *In Those Days*, *Grant of Kingdom*, and *The Conquest of Don Pedro*, and the popular history, *Rio Grande*.

Frontier's End throws much light on a transitional period in the history of the Southwest, and on an author whose very ambivalence emphasizes the mutability of the time and place. Gish concluded with a whole host of challenging questions that could occupy the Fergusson

followers for some time to come, but true to his intent he maintains his objectivity.

Each reader will find some literary qualities in these novels which please him and hold his attention, for Fergusson can tell a good story. He has caught the full flavor of the Southwest with its changing lights and shadows which flicker over the enduring mesas and mountains.

Mary Ellen Caldwell
University of North Dakota

I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers, eds. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1987, xvi + 289 pp., $19.95 hb.

This is a well-done collection of statements by contemporary Native American writers, responding to a general set of questions from the editors, "...about their childhood and education, about their relation to language and to the two cultures—Euro-American and Native American, that have influenced them" (xiii). The resulting eighteen essays collectively do a good and very diverse job of discussing not only the lives and artistic development of each of these writers, but also the wider issues of how Native American people and cultures have interacted with the mainstream American culture, as traced in the family histories of these authors, stretching back, in some cases, three or four generations.

Because so many of these essays do address these broader aspects of cross-cultural conflict and resolution, often from the point of view of the mixed-blood, multi-cultural Indian artist, they provide a unique sort of social and political commentary on American history and society, a commentary that often spans a hundred years or more, culminating in some very penetrating insights into contemporary American society. In this way, this book could, and actually should, be of interest to a wider readership than just those interested in the field of what has come to be called Native American or, interchangeably, American Indian literature.

Four or five of these eighteen authors do emphasize their literary art and how it relates to the larger body of American and world literature. Beyond that, all of these writers, whether or not they emphasize their literary context, are very much aware of how their own

art and life experiences relate to much broader social, political, and spiritual issues. These authors have all gone beyond any narrow definition of the "autobiographical essay," beyond what concerns only the lives of these individual authors, and toward the difficult questions concerning the relationship between all that is and was "Native" American, and the so-called "mainstream" of all that is and was considered "American."

This book demands no specialized knowledge to appreciate, though some familiarity with the literature and subjects being referred to will undoubtedly enhance one's reading pleasure. Intensely personal stories like Mary TallMountain's description of her own search, as an Alaskan Indian child adopted by white parents, for her Indian, and indeed, all her mixed-blood cultural roots, will communicate very directly to any reader. The power and poignancy of Wendy Rose openly discussing an extremely painful childhood and, again, lost roots, will communicate to anyone interested in the human condition.

Despite a number of themes that recur in many of the essays, there is sheer variety here: the surprisingly violent life history of Ralph Salisbury, which sheds new light on his surrealistic prose works; the urbane, gentle humor of former Rhodes scholar Carter Revard discussing Oklahoma bootlegging days; the biting cynicism of "Trickster" Gerald Vizenor; and Paula Gunn Allen's own "tribal" brand of radical feminism, to mention just a few that stand out. Literally all these quite varied essays provide excellent insights into the lives and artistic/creative processes of these particular authors as individuals.

To me, the two most basic themes these authors share could be expressed as: (1) the allegiance to Native American philosophy and spirituality, in the forms that they as individuals have experienced it. There is a strong, even pervasive sense of shared spiritual quest throughout these essays. (2) A sense of fragile but unbroken continuity stretching between the Native American past and the future which lies ahead for all of us.

There is also much shared sadness as different authors write of prejudice, alienation, and the history of land theft and forced acculturation. Many of them also express a shared pleasure with and enjoyment of Native American ways and a solid respect for those, often of mixed blood, who labor to preserve those old ways. Several of the authors also praise those who mediate between the two cultures, and several see themselves and their art as efforts at such mediation; for instance, Diane Glancy explicitly focuses on what she calls a "struggle for reconciliation" between the several opposing aspects of her own experience:

"I find that the Indian, as well as poetry, stands between the visible and the invisible worlds, between earth and heaven. The Indian,

and poetry to some extent, has been rejected by society and is not at home here. Neither are we at rest in the spirit world. We are neither here nor there but in the midst of the journey. Part of one, part the other, revealing neither fully but indicating a struggle for reconciliation on the part of both" (172).

Glancy, Wendy Rose, and several others among these writers view the struggles taking place within their own mixed blood, multicultural consciousness as a microcosmic version of both historical and present struggles in the social, and yes, also in the spiritual, macrocosm. Those familiar with American Indian literature through reading the authors who have already achieved considerable recognition, such as Momaday, Silko, and Welch, none of whom is included here, will recognize this as a vital aspect of such works as *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn*. Indeed, many themes found in those masterpieces are masterfully handled in these essays as well, giving one hope that in the future some of these writers may also attain wider recognition and further advance the entire field of American Indian literature.

Others among these authors, such as Durham, Forbes, and Simon Ortiz, often consciously focus on expressing political messages, activist messages, aimed toward combating the massive misinformation and negative stereotyping about Native Americans that has been so pervasive in the past and which stubbornly lingers in the present. So much damage to Native American lives and property has been done in the past through such misinformation that a need for corrective action to achieve social justice will exist for some time into the future. Many of these writers have managed to merge their consciousness of these problems and needs with their own artistic consciousness in such a way that they can communicate clearly and forcefully without writing simplistic "protest" literature. Their personal essays help to clarify exactly how they feel about these problems and needs.

These authors come across as a group of mature intellectuals; some, like Maurice Kenny and Joseph Bruchac, have been small press editors for many years; many are teachers in colleges and universities, both in English departments and in Native Studies programs of various sorts. Among them, especially in the essays of Kenny, Jim Barnes, Duane Niatum, and others, there is a good deal of intellectual exploration of the role of the poet, particularly the Native American poet, in modern society, and how that relates to the wider context of worldwide art and literature. Some essays are more abstract and intellectual; others are more personal and emotional; but in any case, the best of these essays approach the quality of Ralph Ellison's classic collection, *Shadow and Act*, as commentaries on the American scene from a "minority" point of view.

If there is any overall impression that this book leaves me with, it is the pervasiveness of the spiritual quest; in one way or another, nearly every author affirms that seeking spirituality has motivated a significant part of his or her life. Having said this, I must point out that spiritual quest does not mean personal salvation in the narrow sense, or in the usual Christian sense. The quest referred to here is a quest for connection with the sacred life forms of this universe, a seeking of advice, or strength, but also a seeking of mission in the service of a greater good. This is expressed in so many varied ways, with the diversity only adding strength to a quality that is evasive, fragile, easy to lose, and difficult to regain. These writers, like many other contemporary Native Americans, are putting a lot of individual effort into seeking the sort of spirituality that used to be nurtured by massive communal ceremonials, by whole communities consciously living the messages, not just writing about them. There is a great irony about this and a temptation toward cynicism and despair; but the real strength of these writers is in their communal affirmation of the possibility of renewal, both of the spiritual and cultural condition of mankind, and of the earth itself, which they acknowledge to be suffering under the weight of human abuse and neglect.

Perhaps a Native American spiritual renaissance is still a very real possibility. There is a lot of strength expressed in these essays. I think they should be widely read and that these authors should receive the public support and encouragement they need to keep speaking the truth strongly, as they see it. Voices like theirs may be very important to the future spiritual vitality of America and all its peoples, Native or not.

Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature, eds. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1987, 644 pp., $45 hb, $17.95 pb.

This large (644 pages, with index) volume consists of scholarly essays on the emerging field of Native American literature, with an emphasis on traditional literatures, both oral and written. Most of the selections have not been previously published, and most were the result of solicitations for essays for such a volume. The quality of the essays is very good.

One of the editors, Brian Swann, also edited an earlier collection of similar essays entitled *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature* (1983), also published by the University of California Press. The present volume can be seen as a continuation of that earlier work and an improvement on it as well. *Recovering the Word* represents a wider group of writer/scholars, and its format

reflects a more consistent, thorough approach to the subject. There have been other multiple-author collections of essays in this field, such as *Traditional Literatures of the American Indian: Texts and Interpretations*, ed. by Karl Kroeber (1981), and an earlier effort edited by Abraham Chapman, *Literature of the American Indian* (1975). Other excellent books, or collections of essays by one author, such as the volumes by Ramsey (1983), Wiget (1985), Allen (1983), and a number of others, have also added to the growing corpus of work that has been steadily making American Indian literature a recognized field of study during the last two decades. The university presses, especially those of Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arizona, California, and New Mexico, have been publishing a small but steady flow of books specifically on Indian literature, as well as various other books that are useful for this field of study.

There is a definite need for a volume such as this, mainly for the reading and research of individual teachers of college and university American Indian literature courses, and for use as a text in at least some of those courses. The book will also be useful for many American literature teachers who wish to learn more about this field in order to intelligently incorporate additional American Indian literature materials into their classes.

In addition, people from other college and university disciplines may find the book useful. Folklorists, linguists, and anthropologists have been dealing with the material now being called Native American oral traditional literature for many decades, and some scholars from those disciplines have contributed to this volume.

Since the academic disciplinary origin of these authors can indeed help us to understand several aspects of both the present volume and the present status of Native American literature as a field of study, I was drawn to the handy "Notes on Contributors" that is included toward the end of this volume to see just how interdisciplinary the volume is. I found that of the 21 authors involved, counting the two editors, all but two are college or university professors; of these, ten are specifically identified with English departments, four are part or all linguistics (usually found within English departments), two are part or all folklore (sometimes found within English departments, though a separate discipline); six are part or all anthropology, and one is in Native American studies. In addition, one is identified as a poet and one as an editor.

I think that what all this diversity indicates is that even though the pervasive point of view in the present volume, and in study of Native American literature in general, is indeed that of the college and university English department, the effort is inherently interdisciplinary, and

many of its practitioners are trying to build upon former efforts in other disciplines. The authors involved, regardless of their background or discipline, are all reaching out toward a point of view that will really unlock the full artistry and content of this traditional literature (with a point of view as sophisticated as that of the original creators and practitioners of this literature, perhaps).

At the present time, however, as reflected in these essays, there is no single point of view that provides a magic answer concerning how to approach the traditional literature. Since part of the academic past provides unsatisfactory examples of how to form relationships with Native American cultural materials, it is not surprising that many of these authors are actively struggling with linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. Some are trying to be as "scientific" as possible, doing extremely close analyses of the texts themselves. Others are reaching out in different directions. In many cases, the authors have established individual relationships with the Indian communities which have preserved their oral literature in on-going traditions, though this is not always discussed. Most of these essays are written in a format reflecting a disciplinary background—literary criticism, folklore, linguistics, or anthropology—and aimed toward an academic audience. Folklore, linguistics, and anthropology have all established patterns of relationship with Indian communities in the past, though some of those patterns, especially when carelessly entered into, have sometimes been seen as unsatisfactory or even as exploitative relationships by the Indian communities involved.

To the extent that literary criticism works only with texts, it might seem that it doesn't need such a pattern of relationship; but I think it is the presumption and hope of many in this field that there should be a strong, ongoing, friendly and mutually beneficial relationship with the Indian communities that are still using their oral traditions. If indeed this is a goal, it will be a tough one to attain. Signs of the strain that can accompany such issues show up in Professor Barre Toelken's revelations of worries about witchcraft relating to his analyses of stories; and it is possible that if native "informants" were being as closely and directly questioned in connection with many of the other sets of materials in this volume, that similar problems might emerge there, also. Professor Toelken is being sensible and courageous in discussing these problems openly. However, he doesn't provide much advice, beyond avoidance of sensitive material, for others who might find themselves in similar situations. For those who don't want to avoid such material, it is probably true that the better one knows and empathizes with the total social, political, and cultural context of the Indian community involved, the better chance one has of dealing with sensitive material

without having trouble. If this is true, it would argue against narrow identification with any restrictive disciplinary boundaries that were not part of the tribal societies which created and utilized this literature for many centuries.

Much has been accomplished in the field of Native American literature, but much remains to be done. These essays present some top-notch thinkers, scholars, and writers struggling to find answers in a very complex and difficult area where other disciplines have not been completely successful in the past. If these writers don't present all the answers to us, at least they are pointing the way toward some answers.

The text itself is divided into two main parts: the first dealing with the presentation of traditional stories, subdivided into sections on theory and on practice; and the second dealing with interpretation of the material, and subdivided into sections on oral and written literature. These four categories are clever ways of sorting out the diversity of the essays, and the format allows inclusion of a few essays on contemporary (written) literature while still preserving the primary focus on the more difficult problems encountered in the traditional literature. There are some excellent essays here, and no poor ones. Some are better reading than others, depending upon one's taste and background.

In the first category, the theory of mythographic presentation, the essays by Zolbrod, Hymes, Gingerich, Krupat, and Mattina are very capable discussions of how written versions of oral materials should be presented to the public. An overview of the subject might point out that critics tend to look for the ultimate "authoritative text," but that "the free marketplace of available texts" will ultimately have as much to do with what is read and preserved in written form as does the best judgment of even the most brilliant critics! Hymes justifiably blasts the recent Erdoes/Ortiz anthology for not presenting authoritative texts and not acknowledging the available sources of further information, but the ultimate test of that anthology, and others like the Lopez collection of "Coyote" stories, is whether they are bought and read in sufficient quantities to keep them in print! Some attempt is made throughout this book to present a few opposing points of view, and in this section, Mattina argues convincingly for the use of "Red English" in translations, which many others do not approve of. Krupat's essay also deals with an ongoing argument concerning the use of structural theory in the analysis of Native American literature, but he does not take sides so vehemently. The other essays are less argumentative and more informative. All these essays provide us with food for thought and information for further research.

The second category, the practice of mythographic presentation, contains essays by Sherzer, Bahr, Swann, Kinkade, and Wiget. Since

all of these except the Swann essay contain actual texts of stories or songs, they are indeed more "practical." In this section, the essays do focus more on specific story texts and on how the inherent nature of these stories can best be revealed on paper. Needless to say, there is little agreement on this matter. There does seem to be some consensus among these authors that anytime we can discover meaning in the performance context of a story, we ought to somehow include that with the printed text. Bilingual formats are universally favored, and I might point out that presenting stories in this way is indeed one way to be helpful to contemporary Indian communities as well as to one's academic audience, since Indian schools can often utilize bilingual stories in language classes as well as culture classes at various levels.

The third section of the book, on interpreting oral material, contains some very nice essays by Bright, Toelken, Norman, Rice, and Revard. In this section, information that can illuminate the meaning of various texts is presented without quite so much attention being paid to specific texts. These essays are less technical, more readable, and tend to be more easy-going blends of literary criticism with anthropology, natural history, personal experience, and Indian culture. They are very helpful, and they are good examples of how Native American literature as a new field of study can gain from being eclectic and bicultural without losing its ability to communicate beyond a small circle of specialists.

The fourth and last section of the book, on interpreting written materials, including contemporary Indian literature, contains essays by Tedlock, Kaiser, Brumble, Niatum, Allen, and Bevis. This is the most miscellaneous section, but most of the essays make excellent reading. They are more enjoyable if you are familiar with the literature being discussed, but I think most would be fairly self-explanatory even without background, if carefully read. The Tedlock, Brumble, and Allen essays focus on the cultural and textual contexts of various pieces of literature, while the Niatum essay on stereotypes argues against paying too much attention to information that might predetermine and stifle our direct response to the literature. The Kaiser essay exposes the non-authoritative nature of the most popular Chief Seattle speech text, tracing the several different versions of this popular text in detective fashion until he discovers the truth. The Bevis essay provides a fitting end to this diversity of subject and approach by pointing out a very pervasive cultural quality that unites several apparently diverse Native American novels. These essays are all interesting and readable.

This is, overall, a good, useful volume with lots of material in it. By the time a reader really digests its 644 pages, he or she should have a fairly good grasp of what some of the ongoing problems and issues

are in the study of Native American literature, and where to go to learn more about the subject. While there is no bibliography for the whole volume, each essay has its notes and bibliography, so that by the end of the book, we have seen many, many references for further study. The book is a bargain for its price, and I hope the University of California Press will keep it in print for a number of years.

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Chinua Achebe, Interview; reading excerpts from *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, Columbia, MO: American Audio Prose Library, 1988, audiocassette tapes, 85 min. + 88 min., $12.95 each / $23.00 set (PO Box 842, Columbia, MO 65205).

James Baldwin, Interview; reading excerpts from *Just Above My Head*, Columbia, MO: American Audio Prose Library, 1984, audiocassette tapes, 56 min. + 47 min., $10.95 each / $20.00 set.

Gloria Naylor, Interview; reading excerpts from *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Mama Day*, Columbia, MO: American Audio Prose Library, 1988, audiocassette tapes, 78 min. + 57 min., $12.95 each / $23.00 set.

Three writers included in the Black Writers Group of audio tapes recorded by the American Audio Prose Library, a non-profit organization which has recorded over 100 contemporary writers reading from and conversing about their works, are James Baldwin, the prolific American novelist, essayist, dramatist, and poet; Chinua Achebe, a member of the Ibo tribe of Nigeria, often called the Father of the Modern African Novel, essayist, poet, political writer, and author of five novels which record the struggles of his land caught in the agony of its metamorphosis; and Gloria Naylor, author of three novels of which the first, *The Women of Brewster Place* (Viking Press, 1982), won the American Book Award for First Fiction in 1983 and the National Book Award in 1985, and is currently scheduled as a television miniseries starring Oprah Winfrey.

These interviews savor of the extemporaneous flavor of live radio with Kay Bonetti, the director of the American Audio Prose Library, as a gently probing but non-intrusive interviewer who fosters spontaneity by allowing the writers freedom to explore ideas without interruption

except to clarify a statement or to encourage further discussion.

What becomes insistently apparent in these three interviews is that the common wellspring of their creative impulse is the concern for a truthful history. Achebe recognized this need:

> The moment I realized in reading, for instance, *Heart of Darkness*, that I was not supposed to be part of Marlow's crew, sailing down the Congo, but I was one of those on the shore jumping up, clapping and making faces. The moment I realized that, then I realized that that was not me, and that story had to be told again.

Naylor came to the same conclusion when she discovered at 27 that she "had not read any books that reflected my experience as a black female." Going even further, Baldwin says that the "stubborn manic refusal [of Americans] to accept their history" lies below the surface of America struggling for expression like "something buried alive."

A truthful history is essential to a culture to establish identity (Baldwin), to provide a base for cultural and personal pride (Naylor), and to provide anchorage from which successive generations can take bearing (Achebe). Achebe defines this anchor as those people who refuse to bow to the inevitability of change, but stand "like a pillar in the course of their history"; while Naylor defines it as a geographic center, a specific piece of land, whose history provides the familial, communal, and spiritual values that frame one's identity. Baldwin echoes Naylor's definition: "The key to whoever you really are is in where you come from. If you deny that, then it is sterility." This belief in the importance of a truthful history molds each of these writers' works and determines the shape of each interview.

Achebe, educated and articulate, his conversation sprinkled with Ibo aphorisms and framed against the backdrop of the Nigerian experience, talks directly about his novels and uses them to illuminate facets of the Ibo culture (the world view is change), his personal history as a writer ("I had to return to art as celebrating my people"), his theory about art (it is a community affair, and celebrates everything, warts and all), its purpose (art channels explosive powers into less harmful ways), and the role of the artist in society (the artist must "explain society to itself," not by providing the answers, but by asking the right questions, because "if you are asking the wrong questions, it is like somebody going one place and facing another. No matter how far he walks and how fast he walks, he won't get there; in fact, the faster he walks the farther away he would be").

With the exuberance of a new writer not yet bored with the miracle of her art, the tone and subject matter of Naylor's interview is more personal, revealing, for example, where she has left bits of her own

flesh hanging on her novels, such as the scene in *The Women of Brewster Place* in which Mattie Michael rocks Ciel in her arms after the death of Ciel's child, which Naylor explains came out of her wish for just such an earth mother to come and rock her out of her pain.

This personal approach is consistent with Naylor's opinion that art is 99.94% private, and that it comes out of a need to quell her own interior and exterior chaos. In this vein, then, Naylor discusses her family and education, her years as a missionary for Jehovah's Witnesses, her genesis as a writer ("My mother gave me a diary because I wouldn't talk"), the genesis of her individual works (characters "come to me to have their stories told"), her process of writing ("I am a stenographer"), narrative problems, influences, humor, concluding with her answer to the question, "Why do you write?" "Because I have no choice."

In Baldwin's interview, there is a sense of weariness, of a lack of energy, as though he has been asked these same questions too many times. His discussion, primarily focused against the backdrop of American racial issues, covers a potpourri of topics including his philosophy as a writer and his concerns as an individual, the role of the church in the black community, his quarrels with Richard Wright and Eldridge Cleaver, his personal assessment as a writer ("As a writer I am still fairly young"), the relationship between his essays and his fiction ("Writing the essay set me free for the character"), and the health of the novel (the faltering energy in European countries is being taken up by new voices, South American, African, and Pakastani, for example). Some of these issues are discussed fully; others, such as the blues being the rhetorical principle at work in his novels, are only briefly commented on.

While neither Baldwin nor Achebe, each a prolific essayist says anything new (much of Achebe's discussion can be found in his essay collection, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* [Doubleday, 1974]), freed from the formal restrictions of the essay, they are able to cover a wide range of topics in a limited period of time. In the case of Naylor, a relatively new writer, this interview provides the listener with insights which could take years to reach academic journals.

With regard to the readings, Achebe's dramatized delivery is clearly enunciated, but because his novels are peppered with Ibo names and terminology, it helps to have the eye assist in distinguishing the unfamiliar sounds. Naylor reads with a sense of possession, the words moving across her tongue like cherished children whom a proud mother is showing off to the relatives. In contrast, Baldwin's delivery, rapid, impersonal and without inflection, is at times difficult to understand.

After listening to these writers speaking their own words, each voice

continues to read to me whenever I return to these novels, the words forming themselves into the peculiar phrasing, intonation, and accent of the writer. Each voice creates a presence, moving the writer from an abstraction into a real person, someone to argue with and talk back to, and by listening to several interviews and readings together, someone to take sides with or against. The above more than justifies the cost of the tapes.

Other tapes available from the American Audio Prose Library in the Black Writers Series are Toni Cade Bambara, Ernest Gaines, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Michael Thelwell, Alice Walker, John Edgar Wideman, and Al Young.

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Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 180 pp., $25.00 hb.

A book like this new one by Jane Gallop challenges its reviewer in several ways. On the one hand, the book calls for a review that is anything but conventional, a review that would begin with some comment on the present psychological or physical status of the reviewer. In such a review I might tell you that I was pregnant when I read this book, or had just ended a ten-year marriage, or had just had a first lesbian love affair. I would, in other words, tell (one used to say "confess") something personal, private, bodily—something which would have inevitably informed my reading of Gallop's text. Unlike the conventionally anonymous, authoritative, and, what Gallop (and many feminists) would call, masculine discourse of the traditional academic review, such a move would disrupt the expectations of the reader, interposing the body between seemingly transcendent mental discourses. The difficulty for the reviewer comes with the feeling that however much the book solicits an unconventional review, it simultaneously desires the authoritative approval that only the autonomous and masculine voice of convention can provide. Such an ambivalence is, I believe, (at) the heart of Gallop's work.

Thinking Through the Body is a collection of previously published essays by Gallop (the "body" of the title extends to include the "body" of her work), written, and some revised for this volume, during the decade from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties. While collecting the

essays—which are predominantly and alternately about Roland Barthes, the Marquis de Sade, and Sigmund Freud—Gallop found herself "adding autobiographical bits, not only," she writes, "because I tend toward exhibitionism but, more important, because at times I think through autobiography: that is to say, the chain of associations that I am pursuing in my reading passes through things that happened to me" (4). The reader may well be led to ask when one does *not* "think through autobiography," that is, if the act of reading is ever independent of the reader as anything but reader. Further, the question arises of the relation between "thinking through autobiography" and "thinking through the body": is doing one necessarily doing the other? Gallop's text does not pretend to have any real answers.

Nor do I. My remarks above should not suggest that my act of disclosing, in a review, a pregnancy, the breakup of a marriage, a lesbian affair, or all of these, would be an act of thinking through the body in any sense. The importance of such disclosures would—and in Gallop's text, claim to—be dependent on their relevance to my understanding and experience of the text in question. If this is the case, however, a question is raised not so much of what is relevant, but of who makes that decision. Ultimately, and initially, it is made only by myself. Such a decision then, results in a somewhat conscious construction of (my) self that, however material or physical I have tried to make it, can ultimately only ever be a construct, and one that is not radically different from the supposedly autonomous, objective, constructed self of conventional discourse.

Gallop inevitably posits herself as the subject on which the action of her title is predicated. But the phrase, "thinking through the body," offers meanings beyond that initially implied action. Trying not only to think through, or with, the body, Gallop is also thinking through the body in the sense of thinking it through. The complexity of such a project is apparent. Although many of her chapter headings—"The Anal Body," "The Student Body," "The Female Body," "The Body Politic," for example—illustrate a desire to think the subject of the body through in something of an, if not systematic, at least organized (and hence bodily? or unbodily?) way, ultimately her Freudian emphasis on the very materiality of the body, of the self, limits her. Such an emphasis particularizes the body—making it (only) *her* body—in a way that Gallop perhaps would not find problematic, but a reader might. Gallop's chapter headings are also problematic in that while pointing to the body as multiple, they simultaneously point to the need to construct divisionary boundaries in order to speak at all, implying a speech to which the body is made subordinate.

Such criticisms are not meant to suggest that Gallop is not herself

aware of these problems *as* problems. In her effort to think the mind-body problem physically rather than metaphysically, for example, she often reminds her reader that such a split is there, that such a split *is* a problem, and one that will not be thought away. She inevitably perpetuates the mind-body distinction as she posits the body as that which cannot be "rationalized and subordinated to discourse" (19), as that which is, somehow, always in its materiality, in excess of language or mind or art; as that which is always in some sort of opposition to language, mind, art. Sade's "project," for example, "fails" *because* he tries to contain (constrain) the body within the categories of logic. And the "writing" of Roland Barthes becomes a "modernist defense against the realization that the body will never be totally dominated by man-made meaning" (19). (And in such a self-conscious writer the use of "man" in this sentence, hints at the possibility of some woman-made meaning which would, perhaps, not "mean" at all.) Whereas the notion of "thinking through the body" could imply an erasure of mind-body boundaries—the split subject as one, able to speak as a subject on the subject of her-self as subject—it could also suggest a body thinking which could not be in excess of thought, in excess, that is, of itself, a body which *is* in its thinking and thinks in its being.

At her best Gallop addresses the possibility of a feminism that bridges the Franco-American divide. Interested in both the American desire for some stabilizing or centered self *and* the French insistence on some dispersing subject, Gallop seemingly tries to create an embodied subject. The results of such an effort are not always satisfactory as they too often manifest themselves in reportorial, exhibitionistic, and autobiographical vignettes which, despite any significance they may have had in the shaping of the author's ideas, are ultimately uninteresting and a bit tedious. Where Gallop is always present in her essays as desiring subject, these "autobiographical bits" are intent on offering evidence of her experience as desired subject. It is here that the ambivalence between some desire to disrupt, to deconstruct, and the need for authoritative (and masculine) approval, is most in evidence. And it is here especially that the writing threatens to become some sort of therapy-as-theory, leading this reviewer, leading *me*, to ask, does anyone *really* want to know this much about Jane Gallop?

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Janice Emily Bowers, *A Sense of Place: The Life and Work of Forrest Shreve*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988, [xi] + 195 pp., $19.95 hb.

Few people have heard of Forrest Shreve. But Emily Bowers' biography of him, *Spirit of Place: The Life and Work of Forrest Shreve*, raises some familiar questions for modern biography: "Is biography best when limited to the lives of the famous?" "Can the life of a relatively obscure individual be made interesting for a general reader?" "Just what are the boundaries of biography and what are the criteria for its evaluation?"

Modern biography, in its veering toward fiction and narrative life history as "art," tends to deny some of the assumptions of earlier biographers (who devoted much of their time to eminent individuals) and suggests that ordinary lives are indeed interesting and are as worthy of "biographies" as they are novels.

Bowers' rendering of Forrest Shreve's life story into a worded account of his moment in time adds something of a twist to such questions. His life, as told here at least, is interesting and worthy of telling mostly in terms of his work. In this biography Shreve seems not to exist as a flesh and blood individual apart from his identity as a desert ecologist. Most "common readers" (as that eminent biographer in her own right, Virginia Woolf, called them) will therefore find Bowers' account of Shreve—the man—about as dry as the deserts and cacti he defined, named, and classified.

The great North American deserts which interested Shreve, for example, the Sonoran, the Chihuahuan, the Mojave, and the Great Basin, of course have their special mystique, their exceptional spirits of place as biology, geology, and ingredient in the idea and locale of the West. Thus the fascination of desert study will motivate ecologists and the ecologically minded to endure the aridity of climate which apparently defined Shreve the person. Since Shreve was a western traveler, anyone interested in westering, and especially the early days of motoring, should find specimen and spirit for contemplation in Shreve's story.

In his move west to Arizona to head the Carnegie Institute's Desert Laboratory in Tumamocville, Shreve moved from his dissertation interest in the anatomy of the pitcher plant to wider concerns of botanical adaptation, making him one of the first plant ecologists. In his classic study *Vegetation of the Sonoran Desert* (1951), published one year after his death, Shreve secured a lasting name for himself as a descriptive ecologist by his classification of vegetation, dominant plant genera, and geographical features. His belief was that the plants he systematized were more in struggle with their environment than with each other.

Bowers is herself a botanist, and in *A Sense of Place* she documents the kind of "scientific" arranging and recording of events which bespeak belief in scrupulous objectivity. As scientist and author Bowers is not unaware of the potential soullessness of scientific jargon, and she successfully tries to translate some of the botanist's babel into more accessible language. She does not doubt, one can infer, what at this late date is the urgent need to know more about ecology as a science and attitude and what hope it might hold forth in saving the flora and fauna and all the earth still left living. No doubt this accounts, in part, for the biographer's fascination with Shreve as subject.

In his way Shreve seems to have known this too, and to have somehow anticipated the coming crisis. And yet he was no "deep ecologist," had little passion of the zealot or advocate for the primacy of nature over humanity, the supremacy of life forms beyond the uses fabricated by Homo sapiens. Having no heart for either politics or public relations, he finally failed to persuade the bureaucratic bosses of the Carnegie Institution to continue funding his Desert Laboratory.

Shreve's work establishes him as one of the first ecologists, to be sure, but he seems somewhat naively almost neutrally aware of the need to preserve and conserve not just the deserts and the biosphere but his very livelihood. Somewhat more successfully he convinced his colleagues of his view that life zones were part of a continuum, hardly separate and distinct, and he measured and quantified data of all kinds in attempts to prove the holistic, organic interrelationships of temperature, rainfall, winds, proximity—all the variables of life and death, growth and decay.

A true sense of the nodality and interdependency of person and place, however, demands something more than dedication to scientific detail and objectivity. To be sure, the scientific vocabulary of those who seek to understand the conformations and processes, the habitats and life patterns of plants and places, need not, even dare not, aspire to the passion of poets and painters, the devices of metaphor and color. And yet most readers will close *A Sense of Place* wondering if Shreve really *knew* the deserts he so devotedly studied—or if Bowers' pale revelations of her subject's dusty life, done page after page in her own dogged attendance to series and categories, ultimately stifle whatever pulsing, pleasurable, spirited sense of place Shreve must have had somewhere in his heart and soul, had somewhere in a life so directed by the means and routines of scientific scrutiny and work—and so oblivious to the pending apocalypse.

Robert Gish
University of Northern Iowa

D'Arcy McNickle, *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, 265 pp., $9.95 pb.

When a book is first published the most fundamental question addressed by reviewers is "What does this book add to literature?" But when a book is republished after having lapsed into obscurity, the nature of the reviewer's question changes, becomes "What have they seen that others who have let the book lapse into obscurity missed?" When a publishing house resurrects an out-of-print book, it is restoring the book's lost value or assigning a new one. If that publishing house is a respected university press, it can be argued that since the press traditionally expects little or no profit from the book's publication, and since the only justifications for publication are fiscal or literary, the newly assigned value must be literary. The answer to the question "What have they seen?" becomes more complicated. A case in point, D'Arcy McNickle's *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, recently republished by University of New Mexico Press, was published for reasons much more interesting than the profit motive.

Most obviously the University of New Mexico press elected to resurrect *Wind* because it is a Southwestern literary publisher with a special interest in Native American literature. In addition, since McNickle spent much of his life in New Mexico, even dying there, he is thought of as a Southwest regional artist, and the Press has a special interest in Southwest regional artists. Finally, UNM Press has republished McNickle's other two novels, *The Surrounded* and *Runner in the Sun*; publishing *Wind* completes the process of resurrecting all of McNickle's novels. Still, these are only partial answers. Regional and genre concerns are not sufficient by themselves to justify publishing a book. Ultimately, the question "What have they seen?" must be answered in terms that address the book's literary merit.

Wind is not a spectacularly well written work, but it is one of the first important novels written by an author who identifies himself as Native American. The novel expresses ideas that have been embraced and refined by a succession of Native Americans while it rejects Cooper's "Noble Savage" and most other clichés typical to non-Indian writers who have in the past attempted to deal with Native Americana.

Wind is the story of a small group of Indians facing the dilemma of being unable to cling to their culture, yet unable to adapt to the new one. These Indians have never been at war with the whites; they've never faced the cavalry in battle. But they've still lost. They've lost their land, their water, their dignity, and in the end with the loss of their medicine bundle, they have even lost their identity. McNickle points to the book's ending from the very first chapter: Bull, chief of the few remaining

Little Elk Indians, fires a rifle at a white concrete dam; not only can he not see where the bullet hits, he can't hear the report of the rifle. The book ends tragically, with an almost identical act.

The story is powerful, but it isn't without a few problems. The book's ending is somewhat contrived and more than a little confusing. For example, a shaman goes into the hills, discovers the future, returns, then inexplicably warns no one. He sits around lamenting until he suddenly realizes the future is happening now and jumps into action. But unlike the cavalry he arrives too late. There is nothing left for him to do but to pronounce an epitaph for his people's end. This points to another problem. The book seems to have two endings. One supports a theme that the tribe will be led into the future by a youth who is able to cope with the whites but still knows the Indian way. The other ending (the epitaph) seems to contradict the first theme. Given this contradiction, nobody seems to know exactly what McNickle wanted to say. Still, despite its weaknesses, *Wind* is a very readable book, and given its historical importance it stands among the significant books within the Native American literary genre.

The new edition of *Wind* comes with an afterword by Louis Owens, a University of New Mexico professor well known for his Native American literary scholarship. The afterword explains much of *Wind*'s content and the book's relationship with McNickle's earlier books. Although little of this information will be new to other Native American literary scholars, the afterword (and the book) make an excellent starting point for students interested in the genre, and it is very probable that future classes in the subject will begin with this book. If the present growth of classes dedicated to Native American fiction continues, *Wind from an Enemy Sky* will be read by many students in more than a few universities. That is the most important answer to the question: "What have they seen that the others have missed?"

David E. Hailey, Jr.
University of New Mexico

Donald Hall, *The Ideal Bakery*, Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1987, 138 pp., $14.95 hb.

Donald Hall's first collection of short fiction is entitled *The Ideal Bakery*. Hall has written these twelve carefully crafted pieces over the past 25 years, concentrating his themes to explore human relationships. The people and places are stock material much of the time, but Hall in his stories manages to cast an original, vibrant energy to them. His revealing, often painful insights of self suggest the narrative styles of Ann Beattie and André Dubus.

Hall's work evolves from a profound sense of place, rooted to his New England background. Slipping readers into the mysteries of ordinary life, Hall probes his characters' psyches. The adult world is viewed through a child's eyes to encounter innocence, awe, and confusion.

As the rites of initiation unfold, the family role becomes ambiguous, and the path of attaining adulthood grows more difficult. In the collection's title story, a small boy's experiences growing up in Connecticut during World War Two are chronicled. The gory excesses of global conflict Hall makes a metaphor for the overwhelming tragedy that punctuates the child's life. Later when he becomes an adult, he stoically faces the worst and survives because he has matured and knows what pain is.

In "The First Woman," sixteen-year-old Bill Bolter meets a married woman who coaches him in the sensuous pleasures of the flesh. Becoming a philanderer-professor, Bolter one day finds himself middle-aged. Desperate to restore his former luster, he tracks down his first lover, but she firmly rebukes him. Unlike the boy in Connecticut who learns strength of character at an early age, Bolter never grows beyond being a teenager.

"Figure of the Woods," the volume's most accomplished piece, involves a father-son relationship that confronts divorce, masculinity, and family roots. Alexander, a broker from Boston, takes his son Davis to stay at the ancestral farm. He wants Davis to experience the rural folkways that he once did and to relieve the boy of his doting mother. Here Hall focuses on the father to show guilt and doubt where he is last seen as an alcoholic wallowing in self-remorse.

"Christmas Snow" effuses a homespun cheer about a boy staying Christmas at his grandparents' New Hampshire farm. All proceeds well until a mountaineer uncle arrives and the boy immediately senses his disruptive presence. Hall assembles the family for the holidays, but then exposes the boy to his uncle's cruel Christmas story. The crude raconteur spoils the Yuletide spirit but introduces his nephew to an imperfect world that he will inherit.

Hall, too, examines relationships in and out of marriage. "Keats's Birthday" depicts an American couple vacationing in Rome where an underlying tension and anxiety between them is felt at the outset. Eleanor, a Ph.D. studying Keats, visits the great poet's grave and talks of his stormy, brilliant life. Richard, her laconic husband, indulges her fun for he understands his wife's need to forget her cancer. Keats's allure lasts only for the trip, and flying home they have grown more intimate and together face an uncertain future.

Elsewhere Hall shifts the narrative focus to a college campus. "Arguments and Persuasions" follows a professor who teaches at a junior college in Connecticut. He feels insecure and cynical since losing his bid for a Ph.D. at a prestigious university some years ago. He ruminates over his unhappy life (as many of Hall's protagonists do), fighting an alcoholic wife and rebellious daughter. The story's end drifts off with the feckless educator caught up in a reverie about better things.

In conclusion, Hall's descriptive language and depth of emotion afford rounded, rich dimensions to his characters as well as evoke a passionate sense of place. These stories express a running motif about the interconnectedness of peoples' attitudes and feelings toward each. Pain and confusion often develop from such entanglements, but Hall imbues a quiet strength in his characters. He creates a vigorous outlook and entrancing storyline about his people and places the reader finds recognizable and will remember.

Edward C. Lynskey
Warrenton, VA

Jeffrey D. Mason, *Wisecracks: The Farces of George S. Kaufman*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Research Press, 1988, xi + 134 pp., $39.95 hb.

Since earlier works, Scott Meredith's 1974 *George S. Kaufman and His Friends* and Malcolm Goldstein's 1979 *George S. Kaufman: His Life, His Theatre* explore the playwright's personal and professional relationships, Jeffrey D. Mason focuses on the works of the author, with only minor references to biographical material. Mason grapples with the difficult definition of comedy — especially the relationship between farce and satire; he faces even greater problems when he attempts to classify protagonists according to types in the many plays and variety show sketches by Kaufman. The evaluator exhibits his best insights when

he examines the directions and values of both farce and satire. He supports his view that more social significance exists in the farces of Kaufman than realized by detractors who reviewed his plays when they were first presented.

Mason quotes generously from the published dramas to establish his position that Kaufman took an ironic view of marriage, business, and politics. As a result, a comic tone that lampoons values of society and yet seems to embrace them has not been fully realized by critics of his works. While the dramatist did not attempt to correct the faults of these institutions, Mason claims, he revealed the hypocrisy in them and the tendency of most people to overlook the faults. Irony, therefore, is the key to understanding the plays created over the three decades of Kaufman's fruitful production for the theater. Satirical dimensions, according to the author of *Wisecracks: The Farces of George S. Kaufman*, are seldom achieved by the comic touch with an ironic approach. No reform is possible when a society laughs at yet embraces its own follies. And Kaufman was a practical, commercial playwright who went along with his culture. He has been credited with the statement, "Satire is what closes on Saturday night." Statistics show, Mason writes, that Kaufman's works which came closer to satire had short runs: two for *Strike Up the Band* (1930), seven for *The Good Fellow* (1926), and ninety for *Let 'Em Eat Cake* (1933). On the other hand, the playwright's lighter, more popular works, such as *You Can't Take It With You* (1936) and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939), had runs of 837 and 739 performances.

Jeffrey Mason's investigation into the dramas of one of Broadway's most successful playwrights becomes less convincing when he classifies leading characters in the dramas as fools and clowns. Thus, the plays are categorized as "fool-farces" or "clown-farces." While he broadens these labels beyond the common conception of the terms, the dichotomy becomes awkward when applied to the wide variety of Kaufman's works. To avoid a complete reductionistic evaluation, he leaves some room by making a third classification of the dramas, called "situation-farces." The fool label works best with the early plays, *Merton of the Movies* (1922), *The Butter and Egg Man* (1925), and *Of Thee I Sing* (1931). In the "fool-farce" a naive person gets caught up in the mechanizations of an institution, but by pluck and luck ends up the victor. The clown label works best with Kaufman's creation of Marx Brothers vehicles, *The Cocoanuts* (1925), *Animal Crackers* (1928)—both of which were adapted to film in the Thirties—and the screenplay for *Night at the Opera* (1935).

Mason turns to his situation-farce classification when he analyzes *You Can't Take It With You* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, but

he cannot resist reverting to character labels even in these dramas. The earlier play has normal people, the Kirby family, visiting the eccentric Vanderhof family. The evaluator views this situation as an inversion of Kaufman's usual design. "The mad clowns typically invade a conventional world, but in *You Can't Take It With You*, the conventional characters invade the clownish home base" (50). The later drama, Mason claims, has a protagonist and manipulator who fits one of his classifications: "Like the Kaufmanic clown, Whiteside shapes a world according to his own values, entering a formerly stable setting and turning it upside-down" (57). Here the label seems especially forced. Sheridan Whiteside, drawn from life—a stage portrait of the witty raconteur Alexander Woollcott—has a dimension that goes beyond the clown classification.

In a study of Kaufman's diction, the evaluator reaches firmer ground. He notes that Whiteside in *The Man Who Came to Dinner* provides the most rich and varied humor in all of the dramatist's works. Invective wit sparkles with the use of metaphor, simile, and epigram, capped by a long, ironic sentimental tale on a Christmas Eve radio broadcast. All of this is the product of the brilliant, eccentric Whiteside. On the other hand, Mason notes, Kaufman achieves a great deal of his humor from the staid and bland characters in his plays. His dialogue reveals the faulty logic and foolish attitudes, achieved by the playwright's gifted ear for banal word choice and syntax—views uttered by proper folks who are often thought to be the pillars of society.

Mason provides an excellent, annotated chronicle of the dramas by Kaufman for stage and screen. Also, he studies the role of Kaufman as stage director, a contribution to the theatre arts that has not been fully realized. These elements of *Wisecracks* are placed as appendices and are as worthy of the reader's attention as is the main body of the work.

Donald W. McCaffrey
University of North Dakota

Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, translated from the German by Harry Zohn. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981, 240 pp., $13.95 hb. [Reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1989, 240 pp., $7.95 pb.]

A Friendship of Giants

Walter Benjamin's reputation has taken far too long to reach America from Europe, where he has for many years been regarded as one of the most important literary critics and essayists of the period between the world wars. Especially because he is being claimed as a forerunner of the various French critical schools that are currently fashionable in American universities, Benjamin has now obtained at least some measure of posthumous renown here, with more and more American readers becoming familiar with his small but considerable body of work.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the details of Walter Benjamin's life have yet to be fully explored. An intensely private man, Benjamin left behind no substantial autobiographical record and was accorded little attention by contemporary literary journalists. There exists no definite biography, critical or narrative, of the great belles-lettriste, and documentary sources are few: the two-volume *Briefe*, available only in German; sketches by Hannah Arendt, Asja Lacis, and Theodor Adorno; miscellanea by Bertolt Brecht and a handful of later writers. All of these provide useful information on the mature Benjamin, but they do not offer any picture of his early development or the circumstances by which he achieved his reputation as a man of letters.

One of the chief strengths of Gershom Scholem's *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* is its giving that needed account of Benjamin's adolescence and early adulthood. Scholem met Benjamin in 1913 at a Zionist discussion group in Berlin; both teenagers were aspiring, if unordered, intellectuals, full of imagination and intelligence. (Scholem, who died in 1982, was later to become a great historian of Jewish mysticism and theology.) Scholem was already committed to the cause of Zionism, while Benjamin was not convinced of the evils of assimilation and the necessity of a Jewish state. Their early arguments over the Zionist cause marked the beginning of a long and inspired friendship, based at first more on intellectual than emotional affinity, a *Bekanntschaft*. (For the first five years of their relationship, the two addressed each other by the polite pronoun *Sie* rather than the familiar *du*.) The two were ideal intellectual foils, arguing endlessly over the movements of the day: Expressionism, revolutionary socialism, modern literature, Neo-Platonism, and the political tendencies of a Europe about to go mad. When it did, in 1914, Benjamin, declared unfit for

military service on medical grounds, made his way from Berlin to Munich where he married, and then moved to Switzerland. Scholem, in better health than his friend, was inducted into the infantry, and the reserved acquaintance of the two was interrupted for several years.

At the end of the war, Benjamin returned to Germany to complete his studies, receiving the doctorate in philosophy in 1919. Both he and Scholem, having resumed close correspondence, sought to gain *Habilitation* (unpaid lecturers' posts at the university level); both were unsuccessful, almost certainly because they were Jews. With small private incomes, the two were at some leisure, however forced, and they soon became familiars in the all-hours Jewish intellectual circles of Berlin and Paris. Into their world drifted some of the greatest proponents of that now-lost sensibility which George Steiner has called "Central European humanism": Hannah Arendt, S. Y. Agnon, Ernst Bloch, Georg Simmel, Robert Eisler, Bertolt Brecht, Erich Fromm, and Theodor Adorno. Here Benjamin was to flourish, having earned some recognition as a translator of Baudelaire and Proust and already at work at, though not yet publishing, the lapidary essays on literature, art, and philosophy on which his fame would rest.

Scholem's destiny lay elsewhere. In 1923 he fulfilled his youthful pledge as a Zionist by emigrating to Palestine, and he was soon thereafter appointed to the chair of the history of Jewish mysticism at the National University of Jerusalem. Now he and Benjamin were confined to a friendship by mail; Gershom reprints selections from Benjamin's letters of this period (but none of his own replies, unfortunately), reporting his simultaneous attempts to secure publication for his work, support himself and his family, and continue to explore the many intellectual fields he had set out to master.

In 1927 the two met again in Paris, warm friends now. Benjamin's marriage had collapsed, his career as a literary critic was ever more uncertain, and he was now undertaking a course of study in Hebrew to prepare himself for his unrealized emigration to Palestine. Benjamin had also become something of a Marxist—a later visit to Moscow would temper his enthusiasm for this newfound ideology—although his political views were tinged with mysticism to such a degree that doctrinaire Marxists today dismiss Benjamin as a "subjectivist." Within this personal and intellectual confusion, writes Scholem, lay the seed of the mature Benjamin's most important work—the essays on art in the machine age, on books and book collecting, on the dark night of the soul that was to engulf all of Europe.

In 1933, following Adolf Hitler's rise to power, Benjamin presciently abandoned Germany, moving to Ibiza and then Paris, fully aware of the unfolding fate of the European Jews, as his letters to Scholem reveal.

Benjamin became a completely private man, cloistered in the small library he had been able to salvage from his vast German collection of books and prints. His letters from this time are full of strangely quiet anguish, of resignation to the fact that Central European humanism was destined to die under fascism. Despite Scholem's repeated urgings to emigrate to the relative security of Palestine, Benjamin lingered on in his beloved Paris, a solitary man.

In the end, in 1940, he left the city he called "the capital of the nineteenth century," one step ahead of the pursuing Gestapo. Fleeing south, he and a small party of companions were detained by the authorities at the Spanish border and informed that safe passage to Portugal would surely be denied them. During the night Benjamin ingested poison, and he died the next morning. Scholem records an approximate account of those final days, having received a description of events from a member of Benjamin's party (the remaining fugitives were allowed to proceed to neutral Portugal). A better account of this crucial episode does not exist.

Walter Benjamin is written with a warmth and sympathy befitting the friendship Benjamin and Scholem shared, but Scholem is not reticent to discuss his friend's occasional shortcomings, especially the tendency to agonized indecision that eventually doomed him. Scholem's book, ably put into English by Harry Zohn, Benjamin's American translator, is of great value on its own terms, and with luck it will encourage preparation of a full-length critical biography of the great critic and essayist.

Gregory McNamee
Tucson, Arizona

Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1988, 122 pp., $39.95 hb.

In her new book on the application of feminist criticism to theatre, Professor Jill Dolan of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, takes on the arduous task of looking at the feminist approach to performance. According to Dolan there are three feminist positions possible as a theatre spectator: liberal, cultural or radical, and materialist. In her book, Dolan discusses theatre ideology and psychoanalysis in an attempt to conduct an inquiry into the evolution of the newest theatre spectator, the feminist critic.

The book consists of a series of essays around the central topic: the discourse of feminism and the feminist spectator's role in theatre presentation. Dolan purports that theatre through the ages has created a spectator in the likeness of the dominant culture (i.e., white, middle-class, heterosexual male). Since feminism erupted onto the scene in the sixties, she asserts that the spectator's role needs to be redefined. Dolan perceives the feminist influence on performance criticism as a political instrument, intervening in an effort towards cultural change in the present literary and dramatic canons.

Liberal suggests that body of women who work within the mainstream. In opposition to the liberals, the cultural or radical group wants to abolish patriarchal domination by establishing a female counter-culture. The third group is the materialists who "want to disrupt the narrative of gender ideology, . . . and to demystify the workings of the genderized representational apparatus itself."

After introducing the three types of feminism, Dolan discusses how psychoanalysis is gender biased. Drawing upon Freud, Rubin, and Lacan, she illustrates how each school draws upon the male perspective relegating women to the role of "Other." This role of Other occurs when the male child recognizes that he is different from his mother and places her in the Other role.

Dolan spends some time outlining specific theatre theorists whom she feels are making an impact on breaking down the walls of gender bias. These theorists include Bertolt Brecht and Richard Foreman of the Ontological Hysterical Theatre. Brecht's theory of alienation creates a distance between the audience and the actor; Foreman's desire is to use art to alter the spectator's consciousness.

Dolan poses the question: How does the feminist critic change the spectator's perspective? The liberal feminists are determined to make women in theatre visible, however serious the gender bias. The liberal feminist doesn't feel that there is a need for the establishment of a new dramatic form; thus, women's theatre groups of this ilk choose realism as their foundation.

The cultural or radical group wishes to form a collective creation. This group sees that the traditional canon, like myth, is shrouded in the mists of past values. And those past values are a validation of a social hierarchy that is essentially male. This group works against traditional dramatic forms. They are indebted to the American experimental theatre of the sixties and seventies and use these techniques to undermine traditional theater aesthetics. The cultural group wishes to subvert realism and use consciousness-raising as their *modus operandi*. Women need to create a separate unity instead of serving "as a mask carved from male ideology."

Working towards a more universal point of view, the materialist practitioners are evolving work that appears to be valid politically and aesthetically. The materialist feminist critic maintains that one should have the freedom to examine the performance from a theoretical perspective, but that what is needed is "to eradicate the dominance/submission paradigm that underlies representation." Theatre needs to be a forum for women's as well as men's voices. The materialists prefer an arrangement where the performers are showing the characters rather than becoming the characters. This concept of alienation is Brechtian: the idea of the spectator looking at the character as opposed to identifying with the character.

Dolan advocates working towards a new articulation of gender use in the theatre. She feels it is necessary to leave the male-dominated frame of reference; she proposes that the answer lies "elsewhere." This "elsewhere" is the lesbian subject from the materialist point of view. Dolan feels strongly that the female desire issue must become independent of men's desire in order to separate gender from becoming an issue in the theatre. The lesbian view is a new view, one which will allow for a redefinition of the old and ultimately lead to a more cohesive non-exclusionary canon. As a self-avowed lesbian materialist, Dolan sees this approach as the solution.

Dolan's book is a dense work which will certainly clarify one's position on feminism in theatre. The work is highly informative, but difficult to read. This difficulty is somewhat alleviated by an excellent note section, bibliography, and index. It is definitely a good reference text on the subject of feminism in theatre; albeit costly, it still would be a welcome addition to one's department or library shelves.

Sara Edlin Marlowe
University of North Dakota

Andrei Codrescu, *American Poetry Since 1970: Up Late*, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1987, [xxxviii] + 591 pp., $12.95 pb. (Box 548, Village Station, New York, NY 10014)

Codrescu introduces *Up Late* by performing one of the more difficult tasks facing the poetry anthologist. Having first acknowledged the "difficulty of making an anti-academic anthology of contemporary poetry" (xxxiii), he then goes on to explain just how and why his new anthology qualifies as "anti-academic," challenging along the way "the dead

weight" of the "stiffer-lipped academia of the 1950's" as well as the "phony ease" of the "new establishment" (xxxv). The most telling moment comes, however, when he cites "the chief object" of the poems collected within:

> The making of community against anti-social technology is the chief object of the poetry gathered here. Popular culture as it appears in these poems has been deconstructed for communal use (xxxvii).

For the most part, his assessment is correct; what binds these poems together is an overt preoccupation with public and private location in a world whose means of production threaten daily to dislocate its inhabitants. Accordingly, both deconstruction and its inevitable movement toward reconstruction arise as the major dynamics in the book, and the poems work when that relationship, in terms of Codrescu's definition, has direct "communal" value. The poems do not work when the threat of dislocation surfaces not as a concern but as an irritant in the sensibility of the poet, whose flippant response undermines the urgency of the problem.

Bernadette Mayer's work represents one of Codrescu's better choices. Mayer positions the private, romantic self in close proximity to the social self she is forced to confront in this political world:

> A woman I mix men up
> In my dreams & other ways, I wonder
> If this is the same as knowing
> What is & is not socialism... (69)

And later she remarks, "I feel // The risk's as great in loving as it is / In voting..." (69). Each act, of dreaming, loving, knowing or voting, is a minor assertion in a society which often denies the privileges gleaned from such self-assertiveness. But "socialism" and "voting," rather than denying the self, instead serve to inform it. Making use of these agents, the poet constructs a composite self whose human markings account for their influence.

Mayer deconstructs her culture for "communal use" in that she confronts her own private conflicts as well as the public conflicts that she as a poet must address. Elsewhere, the poets of *Up Late* deconstruct popular culture, it seems, not for communal but for commercial use, and their poems enact, in the name of "humor," a particularly slight form of stand-up comedy. Take, for example, this passage from David Gallup's "Backing into the Fan Mail (Unreceived)":

> But then I always did take everything to heart
> The time I got an atom bomb in the mail
> And when I took it down by the furnace
> It didn't work though it was a lovely
> Red and black bomb to look at... (163)

The tone is ironic, despite the editor's introductory defense against the use of irony in the poems of *Up Late*. And all too often, as in the following passage from David Shapiro's "From Malay," the irony collapses into crude surrealism:

> Opening the knots of your braid,
> I look upon a seething Atlantic
> Behold, a luminous typewriter sails
> into the air above the desk... (295)

At its worst, the comedic response to Codrescu's call for the "making of community" degenerates into a bad joke, the "use" for which is hard to identify. Pat Nolan's "Exercise" is a good example:

> Just as I stood up
> I sat back down
> again forgetting
> what I stood for [sic] (354)

Codrescu authorizes this kind of bad punning when he defines *Up Late* as "an incantation against the organized forgetting of capitalism." This incantation, it seems, invokes and perhaps rationalizes a peculiar form of humor:

> Demystifying in order to believe is steady work. Sometimes black, most often purgative, humor is one of the ritual constants of this generation, whose poetic physiognomy is shaped by an erotic and sometimes unstoppably gruesome laughter. (xxxvii)

True, but often we laugh *at* rather than with the poet. As one of the "ritual constants," humor might help purge the "commodity church" (as Codrescu puts it in one of his truly funny moments), but when mishandled and reduced to ridiculous puns and bad imagery, "humor" might actually encourage the commodification of inadequacy which capitalism in many ways represents.

The range of influence accomplished in this anthology should not be overlooked. Among the hundred or so poets included, few operate in the neo-academic tradition that Codrescu admonishes in the introduction, and only a handful affect the "phony ease" that he is correct in applying to the "new establishment." Most represent current, alternative influences that for too long have gone unrecognized as legitimate sources of poetic discovery. Where the poetry of *Up Late* lapses into silliness and unwarranted irony, the editor's overzealous selection is most likely to blame.

William Marsh
Tucson, Arizona

Joseph Bruchac, *Near the Mountains*, Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1988, 63 pp., $7.50 pb.

Recording Ancestry

Joseph Bruchac, one of the most respected Native American poets, writes frequently of family and kin, celebrating generational continuity in a world that most often concerns itself with politics. Bruchac's *Near the Mountains* links family and poem through a creating imagination. Some of the poems in this book appeared in previous volumes: *Flow*, *This Earth Is a Drum*, *Ancestry*, and *Entering Onondaga*. Like Maurice Kenny, Bruchac is very much committed to the vitality of earth and trying to resolve the problem of mixed ancestry.

Near the Mountains is divided into three parts, "The Balance," "Old Tools," and "Near the Mountains," the title section. In the first part, Bruchac celebrates his grandmother and grandfather. In "Stone Maps," Bruchac makes a historical survey without being either regionalist or modernist:

> Pulling the first carrot of the summer,
> a stone came up, caught in root hairs
> the way a fist might clench a coin.
>
> The oldest people who lived this hill
> before my feet stood here traced
> their lives in the shapes of stones.

And when Bruchac continues in his quest of recording his ancestry in "Two Pictures of My Slovak Grandparents, 1914," he does so with concrete imagery:

> The sun peers down on him
> through coal smoke clouds.
> It squints like the Asian eye
> of a Slovak steelworker.

The control of language, the eloquence of simplicity joins with the poet's wonderful subject matter.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Bruchac does not use surrealistic techniques. His voice echoes cadences that stimulate meditations on loss and self discovery. In the second part of the book, one discerns his individuality in the poem, "Memories of My Grandfather Sleeping":

> Slowly the old man
> would turn towards me,
> toward the eastern door
> and the morning light
> the way a planet turns its face

away from the stars and memories of night,
looking up to be certain
that it was me and not Death
calling his name.

This essentially realistic passage evokes the memory of the speaker's grandfather. More importantly, space and time become a single metaphor.

Yet in the third part of the book, Bruchac concerns himself with illuminating the beauty of American landscape. It is the past and present, sustaining the strongest of Bruchac's poetic compositions. In "Near the Mountains," Bruchac uses the sparest of language, reaffirming a consciousness:

Near the mountains
footsteps on the ground
sound hollow

as if to remind us
this earth is a drum.

We must watch our steps closely
to play the right tune.

Here the focal point is an eternal vision.

Near the Mountains is filled with substance, demonstrating Bruchac's painstaking craftsmanship in simple diction. And this book, a very strong collection, is of considerable value to mainstream American literature for its historical value.

Lenard D. Moore
Writer-in-Residence
Wake County Arts Council, North Carolina

Richard Stephen Felger and Mary Beck Moser, *People of the Desert and Sea: Ethnobotany of the Seri Indians*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985. Illustrated. Pp. 435, $65.

To read and gaze through this elegantly illustrated book is to be exposed, as if through a work of science fiction, to an astonishing and unknown cultural world. It does not transport us to a Philippine mountain cave or a New Guinea valley to reveal this "forgotten tribe." Instead we travel less than a hundred miles south of the Arizona-Mexico border, to the arid western shores of the Gulf of California. For at

least two thousand years the Seri Indians have lived here, designing and protecting an incredibly intricate relationship with the abundant intertidal habitats on which they survived.

That two millenia date is connected to one of the hundreds of science fiction-like facts concerning this resilient and inventive tribe: the Seri are the only people in the world who harvested grains from the sea. Collecting armfuls of eelgrass from the tidal shoals in April, they extracted and parched its seeds, then mixed the flour into a highly nutritious gruel. An archeological dig along their beaches turned up a clay pot containing organic eelgrass remains which dated around 2,000 years ago.

We discover this in a six-page entry on eelgrass, one of the explanatory sections which do far more than parade atomized facts. As with the work of the pioneer enthnolinguist John Peabody Harrington, such data are seen as part of an activity complex. We learn the native name for eelgrass ("what is harvested") and its place in Seri botanical classifications (which, we also find out, recognized micro-plant populations unknown to modern biologists). Then we are shown the role of eelgrass in their diet, the tools and baskets they make to process it, the part it plays in they mythology and customs. Through the clearly-written and accessible format of this book, eelgrass, along with 426 other plants named and used by the Seri, becomes a living character in the saga of Seri cultural survival.

Until the 1950s the anarchistic Seri had defied centuries of Spanish attempts to conquer and assimilate them. Despite the vicious Encinas Wars by local Mexican ranchers to exterminate them and a devastating population drop—in the 1920s they numbered less than 200—a surprising amount of cultural knowledge remained. That was when the linquists Edward and Mary Beck Moser built an adobe house near the beach in the traditional Seri village at El Desemboque. For the next three decades their lives were devoted to recording through word and photograph the lifeways of the Seri, who call themselves, as have so many self-enclosed indigenous worlds, simply Comcaac, "The People." As with the most effective ethnographers before them, their lever into the culture was the language. Their initial mission was to translate the Bible into the Seri tongue under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. But by eliciting vocabulary and texts about everyday activities, history, and beliefs they also became impressed how the Seri viewed and used their natural world, a relationship which called for a suvivalist's knowledge of the waterless desert and the briny gulf.

In the early 1960s a graduate student named Richard S. Felger also came to Sonora to study the ecology of the Gulf Coast. His lever into Seri culture became a directed inquiry about their knowledge of plants

and animals. These parallel researches into language and botany offered the promising sort of scholarly collaboration which happened to mark a sector of cultural anthropology in the 1960s. Known as *ethnobotany* or *ethnoecology* on the level of fieldwork, its interpretative phase was called *ethnoscience*. This approach was often more satisfying to some social scientists than the "interpretative anthropology" then popular among symbolic anthropologists inspired by such scholars as Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Native rules of syntax, glosses for terms, and criteria for plant distinctions seemed more reliable and comparable facts than vague symbols and their often subjective decodings. When you asked Seri men how they distinguished the kinds of sea turtles they caught and under what conditions they caught them, you could compare what Western and Seri theoretical and applied "sciences" had in common. How they diverged taught you a great deal about how the Seri saw and used their world.

For the general reader, however, too often the exciting results of what ethnobotanists learn have been entombed between the uninviting covers of academic monographs. University of Arizona Press book designer Harrison Shaffer has not let that happen. Through an abundance of picture formats and a generous play with typefaces he has opened up the complex relationship between these people and their environment. The century of photography on the tribe is culled for its best material, with ample display of the Mosers' own emphasis on tasks being done which never detracts, however, from the visual force of Seri personalities—proud men and women whose confident and smiling faces gain names and biographical details.

Yet the book never topples from its hard factual plateau into Noble Savage sentimentality. Nor does it attempt to portray its multiplicity of plant, animal, and cultural forms through any innovative format. Essentially this is an exquisite example of the old laundry-list approach, an illustrated taxonomy. Still, its sheer profusion of information about how much it took to know in the mind and the hand to be a successful Seri does amount to a symphonic homage to Seri creativity and industry. Its facts are arrayed with associated cultural customs, braided into ecological themes, and presented so that the total role of flora and fauna in Seri culture gains three dimensions.

Take the Xaaasj, for instance, the great cardon cactus which stands in columnar formation across the Sonoran landscape much like the race of giants whom the Seris believe first lived here and instituted so many Seri lifeways. We learn all the classifications of its forms and edible fruits, how its food was collected and prepared both today and in the times of the mythic forebears of the Seri. We eavesdrop on Seri folklore about these spiny, pulpy columns, we hear how hunters used them as

shelters and stashes for game, how stillborn babies were laid in their enfolding limbs, how placentas were buried at their base, how the oil from mashed seeds was used to soften deer skins during tanning, how the fruit's juice, mixed with charcoal, was used for the facial tattooing which was a trademark of Seri women, how the dry cactus ribs were used for house walls, how people ate the fruit, dried their defecations, gleaned the seeds and cleaned and cooked them, then stored them for later consumption in special pottery vessels, how slabs of ash-heated cactus flesh were used as poultices for aches and pains, and how clam shells were wedged into the stalks as offerings so the spirits of the plant could bestow good fortune.

The worlds of the sea and the desert were a well-stocked commissary, so long as dwellers knew when and how to get at the foodstuffs. The Seri enjoyed a range of foods and pharmacopia superior to that of a modern Chicagoan, but they had to develop special skills to find and harvest these foods. One life source always in short supply, however, was water, and the need to travel between reliable waterholes dictated much of Seri tribal movements. Men were responsible for staying alert to the location and condition of the precious few waterholes, and for trudging between them with pairs of large water jugs suspended in mesquite root nets from the ends of wooden yokes.

For animal protein the Seri hunted the most savory of meats, the green turtle, whose gift to them they regarded with awe and reverence. By the time the Mosers and Felger arrived, many species were practically gone, but at one time the Seri distinguished fourteen kinds of sea turtles, and their knowledge of turtle behavior "was more extensive than that which has been published by biologists," claim Felger and Moser. Indeed, the coverage of Seri-turtle interrelations is perhaps the most poignant of all the culture-nature associations documented in this book.

As Felger and Moser move through their material, what seems to be but an interdisciplinary encyclopedia transforms into an ethnoscientific saga. To their credit they do not deplore the underlying changes of life which have descended upon the Seri since the 1950s. Although they declare that the "Seri had access to marvelous marine resources which the world will never again know," they seem reluctant to leave the impression that radios, tourism, exposure through new roads, communications media, are making this another story of Paradise Lost. Still, the words "last," "gone," and "extinct" punctuate their objective accounts of Seri interactions with animals and plants.

The fact is that this ecological tradition, this sort of an astonishing book on a culture one never knew existed, and this anthropological approach which requires such cultures, are all doomed species. Inter-

national market economies, Third World political instability, global pollution, technological change, and electronic communication are swiftly shrinking and homogenizing the world. Isolated ecological niches are becoming a thing of the past. Tribal diversity is more and more based on self-conscious notions of identity rather than upon the requirements of surviving within unique natural habitats.

For the Seri today, however, the changes seem without tears. "There were joyous and romantic aspects to such a life," the authors write, "but the older people who had actually lived off the desert and sea had no desire to return to the old ways... They were accepting what they could of the new culture and rejecting that part they did not want." Now we must try to understand why it is the rest of us who find ourselves mourning the ways which are so wonderfully and responsibly recorded in this book.

Carolyn Gilman and Mary Jane Schneider, *The Way to Independence 1840-1920: Memories of a Hidatsa Indian Family*, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987 (illustrated), 371 pp., $40 hb., $24.95 pb.

In the summer of 1906, as authors Carolyn Gilman and Mary Jane Schneider describe it, "a blond, bespectacled scholar in tweed cap and puttees" appeared at the cabin of a Hidatsa Indian woman named Maxidiwiac, or Buffalo Bird Woman, on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in central North Dakota.

The visitor was thirty-seven year old Gilbert L. Wilson, an unsuccessful real estate agent from Ohio who had become a minister in Minnesota. His deepest calling, however, concerned the documentation of traditional American Indian life. Fate could hardly have led him to a more auspicious home.

The sixty-six year old Hidatsa Indian woman who greeted him, her face shadowed by a scarf to hide her mottled skin pigmentation, had been born three years after the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1837. Between these two, the oldest and most sophisticated tribal world in the Great Plains was documented with exquisite detail. In this book their interaction, and its larger context of a people struggling to preserve their traditional sense of community, unfold through such a high picture-to-word ratio that it practically becomes a cinematic saga of their touching personal relationship and this tribe's complex cultural history.

The daughter of Small Ankle, custodian of the sacred Waterbuster clan icons, Buffalo Bird Woman was born to one of the first families

to establish thereafter the remarkable refugee settlement known as Like-A-Fishhook Village. Here survivors of the disease from both Mandan and Hidatsa tribes drew together for mutual security, eventually admitting an additional people, the Arikara, into their fortified community. Here, into the 1880s, many features of an agricultural lifestyle perhaps a millenium old experienced a sort of stay of execution.

By the time Wilson showed up, Like-A-Fishhook itself was already abandoned. Following the U.S. government's policy of cutting up tribal acreage into family-size homesteads, its residents relocated around community centers like Elbowwoods and Independence on the Fort Berthold Reservation not far away. But the old way of life was permanently inscribed in the hearts and memories of Buffalo Bird Woman, her brother Wolf Chief, her only son, Edward Goodbird, and their wide circle of kin and friends.

With Wilson's arrival began one of the happier relationships in the annals of American Indian ethnography, and one of the most fruitful. For the next dozen years Wilson would spend summers with Buffalo Bird Woman and her family, often bringing his brother Frederick, a commercial artist in Minneapolis, to help with photography and detailed drawings of Hidatsa material culture. Although this was a period when museum or university professionals often looked down their noses at untutored amateurs, Wilson's meticulous note-taking and the reports he began submitting to New York's American Museum of Natural History drew the respect of such Plains Indian scholars as Clark Wissler and Robert Lowie. Eventually his work among what became known as the Village Indians—distinguishing them from more nomadic newcomers like the Sioux and Cheyenne who abandoned farming for the horse-riding, buffalo-hunting, and war-raiding lifestyle—earned him a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Minnesota.

From all accounts Wilson was an unpushy, gentle fieldworker. But aisde from the tactful, patient personality that even comes through these photos, good luck played its part in his success. Buffalo Bird Woman's son was just about his age, so when she adopted Wilson into her Prairie Chicken clan, making him a son also, Wilson and Edward Goodbird became clan-mates and age-mates, the latter an important bonding category in Hidatsa social life. And the two men had a valuable resource in their enterprising uncle, Wolf Chief, who also became what anthropologist Malcolm McFee calls the "150% man," someone fully at home in his own culture and in addition a participant in the non-Indian world.

Although Wolf Chief started his own country store on the reservation in 1889 and converted to Christianity, he still felt obliged to maintain his father's Waterbuster shrine in its own earthlodge until 1906.

And although Edward Goodbird had been raised a traditional Hidatsa, including undergoing a vision quest, he had of late taken on the cloth of a Congregational minister among his own people. This meant that Wilson and these men could re-explore Hidatsa Indian mysticism and material culture from something of a shared multi-cultural vantage point. Wilson was also pleased to discover that Goodbird was eager to develop his modest drawing talents and recreate on paper Hidatsa material life and folklore.

The reservation years for many Indians were no clear-cut matter of encroaching white and destitute Indian communities, so it is very satisfying to see a book bring to life the many ambiguities of cultures interpenetrating each other. Wolf Chief writes well-worded protest letters to Washington when officials do not treat his people properly; Indian men in short hair wear suits and sell hay while Indian women in long dresses attend church socials and sew quilts. At the same time, however, they make models of old earthlodges and cook recipes centuries old and reproduce bowl-shaped boats which are all part of a heritage of craftmanship that antedates the coming of the white man. This book documents this double-layered life at the moment when, to be sure, the beleagured old ways were fast surrendering to the new. In Buffalo Bird Woman's extended family is the summarized knowledge of a civilization, handed down, ironically, to a non-Indian for perhaps the last time. A hushed mood of urgent, almost sacred transmission pervades this book.

In retrospect, the focused interaction between these modest, purposeful personalities, and the amazingly rich archive it produced of written description and native autobiography, ink and pencil illustrations, photographic coverage, and tool collections of traditional Hidatsa industry sound like a complex long-term ethnographic project funded with fanfare by some major institution. As conveyed in the soft words of Wilson's consultants and the sense of focused participation in photographs showing Hidatsas making mats and weaving baskets, forming pots or shelling corn, however, it was only a profound, calm sense of devotion which made sure this remarkable way of life did not go unsung. Theirs became the optimal sort of ethnographic enterprise: equals purposefully salvaging a past, respecting the minutest details, giving credit not to academic rediscoverers of the culture but to its native perpetuators. Perhaps the documentation of historical change was sacrificed in favor of salvage ethnography, but Gilman and Schneider more than make up for this by orchestrating their presentation of Hidatsa life-skills within the sweep of Hidatsa chronological change.

Nor were Buffalo Bird Woman and her family anxious to make some public case about the sophistication of their agricultural system,

their tool inventory, the multiplicity of craft techniques—pot-making, mat-weaving, basketry-splicing, food storage, and the like. They were still close enough to it in memory to take it for granted. And Gilbert Wilson was more than ready to convey the impression, at least, that specific how-to information might best come across in the Indians' own words. His series of monographs retained the native voice. "Agriculture of the Hidatsa Indians," for instance, first published in 1917, was subtitled "An Indian Interpretation." Relating in affectionate detail the gardening skills and folk beliefs by which her people managed to nurture many varieties of corn, squash, beans, sunflowers, and tobacco, Wilson had Buffalo Bird Woman speak in the first person.

Gilman and Schneider's generous use of quotes magnifies that intimate approach so that the living blood of the material things these people made flows again. The lavishly illustrated summary of the Wilson contribution contains fully 500 photos of these specific Hidatsa people, their communities and homes, the array of practical culture they made, the richly textured atmosphere, in short, of their entire material world.

The book wisely carries their story through the reservation period, illustrating how the Hidatsas preserved old cultural meanings even as their economic way of life suffered upheaval and relocation. An Afterword by Hidatsa Gerard Baker shows how the sense of tribal continuity was maintained through later, difficult years, as the Garrison Dam suddenly threatened what sense of community these brave souls had managed to preserve in their long way to Independence. Nor does the book shy away from problematic issues, such as Goodbird's own divided cultural allegiance, and the controversy which erupted when Wilson misguidedly purchased the Waterbuster shrine for his museum.

It is fair to say that never has there been such a rich, accessible, intelligent book on a Plains Indian people, and it is appropriate that this ground-breaking effort be devoted to the oldest and least-known of them. Through Gilman and Schneider's brilliant, humanistic conception of the project, lucid layout of the varied visual documentation, and expert splicing of Wilson's texts from the Indian point of view, there is also something of a power reversal in the work which is refreshing and one may hope will set a new model for tribal reconstructions to follow. This is not the story of Gilbert L. Wilson. It is the story of the Hidatsa told by the Hidatsa themselves. It is to Wilson's credit that he almost certainly would have wanted it that way.

Peter Nabokov
University of California, Santa Cruz

David Kilgore, *Last Summer*, St. Paul: New Rivers Press, Inc., 1988, 87 pp., $7.95 (1602 Selby Avneue, St. Paul, MN 55104);

Kathleen Coskran, *The High Price of Everything*, St. Paul: New Rivers Press, Inc., 1988, 133 pp., $7.95.

> It was all a bad mistake. I shoulda knowed something was wrong cause the bingo game at the VFW Hall was ten minutes late starting and Harry Wade don't never be late in taking our money. But it was 1:40 in the afternoon when that little piece of man hunched up them stairs on the side of the 'lectric numbers board, perched on his bar stool, and pretended to smile at us, ying-yanging that spiel we all knows by heart. Old Harry's got a megaphone voice, but he always used the mike anyways, trying to amplify hisself into something he ain't; looking down on us from the platform like Pharaoh gotta hold of Moses and made him promise to lead us to the land of bankruptcy.
>
> —From Davida Kilgore's "Bingo"

Winners of the 1987 Minnesota Voice Project, *Last Summer* and *The High Price of Everything* do indeed have strong voices. Davida Kilgore's short stories sing ghetto blues, and Kathleen Coskran records country in Georgia and drum-punctuated voices of Africa.

Kilgore's "Bingo" is about poverty, desperate hope, murder, and suicide. "The Day We Discovered We Were Black" is about the day a white teacher with "a long pointy nose her glasses used for a sliding board" called a student a "nigger." "Three Alarm Fire" is about a girl who burned down her family's house because she thought her impecunious parents would prefer the insurance money. "The Dietary Exploits of Bessie" is about fat Bessie, her man she calls "Sweet Meat," and her contempt for skinny people: "Don't nobody pick no tree for me to shit under and that includes deciding how I should look." "Last Summer, or How I Spent My Summer Vacation," is the sort of story that is never told in affluent suburban schools.

Coskran's "An African River" is about an American couple who take a vacation to "experience" Africa, during which the husband experiences being eaten by a crocodile. In "Facing Mount Kenya," an American loses her child to malaria after which her African husband chants to the mountain god, "Praise ye, Ngai." In "Graven Images," an artist—a painter and sculptor—leaves his forty-year-old wife for a younger woman: "Covering one wall was a painting of a woman cut off at the waist. They were bending and twisting or pointing straight ahead—black women, white, brown and all of them naked. Opal chewed her lip and surveyed the room slowly. In a corner was a thing that looked like a woman's breast."

Both Kilgore and Coskran write about the hurt and pride of impoverished men and women, and in addition Coskran writes about women who are poor despite their husbands' financial comfort. Coskran's stories are more artistically structured and polished than Kilgore's, but Kilgore's, rambling and gossipy, are more passionate. Nevertheless, both *Last Summer* and *The High Price of Everything* are crafted collections of flesh and blood voices that we need to hear.

*****

Once upon a time, before television shows were elevated to the level of art and set in Yuppie Heights and about the drama and ethics of choosing new wallpaper for the dining room, before the typical book jacket took to presenting a writer's degrees and foundation grants as if invitations to exclusive parties—back when a dust jacket might still boast, if affectedly, about a writer's many minimum-wage jobs—mass-market literary fiction was not almost always by and about those whom Lewis Lapham calls "the equestrian classes." Nor were the novels and short stories about poor- or working-class people necessarily reviewed in the shamed and intrigued whispers of patrons at a freak show (*Love Medicine*; *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*; *The Color Purple*; *Ironweed*).

Notes Lapham, in *Money and Class in America*, "under the new cultural dispensation, poverty is merely poverty, and both boorish and subversive. The phrase 'a poor artist' stands revealed as a contradiction in terms." Lapham then surveys recent American literature:

> But in the spheres of writing specifically and self-consciously literary (i.e., the work of Philip Roth, John Barth, William Styron, Robert Coover, Joan Didion, Donald Barthelme, etc.) none of the acquisitive frenzy of the period intruded upon the solemn contemplation of the self. Most of the writers were themselves rich. . . . More often than not their protagonist was a sensibility, not a person. The sensibility remembers the color of the light on the grass near its grandmother's house when it was six. Eventually it discovers, much to its horror and surprise, that it got itself soiled in the mud of love and commerce. The experience is by no means pleasant, and the sensibility wanders through the rest of the narrative apologizing to Nanny and mourning its departed glory. . . . Variations on this descent into the devouring maw of age and time account for the bulk of American literary fiction published between the years 1960 and 1980. During the early 1980's the "minimalist" fiction of writers such as Ann Beattie or Susan Minot or Raymond Carver presents characters so abstracted from the dung pile of the world, so smoothly polished and so free of voices or emotions, as to aspire to the condition of a neatly packaged spray cologne.

From Davida Kilgore's story, "The Deterioration of 47th Street":

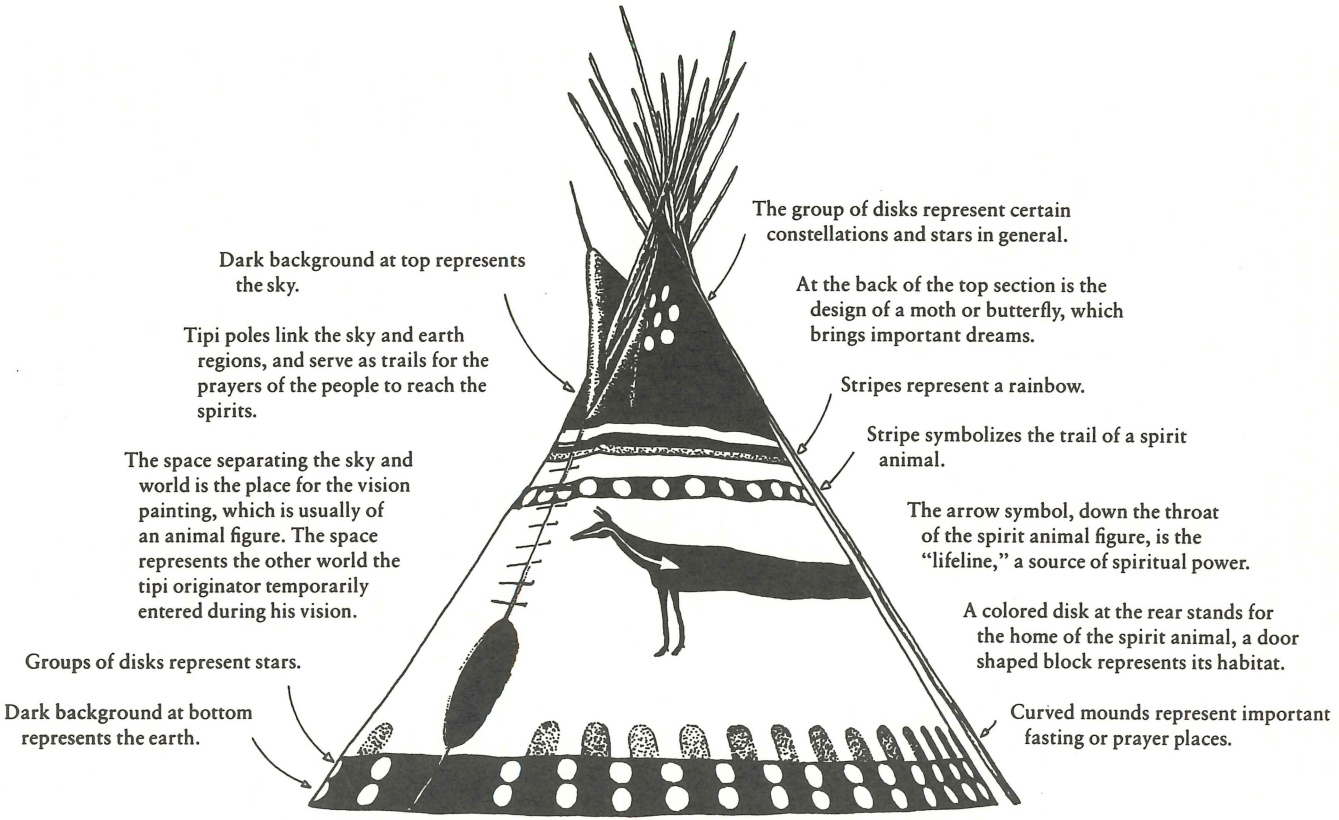
I used to live in a place before the rats and roaches and the "no" people invaded the kingdom. Before the management removed the jimmied mailboxes and installed shiny new silver ones in the front office, under heavy security. Before intercoms, buzzers, peepholes, sliding chains and two dead bolt locks replaced welcome mats and unlocked doors. Before four-lettered words were sprawled across sidewalks, covering the faint outlines of hopscotch games, and gangland battle cries—"Stone to the bone/D to the knee/Blackstone run it!"—were splashed against the bricks where balls bounced during Off-the-Wall. Before shrieks of laughter became silent nods in passing, "Please stay off the grass" gardens shriveled, yellowed and died, and the sweet aromas floating from the basement store, Harold's Chicken Shack, Ringo's Bar-be-que and Mamie's Bakery were overpowered by the stench of drying blood, vomit on curbstones, urine in alleyways, and sex—begged or borrowed, stolen or sold.

Mark Phillips
Cuba, NY

Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton, *Native American Architecture*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Pp. 431, $50.00 hb.

In the developmental years of American anthropology the Bureau of American Ethnology, a department of the Smithsonian Institution, published encyclopedic comparative studies of Native American basketry, bows and arrows, cradles, games, transportation and other technological aspects of tribal culture that have become standard references for students of traditional Indian culture, but changing anthropological interests focused attention elsewhere and technological studies virtually disappeared. Now, after a hiatus of almost a century, *Native American Architecture* returns us to those fascinating descriptive works of yesteryear, but in a new and improved rendition that avoids the ethnocentrism of the earlier works.

In *Native American Architecture*, Peter Nabokov and Robert Easton examine the multi-faceted role of architecture in tribal life. In order to accomplish their goal they use an all-embracing definition of architecture that includes "what happens whenever human thought or action makes order and meaning of random space" (11). This definition enables them to consider village plans, gardens, food-gathering areas, social significance, and religious meaning as well as house forms and construction.

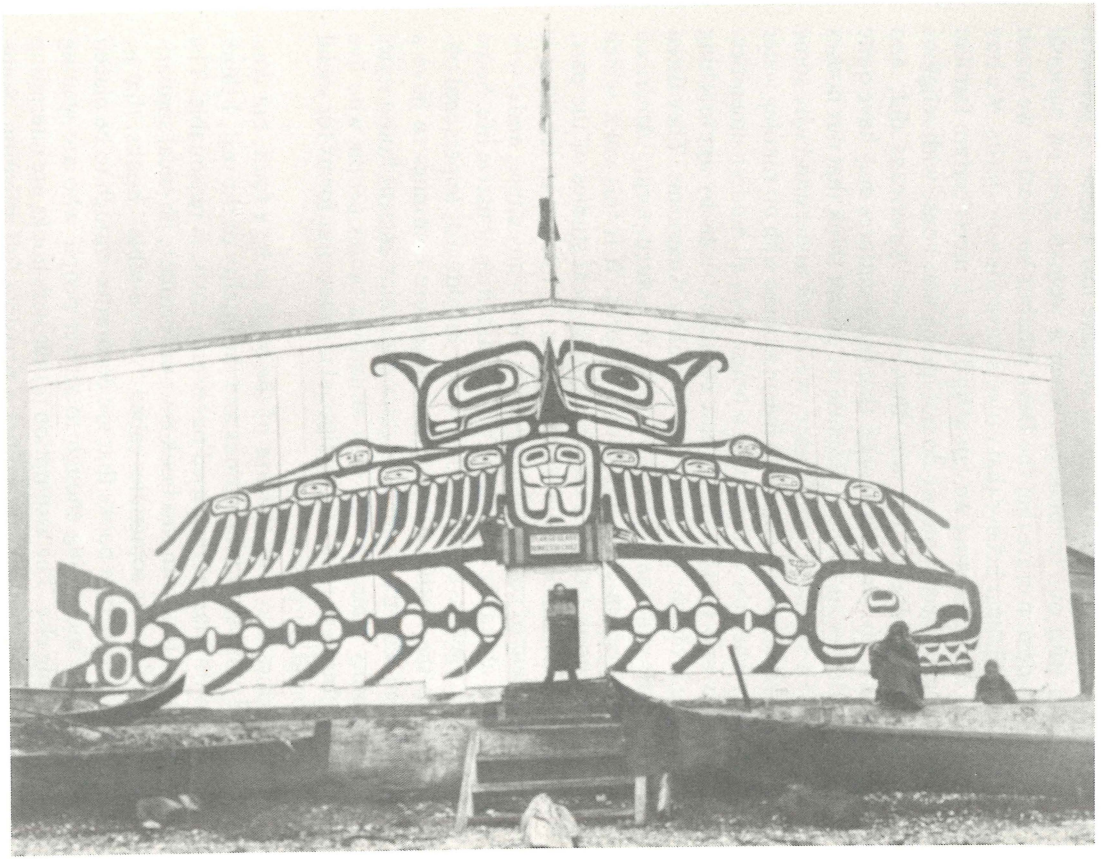


Blackfeet tipi symbolism

The introductory chapter explains how the book developed, summarizes some of the variables and explains the sources on which the book is based. Subsequent chapters are titled by house-type, but the arrangement is basically geographical. For example, chapter 3, "Earthlodge, Grass House, and Tipi," describes Plains Indian architecture, while chapter 6, "Plank House" deals with the Northwest Coast. Each chapter uses historic sources, drawings, and photographs to explore the significance of the particular house form, and each description ends with a consideration of the situation of traditional architecture today. Thus we learn that directions for the construction of the acorn-shaped grass house of the Wichita were contained in the sacred myth of the Red Bean Man and that modern Wichita have revived the art of grass housebuilding. Another chapter explains that the Eskimo likened building an iglu to giving life and believed that a man desiring to have many children should cut the first block for the sleeping area with a serrated knife and take care to make sure that the opening for the keystone block was as large as possible because that would make an easy childbirth for his wife. A man that wanted a son was told to cut the keystone block larger than the others. Now that modern Eskimo live in government-provided houses these beliefs may have died out, but the authors reveal that the Eskimo often modify their houses to reflect the older patterns of communal family living. Every chapter contains similar fascinating and provocative glimpses into the private world of tribal peoples.

There is no chapter 10, but the bibliography should be considered a chapter because the authors replace the standard footnotes and list of books with a bibliographic essay that summarizes non-Indian interest in American Indian architecture and comments on the various sources of information. This essay is so filled with perceptive observations on non-Indian attitudes and information on published and unpublished sources that it could stand alone as a scholarly contribution to the histories of anthropology and architecture.

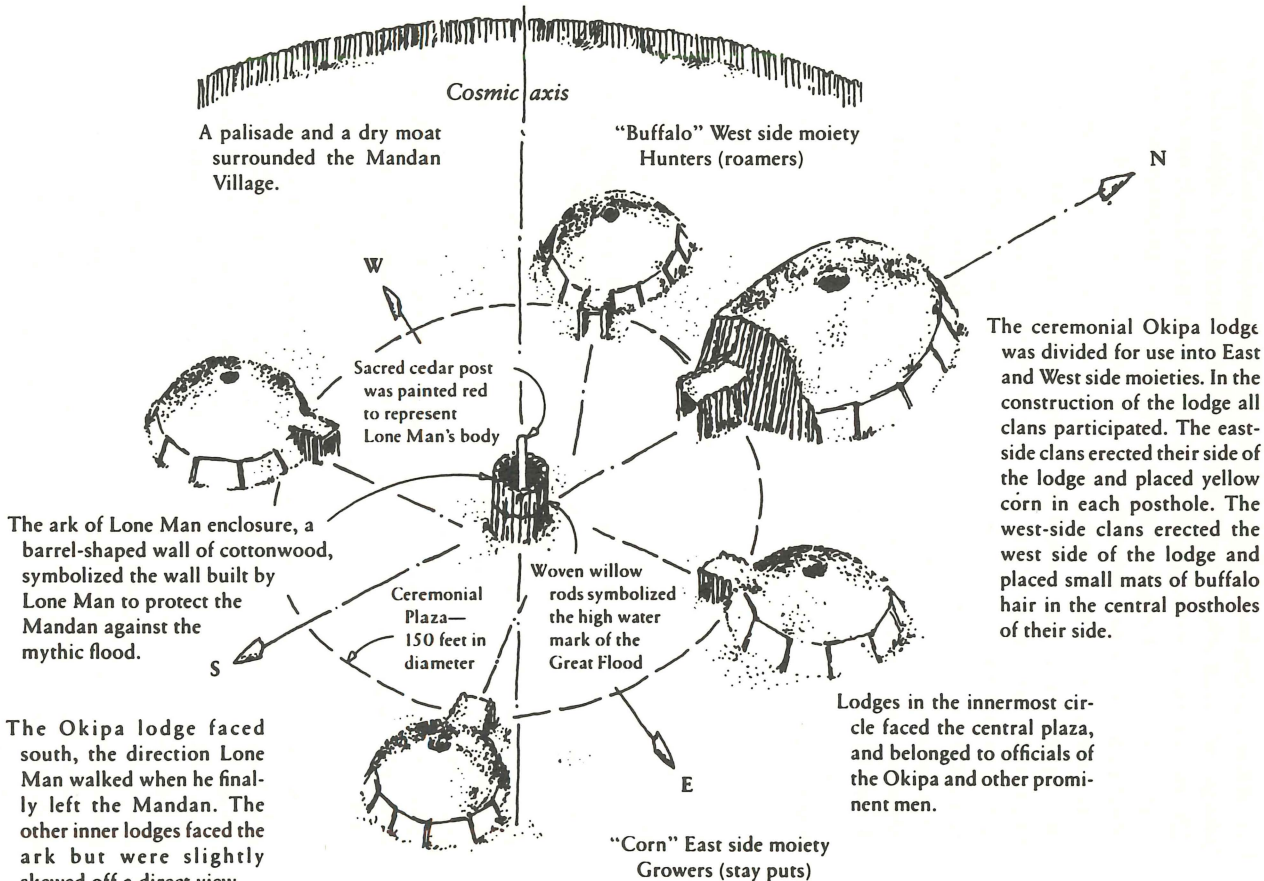
In its single focus, wide-scope approach to details *Native American Architecture* retains the best of the old-style comparative studies, but escapes the ethnocentrism that produced a pedantic, esoteric tone in the early works. A century ago, anthropologists were studying "primitive" and sometimes curious ways that they believed to be on the verge of disappearing forever. In some cases the "disappearance" philosophy was accompanied by an assumption that, because the disappearance resulted from replacement by a superior technology, the disappearance was beneficial. At best, these books presented the technology as something no longer vital to native life and no longer requiring much attention.



Another ethnocentrism found in these early works was a failure to recognize the depth of meaning in the technologies of tribal cultures. The early anthropologists held the same industrialized attitude toward objects that we find among modern Americans. Because we no longer design and construct our own tools, we have lost a sense of personal relationship with our technology. When a woman goes on national television to demonstrate that the Devil inhabits her toaster, we laugh because we no longer believe that objects have souls or spirits. We buy a particular house because we can afford it or it meets certain familial or psychological needs, but we do not imbue that house with religious or spiritual meaning in the way that Native Americans did, and sometimes still do, and so we forget that other cultures may have quite different attitudes and beliefs. Because we do not think that our houses have sacred or symbolic significance, we do not understand why some Native Americans would choose to live in a house with no running water or electricity when they could have a house with all modern amenities.

Nabokov and Easton avoid these ethnocentrisms by approaching their subject from the point of view of Native Americans. They listen for the native voice and find it not only in contemporary American Indians, but even in early non-Indian records. It is this voice which removes this book from the classic technological studies of the past. No longer is technology an esoteric subject of interest to scholars; it is a vital element of contemporary Native American culture, and it tells us something about the persistence and continuities of native life. Some technologies may have been smothered by introduced, impersonal objects, but to the Native American, architecture continues to have a spiritual significance that in some cases maintains ancient house styles and community plans and in other situations causes people who live in modern houses to return to traditional architectural forms for social and ceremonial purposes.

Some critics may find the cost of the book to be a fault, but considering the number of illustrations and the quality of the text, I think the price, in this day of increased publishing costs, is reasonable. The only fault I can find with this book is its unfortunate physical similarity to a class of books sometimes called "coffee-table" books; that is, large, attractive picture books that are decorative enough to be placed on display and interesting enough to attract people who are waiting to do something else. The assumption is that such books are interesting and entertaining, but do not require a person's full attention. Some people may find that *Native American Architecture* makes a good coffee-table book, but it is much more than a picture book. People interested in American Indian history and culture will appreciate the way in which this book adds to our understanding of tribal life.


Cosmic axis
A palisade and a dry moat surrounded the Mandan Village.
"Buffalo" West side moiety Hunters (roamers)
N
W
Sacred cedar post was painted red to represent Lone Man's body
The ceremonial Okipa lodge was divided for use into East and West side moieties. In the construction of the lodge all clans participated. The east-side clans erected their side of the lodge and placed yellow corn in each posthole. The west-side clans erected the west side of the lodge and placed small mats of buffalo hair in the central postholes of their side.
The ark of Lone Man enclosure, a barrel-shaped wall of cottonwood, symbolized the wall built by Lone Man to protect the Mandan against the mythic flood.
Ceremonial Plaza— 150 feet in diameter
Woven willow rods symbolized the high water mark of the Great Flood
S
Lodges in the innermost circle faced the central plaza, and belonged to officials of the Okipa and other prominent men.
The Okipa lodge faced south, the direction Lone Man walked when he finally left the Mandan. The other inner lodges faced the ark but were slightly skewed off a direct view.
E
"Corn" East side moiety Growers (stay puts)

Moreover, teachers, social workers, health purveyors, government bureaucrats, and anyone working with American Indian people should read this book very thoughtfully because it contains much pertinent, although subtle, information about American Indian attitudes that need to be understood and accepted by non-Indians.

In recent years, many Indian people have turned to the old publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology to find answers to questions or for information they can use to revive ancient technologies. Many modern anthropologists have had the experience of having Indian people refer them to Bureau of American Ethnology publications for answers to questions about traditional culture. I expect that in much less time than the BAE publications took to find their way back to the tribes, *Native American Architecture* will become a standard reference.

Mary Jane Schneider
University of North Dakota

Linda Whitney Hobson, *Understanding Walker Percy*, Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1988, 203 pp., $19.95 hb, $7.95 pb.

Recently Matthew J. Bruccoli edited a collection of guides introducing important contemporary writers to both students and "good nonacademic readers" alike, "identifying and explicating [those writers'] material, themes, use of language, point of view, structures, symbolism, and responses to experience" (editor's preface). One of the volumes in this series is a companion to the fiction and, to an extent, the nonfiction of contemporary Southern writer Walker Percy.

The author of this particular study, Linda Whitney Hobson, must have approached her task of introducing Percy to the layperson with certain reservations, for as anyone familiar with his writing knows, Percy's thought is far-reaching and multifarious—hardly subject to encompassment in a work as relatively short as Hobson's. Indeed, she herself refers to Percy as "a writer with the hardest of messages to read and understand" (172). Despite her subject's complexity, however, Hobson shows competence in giving the uninitiated reader access to Percy's work. The book will ultimately help newcomers to his writing understand at least some of his depth.

Though in the end I find Hobson's study valuable, I say so with my own share of reservations, for her book has flaws. Its weaknesses, though, lie more in organization than in content, and Hobson over-

comes many of them with the quality of her information and an index which spans some eighteen pages and helps order the otherwise unsystematic parts of her work. Therefore, though *Understanding Walker Percy* could be improved, it remains a useful book.

The weaknesses of Hobson's book, as I see them, result chiefly from the fact that she assigns each novel a separate chapter, starting with *The Moviegoer* and progressing through the other five novels in the order they were written. (Incidentally, she frames these six chapters with an introduction about Percy's life and a conclusion addressing his place in American fiction.) An apparent advantage of this one book per chapter method of organization is that the reader of any single Percy novel can go straight to its respective chapter and find everything Hobson says about it. Hobson, however, refers to the various novels in chapters other than the ones assigned to them, often making quite valuable points such a narrow reading of her book would miss. For instance, in her chapter on *The Second Coming* she discusses the first book its main character appeared in, *The Last Gentleman*, to some extent. Likewise, she frequently refers to *Love in the Ruins* in her chapter on *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Therefore, this apparent advantage of her organization seems negligible.

One might also assume that approaching the novels in chronological order would have its benefits—that it might let us see Percy's development as a writer, for example—but Hobson doesn't capitalize on this opportunity. In fact, the chronological sequencing works against her—she would have been better off arranging the Percy novels by protagonist. That is, her book would flow more smoothly had she dealt with *The Second Coming* directly after *The Last Gentleman*, the first book in which Will Barrett appears. Similarly, she'd have profited from addressing the Tom More books—*Love in the Ruins* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*—in sequence. One can see her arrangement working against itself when her chapter on *The Last Gentleman* grows into a discussion of Barrett's later life as chronicled in *The Second Coming*. At this point Hobson stops abruptly, letting the discussion that flowed so naturally drop until three chapters later when her own book's scheme allows her to discuss the latter Percy novel.

It seems Hobson should have changed her book's structure radically. Not only should she have eliminated the chronological sequencing of Percy's novels, she should have used the seven topics Bruccoli mentions in his preface as her organizing principles, devoting one chapter to Percy's materials, another to his themes, one to his use of language, and so on. Within each of these chapters she could have dealt with each novel in turn, but I would suggest the arrangement by protagonist proposed above would sidestep the problems encountered with her

chronological organization.

Had she ordered her book around the points Bruccoli stresses, the reader would come away with less of a sense that Hobson "forces the mold" to fit her information to Bruccoli's specifications. At several points in her study where Hobson seems to realize her book has started to stray from her editor's description, she throws in a brief section on, say, Percy's use of language, as in her chapter on *Lancelot* where without warning she inserts a piece of Percy's "vivid description and imagery" (100). Or, for another example, in her chapter on *The Second Coming*, she adds a section on desert symbolism where it doesn't seem to belong (121). This information would have fit much better in a separate chapter on symbolism—probably close to the exposition of desert symbolism she includes in her chapter on *The Last Gentleman*. I don't mean to say that Hobson's information isn't accurate or important—it is, in these two instances and throughout the book. Indeed, the quality of her information is one of her strengths. I do mean to say, however, that her book would profit from a more intrinsic sense of organization.

At least as bothersome as this tendency to force her material to fit Bruccoli's mold is Hobson's failure to identify and explicate as much material as she might. Now in part this weakness isn't really her fault. As mentioned earlier, Percy's complexity is hardly encompassible. Had Hobson devoted a chapter to each of the seven areas stressed by her editor, however, it seems to me she would have been able both to cover more and to treat the novels with greater consistency than she does. Using the more structured organization I suggest, she would not, for example, have neglected discussing Percy's use of language in several of his novels, nor would she have failed mentioning point of view in any detail as it pertains to Percy's novels except *Lancelot* and *The Thanatos Syndrome*. Though the information she has struck me as excellent, the unevenness of her coverage of important parts of Percy's work disturbed me. Surely structuring her study differently could have improved it.

In addition to her main strength—the aforementioned quality of her information—Hobson shows a strong sense of audience, never forgetting she intends her book to be read by nonacademic readers as well as students, always stating her facts and opinions clearly, making complex points understandable. This strength is especially apparent in her discussions of Percy's philosophic background. For example, when discussing Kierkegaard, she introduces his thought with the assumption that her readers have no previous exposure to it. She keeps her discussion of philosophic points basic and defines key terms clearly. Indeed, her interpretations of the philosophy—as well as the religion—

behind Percy's works are another of Hobson's main strengths. With regard to religion, she demonstrates a good sense of who God is for Percy and his characters (for instance, in her discussion of *The Second Coming*, 125-26), and she explicates nicely the tension between Christianity and Stoicism so important in Percy's works and his own life. In these surveys of Percy's religion and philosophy, as elsewhere, Hobson demonstrates a solidity of opinion and a sharpness of insight that can't help but impress. Rarely did I find her speculations questionable; occasionally I found them fresh. She showed me new ways to see some of Percy's symbols, his minor characters, and his debts to such writers as Twain, Melville, and Swift.

Though a flawed work, there is much good information in *Understanding Walker Percy*. While her original contributions to the body of knowledge about Percy are not numerous here, making such contributions wasn't her main intention. She intended to make Percy accessible to the layperson and to help all readers of his works understand them better. This she certainly does. Hobson's book could be surpassed by another introductory work, but currently hers is the only guide available for Percy novices. Should another Percy scholar write a similar but more thorough work, the usefulness of Hobson's book might diminish. For now, though, it serves its purpose—to introduce newcomers to Walker Percy and, at least in some cases, to encourage those new readers to continue reading the author's works.

Anne Sternal
St. Paul, Minnesota

J. Allan Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988, xvi + 319 pp., $22.95 hb.

"So," begins your gentle-voiced analyst, "tell me about the dreams you had last night."

At this point, if you've been edified by J. Allan Hobson's new book on dreaming, you'll leap from the hypnagogic state and, one hand on your wallet, flee the good doctor's office. For, maintains Harvard's Hobson, a psychiatrist and neuroscientist, dream theory from the Old Testament Joseph of lean-and-fat-kine fame right on down through the centuries to Freud and most present-day practitioners is hogwash—at least largely hogwash.

Let's look at some of the old wives' tales that the professor demolishes. Previously, a handful of us strutted about, proud that we dreamed in color, while most of humanity had to make do with black and white. To the contrary, everyone has chromatic night visions. It's only because we have poor recall upon waking that our dreams fade to less than Technicolor quality. And some of us, so we think, are particularly blessed by rich dreaming while the less imaginative suffer a dearth of sleeping night life. Wrong again. We all dream regularly and predictably, every night, usually for periods as long as an hour at a time. Again, it's our failure to remember that accounts for the popular misconception.

But how about our rampant dreaming after we've gorged on pickles and hot-sauce-laden tacos? Why, when we lie tossing in Kuala Lumpur after a seventeen-hour flight do we dream like nobody's business? In truth, we don't. Rather, because our sleep cycle is disturbed by too much food or travel, we wake more often than normally. Hence we have more opportunity to review the events on the nightly stage.

All this, however, is fairly small fry for Hobson, who, through years of research in the sleep laboratory, feels he's latched onto the Big Answer about the nature of dreams. On his method of presenting it, however, I, an impatient man when it comes to revelations of truth, find fault. Hobson spends the first half of his study on a chronological excursion, detailing the blind and successful alleys that dream scientists have scurried up over the ages. Certainly, many readers will appreciate the finely ground history here, for instance, the contributions of the nineteenth-century's Hermann von Helmholtz, whose invention of the ophthalmoscope allowed us to peer through the eye into the brain. Or of this century's Santiago Ramón y Cajal, whose labors over a microscope in Spain made him the father of modern neurobiology. Yet I'd prefer to get the Big Picture first and let the ancillaries trail after.

Nevertheless, Hobson's scheme does allow him to assemble a meticulous case, to define targets that he will later vaporize when his big guns finally come into play. The foremost target, of course, is Sigmund Freud. He held that we're all bags of repressed urges. At night while our conscious mind sleeps and is, in effect, off guard, these rise to the surface and have their flings on the nightly playground. They, however, romp in disguise, dressed in the often fantastic content of our dreams. Otherwise, shocked at their appearance, we'd wake and end their game. Dreams, then, are not only the "guardian of sleep," to use Freud's term, but the key to what troubles our waking lives.

Hobson lances the Viennese psychiatrist for a poor science based on anecdote and offering "no systematic evidence." Opposing Freud's "speculative philosophy," Hobson advances anatomically, studying the

physical structure of the brain.

To short-circuit the author's carefully built argument, what this comes down to is that our brains have a life of their own. They're always thinking, sorting things out, and especially at night they're throwing useless tidbits we picked up through the day overboard, while assembling useful information to prepare us for the morrow. So even as we sleep, our head is a "chatterbox" as all this processing of chaos goes on. Still, our dreams often have the nature of stories, with plot and character development, vivid scenes, and the like. What about that? That's due, again, to the innate structure of the brain, which has a natural bent to impose "a narrative-scenario" on arbitrary material—an observation that should reverberate both through the sciences and the humanities. For apparently, in our sleep we're all short-story writers.

What to do about our new insights on dreams Hobson isn't entirely sure. The theory is so new that the neuroscientist warns us to be "constantly cautious lest we make unjustified and overly ambitious leaps from the still inadequate information. . . to the domain of psychology." Still, he remains confident that his activation-synthesis hypothesis, as he calls it, at last has put dream science on the right track. He offers some alternatives to Freud in interpreting our own dreams and lastly praises the brain for its "autocreative" abilities. They may, if nothing else, have a "sybaritic" function, entertaining us with "home movies" as we wile our nights away.

Gary Paul Nabhan, *Enduring Seeds: Native American Agriculture and Wild Plant Conservation*, San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989. Pp. 225, $18.95, hb.

The inquisitive scientist has brought his three-year-old daughter along to help him investigate a dry irrigation ditch just beyond the runway of the Phoenix international airport. It was a poor decision. When an airliner lifts off over their heads, the girl comes screaming toward him, hands over her ears, horrified by the monster's noise. The jet backblasts the nearby saltbushes as the child sobs in her father's arms.

Given the situation, we might expect the author to pull the throttle out to the stops, to stand there as his weeping daughter clings, shaking his fist at the technological behemoth and in the bargain cursing the whole, mindless, computer-guided, plastic-and-aluminum madness that rules our lives, robs us of individuality, and makes little girls cry. But

the role of Jeremiah is not Gary Nabhan's way. Instead, he comments that fish the size of his crying daughter once swam where they stand, in the long-abandoned canal dug by prehistoric Hohokam Indians. The agricultural people once farmed the desert of southern Arizona with such lush success that the variety of their crops outstripped the limited number of species now produced in the valley. This despite the help of bulldozers, tractors, petrochemical fertilizers, insecticides, and all other manner of modern straining. Today, that great, edible fish has vanished from the streams once meandering through the area, streams now dried up because the frenetic pumping of water for modern agriculture has all but destroyed the valley's water table.

So as to literary technique, Nabhan has the grace not to bludgeon us with the obvious. Rather, good teacher that he is, he teaches by allowing us to follow implications to our own conclusions. In the case of *Enduring Seeds*, this involves the author's hope that by reintroducing fast-fading Native American plants and agricultural methods we might not only improve our diets but enjoy kindlier relationships with the earth.

This might seem preposterous, the airy dream of a luftmensch. After all, our supermarkets, the envy of the world, overflow with food, much of it reasonably priced. But in light of the long-term costs, we may be living in a fool's paradise. Most of our food is produced on factory farms, massive operations churning out single crops. Yet in many cases the highly developed strains of plants aren't as nutritious as the ancient varieties from which they're descended. They lack the resistance to disease and insects of their wilder relatives. And, grown in monocultures, in huge fields devoted to one crop, they offer romping grounds for pests and pathogens. This hedgerow-to-hedgerow mentality requires ever larger doses of insecticides to stave off disaster. In other words, factory farms are based on technological fixes against nature that are not as victorious in the long run as we'd like to boast, witness frequent alarms over chemically-tainted foods and plummeting water tables in much of America's breadbasket.

Yet *Enduring Seeds* charms as well as informs because Nabhan teaches not by railing polemics but by gentle example. He takes us from North Dakota to Florida to Mexico, showing how a few traditional people still cling to the old farming methods. This involves not simply doing things the way grandfather did but a holistic view of one's entire life—surely not a statement applying to our dominant corporate agriculture whose sole raison d'être is profit.

Contrast such narrowness with a Hopi Indian of northern Arizona who tends his hardy, native corn through a droughty summer. Nearby grows a rare variety of sunflower that occasionally creeps into his field.

Why not do the efficient thing and root out the invaders? asks Nabhan. "The place is really named after those sunflowers, so that's why I leave them there," replies the Hopi.

But there's more. For certain religious ceremonies, Hopi maidens gather the sunflower petals, grind them, and powder their faces with the flower's dust until their faces shine like gold.

Tell that to a corporate farm manager when he hears of a sunflower invasion in his fields.

Peter Wild
University of Arizona

Duane Niatum, ed., *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988. Pp. xxxii + 396, $15.95 pb.

By their very nature, anthologies put the mock to etymology. The word literally meant "flower gathering" and was first used to name collections of Greek epigrams before it then was used more generally to name a collection of "flowers of literature," the prettiest and best one could gather, usually unified around a central theme such as love. Now they have proliferated like dandelions in the groves of academe, de rigueur in humanities classes and common in the social sciences too. Pedagogically they are practical solutions to representing works in a broad field; for both students and professors they set limits not only in the quantity of what can be studied within the somewhat arbitrarily set limits of the school term, but also in the amount of money needed to represent the subject fairly. They are the publishing equivalent of Gresham's law: The anthology is "equal" to whatever its announced subject is, whether one author's work or an omnibus like "American literature 1620-1865" in which the weighty anthology provides more pages than will surely ever be read to students who will likely never buy an actual book by any of the authors included.

Some anthologies, nonetheless, are dear to me. Although I have only a passing knowledge of "World Poetry," I have owned and read Hubert Creekmore's *A Little Treasury of World Poetry* for many years. Its latest service was in the long slow-moving election-night line of 1980 when the news media had already declared Ronald Reagan the winner over Jimmy Carter, and I was dutifully waiting to cast my votes for

a series of Hobson's choices.

And yet, anthologies spring up, dragon's teeth, like this new one assembled by Duane Niatum, himself a Native American poet unabashedly including his own work, and in his preface clearly stating his purposes and apologizing for the inevitable limitations. (If we could—does he not suggest?—we would give you an entire library of Native American poetry.) Limitations are, indeed, an issue, whether they are of inclusions or exclusions. But better to err on the side of including too many poets and too many poems. Here there are thirty-six poets representing some thirty different tribes. Geographically widespread, the poets in point of time are virtually all contemporary and still very productive. Most will be familiar to students of American Indian literature, but the works of many are not easily available. For all the seeming concern about including minorities and women in our school anthologies, Native American writers are poorly represented. Yet, as Brian Swann also notes in his introduction, they are a vigorous, productive group, writing much good work out of all proportion to their peoples' modest numbers. Like other culturally threatened groups, American Indians have responded by appropriating the colonizer's language and turning it to their own cultural uses and concerns.

Thus, this book succeeds as an important cultural document apart from its fate as an anthology. We may expect that as these poets and their successors continue to write that their work will soon demand either a replacement or continuing extension of this collection. That is, it is not and cannot be an enshrinement of a Native American poetic canon. It is merely the best single-volume collection of at least all the best recognized and many of the able but less well known contemporary American Indian poets. It also well recognizes Indian women writers, nearly half of those included being women.

The introduction by Brian Swann is a useful addition that provides a historical context for the poetry and a characterization of it. Important to the latter description are warnings about stereotypes. Swann quotes Wendy Rose (a poet included in the collection): "There is no *genre* of Indian literature because we are all different. There is only literature written by people who are Indian..." and who thus, like Armenians and Zambians, Anglos and Afros, write out of their identities. The critical political difference, however, lies in the fact that these writers are native to *this* land, Turtle Island, and we would no more pretend to an understanding of Armenia or Zambia in ignorance of its peoples' literatures (written or oral) than we would pretend to an understanding of this *land.*

I believe in that idea (just put) theoretically at least, and practically I recognize that many of these poems do not individually help me to

understand the experiences and places we share, here. Some of these writers indeed are reluctant to be "collected" as *Indian* writers, not wanting the implied reservation but wanting to be, first of all, simply writers and to be judged on that basis alone. But until publishers and teachers "abandon their tokenism and parochialism" (Swann), we will need books like this one and courses in American Indian literature and other aspects of native culture.

Swann also points out the cultural dangers of much of Anglo-America's ahistoricity. Henry Ford said, "History is bunk," and one might add for too many Americans geography is bunk, too. One would not want to stereotype American Indian literature as being holistically tied to the land and its past, nor are the themes that Swann notes as recurrent always or even mainly inherent in the work. But Niatum's list of these "common concerns" of tribal people in his preface are a fair beginning, and they include "kinship, Nature, art as a part of tribal religion, and cultural survival and rebirth." I think most if not all of the authors included here have some degree of identity and voice as "tribal people" in this general way. After all, they come from widely different tribes with varying degrees of acculturation to Anglo-America, that strange chimerical beast.

Patterns of Life, Patterns of Art: The Rahr Collection of Native American Art. Preface by Jacquelynn Baas, "Traditional Native American Art of the Plains and Northern Woodlands" by Barbara A. Hail, and "Catalogue of the Guido R. Rahr, Sr., Collection" by Gregory C. Schwarz. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987, 80 pp., $17.95 pb, $30 hb.

The heart of this handsomely printed book is the 32 color plates that depict a portion of the 182 items in the Rahr collection of the Hood Museum of Art at Darmouth College. The articles of Native American clothing, the baby carriers, and the various functional containers such as medicine and pipe bags were all carefully decorated with beadwork, furs, shells, quillwork, leather, and cloth in consummate floral and geometric designs. The plates were carefully made, and one of my favorites of the four lovely bandolier bags also graces the cover of the paperback edition.

The preface explains how the collection and the book of it were made. (Guido Rahr was a Wisconsin businessman, conservationist, and student of Native American art.) The essay by Barbara Hail places the art in its social and cultural contexts from an anthropological point of view. Although her subject is complex, her description of it is well

written and nicely organized. In "The Nature of Traditional Art" she introduces the importance of "the triad of sacredness, beauty, and harmony or appropriateness to intended use" as the guiding principles of the very slowly changing art of the pre-Euro-American period and the transition period of 1870-1940 (the reservation period). In recent years, art has again emerged on many reservations and in other Native American communities, in part as a response to economic need, in part as a revitalization of entire cultures.

Moreso than in the Euro-American culture, art was and continues to be central to Native American culture. Whereas, typically (and unfortunately), art in Euro-American culture tends to be marginal, decorative, and non-functional, an indulgence of leisure time and excess capital, art for Native Americans was and in some instances remains functional, inherent in and basic to one's day-to-day life. It might be sacred art inspired by a vision or a historical record of an individual's or tribe's history. And both men and women would incorporate images from visions or dreams in their art.

But apart from such meaningful art, utilitarian objects were decorated in order to make them beautiful. The regard for a baby, for instance, would be reflected in the regard the craftswoman or craftsman bestowed on the cradle board swaddling the infant in soft buckskin ornamented by painstaking beadwork. Perhaps the aesthetic end of the art, apart from the beauty of materials and design, was to suggest the total harmony of the culture in which even everyday objects reflected grace and unity.

The "Catalogue..." lists and describes all of the collection (of which the plates represent only a fraction). Many of the items include useful historical information. All in all, as an introduction to Plains and Northern Woodlands Indian art (as well as a description of this particular collection), *Patterns of Life, Patterns of Art* is a fine book.

Robert W. Lewis
Editor

Editor's Notes

In 1992 *NDQ* will help celebrate the quincentenary of Columbus' first voyage to Turtle Island (a Native American name for North America). No doubt there will be many special publications that year, but *NDQ* plans to commemorate 1492 by featuring articles, essays, poems, stories, reviews, and visual art that interpret or respond to Columbus' voyage from perspectives that are not European but native to the worlds he found. We ask that writers eschew words like *discovery* and *New World* to characterize the explorations, for they are ethnocentric and tend to deny or at least conceal the historical truth of the native cultures that were thriving on Turtle Island in 1492. Contirubtions need not be directly about Columbus and his world nor even allude to them, but all contributions should in some measure celebrate the world of Turtle Island as it once was, or as it has become, or as it may be.

"Turtle Island—the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millenia, and reapplied by some of them to 'North America' in recent years. Also, an idea found world-wide, of the earth, or cosmos even, sustained by a great turtle or serpent-of-eternity.

"A name: that we may see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities—plant zones, physiographic provinces, culture areas; following natural boundaries. The 'U.S.A.' and its states and counties are arbitrary and inaccurate impositions on what is really here...." From the "Introductory Note" to Gary Snyder's collection of poems, *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974).

In 1980, list-makers Irving Wallace, David Wallechinsky, and Amy Wallace "asked then-candidate Ronald Reagan for a list of people whose lives he would have liked to have lived." His list included Adam, Hernando Cortes, Balboa, Lewis and (or?) Clark, Father Junipero Serra (who forcibly converted California Indians), "And any of those men who first crossed the plains in the opening of the west. In other words, I'm fascinated by those who saw this new world when it was virtually untouched by man."

Some Peoples' touches are lighter than others.

NDQ is preparing an issue on nature and ecological writing. It will be devoted to essays on writers and not examples of such writing, though such writing by those still unheralded may be included. Although the editors are soliciting manuscripts directly, they welcome inquiries from those who may be interested in submitting essays or short pieces of nature-ecological writing. The closing date is June 30, 1990. Guest co-editors are Sherman Paul, 3735 Morningside Lane SE, Bemidji, MN 56601 and Don Scheese, 5660 Ocean View Drive, Oakland, CA 94618. Inquiries may be directed to them or to *NDQ* directly.

The summer issue will contain a special section of seven articles on The Colonial Mind from writers in the fields of literature, anthropology, history, and language. These papers were first given as part of a symposium on The Colonial Mind at the Monterey Institute, California.

North Dakota Place Names has been published by Hedemarken Collectibles (P. O. Box 7399, Northbrook Station, Bismarck, ND 58502).

Casper College invites applications for the sixth annual lecture in the Margaret Demorest Lectures in the Humanities to be held in Casper, Wyoming, in January, 1991. The honorarium is $1,000. The focus of the 1991 series will be language. The Demorest Lecturer will present a keynote speech around which Casper College will organize a two-day humanities festival. By January 31, 1990, applicants should submit vita, 500-word proposal, sample bibliography, and three references to Shirley Jacob, Chairperson, The Margaret Demerest Lecture Series, Casper College, 125 College Drive, Casper, WY 82601.

Contributors

Katharyn Machan Aal teaches on the faculty of the Writing Program of Ithaca College. Her poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies, and she is the author of thirteen published collections of poems, the most recent of which are *When She Was the Good-Time Girl* (1986 winner of The Signpost Press annual competition) and *From Redwing* (Foothills Publishing, 1988).

John G. Adams, retired Washington, D.C., lawyer and a former high government official, has published other memoirs relating to the depression years in South Dakota and World War II in earlier editions of *NDQ*. He is also the author of *Without Precedent: The Story of the Death of McCarthyism*, based largely on his own experiences.

Jeffrey Bartlett lives in Berkeley, California, and is the author of a book-length manuscript on the Beat writers and America since 1950.

Christopher Cokinos is Associate Editor of *Research & Creativy Activity* at Indiana University. He was a Working Scholar at Bread Loaf in 1988. He has poetry recent and forthcoming in *The Midwest Quarterly* and *Witness*.

Andrew Dillon teaches Shakespeare, Milton, and creative writing courses at Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida. He has poems forthcoming from *Manhattan Poetry Review*, *Descant*, and *Kansas Quarterly*.

Lester Faigley is a mountaineer, kayaker, and photographer who teaches linguistics at the University of Texas, Austin. His publications include a monograph on the teaching of composition.

David Galef teaches at Columbia University. His fiction has appeared in the British *Punch*, the Canadian *Prism International* and *Writ*, *Portland Review*, *Confrontation*, *Shenandoah*, and a variety of other journals. He's also published non-fiction in *The New York Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Newsday*, *Self*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

Arnold Krupat is Director of the American Studies Program at Sarah Lawrence College. He has published articles in *Critical Inquiry*,

Diacritics, *The Georgia Review*, and other journals. In addition to the collections co-edited with Brian Swann, his books are *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography*, and the forthcoming *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*.

Catherine Diane Mellet's short stories have appeared or will appear shortly in *Apalachee Quarterly*, *Backspace*, *Confrontation*, and *Sinister Wisdom*. She is a Yaddo fellow and in 1986 was awarded a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship for fiction. She is currently at work on a novel.

Glen E. Rodgers, associate professor of chemistry at Allegheny College, has research interests in synthetic inorganic chemistry and chemical education. He is currently preparing an introduction to coordination, solid state, and descriptive inorganic chemistry to be published by McGraw-Hill. He and Professor Zolbrod have taught a course entitled "Images of Creation in Science and Poetry" for the past eight years.

Dusty Sklar is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Ascent*, and *Kansas Quarterly*. She is also the author of *Gods and Beasts: The Nazis and the Occult*.

Mary Slowik teaches literature at the Pacific Northwest College of Art in Portland, Oregon. Magic realism and Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* occupy some of her current research.

Brian Swann is Professor of English at The Cooper Union and Director of the Bennington Writing Workshops. In addition to the books edited with Arnold Krupat, he has edited *Smoothing the Ground: Essays on Native American Oral Literature*. His books include *The Middle of the Journey* (poetry), *The Plot of the Mice* (fiction), and *Collected Poems of Primo Levi* (co-translated with Ruth Feldman).

Jeffrey A. Triggs is a poet living in New Jersey who writes about modern poetry and film.

Besides writing fiction, **Max Westbrook** has published poetry and critical books, articles, and reviews on American literature. He has taught and held administrative positions at the University of Texas, Austin.

Paul G. Zolbrod, professor of English at Allegheny College, has written extensively about traditional Native American poetry as well as on medieval and Renaissance literature. His latest book is *Dine Bahanné: The Navajo Creation Story*, University of New Mexico Press, 1985.

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NWR 5



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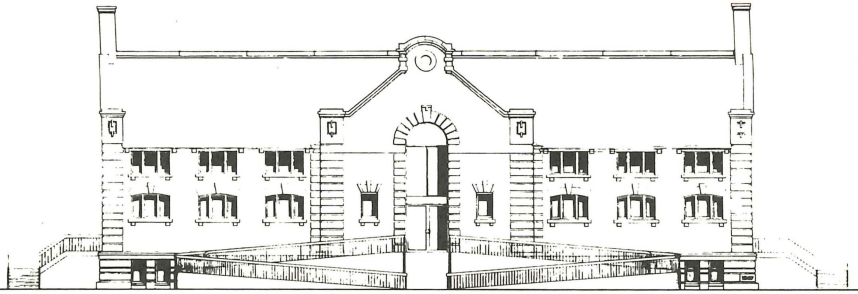

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