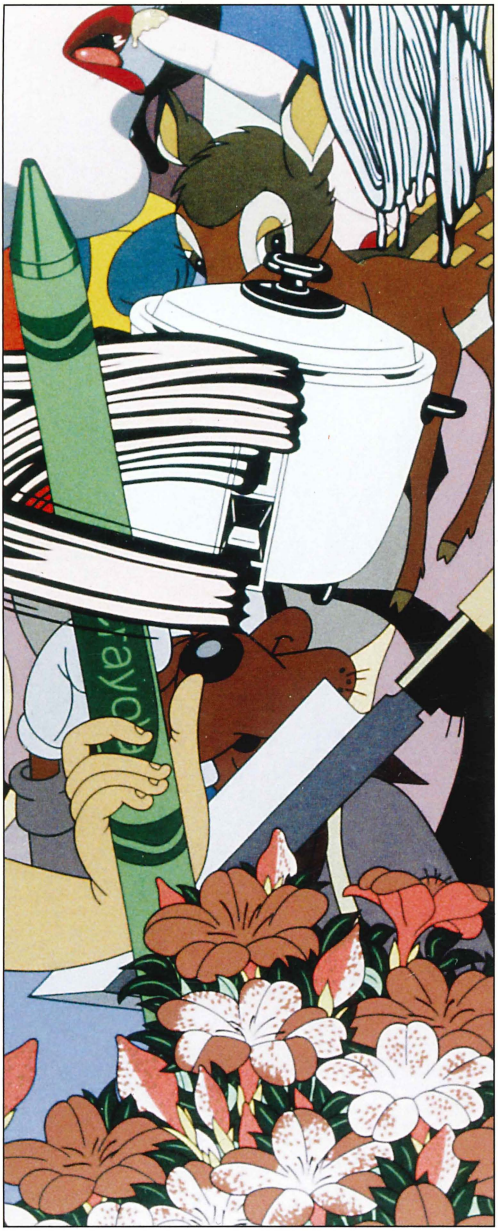

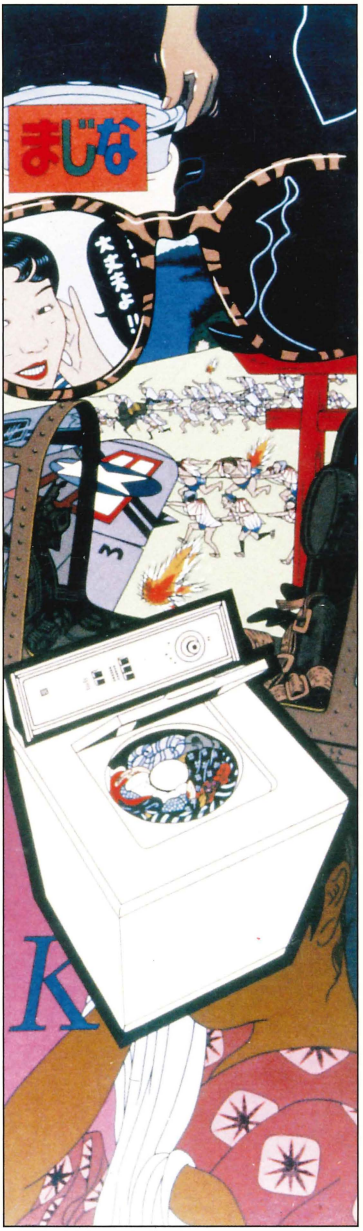

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ON THE COVER

Roger Shimomura's untitled arcylic paintings are 84" x 84" (1988), right, and 60" x 24" (1986), left. He retired as professor of art at the University of Kansas and lives in Lawrence, Kansas. He uses painting to explore the relationships and contrasts between Japanese and American cultures. A major theme is the discrimination experienced in the U.S. by Shimomura (a third-generation American) and other Japanese- and Asian-Americans.

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Reviews

Acknowledgements

The originals of Luis Miguel Aguilar's poems appeared in *Todo lo que sé,* a book of new and selected poems, Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1990.

The selection by Nichita Danilov is from *Maşa şi extraterestrul,* Bucharest, Romania: Editura Polirom, 2005.

Geneviève Huttin's poems published here originally appeared in French in her book *L'histoire de ma voix,* Tours, France: Editions Farrago, 2004.

Paola Masino's "Intimate Hour" is copyright Alvise Memmo, 1989.

Marina Mayoral's "In Parks at Dusk" ("En los parques, al anochecer") is from *Recuerda, cuerpo*, Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998.

Malin Schwerdtfeger's "My First Eight Thousand Climb" is from *Leichte Mädchen: Erzãhungen*, Verlag Kiepenheuer and Witsch, Köln, 2001.

The selections by Rudolfo Wolf are from his book *Batallas de una guerra perdida*, Montevideo, Uruguay: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 2005.

MICHAEL BEARD

Introduction

Writing is famously a solitary business, but we could argue that translation has a built-in sense of community. Sometimes, if for instance we are readers of *Two Lines* from San Francisco or *Circumference* from New York who print the original text across from the translation, even the appearance of the texts on the page looks crowded. When we're dealing with translations the personnel is a larger list too. The list of contributors in a periodical full of translations will invariably be two or three times as long as usual—original writer, translator, sometimes multiple translators. A collection like this is inevitably a bigger party.

What strikes me reading the translations assembled in this issue of *North Dakota Quarterly* is an additional kind of variety, the variety of styles which has evoked from every translator a different kind of resourcefulness. Even in a collection of translations from European languages the differences are remarkable. John DuVal's translation of Henri Joutel's account of the New World in 1687 portrays for a contemporary reader a practical and business-like non-literary text which over the years has become such a fascinating glimpse of otherwise invisible historical moments that it feels, in a clear and unornamented English, oddly literary. (It even conveys a kind of suspense peculiar to a non-literary text because there are no generic expectations to tell us, say, that M. de la Salle and his nephew will die—and they die so suddenly we are reminded of the ways mortality strikes in real life, independent of narrative logic.) At the other end of the stylistic scale we have Richard Wilbur's adventurous rendition of a mannered text difficult for its literary self-consciousness. Wilbur has always taken on the most difficult texts, and I suspect his translations of Racine and Molière into English heroic couplets are among the most frequently taught translations in our anthologies. With the passages in this issue from Corneille's *Le Menteur* (1643) we experience a whole other level of difficulty. To describe virginity as a doubtful virtue is one thing; to do so in the form of a maxim, in which it is both a *nom glorieux* and a source of *honte*, raises the stakes:

C'est un nom glorieux qui se garde avec honte;
Ca défaite est fâcheuse à moins que d'être prompte.

It still sounds like a proverb in Wilbur's English version:

Theirs is a title which, if kept, brings shame;
The timely loss of it must be their aim.

And in between the spareness of a diary and the complexity of mannerist verse we have a full spectrum of possibilities—poems, short stories. We even get to see how Herakles died in Sophokles' account. And all of our translations link us with other dialogues, some still contentious. Even the minimal verse forms of public inscriptions find their place in this list, such as Michael Wolfe's version of a famous Greek epitaph

My name is Dionysius of Tarsus.
I was sixty when I died. I never married.
I wish my father hadn't married either. (7.309)

It wouldn't surprise me to learn that Wolfe had in mind those famous translations by Dudley Fitts which were for such a long time taken as state of the art for translations from the classics.

At sixty I, Dionysios of Tarsos, lie here,
Never having married: and I wish my father had not.
—Trans. Dudley Fitts, Poems from *The Greek Anthology* (New York: New Directions, 1956 [1938], 70)

Since Lawrence Venuti's discussion of Fitts in *The Translator's Invisibility* (Routledge 1995) there has been a debate over the definitions of accuracy and equivalence which could continue in our pages. Meanwhile Corneille may have the last word on translation earlier in the same speech we quoted above: *Et ne suis pas d'humeur à mourir de constance*—which still sounds like a maxim in Wilbur's English transfer:

And I don't aim to die of constancy.

Adnan Haydar and Michael Beard edit a series of translations of writing from the Middle East for Syracuse University Press. Although research about another culture is very useful, Beard has said,

. . . a translation brings you closer to hearing the voice of the other culture. Reading the textbook or any book of scholarship has real value, but that's somebody from our culture describing it from outside. The moment you are reading a poem or a story, you are reading a voice from inside that culture. There is some importance in translation that the other modes of vision of another culture don't offer. Translation gives a direct perception.

DONALD JUNKINS

The Language of Translation

William Arrowsmith's bold essay on translation in which he amplifies the imaginative opportunities of the translator with the generic phrase, "loyal improvisation," sets the tone for and continually refocuses the ongoing discussion about translation.[1] It also rightly centers language itself and the nature of equivalency, not exactitude. The question, "How close is close?" will always be with the translator, and editors will forever be forced to choose between "translations" that range between levels of accuracy and displays of language facility that approach "equivalencies" in performance. The foremost question that critics face in evaluating "poetic" translation (drama and poetry) is not accuracy per se, because the translated piece must achieve some heightened level of language that qualifies it for critical "consideration," but levels of accuracies. The given in the discussion is accuracy itself, and the target is not a large one. How close to the bull's eye is close? The rest of the discussion ranges between the polar considerations that all competent translators face—accuracy and secondary language overtones generated by whatever is meant by richness and the generation of meanings.

The gifted translator of drama and poetry is usually a gifted poet, but not always, and no delimiting qualifications hold true in all attempts. William Arrowsmith's translations of the Greek dramatists and of Cesare Pavese's poems are the best examples I know of to settle the point.

Accuracy takes the critical evaluator to the edge of the cliff, but for the leap outward, the flying equipment has everything to do with language itself and "how," to use John Ciardi's word, it means.[2]

Notes

[1]William Arrowsmith, "The Lively Conventions of Translation" in *The Craft and Content of Translation*, ed. William Arrowsmith and Rogert Shattuck. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1964, p. 188.

[2]John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.

ELIZABETH HARRIS BEHLING

On Translating Fiction

If you ran into a group of literary translators, probably drinking heavily at some bar, the conversation might well turn to translators not being understood, not getting the recognition they deserve. For translators of fiction, this is especially the case. A translator of poetry—if she's any good—has written a new poem in English. But seldom do I read of a fiction translator getting any more recognition than "the translation read smoothly." I've been chewing this over for quite some time: what does it really take to translate a piece of fiction and to do it well? Certainly it's not a matter of finding equivalent words between languages: as John Ciardi pointed out, the word "apple" in English simply isn't equivalent to the word "mela" in Italian: it fits differently in the mouth and has a different impact on the page. No, translating fiction is hardly a matter of finding equivalencies, for words often don't carry over from one language to another and neither does syntax. But what does carry over? What I've been thinking of for quite some time is that in translating fiction, what the translator is doing is translating character and therefore translating narrative voice. To do that, and to do it well, you have to be a writer yourself, someone able to invent, someone really capable of considering the question, "What would the author have written if her first language were English?" The real work of the translator of fiction, like the translator of poetry, is interpretation, and as such, the translated work is no longer the work of the original author; it is the work of two writers, and the second writer, the translator, deserves attention and credit, not simply for bringing a work from one language to another, but for creating a new work of art, a work in English, but a new sort of English, entirely pervaded by the language and sensibility of the original author. In this way, as has been attributed to Goethe, the translator is the voice within the voice of another.

PIERRE CORNEILLE

The Liar

Pierre Corneille wrote The Liar*—a free adaptation of a Spanish play by Alarcón—during the winter of 1643-44, and it was then performed at the Marais with the famous comedian Jodelet in the role of Cliton. It was a hit, and we are told that Parisian ladies, charmed by Dorante's imagined banquet-on-the-water in Act I, clamored for real entertainments based upon "la fête du* Menteur.*" The verve and inventiveness of the play have continued to delight audiences ever since.*

It is a dishonorable thing to tell a lie, and the point is vigorously made by Dorante's friend Alcippe, who lays it down that "Deceit was never taught in valor's school," as well as by Géronte, Dorante's father, in his furious reproaches of Act VI. Corneille himself said that Dorante's fictions "are certainly not good from a moral point of view." And it is not only for mendacity that Dorante might be faulted; one cannot admire, for instance, his callow disrespect for a patient and loving father. Nevertheless the audience of this play, or its reader, does not anticipate some sort of punishment or bitter comeuppance for the hero. The Liar *is not experienced as a moral fable; it is animated by something else.*

In the very first speech of the play, Dorante declares that he has "doffed the Robe and donned the Sword," and asks his valet Cliton whether his appearance as a dashing cavalier is convincing. Cliton reassures him and goes on to describe Paris as a city in which each newcomer is free to invent himself—a city, as Géronte later says, in which "metamorphoses are everywhere." From the beginning, The Liar *projects, not only in Dorante but in its whole atmosphere and action, a baroque sense of the world's duplicity, a dazzling texture of appearance and reality. One finds this theme in Alcippe's blind mistakenness and Cliton's repeated deception; in Clarice's speech (II, 2) about the difficulty of divining a suitor's true nature; in Clarice's twilight impersonation of Lucrèce, in which Lucrèce abets her; in the calculating demureness of Sabine; in Géronte's urgent belief in the fictitious Orphise and Armédon. Of being and seeming, truth and falsehood, there is no end in this play. By Act III,*

the texture of true-and-false has grown so dense that Clarice can say of Dorante that "He makes a fib sound honest and naïve, / So that one's almost tempted to believe." Later in the same act, that ambiguity is inverted: Dorante is distressed that his "honest passion" has not been believed, and cries, "I told the truth." To which Cliton replies, "Yes, but a liar said it, / And coming from your lips it lost all credit."

However wrong it is to speak falsely, critics have pointed out that Dorante's lies are not base or mean; most of them are intended, as Isabelle says, to show the liar as "Not what he is, but what he'd like to be"—a famous soldier, a gallant and generous ladies' man, a speaker of ten languages, and so on. Dorante's invention of a forced marriage to "Orphise" is mitigated, so Corneille said, by the fact that his motive is love. In any case, the fact is that we listen to Dorante's fibs and fantasies with shock but also with pleasure, enjoying his quickness of mind and inventive amplitude, and hearing in his bold speeches something not wholly unlike the heroic vaunts of Corneille's tragic heroes.

In another baroque comedy of Corneille's, L'Illusion comique *(1637), there is a boastful soldier named Matamore whose conversation consists entirely of whopping lies regarding his prowess and his conquests. Matamore is delightful, yet since no one in the play ever believes him, he has little impact on the plot. The lies of Dorante, however, do have consequences, and they, together with his confusion between Lucrèce and Clarice, initiate a comedy of intrigue which builds to a crisis of bewilderment in V, 6. The next and final scene settles everything in a blithe, conventional, and slightly bittersweet manner, marrying everyone off in spite of doubts and reservations.*

In proportion to his presence on stage, we do not understand a great deal about Dorante; Clarice and Lucrèce are not analyzed in depth; Géronte is to some extent a stock figure; it may be that Cliton—cynical, witty, worldly-wise, and annoyed at being taken in—is the most fully developed character in The Liar. *Yet one can easily understand the younger Molière's reported admiration for the play, and one can see how it may have pointed the way to those great comedies of character in which Molière studies the impact of a quirky central figure on those around him. Certainly the fifth act of Molière's* Don Juan, *in which Don Luis berates his degenerate son, is much indebted to Géronte's upbraidings of Dorante.*

But The Liar *is in itself a marvel, and need not be enhanced by claims for its influence. I hope that my translation has done it justice, and I thank my wife for patiently reading it as it came.*

—Richard Wilbur

Cast

Géronte, father of Dorante
Dorante, Géronte's son
Alcippe, friend of Dorante, suitor of Clarice
Philiste, friend of Alcippe and Dorante
Clarice, a young woman courted by Alcippe
Lucrèce, a young woman, friend of Clarice
Isabelle, Clarice's maid
Sabine, Lucrèce's maid
Cliton, Dorante's valet
Lycas, Alcippe's valet

Summary of Act I

Dorante, a young man who has been studying law in Poitiers, is freshly arrived in Paris, and we find him with his newly acquired valet Cliton in the gardens of the Tuileries. Two young ladies, Clarice and Lucrèce her cousin, pass by. Clarice chances to stumble, and Dorante, coming to her aid, takes possession of her hand. He proceeds at once to flirt with her, telling her of his (quite imaginary) exploits in war, and claiming with equal untruth to have worshiped her from afar for a year. On the basis of some remarks of Cliton's, Dorante gains the impression that the object of his flatteries is named Lucrèce, and this makes for confusions which are not resolved until the final act. Two old friends of Dorante's now appear —Alcippe, who is the suitor of Clarice, and Philiste. Alcippe is distressed by reports that the night before some rival may have given Clarice a sumptuous banquet upon the river; Dorante, unaware of Alcippe's anxieties and of his relationship to Clarice, takes the opportunity to fantasize and claims that *he* was the giver of the elaborate entertainment in question. This will lead to an aborted duel in the third act. At the close of Act I, Dorante discourses to Cliton upon the science and advantages of lying.

Act II

Scene 1

Clarice That he's a son of yours, Sir, is no mean
Attraction, yet to wed him sight unseen,
Though you assure me he's extraordinary,
Would show a strange anxiety to marry.
What's more, were he to call upon me, and
Be welcomed as a suitor for my hand,
Before your plan gave signs of working out,
'Twould give the world too much to talk about.

Pray find some way for me to see your son
In which no risk of scandal will be run.

Géronte Clarice, you are both beautiful and wise,
And I shall gladly do as you advise.
Bowing in this to your authority,
I'll soon return, and bring Dorante with me.
Beneath your window I'll detain him so
That you can look him over, high and low.
Study his form, his face, his bearing too,
And judge what kind of spouse I offer you.
He's fresh from Poitiers, but I think that you'll
Agree that he's not redolent of School.
Young scholar that he is, he likes to sport
Clothes as well-cut as anyone's at Court.
But judge him, too, by the decent life he's led.
He's my only son; I long to see him wed,
And dearly hope that you will be his bride.

Clarice By that sweet wish I'm deeply gratified.
I'm eager for a better knowledge of him,
And even now your words have made me love him.

Scene 2

Isabelle So, uncommitted, you'll look this fellow over.

Clarice But from a window, what can I discover?
I'll see his mien, his looks, his outward show,
But, Isabelle, of the rest what can I know?
Faces are flattering mirrors which provide
Untrue reflections of the man inside;
How many flaws can lurk behind a smile!
And handsomeness can hide a soul that's vile.
Choosing a husband, we must use our eyes,
Yet trusting them alone is most unwise.
If we're to be happy, what they see must please them;
Though not obeying, we must yet appease them;
We must accept their *no* but not their *yes*,
And build on firmer ground our happiness.
This marriage bond, which lasts our life entire,
And which should cause more terror than desire,

Unless one's careful, often seems to wed
Like to unlike, the living to the dead.
Since marriage means to have a master, I
Must know the man I'm to be mastered by,
Ere I accept him.

Isabelle Then he must talk with you.

Clarice Alcippe would be most jealous if he knew.

Isabelle What do you care? Dorante's the better bet.

Clarice I'm not prepared to lose Alcippe as yet.
We pledged to marry, and if affairs permit
His sire to come here, I'll go through with it.
For two years now his father has delayed;
Sometimes it's business, sometimes he's afraid
Of stormy weather, or the roads are poor.
The dear man clearly wants to stay in Tours.
In these delays I read mistrust of me,
And I don't aim to die of constancy.
Each minute that we wait brings down our price;
Young virgins can grow older in a trice;
Theirs is a title which, if kept, brings shame;
The timely loss of it must be their aim.
They cannot fence with Time, which is too strong;
Their honor's lost if it's preserved too long.

Isabelle So, you might leave Alcippe, if you could find
Another who could please your heart and mind?

Clarice Yes, I might leave him, but do understand
That I'd have to have that other well in hand,
And think him right for me, and that the day
He married me could not be far away.
Without these things, my interest would be small.
Alcippe is better than nothing, after all;
His father, after all, may come to town.

Isabelle There's a safe way to nail this matter down.
Your friend Lucrèce is generous and zealous;
She has no suitors now who might be jealous;

Let her send Dorante a message to be right
Beneath her window on this very night.
Because he's young he'll take the dare, and you
And he may have a darkling interview;
And while Alcippe will never know the joke,
Dorante will think 'twas with Lucrèce he spoke.

Clarice A fine idea. Lucrèce will without question
Send him a sweet note, following your suggestion.
I much admire you for this cunning plan.

Isabelle Once more, I wonder if that unknown man
You met today has waked in you some feeling.

Clarice Oh, heavens! If Dorante proved so appealing,
Alcippe would not be needed any more.

Isabelle Don't speak of him; he's coming.

Clarice What a bore!
Go, please, and tell Lucrèce of our design,
And ask her help in these affairs of mine.

Scene 3

Alcippe Clarice! Clarice! Ah, false, inconstant one!

Clarice *(initially aside)*
Can he have guessed what I just now have done?
Alcippe, what is it that's upset you so?

Alcippe What is it, traitress? As if you didn't know!
Your conscience knows what heavy guilt it bears.

Clarice Do speak more softly. Father will come downstairs.

Alcippe "Father will come downstairs." That's but a myth.
You have a father just to hush me with.
At night, on the river . . .

Clarice The river? Yes, go on.
What are you trying to say?

Alcippe All night, till dawn.

Clarice Well?

Alcippe You should blush!

Clarice Blush? Why, in heaven's name?

Alcippe Hearing those few words, you should die of shame!

Clarice Why should they make me die, as you suggest?

Alcippe So! Hearing them, you dare to hear the rest?
Will you not blush, if I describe it all?

Clarice All what?

Alcippe The whole appalling carnival.

Clarice I've no idea of what you mean, I swear.

Alcippe When I speak to you, your father's on the stair.
It's a clever trick, for which you have a talent.
But as for spending all night with your gallant . . .

Clarice Alcippe, are you crazy?

Alcippe Not with love for you
Now that I know the sort of thing you do.
Yes, when you feast and dance the night away
With a gallant lover till the break of day
(As just occurred) does your father know you're out?

Clarice What's this mysterious feast you rave about?

Alcippe It's a recent mystery that's been solved, my sweet.
Next time, best choose a lover more discreet.
He's told me everything.

Clarice Who?

Alcippe Dorante. My friend.

Clarice Dorante!

Alcippe Go on; claim not to comprehend.

Clarice I've never met the man; it isn't true.

Alcippe Didn't I see his father visiting you?
Ah, fickle creature! You spend, unfaithful one,
Days with the father, nighttimes with the son!

Clarice His father and mine were bosom friends of yore.

Alcippe And is that what he came to see you for?
You know you're guilty, but you still talk back!
How can I make your obstinacy crack?

Clarice Alcippe, I wouldn't know the son by sight.

Alcippe When last you saw him, it was darkest night.
Did he not hire for you four bands at least,
And in your honor give a wondrous feast—
Six courses of twelve dishes each, and more?
Did you then find his company a bore?
And when his fireworks lighted up all space,
Did you not have a chance to see his face;
And going home by dawnlight, when your dance
Was over, did you give his face a glance?
Have I said enough? Now show some shame, and blush.

Clarice All I can say to that is pish and tush.

Alcippe What am I, then? A liar? Jealous? Mad?

Clarice Someone, I fear, has hoaxed you. You've been had.
Trust me, Alcippe.

Alcippe No, spare me your evasions;
I know your dodges and your sly persuasions.
Farewell. Go, follow your Dorante, and love him.
Forsake Alcippe, and think no longer of him.

Clarice Please listen to me.

Alcippe Your father's on the stair.

Clarice No, he can't hear us, and he isn't there;
Listen, and I'll disprove this calumny.

Alcippe No, I won't listen, unless you marry me—
Unless, while we await our marriage, you
Give me your promise and two kisses, too.

Clarice To clear my honor, what is it you demand,
Alcippe?

Alcippe Your pledge, two kisses, and your hand.

Clarice No more?

Alcippe Make up your mind; don't make me wait.

Clarice Father is coming down now; it's too late.

Scene 4

Alcippe Now that you're lost to me, come mock my pain,
And free me from my bonds by your disdain;
Help my rejected passion to congeal
Till a just wrath is all that I can feel.
I thirst for vengeance, and shall take your lover
A cold and vengeful heart, as he'll discover.
If he's a man of honor, you'll receive
This very day some cause to laugh or grieve;
Yes, ere my treasure's taken by my foe
May all his blood, and mine, be made to flow!
Here comes my rival, and his father too.
Old friendship yields now to a hate that's new.
At sight of him, that hatred grows more grim,
But here is not the place to challenge him.

Scene 5

Géronte Let's pause a while, Dorante. We've rushed about
Till I am short of breath and quite worn out.
How great this city is, how nobly planned!

Dorante All Paris seems to me a fairyland.
I saw this morning an enchanted isle
Which was unpeopled then, yet in a while
Some new Amphìon, so it seemed, had made
Great buildings rise there, with no builder's aid.

Géronte Such metamorphoses are everywhere.
You see the same thing in the Pré-aux-Clercs,
And nothing in the world is oh'd and ah'd
More than the Palais Cardinal's facade.
It is as if a whole great town should float
Skyward by magic out of an ancient moat,
And by its cloud-high parapets implied
That gods, or kings at least, must dwell inside.
But now to business. You know you have my love?

Dorante It is the thing, Sir, that I'm proudest of.

Géronte Since you're my only child, and since, I fear,
You've entered on a perilous career
In which the quest for martial glory drives
Young soldiers every day to risk their lives,
Before some mishap comes to you, and makes
You slow down somewhat, and apply the brakes,
I want you married.

Dorante (*aside*) Lucrèce, how I adore you!

Géronte I have picked out a proper partner for you—
Fair, virtuous, and rich.

Dorante Oh, Father, take
A bit more time to choose, for mercy's sake.

Géronte I know her well. Clarice is good and sweet
As any girl her age you're like to meet.
Her father's been my closest friend forever.
The matter's settled.

Dorante Oh, Sir, it makes me shiver
To think of burdening my young years thus!

Géronte You'll do as I say.

Dorante *(initially aside)* I must be devious.
Sir, I have yet to prove myself and wield
My sword-arm with distinction in the field—

Géronte Before some other sword-arm takes your life,
I want you, for my sake, to take a wife;
I want a grandson who will fill your place,
And prop my old age, and preserve our race.
In short, I wish it.

Dorante Alas, you're adamant.

Géronte You'll do as I command.

Dorante But, Sir, I can't.

Géronte You can't, you say! How so?

Dorante Permit me, please,
To ask your pardon while I clasp your knees.
I'm—

Géronte What?

Dorante In Poitiers—

Géronte Stand up, now. Explain.

Dorante I'm married, Sir. To hide the truth is vain.

Géronte Without my blessing!

Dorante It was done by force,
Which you've the power to annul, of course.
We were compelled to wed in consequence
Of a series of outrageous accidents—
If you only knew.

Géronte Come, tell me everything.

Dorante She's of good family, though she doesn't bring
As rich a dowry as you might prefer.

Géronte What's done is done. Well, tell me more of her.
Her name?

Dorante Orphise. And Armédon's her father.

Géronte One name's as unfamiliar as the other.
Go on.

Dorante Soon after I arrived, I saw
A girl for whom the coldest heart would thaw.
Such were her charms, so brilliant was her gaze,
That she enslaved me by her gentle ways.
I sought therefore to meet her, and to please
By gifts and kindnesses and courtesies,
Till after six months' fervent courtship of her
I was both her beloved and her lover.
She showed me secret favors—though nothing wrong—
And I so pressed my conquest that ere long
I'd tiptoe through her quarter, out of sight,
To chat with her for part of every night.
One night, when I'd just climbed into her chamber
(It was, I think, the second of September—
Yes, I was caught precisely on that date),
Her father had been dining out till late.
He comes home, knocks upon her door, and she
Grows pale, then finds a hiding place for me,
Opens the door, and with sly expertise
Enfolds the old man in a hug and squeeze,
So that he won't perceive her rumpled state.
He sits down; says it's time she had a mate,
And tells her of an offer he's received.
Needless to say, I'm anxious and aggrieved,
But she replies with great diplomacy,
Pleasing her father and yet soothing me.
Just when the old man says that it is time
To go, my pocket watch begins to chime!
He says to his daughter, who's at first struck dumb,
"Since when do you have a watch? From whom did it come?"
"Acaste, my cousin, sent it," she declares,

"Requesting me to take it for repairs.
There are no jewelers where he lives, you know.
It just chimed three half-hours in a row."
"Give it to me," he says, "I'll get it working."
She comes then to the alcove where I'm lurking,
I hand it to her, but to my despair
The watch-chain tangles with the gun I wear,
And pulls the trigger, and a shot rings out.
You can imagine what that brings about.
Seemingly dead, she drops then to the floor;
Her father runs in terror to the door
And calls out "Help" and "Murder" in his dismay.
Two servants and his son soon block my way.
Enraged by my mischance, consumed with wrath,
Through those three men I start to hew a path,
When, in another one of fate's caprices,
The sword I'm wielding breaks into three pieces.
Disarmed thus, I retreat; Orphise, who's quite
Recovered now from her initial fright,
Yet has the energy that fears provide,
Slams shut the door, and locks us both inside.
Quickly, we heap up chests and chairs to make
A barricade for reinforcement's sake,
Thinking that such a rampart may delay
Their coming in and somehow win the day.
But as we labor to avert our doom,
They break the wall down from a neighboring room,
And we are forced to parley and confer.

Here Clarice observes them from her window, while Lucrèce (with Isabelle beside her) does the same from hers.

Géronte So, in plain French, you had to marry her.

Dorante I had been found alone with her, at night;
Her kin outnumbered me; she charmed me quite;
The scandal might be great, her honor lost;
If I refused, my head would be the cost.
The way in which she bravely took my part
Had added to the fervor of my heart.
Therefore, to save my life and her repute,

And render our contentment absolute,
I said what calmed the storm, as anyone
In my position surely would have done.
Say now if you'd prefer to see me perish
Or dwell in happiness with one I cherish.

Géronte No, no, I'm not so harsh as you suppose.
I well can understand the course you chose.
My love excuses you; your only wrong
Was to have kept it secret for so long.

Dorante Her want of money made me wed by stealth.

Géronte A father should not make too much of wealth.
She's well-born, fair, and good, and as you tell,
You love each other; that's enough. Farewell.
I'll tell Clarice's father that we withdraw.

Scene 6

Dorante Well, how did you like it? Are you full of awe?
Didn't I dupe him? Wasn't my story apt?
In my place, some poor fool would have been trapped.
He would have started in to moan and whine
And then, with a broken heart, have toed the line.
Yes, lying is a useful form of wit.

Cliton What? It wasn't true, Sir?

Dorante Not a word of it.
What you just heard was a bit of cleverness
Which saved my heart and soul for fair Lucrèce.

Cliton And the watch, the sword, the pistol, what were they?

Dorante Inventions.

Cliton Sir, oblige your poor valet.
When you're about to pull some master stroke,
I wish you'd make me privy to the joke:
Though you'd forewarned me, I was taken in.

Dorante Henceforth, you'll share in all the lies I spin.
You'll be the secretary of my spirit,
And if I have a secret, you shall hear it.

Cliton Well, given that assignment, I shall hope
In serving you, to understand and cope.
What are your plans for amorous success?

Scene 7

Sabine, *handing Dorante a letter*
Read this, Sir.

Dorante Who's the sender?

Sabine It's from Lucrèce.

Dorante, *after reading the letter*
Tell her I'll come.

Sabine exits and Dorante continues

Cliton, rethink your claim
To know which beauty bears that charming name.
Lucrèce is touched now by her devotee,
And from her window wants to talk with me.
If you think it's the other one, your wits are broken.
Why should she write me, when we've never spoken?

Cliton Sir, on this head I won't debate with you.
Her voice tonight will tell you who is who.

Dorante Get into her house by hook or crook, and quiz
Some lackey about how rich her father is.

Scene 8

Lycas, *handing Dorante a letter*
Sir.

Dorante One more letter.
He goes on speaking after reading it.

I don't know what offense
Has moved my friend Alcippe to truculence,
But tell him to expect me anyway.
I'll come.

Lycas leaves, and Dorante continues to speak.

Last night I got here from Poitiers.
Already, since this morning, I have met
With love, a duel, and a marriage threat.
For a single day, that record's hard to beat.
A lawsuit, and my life would be complete.
I challenge anybody to encumber
Himself with problems worse or more in number,
And wriggle out of them as I can do.
Well, time to face this duel and see it through.

—Translated from French by Richard Wilbur

SOPHOKLES

Women of Trakhis

Sophokles wrote Women of Trakhis, *his sardonic revisionist take on that mythical jack-of-all-crises Herakles, for an Athenian audience obsessed with heroes—mortals divinely endowed with unique, uncanny, sometimes criminal attributes, and in whose powers the Greeks believed with worshipful fascination. When the play begins Herakles has already completed his twelve labors. Now free to return to his wife and family, whom he left in Trakhis when Zeus sentenced him to a year's punishment for committing a treacherous murder, Herakles indulges his lifelong blood- and sex-lust one last time. The* Women of Trakhis *dramatizes the physical and psychic damage that Herakles, ultimately doomed by the will of Zeus, inflicts on himself, his family, and those who get in his way. But Sophokles adapts the legend to make Herakles' wife Deianeira (meaning man- or husband-killer) a negligent (or unconsciously motivated) killer rather than a cold-blooded murderer, a victim herself of deceit. As the tragedy unfolds Sophokles explores the destructive powers of love, and the silent will of the god and goddess Eros and Aphrodite, in an avalanche of ironic words and events—some of it conveyed by an observant chorus of young Trakhinian women.*

—Robert Bagg

Characters

Deianeira, Herakles' wife
Servant, a woman of Deianeira's household
Hyllus, eldest son of Herakles and Deianeira
Messenger, from Trakhis
Chorus of young Trakhinian women
Leader of the Chorus
Likhas, personal herald to Herakles
Captive Women of Oechalia (silent)
Iole, daughter of Eurytus (silent)
Herakles, hero for hire
Old Man, senior aide to Herakles
Soldiers serving Herakles (silent)

In Trakhis, in front of the house in which Deianeira has been living. Its size and façade are impressive, but less than royal. Deianeira and her woman servant enter from the house.

Deianeira People have a saying that goes way back:
you don't know your own life,
whether it's good or evil—not
until it's over.
But I know now:
My life's unlucky and it's bitter. I know
this long before I'll go down to Hades.
When I was still a girl, living with my father
Oeneus in Pleuron, marriage terrified me—
like it terrified no other girl in Aetolia—
because a river lusted for me, a river
named Achelous. He kept asking
Father if he could marry me, each time
in a different shape: first a bull,
next a glittering snake, then an ox-
head rising from a man's trunk, water
sloshing from his rank beard.

When I imagined marrying that creature
I was so miserable! I'd want to die
before I got near a bed like his.
Then, just in time, joy arrived! Herakles,
the famous son of Zeus and Alcmena,
battled Achelous and saved me.
Exactly how he won this fight I can't
tell you, because I don't know. If someone
feeling less panic than I felt was watching,
he could tell you. I sat there numb, sure
my beauty would destroy me.

But Zeus the battle god blessed the outcome—
if what happened was really a blessing.
Ever since Herakles won me for his bed
I've nursed one fear after another.
There's been no end to my anxiety.
Each night I imagine some new threat
which the next night chases away.
Of course we had children. He sees them, sometimes,
the way a farmer tends his back fields, twice
a year—sowing his seed, reaping the harvest.
That was his life: no sooner home than he's
back on the road, always working for someone.

Now that he's put his labors behind him,
I'm more afraid than ever.
From the time
Herakles killed that brave fighter Iphitus,
we've been uprooted, forced to live
among strangers, here in Trakhis.
Where Herakles is now, nobody knows.
He's gone. That's all I know. And that I ache for him.
No herald's brought news for fifteen months.
I'm all but sure he's mired in more trouble.

Then there's this tablet he left me;
I've prayed so often to the gods
it wasn't meant to bring me grief.

The female servant who has been listening to Deianeira worry out loud approaches and speaks to her mistress.

Servant Deianeira, my lady, so many times I've quietly
watched while you've wept, suffering with you
since Herakles has been gone. But now
I've got to ask—if a slave may advise
the freeborn and say what I think right—
I've got to ask: since you're so blessed with sons,
why not send one to find your husband?
Hyllus your eldest is the one to send—
if he thinks news of his father's well-being
matters to us.
Here he comes now,
running up the path. If my advice
makes any sense, why not take it?

Enter Hyllus, breathing hard from sport or the hunt. Deianeira stops him as he runs past. Servant goes indoors.

Deianeira Hyllus, my son, sometimes even a slave
knows just what to say. She wasn't born free
but speaks so freely you'd think she were.

Hyllus Her words, Mother? Can I hear them?

Deianeira Your father's been gone for so long. She thinks
it's shameful you haven't tried to find him.

Hyllus But I *do* know where he is, if you
can believe what people are saying.

Deianeira Then why not tell me where he's living, Son?

Hyllus He slaved during last year's plowing season
—seed to harvest—for a Lydian woman.

Deianeira If he has sunk that low, we can expect
to hear much worse said about him.

Hyllus He's gotten clear of it now. So I hear.

Deianeira Do people say where he is? Alive, dead, what?

Hyllus They say he's attacking Euboean
territory—the kingdom of Eurytus—
or getting ready to attack.

Deianeira Did you know, Son, that Herakles left me
prophecies—ones I trust—about that very place?

Hyllus What prophecies, Mother? I don't know them.

Deianeira They say: when he has carried out
his final mission, either his life will end—
or the rest of his days will be peaceful.
With his life balanced on that knife edge, Son,
won't you go help him? Our own survival
depends on his. If he dies, so do we.

Hyllus Of course I'll go, Mother. If I had known
how dangerous these prophecies were,
I'd be there right now. But since Fate
usually treats father so well,
we never had much reason to worry.
But now I understand, and I will do
whatever it takes to find out the truth.

Deianeira Then go, Son. No matter how late we learn it,
we always profit when the news is good.

Hyllus exits stage left on the road out of town.
Chorus enters from the town, singing.

Chorus O Sun! The Night
pulsing with stars
gives birth to you

the moment she
reddens into death.
You set, O Sun,
fire to her sky
as she lays you
to rest. O Sungod—
where, tell us where,
is Herakles,
Alcmena's child?
Master of flaming light,
find Herakles!
Is he edging
through the straits
of the Black Sea?
Or making landfall
where continents meet?
Speak to us, you
who sees what no man sees.

Deianeira's heart
aches for this man.
Once a prize won in battle,
she's restless as a bird
who's lost its mate.
She can't still her desire
or stop her tears.

Sleepless, ravaged
by fears for the husband
who's gone, she wastes away,
alone on her manless bed,
imagining terror.

Just as you watch
waves surge and foam
over the open sea
under tireless winds—
Northwind, Southwind—
so the troubles of a life
wild as the sea off Crete,
plunge Herakles under,
then lift him to greatness—
because always some god,
when Death sucks him down,
pulls him back into life.

Lady, I respect you,
but not your despair.
I don't think it's right
for you to let hope die.
Zeus makes sorrow a part
of whatever he gives us.
Grief and joy
come circling back
to all of us,
circling as the Bear
retraces her steps
on the starpaths.

For the night pulsing with stars
slows for no man, nor does wealth,
nor does pain—they all
speed through us, then they're
gone to some other man
who'll know joy and its loss.
Now I ask you, Queen Deianeira,
to ask this of yourself:
When has Zeus ever been
indifferent to one of his sons?

Deianeira You're here, I suppose, because you know my troubles.
But you cannot know the worry eating
my heart out; I hope you'll never
learn it by suffering what I've suffered.
We young girls thrive in our own safe place,
where the Sungod's heat doesn't oppress us,
nor the rain nor the wind. You glory there
in your innocent life—until you marry.
Then panic attacks night after night—
you fear for your husband, your children.
Wives know the misery I feel now
when they face what I've had to face.
I've wept—so much—long before this.
But now I must tell you something far worse.
When Herakles embarked on his last journey
he left behind a message carved into wood.
Never before—and he went to fight often—
had he explained its text to me.
Always he strove to win, never to die.
But this time he seemed to expect his own death.
He told me how much of his wealth would be
my widow's share, which lands went to each child.

This time he fixed the date of his own death.
When he had been out of the country
fifteen months, he said, that would be his time
to die. But if he survived after that,
there'd be no further trouble in his life.

The gods ordained this doom, he told me—
ordained that Herakles' own labors
would bring it to pass. It must happen
just as the ancient oak at Dodona
told him it would, when its leaves
whispered his fate to both its sibyls.

Today's the day that prophecy falls due.
I wake in terror from a long sweet sleep, friends,
fearing I'm destined to live on without
the man who is—of all men living—the best.

Leader Shush. No more fate-tempting words.
A man wearing laurel flowers
is walking towards us, a sure sign
he brings news we can celebrate.

Enter Messenger.

Messenger Queen Deianeira, let me be
the first to reassure you.
Herakles is alive. He's won,
and from that battle he's sent home
trophies to our own native gods.

Deianeira Old man, what's this news you've just told me?

Messenger That your lord, loved by so many,
shall be restored to your house
in all his victorious might.

Deianeira Who told you this, a stranger or a local?

Messenger Back in the meadow where oxen graze all summer,
a herald named Likhas is telling everyone.
I heard it from him and hurried here.
I hoped you'd treat me well
if I was the first to tell you.

Deianeira Why doesn't Likhas bring the news himself
if fortune's been so generous to Herakles?

Messenger It's not so easy for him, ma'am. The whole
village of Malia crushes around him,
asking questions. He's stuck there—everyone
intent on learning what interests them.
They won't let him go till each hears his fill.
That ruckus holds him there unwillingly,
but I'm sure you'll see him in person soon.

Deianeira O Zeus,
who guards the virgin highlands of Mount Oeta,
you've given us some joy at last! Sing out
your gladness at this news, you women
in the house and come from town, brilliant news
beyond all hope, that dawns on me, on us!

Chorus Let the house
that awaits
its bridegroom
sing out in joy
triumphant
from its hearth!

Let shouts from the men
in one great voice
go to the god Apollo
whose keen bright
arrows protect us!

Join them, girls,
sing the anthem
to Artemis his sister, let
your voices carry
to her hunting deer
in fields where quail fly!
Sing to the goddess
whose torches blaze
in both her hands, sing
to her neighbors
the nymphs!
I'm soaring!
I won't deny you,
flute, king of my soul!
Ivy is working

green magic
through my body—
Haiiiii! Eiiiiiiii!—
ivy whirls me
into the flashing
dance of Bakkhos!
Praise Bakkhos
who heals us!

Look over there,
beloved lady.
What I am singing
your eyes can see!

Deianeira I see them, girls. My eyes
have been scanning the horizon.

Enter Likhas leading several slave women up the path.
The group includes strikingly young and sensual Iole.

You've come a long way, Likhas. We're glad you're here,
if it's true that your news will make us glad.

Likhas Our coming is good news—and the facts I bring
will justify your welcome. When a man's been
lucky, he should be greeted as a friend.

Deianeira Then tell me, friend, what I most want to hear.
Will I see Herakles come home alive?

Likhas Not only was he alive when I left him,
he was robust. Not sick in any way.

Deianeira Where is he? Home, or still on foreign soil?

Likhas A headland juts west from Euboea; Herakles
is on it making sacrifices to Zeus.
He builds altars and offers to the gods
some of the wealth he's won by making war.

Deianeira To keep a vow? Or was an oracle involved?

Likhas A vow. He keeps the vow he made
when he conquered a country
and stripped it of these women here.

Deianeira notices the slave women entering under guard.

Deianeira These women—who are they? Who owns them?
I feel so sorry for them. Or am I wrong
to think that they'll be slaves?

Likhas He picked them out when he raided Eurytus' city:
splendid prizes for himself—and the gods.

Deianeira Was it that raid against a city—which
lasted longer than anyone predicted?
So long I lost all track of the days?

Likhas No. Herakles was in Lydia most of that time—
not a free man, he told us, but enslaved.
You won't take offense at the word "enslaved,"
lady, when you hear the reason Zeus willed it.
Herakles was bought by a foreign queen
named Omphale for a full year; he admits it.
He was so mortified by this disgrace
he vowed to make the man who had caused it,
as well as his wife and daughter, slaves themselves.
Not idle words. When he'd done a year's
penance for his crime, he hired
an army to lay siege to that man's
city—making Eurytus pay dearly,
the man most to blame for his troubles.

Herakles was an old comrade of this Eurytus,
and had sought refuge—in friendship—under his roof.
But Eurytus abused Herakles, lashing him
with vicious words meant to wound him:
"Your arrows never miss, do they Herakles?
How come my sons out-shot you in the trials?
What's more, you're now a mere slave who grovels
when a free man barks at you." When Herakles
got drunk on wine at a feast, Eurytus kicked him
out of the house. Herakles was enraged.
So one day, when Eurytus' son had scrambled
high up Mount Tiryns tracking some lost horses,
he drops his guard while his eyes search
the vast plain below him. Herakles grabs
the preoccupied lad and throws him
off a sky-high battlement to his death.
This murder disgusted our real king,
Zeus, Olympian father of us all.

Zeus forced Herakles to be sold
as a slave to another country:
with no parole allowed, since he'd
killed Iphitus by deceit—the only
man Herakles ever killed that way.
Had he killed his man fairly,
Zeus would have pardoned him.
Gods don't appreciate insolence
any more than we do.
Now all those men
he killed, so full of themselves, bursting
with arrogant and bitter things to say—
they're down in Hades, their town's enslaved.
Their women I've brought here trade their lives
of ease for a much less pleasant existence.
Your husband ordered this, so I loyally
carry it out. Once he has sacrificed to Zeus,
the god who fathered him, in thanks for his
victory, you can be sure he'll come to you.
Of all my news, this last must please you most.

Leader It's certain you'll be happy, Queen. Half your joy
has arrived, and the rest is on the way.

Deianeira Why shouldn't news of my husband's success
make me happy? Such good fortune must
always be celebrated. But a cautious mind
will feel apprehension for any man
who has so much luck. He could lose it all.

Deianeira looks at the Captive Women.

My friends, I feel a strange pity,
looking at these sorry captives—
exiles who've lost their fathers and their homes.
Once they were daughters of free men.
Now they'll be slaves for the rest of their lives.
Zeus, the decider of battles, grant
me this: never do violence to my children
the way you've done violence to these.
But if it must happen, do it when I'm gone.
That's how much the sight of them scares me.

Deianeira approaches Iole.

You poor girl! Who are you? Are you married?
Have you a child? You look so innocent.
And so well-born. Who is her father, Likhas?
Her mother—who is she? Out with it!
I pity her more than the other women
because she seems to know what to expect.

Likhas Why ask me? How should I know? Could be
her father's not the poorest man in his kingdom.

Deianeira Is she royal? Did Eurytus have a daughter?

Likhas I don't know. Sorry. I didn't ask many questions.

Deianeira Didn't her friends ever mention her name?

Likhas No, ma'am. I had a job to do. No time for chat.

Deianeira again approaches Iole.

Deianeira You tell me then, poor girl. It upsets me
that I don't even know your name.

Likhas It won't be like her if she speaks. She hasn't
spoken a word. She's done nothing but cry
miserable tears the whole way here
from her windswept home. She feels
abused by Fate. Let's respect that.

Deianeira Let her be. Let her go inside if she wishes.
I won't add to the pain she's been through.
She's had enough. Let's all go in—so you
can make an early start on your journey,
while I see to some things in my house.

Likhas and Captives start to go inside; the Messenger intercepts Deianeira as she follows them inside.

Messenger Don't go inside just yet. Let all these folk
move out of earshot, so I can tell you
some things you haven't heard. Things I know.

Deianeira What things? Why are you keeping me here?

Messenger Stay and hear me out. You valued what I told you
before; you'll value what I tell you now.

Deianeira Shall we call everyone back? Or do you want
to speak only to me and these women?

Messenger I can speak freely to you—and these women.
Don't bother the others.

The captive women disappear into the house.

Deianeira They're gone. Go ahead.

Messenger None of what that man just told you is true.
Either he was lying to you here, or
lying to the rest of us a while back.

Deianeira What are you saying? Collect
your thoughts. Speak distinctly.
So far your words just puzzle me.

Messenger I heard that man say—in front of witnesses—
this girl was the real reason Herakles
crushed Eurytus and his city Oechalia.
It was Love, that god alone, who made him fight—
not his bondage to Omphale in Lydia,
nothing to do with Iphitus' death.
Likhas has thrown lust out of his story
so he can tell you a much different one.

Now when Herakles couldn't persuade
her father to let him bed this young girl
in secret, he blew up a minor insult
as a pretext to make war on her country—
then killed Eurytus and plundered his city.
Please try to see that it's no accident
he sends her to this house. She won't be a slave.
That's not likely to happen, when his heart's
burning for her.
I vowed, Queen, to tell you
everything I had heard from that man.
Many others heard him say it, along with me—
Trakhinian men gathered in the market—
they'll back me up and convict him.
If what I say hurts, I'm sorry.
But I've told you the straight truth.

Deianeira I'm in shock. What's happening to me?
Who is this secret rival I give houseroom?

I'm so stupid! She doesn't have a name,
as Likhas swore to me? No name? A girl
with such striking looks and royal bearing?

Messenger She has a name. Her father is Eurytus
and her name is Iole. If Likhas
can't tell you her name or her family's,
it must be—as he says—because he never asked.

Leader Treachery to those who trust you
seems to me the worst kind of evil.

Deianeira What should I do, friends? That last piece
of news leaves me dumbfounded.

Leader Find Likhas. Question him. Maybe he'll
tell you the truth if you force him to talk.

Deianeira That's good advice. Exactly what I'll do.

Messenger Should I stay? What would you like *me* to do?

Deianeira Wait here. Likhas is coming without my asking.

Enter Likhas.

Likhas Lady, have you a message for Herakles?
If you do, instruct me. As you see, I'm off.

Deianeira You're leaving in a big hurry—for someone
who took so long getting here—and before
we've had time to finish our conversation.

Likhas If there's something you want to ask, I'll oblige.

Deianeira Can I trust you to tell me the truth?

Likhas You can—if I know it. Zeus will know if I lie.

Deianeira Who is that woman you've brought here?

Likhas She's from Euboea. From what clan I can't say.

Messenger You! Look at me. Who are you talking to?

Likhas Who are *you*? Why ask *me* such a question?

Messenger You understand me well enough to answer.

Likhas I'm talking to Queen Deianeira—unless I'm blind.
Herakles' wife, Oeneus' daughter. My Queen.

Messenger Your Queen. That's what I hoped you'd say.
So what does that make you?

Likhas Her loyal servant.

Messenger Right.
What's the penalty for disloyalty?

Likhas Disloyal how? What word game are you playing?

Messenger If someone's playing games with words, you are.

Likhas I'm a fool to put up with this. I'm gone.

Messenger No! Not till you answer one brief question.

Likhas Ask it. You don't seem bashful in the least.

Messenger That girl slave you brought here—you know the one?

Likhas I know the one. What about her?

Messenger Didn't you tell us that this captive—the one
your eyes keep trying to avoid—
is Iole, Eurytus' daughter?

Likhas Said that to whom? Where's the witness
who swears to have heard me say that?

Messenger You said it to the whole town in the main square—
many Trakhinians heard you say it.

Likhas Right. It's something I'd heard second hand.
That's not the same as swearing it was true.

Messenger Second-hand, eh? You swore on oath
you brought this girl to be Herakles' wife!

Likhas Me? Bringing him a wife? For god's sake, Queen,
please tell me who this stranger is?

Messenger I'm the man who heard you say that a city
was leveled out of lust for her—no Lydian woman
destroyed it—it was desire for that girl.

Likhas Lady, get rid of him. It's undignified
for a sane person to conduct
a ludicrous quarrel with a sick man.

Deianeira By Zeus!—whose lightning scorches mountain glens,
don't cheat me of the truth! Tell it to me!
You won't find me a spiteful woman, or
one ignorant of what people are like;
I know the things that pleasure men can change.
Someone who picks a fight and trades blows
with Eros the love god is so foolish.
Eros rules even the gods, and he rules me
just as he rules any woman like me.
I would be mad if I blamed my husband
because he's lovesick—mad to blame that girl,
who has done nothing shameful, or harmed me.
I can't think like that.
But if you were taught
to lie by him, you learned a vulgar lesson.
If you're a self-taught liar, you'll always seem
treacherous when you're trying to be kind.
Tell me the truth, all of it. To be called a liar
is the worst reproach a free man can suffer.
Don't think I won't find it all out. Many men
heard you, and they'll tell me what you said.

Deianeira pauses. Likhas says nothing.

You're worried you'll hurt me? You fear the wrong thing.
Not knowing the truth—that would damage me. What's
so terrible about finding out? Herakles
has been the lover of many women—
more than any man living. Never once
has one of these women—ever—heard me speak
a harsh or jealous word. Nor will
she, even if her whole being
melted with love for him.
I pitied her as soon as I saw her
because her beauty has ruined her life.
And though she never willed it, her beauty
has looted and enslaved her fatherland.

But wind and water blow all this away.
Deceive somebody else. Tell me the truth.

Leader *(To Likhas)*
You're hearing good advice. Follow it. You'll
never have cause to complain of this woman.
And all of us will be grateful to you.

Likhas So be it, Queen. Men are weak. You grasp that.
I see that you think like a sane woman.
I'll tell it to you plainly, hiding nothing.
That fellow has it right. The girl touched off
lust in Herakles that devoured his soul.
For her sake he drove his spear straight through
the desolate heart of her city, Oechalia.
And to be fair to the man, he never asked me
to hide these facts. I was afraid to wound you,
so the fault's mine—if it's truly a fault.
Now that you know the whole story—
for your own good as well as his—keep your promise
to treat her with kindness. For the man who has
proven himself stronger in every battle
has been beaten by his lust for this girl.

Deianeira I haven't changed my mind. I'll keep my word.
Trust me, it would only make my sickness
worse to wage hopeless war against the gods.
But we should both go inside. I'll give you
messages to take back, and fitting gifts.
The gifts we've just received should be repaid.
I don't want you to leave empty-handed,
since you came here with such precious goods.

Deianeira, Likhas, and the Messenger enter the house.

Chorus Huge are the victories
the power of the love
goddess always wins!
I won't pause to tell
how she tamed gods;
beguiling Hades,
lord of the dark,
Zeus, son of Kronos,

and Poseidon
the earthshaker—

but when our lady's hand
was there for the winning,
who were the rivals
that met in battle,
trading blows in the dust?

One was a big Rivergod,
who took the monstrous
body of a spike-horned
four-legged bull; he
was Achelous, from Oeneus.
His rival from Thebes,
city Bakkhos adores,
came armed with a bow
powerfully arched, spears,
and one huge club—he
was Herakles, son of Zeus.
Bride-hungry males,
they battered each other.
Aphrodite, goddess
of sexual joy, was there
as the sole referee.

Then came the thud
of pounding fists,
a bow twanging,
horn cracking bone!
Legs grappled torsos,
a forehead struck
murderous blows,
and harsh groans of pain
bellowed from both,

while she in her fragile
beauty sat in plain view
on a hillside nearby,
soon to be claimed
by her husband-to-be.

So the battle roared on,
the bride, the dazzling prize,
helpless in her anguish,
till suddenly she's taken
like a calf from its mother.

Enter Deianeira.

Deianeira My friends, while our guest inside says goodbye
to the captives, I've stepped out here unseen
to tell you what my hands have done, and ask
your sympathy for my troubles.
A virgin,
though I think she's been bedded by now,
has invaded my house like cargo stowed
on a ship—merchandise sure to drive
my own peace of mind on the rocks.
Now we both will sleep under one blanket
and share his lovemaking. That's my reward
from Herakles—the man I said was true
and loyal—my repayment for guarding
his home through all these grinding months.
I don't know how to feel anger toward him,
now lust has sickened him so. What woman
could live with her, inside the same marriage!
I see her youth bloom, while mine fades.
Men's eyes adore fresh young blossoms;
they look away from flowers turning dry.
That's my fear—that Herakles, whom I call
my husband, is now this young woman's man.

I've said anger is ugly in a woman of sense,
and I'll tell you, friends, my hope for its cure.
Years ago, a strange beast gave me something
that I've kept in a bronze urn. I got this gift,
when I was a girl, from that hairy-chested
creature Nessus—it was his own blood,
that I scraped from the wound that killed him.
He was a centaur who took people over
the river Evenus, not rowing or sailing,
but swimming them across in his arms.
He carried me on his back when Father
sent me to marry Herakles. Out in midstream
he fondled me with his lewd hands. I yelled.
Herakles looked back and saw us. He whistled
an arrow through Nessus' chest into his lungs.
As Nessus' life dimmed, the centaur whispered,

"You listen to me, Oeneus daughter!
Take at least this much profit from being
the last passenger I will ever carry.
If you scrape up the blood clotting my wound,
just where the arrow soaked in black bile hit—
bile leeched from the Hydra of Lerna—

you'll have something to charm Herakles' soul.
It will keep him from seeing and loving
any other woman but you."
I remembered
this charm, my friends, because after he died,
I hid it in my house—and now I've dampened
this robe with that gore, doing exactly
what the centaur told me to do. It's ready.

May I never know anything
about rash acts of malice; keep me
from ever learning what they are.
I detest women guilty of such things.
But if I can defeat that girl by using
a love-spell that works only on Herakles,
I have the means. Unless you think
I'm being reckless. If so I'll stop now.

Leader Don't! If you think this drug might work
there is surely no harm in using it.

Deianeira I'm at least this much confident: there's a good
chance it will work, though it's not tested yet.

Leader You test something in action. To test it
in your mind does no good at all.

Deianeira We won't have to wait long. I see him
coming out, eager to leave. You won't give
me away, will you? What's done out of sight,
even if it's shameful, won't expose me to shame.

Enter Likhas from the house.

Likhas Your orders, lady? Is there more I can do,
daughter of Oeneus? I should be on my way.

Deianeira I was getting this ready, Likhas,
while you said goodbye to the slaves.

Deianeira hands Likhas a box holding the robe.

Take this flowing handmade robe—my own
design—as a gift to my absent master.
When you hand it to him, make certain he,
nobody else, is the first to wear it. Be sure

to keep it in a dark place—no sunlight—
don't take it near grounds that are sacred,
or near an altar fire. Wait till he's standing
in plain sight before everyone. Give it to him
on a day when he kills bulls for the gods.

I made this vow: that on the day Herakles
came safely home, I'd wrap him in this robe,
and show him to the gods, radiant
at their altar in his bright new clothes.

So he'll have proof it's from me, take this ring.
He'll know my sign; it's carved into the seal.
It's time you left. Remember the first rule
of messengers—they shouldn't interfere.
Do this well, and you'll earn thanks from us both.

Likhas Well, if I'm any good at Hermes' craft
there's no chance I'll ever fail you.
Count on my handing him this box intact,
adding only your words, to prove it's yours.

Deianeira You should be on your way, now that you've
found out how things stand in this house.

Likhas I'll report all is going well here.

Deianeira You saw me greet the young stranger.
Will you tell him how I welcomed her?

Likhas It was a gracious welcome. I was amazed.

Deianeira There's nothing more, then, for you to tell him,
is there? Don't tell him how much I want him,
until we know whether he still wants me.

Deianeira reenters the house as Chorus sings.

Chorus All of you living
near the hot springs
between harbor and high rock
and on the heights of Oeta;
all of you living
by the waters
of the land-locked
Malian Sea,

on shores sacred
to the Virgin Goddess
armed with arrows of gold—
shores where the Greeks
hold fabled councils
there at the Gates:

Soon the vibrant-voiced
flute rises in your midst,
not resonant with grief,
but musical as a lyre
pleasing to the gods.
The son born to Zeus
and Alcmena
hurries to his home,
bearing all that his courage won.

We had lost Herakles
from our city
while he wandered the seas;
we heard nothing for twelve months
while his wife,
loving and heartsick,
waited in tears.
Now the Wargod,
furious at last,
chases away
her days of hardship.

Let Herakles come home!
Let him come home!
Let there be no missed beat
in the pulse of the oars
of the ship sailing here
till it lands in our port,
leaving astern the island
where he built altars for the gods.

Let him come home fired by love,
melting with lust, feeling
the power which burns in the robe,
put there by the Goddess
of Yes—charming Persuasion.

Deianeira returns from the house.

Deianeira Women, I'm scared. I think I've done
something extremely dangerous.

Leader Deianeira! Child of Oeneus! What's happened?

Deianeira I'm not sure. But I'm terrified
I'll be blamed for a savage crime—
while trying to do something lovely.

Leader It's not your gift to Herakles, is it?

Deianeira That's right. Never act on impulse
if you can't see clearly what will happen!

Leader What makes you so upset? Please tell us.

Deianeira Something weird has just happened, sisters,
which, when you hear it, will astound you.
A ball of white fleece, with which I was rubbing
chrism into the ceremonial robe,
has disappeared. The wool ate itself up—
nothing in my house consumed it—it just
crumbled away to nothing on a stone slab.
But so you'll understand exactly
how it happened, I'll tell you step by step.

I followed the instructions given me
by the centaur, neglecting no detail.
What he told me writhing in pain, the arrow
still in his chest, I carried in memory
as though indelibly hammered in bronze.
I did what he told me to do—no more:
Keep the drug far from fire, hide it deep
in the house where the hot sun can't touch it—
keep it fresh till the moment it's smeared on.
That's what I did! Now when the time came
to go into action, I rubbed it in secret
there in my dark house, using some wool tufts
that I pulled from one of our own sheep.
Then I folded the robe up and packed it
safely in a box. Sunlight never touched it.

But as I went back in, I saw something
strange beyond words—and human comprehension.
I happened to toss the damp tuft of wool
I was using into a patch of bright sunlight.

As it warmed up, it shriveled, dissolving
to powder fast as trees turn to sawdust
when men cut them down. So it lay there, right
where it fell. From the ground white gobs
foamed up, like the rich juice of Bakkhos' blue-
green grapes, poured—still fermenting—on the earth.

I'm stunned. I don't know what I should do now.
All I know is . . . I've done something awful.

Why should that dying monster have had
any possible motive for doing me
a kindness? I'm the one who got him killed!
No, he used *me* to kill the man who shot him.
I see this clearly, now that it's too late.
It's *me*, nobody else—unless I've lost
my mind—who's going to kill Herakles!
I know the arrow that hit Nessus maimed
even Chiron, who was a god—so its
poison kills every creature it touches.
The same black venom oozed from Nessus' wound.
Won't it kill my lord too? I know it will.
And if he dies, so will I, both of us
swept to our doom. What woman who values
her goodness could survive such disgrace?

Leader You're right to be alarmed by what's happened.
But don't expect the worst until it strikes.

Deianeira A person who's made a fatal mistake
has no use for that kind of wishful thinking.

Leader Men are forgiving when it's not your fault!
Their anger softens; so it will toward you.

Deianeira You can say that because it's not your life!
What if this menace pounded on your door?

Leader Better hold your tongue. Your son will hear you.
He's home from trying to find his father.

Enter Hyllus.

Hyllus Mother! I wish any one of three things
had happened: that I'd found you dead;

or if you were living, you'd be somebody
else's mother. Or you'd be somehow changed,
and a kinder spirit lived in your body.

Deianeira Son, what did I do to make you hate me?

Hyllus Today you murdered your husband. My father!

Deianeira I'm stunned by what comes out of your mouth, child.

Hyllus The words I've spoken will be proven true.
Who can undo what's already been done?

Deianeira What did you say? On whose authority
do you charge me with this horrendous crime?

Hyllus I didn't hear it from anybody.
I've seen Father dying with my own eyes.

Deianeira Where did you find him? Were you with him?

Hyllus You listen while I tell you everything.
After he looted the famous city
of Eurytus, Herakles headed home,
loaded down with the spoils of victory.
At Cape Cenaeum, a headland off Euboea
where the sea crashes in, he dedicated altars
and a grove of trees to his father Zeus.
When I first saw him, love shivered through me.

He'd just begun a great solemn sacrifice,
when his own herald, Likhas, arrived from home,
bringing your gift, the lethal robe, which he
put on, just as you planned he would. Then he
began slaughtering bulls, twelve perfect bulls,
the first he'd looted, but there must have been
a hundred animals herded toward the knife.

There he was, doomed already, serenely
praying, thrilled with his gorgeous attire.
But just as the blood-drenched fire blazed up
through the bulls and the resin-soaked pine-logs,
sweat broke out on his body, the robe clung
to his ribs, as if a craftsman glued it there.
Pain tore at his bones—and then the venom
sank its fangs into him, gorging on his flesh.

He yelled for doomed Likhas, who was in no
way guilty, demanding what treachery
inspired him to bring that robe. But Likhas,
totally ignorant, said he had the gift
from no one but you, that he delivered it
just as you sent it. Hearing that, his master—
a slashing pain clawing at his lungs—caught
Likhas by his ankle joint and launched him
at the sea-pounded rocks below. His brains
oozed white through his hair where the skull
broke open, then blood darkened it.

The people
cried out in awestruck grief, seeing one man
gone mad, another dead—but no one dared
go near him. Pain wrestled him down, then forced him
to leap up, shrieking wild sounds that echoed
off the headlands of Locris and the capes of Euboea.

When he was worn out from throwing himself
so many times screaming on the ground,
cursing and cursing his catastrophic
marriage to you, miserable woman,
and his alliance with your father Oeneus—
yelled that it ruined his life—at that instant,
half-hidden in swirling altar-smoke, he looked up,
his fierce eyes rolling, and saw me weeping
in the crowd. "Come here, Son," he called to me,
"Don't turn your back on me now—even
if you must share the death I am dying.
Lift me up, take me somewhere men can't watch.
If you can pity me at all, take me away
so I'll die anywhere but in this place."

We did as he asked, carried him aboard,
and landed him—it wasn't easy—on this shore,
suffering and groaning. You'll see him soon now,
still breathing, or just dead.
Those, Mother, are
the plot and the acts of which you're guilty.
May Vengeance and the Furies destroy you.
And if they do crush you, I will rejoice.
And it is just to exult. You've made it
just, killing the best man who ever lived.
You'll never see a man like him, ever.

Deianeira turns and walks toward the house without a word.

Leader Why are you walking quietly away? Don't you see? Your silence proves him right!

Hyllus Let her go.
Let a fair wind blow her away.
Why call her "Mother"
if there's no mother
left in the woman? Let her go—
goodbye and good luck to her.
Let the same joy
she gave Father
seize her.

Hyllus enters the house.

Chorus O sisters—see how suddenly
the sacred promise of the oracle,
spoken so long ago, strikes home.
It promised us the twelfth year
would end the long harsh work
of Herakles, a true son of Zeus.
At last the oracle comes true.
For how can a dead man work,
once he has gone to the grave?

If death darkens his face
as the centaur's poison
pierces his sides, poison fathered
by Death and nourished
by the jewel-skinned
serpent, how can he live
to see tomorrow's sun?
Locked in the Hydra's
writhing grip, the black-
haired centaur's
treacherous words
erupt at last—lashing him
with burning, surging pain.
Our Queen knew nothing of this,
but a marriage loomed
that threatened her home.
She saw it coming;
her hand seized the cure.

But the virulent hatred
of a strange beast—spoken at their one
fatal encounter—now brings tears
pouring from her eyes.
And doom comes on,
doom comes on, making
ever more clear this huge
calamity caused by guile.

Our tears burn as this plague
invades him, a crueler blow
than any his enemies
ever brought down
on this glorious hero,
Herakles.
O dark
steel-tipped spear, keen
for battle, did you
capture that bride

from the heights
of Oechalia?
No! The love goddess,
Aphrodite, without
saying a word,
made it happen.

Servant *Offstage*
No! No!

Half-Chorus Do I imagine it?
Or is it the cry
of somebody grieving?

Half-Chorus No vague noise—
it's anguish inside.
More trouble
for this house.

Leader See how slowly, her face dark,
an old woman comes toward us,
bringing us news.

Enter Servant from the house.

Servant Daughters, we are still harvesting evil
from the gift that she sent to Herakles.

Leader Old woman, do you bring worse news?

Servant Deianeira has left on her last journey.
Gone without taking one step.

Leader You mean death, don't you?

Servant You heard me say it.

Leader Dead? That poor woman?

Servant You've heard it twice.

Leader Wretched woman! How did she die?

Servant The act itself was ruthless.

Leader Tell us what happened!

Servant She stabbed herself.

Leader What mad rage,
what sick frenzy, made her do it? How
did she manage to make her death
follow his—do it all herself?

Servant One thrust of a steel blade was enough.

Leader You saw this awful thing yourself, woman?

Servant I saw it. I was there.

Leader What happened! How did it happen? Say it!

Servant Her hand did what her mind chose.

Leader What are you saying?

Servant The simple truth.

Leader The first-born child
of that new bride

is an avenging Fury—
scourging this house!

Servant You see it now. If you had seen the act itself
you would have pitied her even more.

Leader How could a woman's hand dare strike that blow?

Servant With terrible courage. You must know what she did
so you can tell the others.
When she came in alone,
and saw her son preparing a stretcher
in the courtyard—so he could go meet
his father—she hid where no one could find her.
She collapsed on the sacred altars, screaming
they'd be abandoned. When she touched
ordinary things that had been part of her life,
she wept. Aimlessly roaming, room to room,
she saw the faces of servants she cherished.
This brought on more tears, more grief
at her own and her household's destruction.
Strangers, she said, would soon take over
her house. After she'd stopped all that,
I saw her burst into Herakles' bedroom.
Through an open doorway I watched.
She spread blankets on her lord's bed,
jumped onto it, huddled there, tears
welling from her eyes, and cried out:
"My marriage bed! Where I loved him! Goodbye,
now, forever! Since you will never
again feel me lie down." That's all she said.

She ripped her robe open, viciously, just
where a gold brooch was pinned over her breasts,
leaving her left arm and whole ribcage naked.
I ran—fast as I could—to find her son
and warn him what she meant to do. Before we
got back, she'd driven a sword through her heart.

When he saw her, her son roared, because
he knew, *he knew*, that his own rage
had made her do it. He'd found out
too late from the servants that she hadn't
known what she was doing when she
followed the centaur's instructions.
Her young son, now so miserable,

mourned her passionately. Kneeling at her side,
he kissed and kissed her lips, then stretched out
sobbing on the ground next to her bed,
confessing he was wrong to attack her,
weeping that he'd been orphaned for life,
his mother and his father, both of them, dead.

That's the fate of this family. He is rash
who makes plans for tomorrow, makes any
plans at all—tomorrow doesn't exist
until we have survived today.

Leader Who should I mourn first?
Whose death brings more grief? I don't know.

Chorus There is one sorrow in the house,
we wait for another to arrive—
anxiety and grief are blood brothers.

Leader May a blast of wind
blow through our house
to drive me out of this land,

so I won't die of terror
when I see him, the once
great son of Zeus.

Chorus He's coming home, they tell us,
a fire in his bones nothing can cure,
an unspeakable miracle of pain.

Leader He wasn't far away,
he was near, the man I grieve
in my ear-piercing
nightingale's voice.

Strangers are bearing him here,
but how do they carry him?
They seem to suffer his pain,
as they would a lover's,

Herakles, unconscious, accompanied by the Old Man, is carried in by his Soldiers on a stretcher.

they walk on sad silent feet.
Oh they bring him in silence!

Should I think he is dead?
Or think he is sleeping?

Enter Hyllus, from the house.

Hyllus Father, to see you like this
hurts me so much! Father,
what can I do?

Old Man Don't talk. You'll only stir up spasms
that'll enrage him. He breathes, but he's still
unconscious. Keep your mouth shut.

Hyllus You're saying he's alive, old man?

Old Man Don't wake him up! Don't start him
again on that crazed lashing out.

Hyllus I'm the one losing my mind
under the weight of his pain.

Herakles wakes.

Herakles O Zeus, what country are we in?
Who are these men staring at me?
I'm worn out by this torture.
God it hurts! Like rats gorging on my flesh.

Old Man You see, I was right. Better to keep still,
than to chase sleep from his mind and eyes.

Hyllus No! How can I stand here while he suffers?

Herakles You—Cenaean Rock on the coast
where I built my altars—is *this* how
you thank me for those sacrifices?
O Zeus! To what weakness that Rock
brought me! What wretched weakness.
I wish I'd never seen that place—
the place that made these eyes
boil over with madness,
madness nothing can soothe.
Where is the spellbinder, the shrewd doctor,
who can cure this disease? Only Zeus.
Will the healer visit my bed?
I'd be amazed if he did.

Aiiiie.
Let me be. So unlucky! Let me die.

To Hyllus and the Old Man.
Don't touch me.
Don't turn me over.
That will kill me! Kill me!
If any of my pains slept,
you woke them up.
It grinds me—
O this plague
keeps coming back!
Where are you now, you Greeks,
my cold-hearted countrymen?
I wore myself out, clearing
Greece of marauders—
sea monsters, forest brutes.
Now, when I'm struck down,
where is the man willing
to save me with the mercy
of fire and steel? Come—cut
this head from my neck—
one solid blow will do it.
O Zeus, I am miserable.

Old Man Help me with him—you are his son!
He's more than I can handle. Your strength
can lift him much better than mine.

Hyllus I'm holding him. But I don't know how—
does anyone know how?—
to deaden his flesh to this torture.
This is what Zeus wants him to feel.

Herakles Where are you, Son?
Lift me up. Hold me here,
under here. Here it comes—
this beast none of us can beat down,
lunging at me, sinking its teeth.
Goddess Athena, it hits me now, again.
Honor your father, son. Take a sword,
no one will blame you, and drive it
through me—below my collarbone.
That will numb the screaming pain
your heartless mother tears from me.

I want to see her quieted just like that—
screaming, the same way I'll go down.
Sweet Hades, Zeus' brother,
let me rest, take my life, take it
with one swift stroke of peace.

Leader Friends, I hear our lord suffer and I shiver.
Such a great man—and so much pain.

Herakles I have done blazing work with my hands,
I've shouldered ugly burdens on this back,
but no task given me
by Zeus' wife, or that hated
Eurystheus, equaled
what Oeneus' daughter—
Deianeira! Deianeira!
so lovely, so treacherous—
forced on me: this net
of the Furies
woven around my death!
It's plastered to my body, it
eats through to my guts.

It's always in me—sucking
my lungs dry, leeching the fresh
blood from my veins—so my whole
body's wasted, crushed
by these flesh-eating shackles.

No fighting soldier,
no army of giants
sprung from the earth,
no shock of wild beasts,
hurt me like this—not my own Greece,
not barbarous shores, no land
I came to save. No, a frail woman,
born with no male strength,
she beat me—only she.
And didn't even need a sword.

Son, prove you are my son in fact.
Show me you're my son, and not hers.
Bring her out here, the woman who bore you.
Take her in your hands and put her in mine.
When she suffers what she deserves

I'll know what causes you more pain—
my own broken body, or hers.

Go do it, Son. Don't cringe. Do it.
Show me some pity; others will say
I have earned it. Look at me,
weeping and bawling like a girl. No man living
can say he saw me act like this, no!
I went wherever fortune sent me, without
a murmur. Now this hard man
finds out he's a woman.

Come here, stand by your father,
look how Fate mauls me. I will
open my robe. Look, all of you,
on this sorry body. See how
disgusting and shocking my life is!

Herakles rips open the blood-soaked
robe that's bonded to his chest.

Aiiiie!
That raw, flaming pain
is back, roaring through me,
forcing me to fight it again,
so hungry for my flesh.

Hades, welcome me!
Zeus, drive your lightning
into my brain.
The beast is at me again,
it's famished and it's raging.

My hands, O you hands,
my shoulders, chest, arms—
how frail you are!
Once you did all that I asked.
You are the lethal weapons
that strangled the lion prowling
the plains of Nemea—
no man could get near
that cattle-raiding cat—but you could!
You tamed the flailing Hydra of Lerna
and that monstrous herd, those centaurs—
men fused to horses, a breed
violent, lawless, brutally strong.

You mastered the wild boar
of Erymanthus, and the three-headed bitch
Hades kept in his dark realm, a terror
that cowed all comers,
the whelp of Echidna the Dreaded.
You whipped the serpent who stood guard
over the golden apples at the ends of the earth.

These struggles—and a thousand more—
have tested me. No man can boast
he has beaten my strength.
But now, with my bones
unhinged and my flesh shredded,
I lose to an invisible raider—
I, son of a mother so noble,
I, whose father they call Zeus,
god of the star-filled sky.

Be sure of this one thing—though I'm nothing,
though I can't walk a step—she, she, who did this
will feel my stony hand, even now, even now.
Let her come here. She'll show the world
that in my death, as in my life, I punish evil.

Leader What misery for Greece!
So much grief if we lose this man.

Hyllus Father, let me speak while you're quiet.
I know your pain's unbearable, but listen.
I ask for no more than you owe me.
Take my advice. Be calm. Cool your anger.
If you rage, you will never learn
why your lust for vengeance is futile.
Why your hatred has no cause.

Herakles Say your piece, then be still. I'm in too
much pain to make sense of your riddles.

Hyllus I want to tell you of Mother—how she is.
She never willed the wrong she did.

Herakles You worthless son! You're brave to use
her name in my presence, the mother
who murdered—me—your father.

Hyllus There's something else about her you must know.

Herakles Tell me her past crimes. Speak of them.

Hyllus Her acts today will speak to you.
When you've heard them, judge her.

Herakles Go on.
But don't disgrace yourself or betray me.

Hyllus Here is my news. She is dead. Killed just now.

Herakles Who killed her? Incredible! You couldn't
have given me more hateful news.

Hyllus She killed herself. With her own hand. No one else's.

Herakles It should have been this hand. She deserved this hand!

Hyllus You wouldn't hate her—if you knew.

Herakles Wouldn't hate her? If I knew what?

Hyllus Her good intentions hurt you—that's the truth.

Herakles Her "good intention" to kill me?

Hyllus When she saw the woman who's in our house,
she used love medicine to keep you. It went wrong.

Herakles And who in Trakhis has a drug so potent?

Hyllus Years back, the centaur Nessus
gave it to her—told her this drug
would make your passion burn again.

Herakles O what a miserable creature I am!
I'm finished. Finished! For me
there will be no more sunlight.
This is my ruin. I know where I am.

Your father's life is over, Son.
Gather all of my children here—
and poor Alcmena whose lovemaking
with my father Zeus came to nothing.

I want you to have, before I die,
all the prophecies I possess.

Hyllus Your mother is not here. She's at Tiryns
on the seacoast, where she's been living.
She's taken some of your children
to raise them there. Your other children
are in Thebes. Those of us left—we'll do what you ask.
Tell me your wishes. I'll carry them out.

Herakles Listen to my orders. Here is your chance
to show what you're made of.
To prove you're my son.
I learned long ago from my father
I would be killed by no creature who breathes—
but only by a dead beast from Hades. Just so!
The centaur kills me—the dead kill the living—
just as the voice of Zeus had sworn to me.

Now hear how one old prophecy
makes sense of an even older one,
the one I brought home from the grove
of the Selloi—mountain people who still
sleep on the ground—a prophecy
made by an oak tree of my father's,
an oak which spoke every language.
This oak whispered to me
that at the very hour
through which we now live,
I would be set free at last
from my life of hard labor.
I thought that meant
good times would come,
but those words meant
no more than this:
that I would die now.
The dead do no work.

Son, since those old words are coming true,
you must help me. Don't obstruct me, don't
force me to use harsh words. Help me willingly—
because you've learned the best law there is:
fathers must always be obeyed.

Hyllus Father, I am alarmed at where your talk
is taking us, but I'll do all you ask.

Herakles First, put your right hand in mine.

Hyllus Why are you forcing me to pledge this way?

Herakles Give me your hand—now! Don't refuse me.

Hyllus Here, take my hand. I can't refuse you.

Herakles Swear by the head of Zeus, my father. Swear.

Hyllus Swear to do what? What am I promising to do?

Herakles You're promising *me* to do what I ask.

Hyllus I promise you. I swear this before Zeus.

Herakles Ask Zeus to crush you if you break your word.

Hyllus I so pray. Zeus won't punish me. I'll keep my word.

Herakles You know Mount Oeta, whose peak is sacred to Zeus?

Hyllus Yes. I've gone there often to sacrifice.

Herakles Carry me there, with your own hands,
helped by what friends you need.
Cut down a great oak, cut wild olive limbs.
Bed my body down on these branches.
Then set them on fire with a flaming pine torch.

No tears. Don't sing hymns of mourning,
No, do not weep. Do it this way
because you are my son.
If you fail, I'll wait in Hades
to curse you through eternity.

Hyllus Father! What are you asking? You force me to do this?

Herakles I ask you to do what must be done. If you can't
do it—go be some other man's son. You're not mine.

Hyllus Father, why this? You're asking me
to be your killer, to curse myself with your blood.

Herakles I don't ask that. I ask you to heal me,
to be the one healer who can cure my pain.

Hyllus How does setting fire to your body cure it?

Herakles If burning me appalls you, do the rest.

Hyllus I'll take you there—I can at least do that.

Herakles And will you build the pyre just as I asked?

Hyllus I will, but not with my own hands. Others will build it.
I'll do everything else. You can trust me.

Herakles That will be more than enough.
You do a great thing for me, Son.
But there's one small thing more I ask.

Hyllus Ask it. I'll do it. Nothing is too great.

Herakles Do you know the girl whose father was Eurytus?

Hyllus You mean Iole.

Herakles You know her. This is what I charge you
to do, my son. When I'm dead, if you would
honor the oath you swore to Zeus,
make her your wife. Do not disobey me.
No other man must marry this woman
who shared my bed. No one but you, Son.
Marry her. Agree to it. You obeyed me
on the great things. If you fight me on this
small one, you will lose all the love you have won.

Hyllus How can I rage at a sick man? But who
could stand what this sickness does to his mind?

Herakles You refuse to do what I ask.

Hyllus She caused my mother's death and your disease.
How could any man choose her—
unless the Furies left him insane?
She's my worst enemy.
How could I live with her?
Better to die.

Herakles I'm dying, and he scorns my prayer.
You can be sure, my son, that the gods' curse
will hound your defiance of my wishes.

Hyllus No, you are going to show us
how cursed you already are.

Herakles You! You are waking up my rage!

Hyllus There's nothing I can do. There's no way out.

Herakles Because you've chosen not to hear your father.

Hyllus Should I listen, and learn blasphemy from you?

Herakles It isn't blasphemy for a son
to make his dying father glad.

Hyllus Do you command me as your son?
Do you make it my duty to you?

Herakles Son, I command you. May the gods judge me.

Hyllus Then I'll do it. Can the gods condemn me
if I do this out of loyalty to my father?
The gods know—it is you who have willed this.

Herakles In the end, Son, you do what's right.
Now make good on your words.
Put me on the pyre before the pain comes
searing back. Lift me up. The only cure
for Herakles' pain is Herakles' death.

Hyllus You'll have your wish.
Nothing stands in its way.
Your will prevails.

Herakles Act now, my hard-bitten soul—
before my sickness attacks again—
clamp my mouth shut like a steel bit
so not one scream escapes your stony grip.
Do this harsh work as though it gives you joy.

The bearers lift the stretcher and carry it toward the mountain, with the Chorus and then Hyllus following in cortege.

Hyllus Lift him up, friends. Forgive me
for what I am about to do.
But look at the cruelty of what

the ruthless gods have done
to us—the gods whom we call
our fathers, whose children we are—
and yet how coolly they watch us suffer.
No one foresees the future,
but our present is awash with grief
that shames even the gods, and pain
beyond anything we can know
strikes this man who now meets his doom.
Women, don't cower in the house.
Come with us. You've just seen death
and devastating calamity, but
you've seen nothing that is not Zeus.

Hyllus and Herakles' men lift and carry the hero offstage toward the mountain.

—Translated from Greek by Robert Bagg

Selections from *The Last Word: Ancient Greek Epitaphs**

I. Anonymous Epitaphs of No Known Date

Anonymous epitaphs and dedications were already common in ancient Greece when the first lyric poets began writing in the seventh century B.C.E. Chiseled on marble pillars, incised on votive tablets, these spare verse memorials supplied the basis for a much later invention, the literary epigram. No one knows who wrote the first examples. No one is sure of their age.

Many early cultures marked their graves with names and unremarkable sentiments. The best of the Greek epitaphs are different. Small vivid time-capsules, they convey their brief memorials with surprising directness in unconventional voices that still retain a modern ring. Many thousands of these verses have survived, ranging across the spectrum of Greek society. Here we meet generals, admirals, soldiers, sailors, philosophers, poets, priests, playwrights, paupers, fishermen, farmers, physicians, merchants, elders, infants, teachers, musicians, astronomers, tyrants, virgins, misers, undertakers, drunks, tycoons, crones, slaves, actors, dolphins, horses, insects, and farm animals, as well as people of no stated rank or occupation. Reading a good Greek epitaph, we learn a little something of Greek life.

Note: Numerals and initials below each English version indicate the collection where the original Greek may be found. The numbers standing on their own refer to the volume and entry number (not page number) of the Greek as it appears in the Loeb Classical Library edition of the *Greek Anthology*.

—Michael Wolfe

**The Last Word* is to be published in 2009.

My name is Dionysius of Tarsus.
I was sixty when I died. I never married.
I wish my father hadn't married either.

7.309

Lines on a Pillar Depicting Ampharéte Holding Her Grandchild

I hold my daughter's young child lovingly,
The one I held on my lap while we were living
Back in the days when we blinked at the bright sun,
The one I still hold here, though we have gone.

C.W.C. No. 23

I, unhappy Sophocles,
Entered Hades grinning
Because I swallowed Sardinian celery
[A poison that contracts the throat and lips].
And so I died, and others otherwise,
But all of us somehow or other.

7.621

The way down to Hades is straight,
Whether one starts from Athens or the Nile.
Don't be upset if you die far from home.
From every quarter a fair breeze blows
Straight to the land of the dead.

10.3

I am dead, yet I await you.
You will wait for someone else.
A single death waits for everybody.

7.342

Three times I reigned in Athens,
Three times the clan of Erechtheus ran me out.
Each time they called me back again:

Pisistratus, the great adviser,
Who brought together Homer's works
Only sung till then in bits and pieces . . . .

For Homer, the man of gold, was one of us.
His birthplace, Smyrna, we made our colony.

11.442

Inscription, Athens, 6th century B.C.E.

Whether you come from here or not,
Pity Tetticos as you pass—

A man of valor cut down in action,
Robbed of his youth on the battlefield.

Mourn him a minute. Then get started
Doing something good.

Friedlander, No. 135

II. The Late Archaic and Classical Periods. 600 to 350 B.C.E.

A small group of well known epigrams is traditionally assigned to the first Greek lyric poets, but today, modern scholars persuasively argue that most of these venerable entries are literary forgeries composed by poets of a later age.

The attribution of epitaphs to lesser fifth century poets like Cleobolus and Isadoras seems sound. The epigrams attributed to Plato a few decades later reflect a legend that, before he turned to philosophy, he tried his hand at verse, but their authorship is in doubt.—**Michael Wolfe**

Cleoboulos

I am a girl made of bronze set up on Midas's grave.
As long as water runs and tall trees spread
I will stand on this tomb where the tears keep flowing
To tell those who pass this way that he lies here.

7.153

Anacreon

Agathon, fearsome warrior,
Set down his life for Abdera.
As he lay on the pyre
The whole town shouted his name.

For the bloodthirsty war god
Who stripped away his armor
Dragged down no one braver
In the whirlwind of that awful fight.

7.226

Simonides

Here once upon a time three million Persians
Fought four thousand Greeks from the Peloponnese.

7.248

Simonides

Stranger, take this news to our Spartan leaders:
We who lie here stood by their commands.

7.249

Simonides

After drinking a lot, eating a lot
And speaking badly of everyone,
Here I lie, Timocreon of Rhodes.

7.348

Isadorus of Aegae

This hump in your field? It's someone's grave.
Back off the oxen! Raise the plough:
You almost tore up my ashes.
Don't plant corn on land like this. Sow tears.

7.280

Isadorus of Aegae

I am Eteocles, bred to a farm
Then lured away by high hopes to the sea
To take up long distance trading.

I was skimming along the Tyrrenian waves
When my ship went down
In a sudden squall.

Now I know: The wind that swells a sail
Is not the wind
That sweeps the threshing floor.

7.532

Anonymous Inscription at the Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.E.)

To our towering friendship
I've raised this little stone.
Sabinus, I will look for you forever.
If it happens as they say,
And you join the dead
To drink from the river
That helps men forget,
Please don't drink the drop
That makes you forget me.

7.346

Aeschylus

This monument holds Aeschylus,
Son of Euphorion, from Athens.

He lies here at Gela in Sicily
Among the fields of wheat.

Yet the far-off forests of Marathon
Bear witness to his bravery,

And the long-haired Persian he fought there
Could tell you of his strength.

D.L. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams*, p. 131
[Also: E4. (In J. M. Edmunds, *Elegy and Iambus*, 1931)]

Plato

The sea that drowned me showed some pity,
Leaving me the clothes in which I died.

It took a brazen man to strip me,
Weighing down his soul with my wet clothes.

Let him have them. Let him take them to Hell with him.
Let Minos catch him wearing my old jacket.

7.268

III. The Hellenistic Period: The Age of Alexander the Great. 330-100 B.C.E.

Beginning early in the third century, the epigram (and so the epitaph) was rapidly refined into a sophisticated literary form capable of depicting contemporary life in all its physical, social, and emotional detail.

Three poets figured largely in the transformation: Leonidas of Tarentum, Anyte of Tegea, and Nossis of Locroi. It is no accident that two of them, Anyte and Nossis, were women. Their distance from the centers of power is significant, too. Leonidas and Nossis lived in the rural boot of Italy, within a hundred miles of each other, while Anyte wrote from a remote part of the Peloponnese. Together, these provincials relocated the epigram in pastoral imagery, feminine values, and a celebration of life among common, non-heroic Greeks. Both women were aristocrats, and Leonidas may have been well born, too. They wrote with great sophistication, yet their shared vision is strongly democratic.

Leonidas was the most wide-ranging and prolific epigrammatist of the period with one hundred surviving poems. His generous epitaphs for fishermen, farmers, and ascetics form a representative album of lower-class Greeks, many of whom led hard lives near the bottom of the social ladder.

Nossis, Leonidas's neighbor, quietly glorified the social lives of contemporary women. Her choice of themes, and lesbian allusions harking back to Sappho, threw open the doors of the male-dominated epigram.

Anyte wrote like a Spartan, chastely, often on rural themes. With twenty-five entries to her name in the Anthology, we have more complete poems by Anyte than by any other woman of ancient Greece. Like

Sappho and Simonides, she harmonized strong feelings with a delicate verbal music that defies translation.—**Michael Wolfe**

Leonidas of Tarentum

Old Theris lived by his fish traps.
He spent more time at sea than any gull.
A seine net pirate, a cave diver,
He probed the rocks for eel and crab
And never sailed on showboats.
Despite so many years at sea
He did not drown in an autumn squall
Or see his life cut short by storms.
He died at home in a reed hut,
Going out like a lamp
Because he was ancient.
No wife or son set up this tomb,
But his friends in the divers' union.

7.295

Leonidas of Tarentum

This is Kleito's little shack,
This his garden strip and skimpy vineyard,
This his little woodpile.
Here Kleito lived out eighty years.

6.226

Leonidas of Tarentum

I, the stone over Kretho, speak his name.
Kretho is the ashes underneath me.
He once matched Gygos in his wealth,
He once owned countless herds,
He once—. Well he was everybody's envy.
What a small patch of that great estate is his.

7.740

Leonidas of Tarentum

Like a vine on a stake I lean on this stick.
When death calls my name, why play deaf?
What pleasure could sun bathing hold for me
For three or four more summers?

Speaking unvarnished words like these,
Old Gorgos cast off life
And settled down where everybody gathers.

7.731

Leonidas of Tarentum

A little mound of earth will do.
Let the pointless mausoleum
Crush someone else's resting place—
Now that I'm dead,
How could being noticed
Matter to Alexander,
Son of Calliteles?

7.655

Leonidas of Tarentum

A fierce, unexpected southeastern squall
And night and the waves Orion whips up
When it sets in late November
were my downfall.
I, Caliskros, slipped out of life
While sailing the deep-sea shelf off Libya.
Now I am lost, swirled here and there,
A miserable prey to the fishes.
The stone on my grave claims
Caliskros lies here.
What a liar.

7.273

Leonidas of Tarentum

A wallet, a goatskin hard as rock,
A walking stick, a grimy flask,
A purse with nothing in it and
This hat to shade his Cynic's head
Were all Sochares had. The day he died,
Starvation hung them in the bushes for him.

6.298

Leonidas of Tarentum

Step softly past the grave
Of Hipponax, the poet.
Don't stir the wasp at rest here.
Bitter creature,
He raged at any one,
Even his parents.
He sleeps at last,
But be careful.
Forged in fire, his words
Still sting, all the way from Hades.

7.408

Leonidas of Tarentum

Marion the wino, who drained dry every glass,
Lies beneath this tomb topped by a cup.

Deep in the bowels of Earth she sheds a tear,
Not for the husband and children

She drank out of house and home, but rather
For the cup—because it's empty.

7.455

Anyte

All his life this man was a slave named Prince.
Dead, he is the equal of King Darius.

7.538

Anyte: A Dolphin

I will never delight in a buoyant sea again
Rocketing up from the depths, neck out of the water,

Nor circle the oarlocks of a ship, my long lips grinning,
Pleased to see my own bust carved on the figurehead.

Dark waters dashed me to the land.
I lie here on a narrow strip of sand.

7.215

Nossis of Locroi

Stranger, if you sail to Lesbos,
That island of gorgeous dancers
Who set Sappho, the Graces'
Flower, on fire,

Tell them the land of Locroi too
Bore one the Muses loved
Who was her equal.
My name is Nossis. *Go!*

7.718

Callimachus

"Farewell, Sun," young Cleombrotus cried
And leapt from a high wall straight down into Hades.

Not because he had seen things that called for suicide
But because he had read Plato's treatise on the soul.

7.471

—Translated from Greek by Michael Wolfe

Hylas Proposes to Not Get Married

What could coax me into marriage?—
You get headaches then go broke!
First, it's servants; then a carriage;
Women are the strangest folk.
If she's rich, she'd be the master;
If she's poor, who'd buy the bread?
Young, she'd tempt men toward disaster;
Old, I might as well be dead.

Never take me for some friar
Who's been gelded, cowled and cowed;
With some filly I desire,
If she's not too stiff and proud,
I'll soon take her someplace private
With the lure of honeyed words;
Just one guess and you'll arrive at
What might happen afterwards.

Money's poured out for a wedding—
Costly outfits must be worn;
Next, that baby you've been dreading
Might develop and get born.
Nursemaids want the choicest victual,
Plump themselves on meat and stout;
Better think on this a little
Or your child might do without.

Aren't boxes, brooms and barrels,
Chests and armchairs mighty dear?—
Shitty Kate the cook's apparel,
All her kitchen tools and gear:

Glasses, dishclothes, then a table,
Jugs and mugs and plates enough—
Who in all creation's able
To afford such piles of stuff?

Many mouths are yours to nourish;
There's a famished dog and cat.
Guests might come—they'd think it boorish
Just to turn them out like that.
Meat and fish cost lots of money;
Beer and bread and wine are worse;
What your platters serve a-plenty
Quickly empties out your purse.

Then the wife will start in clamoring—
Always wanting to be boss;
Like as not, she'll get a hammering
Since that makes a husband cross.
Then whenever friends come calling
She'll complain and curse her lot.
Folks will say her life's appalling;
That could put him on the spot.

Many a man, from wedlock's trenches,
Flees his house and spouse to roam,
Takes to drinking, cards or wenches;
Day and night he won't go home
While the wife from whom he's wandered
Hasn't one crust to her name;
All they owned he's quickly squandered
So his children live in shame.

As for me, I'm sure I'd never
Want to cause such storm and strife;
I'll go on the same as ever—
Lots of women in my life:
One today, the next tomorrow;
That's my key to mental health
And the antidote to sorrow:
Each one looks out for himself.

—Translated from Danish by W. D. Snodgrass

A Drinking Song

This blessed day
I've come to stay
Where friends can drown their sorrow;
Now I believe
I'll never leave:
I'll be right here tomorrow.
Landlord, I vow
If you'll allow
I'll act out all that I'm feeling;
To you, my host,
I raise this toast,
Hoisting my glass to the ceiling.

With wine and sack
Troubles stand back,
Leaving us bright and jolly;
Good wine imparts
To minds and hearts
Solace from melancholy,
Then she displays
Our soul's deep base,
Makes princes of born beggars;
Once sure we're good,
We thirst for blood;
Soon we're all drawing our daggers.

Sometimes the grape
Sweetly will shape
Speech for the dull and the giftless;
Some give away
Most of their pay
To the corrupt or shiftless;
Soon courage starts
In timid hearts
So no one dares abuse us;
She even grants
Some men the chance
To make out with the Muses.

With good, strong beer
Often you'll hear
Drunkards at jeers and mocking;
No winged horse,
Russian or Norse,
Inspired the trash they're talking:
First, prophecy;
Then poetry;
One thinks he's a great physician,
While one poor clod
Just talks of God
And of his soul's condition.

Notice that pair
Quarreling there—
One tries to gesture and threaten;
Raging about,
One starts to shout,
Curses, then draws out his weapon;
One makes a toast
While one will boast
He's fought in fort and ravelin;
One proudly brags
What snarls and snags
He's had to suffer while traveling.

I'll always stay
Cheerful and gay,
Wine, just as long as you'll bring me
Music and dance,
Girls who'll enhance
Whatever tune they'd sing me.
Come then, let's raise
Our glass to praise
The joys and merry countenance
Of ruby grapes,
Then let's all traipse
Forth in a rowdy round-dance.

—Translated from Danish by W. D. Snodgrass

LESZEK SZARUGA

Time of Transition

We live in a time of transition, which our grandchildren
May designate an epoch. We know nothing about ourselves but they
Will classify us as butterflies in History's specimen cases.
We will be gazing through the glass with our lifeless
Eyes, and our children's children, the conquerors
Of stars, will be thumbing through family albums. This
Old fashioned elderly gentleman is me, the photograph
Already faded. I'm standing motionless, eyes fixed
On the setting sun. In the top left corner
You can see a shining dot. And that's precisely why
This old photograph has such significance. That was
The first sign. Then came the others.

—Translated from Polish by
W. D. and K. B. Snodgrass
with Justyna Kostkowska

Whew

Whew—poetry, poetry! What is it more than words
written under duress? What freedom is it, then,
a poet defends these days? Who does he want to hoodwink
except himself? They're long dead, after all—
those ancient paradoxes. A guy repeats the slogan: freedom
is a conscious necessity. Another guy: that's a joke
with a very long beard. Old Marx's portrait
watches us from the wall, it winks and
laughs without a sound. But none of his students
get the joke. And only the poets
choke themselves with laughter.

—Translated from Polish by
W. D. and K. B. Snodgrass
with Justyna Kostkowska

MARIN SORESCU

Pathway

Thoughtful, hands behind me,
I walk the railroad tracks
The straightest pathway
Possible.

Behind me, at full speed,
A train is coming
Which has heard nothing about me.

This train—old man Zeno be my witness—
Can overtake me never
Since I'll always have a head start
Against objects that lack thought.

Or even if it, brutally,
Should override me
There'll always be a man
Walking ahead of it

Like myself now
In the face of this black monster
That closes in with horrifying speed
And which can overtake me
Never.

—Translated from Roumanian by W. D. Snodgrass with Dona Roşu and Luciana Costea

Symmetry

As I went walking like this,
Up ahead, suddenly,
Two roads diverged:
One to the right,
The other to the left,
In complete symmetry.

I stood there
Narrowing my eyes,
Pursing my lips,
Coughing,
Then took the one to the right
(Just what no one ought to do,
As I realized later on).

I walked onward, ever onward—
No use giving more details.
And up ahead, in time, diverged
Two abysses:
One to the right,
The other to the left.
I rushed into the left
Not blinking an eye, not getting worked up,
With might and main to the left
Which was, alas, not lined with goosedown.
Limping, creeping along,
I crawled onward, ever onward.
And up ahead, suddenly,
Two boulevards diverged.
"I'll show you," I told myself
And took the one on the left
Just for spite.
Wrong, all wrong—to the right
Lay the genuine, broad, true road, as they say
And at the first crossroads
Committed myself wholeheartedly
To the one on the right. Once more the same,
The other was demanded this time, the other . . .
My provisions are used up by now.

My walking staff has grown old;
It never puts out, anymore, buds
In whose shade I could tarry
When I feel downhearted.
Worn out by the stones, my limbs
Creak and groan against me
For my persistence in error.
And look now, up ahead again, two skies
Are gaping:
One to the right,
The other to the left.

—Translated from Roumanian by W. D. Snodgrass with Dona Roşu and Luciana Costea

LUIS MIGUEL AGUILAR

Hilario, Imprudent

Anybody who's lived any time in Chetumal
Will understand the circumstances of my death.
As for the others: if someday they're on board a boat,
Headed for the high seas,
And they see, suddenly expelled,
Flying several meters up,
Over the water's blue surface,
The shell that's just been vacated by a snail,
They'll know what happened:
Catfish clamped his mouth on the snail—that's what he eats—
And then absorbed it. The suction is so powerful
That when he extracted the snail its shell
Shot straight up, crazed by a vigorous impulse.
Still, the Cat, however enormous, is a peaceable fish,
Sucking only to eat. That time,
While deep-sea diving some meters down,
I committed the stupidity of hurling a harpoon
Just for the fun of killing it.
I only wounded it. The Cat attacked me.
It's clear he's absorbed my intestines
and my stomach, leaving a huge hole
In the middle of my body. It pains me to say it, but the fact is
I died an idiotic death, and deservedly so.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

José María, Logger

The waning moon above and the Hondo River under my boat.
The moon's impartial but the Hondo has two authorities:
The Mexican side and the English side. From a submerged spot in the jungle
I hauled the wood across the river and watched it on its way;
Me, the unlikely shepherd of mahogany trunks, herding them
In the forded neutrality of the Hondo. For several nights
The shipment of wood to pickup point arrived incomplete; at first I thought
the caprices of transport caused the loss.
There were ten of them: Blacks, thugs, scum, Belizeans; and for several nights
They went on doing this to me: they dragged the wood away from my boat
And sent it over to the English side.
One afternoon I asked Gálvez if he'd unload the trunks
While I went on ahead on the route.
There were ten of them. Hiding in the night, I waited for them on the other side;
they never did get back to their side—except for three who were
working above
and escaped over the mountain.
There were ten of them and I killed seven.
I hunted them like alligators and they broke up the same way,
Bucking and spinning in the water,
Spine cracked in two.
For a moment they themselves were trunks; that's what I saw, along with
the reflection of the moon in the river,
And in between puffs of gunpowder, the Hondo's slow current.

That's how I began my logging business.
All this was long before the hurricane.
That was the time that mahogany died for mahogany.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

Bernardo, Bashful

I could never bear it when my friends
Pointed at me, yelling out my name,
When she came walking down Héroes.
It didn't mean anything to them. Like a dope
I told them I had a crush on her, or they noticed.
I stopped hanging out with them. We didn't get along anymore.

Mara on Héroes at four o'clock in the afternoon.

I never got near there. Everybody knew about it.
Or, really, they knew the exact day
That agent from Campeche turned up.
Older than her. Than me. An acquaintance.
He came courting and he won her
—With the family's wholehearted approval—
And married her in Chetumal.
It's all so obvious that the night of the wedding
I got into a boat along with three bottles
And rowed for a half an hour until I ended up
In the middle of the Milagros lagoon.
Nine days later my body floated up.
My eyes were lost and clouded over
With the lagoon, with Mara, with the booze.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

The Twins, Prostitutes

Here we are, Ignacia and Sonia Hernández.
In life, the Twins.
The two of us were as slender as palm trees,
The shining blue stars of the *Xel-há*.
She was killed by a guy who overreacted;
I died of lung cancer; though deep down
The two of us died of cadaver love. We found out about it
In Guadalajara. We went on doing it in Chetumal.
Ignacia asked me to talk about
Our situation, in case anybody is interested.
If so, we were wondering if it were also possible
To remember, instead of us, the song we love, *The Three Isabelas*,
Even though there were only the two of us: Ignacia and me.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

Remes, Pen Pusher

I spent my life among rubber stamps and papers,
Certifying births, deaths, marriages, or divorces.
But that wasn't the important thing; I keep thinking about the sea and the ways
It tried to destroy us. I hated it, but that wasn't enough.
In Chetumal only two passions
Were rock hard, able
To keep a diamond from eroding.
But the Deaf Latife landed in the traffic islands of Héroes
Defeated by the sea—and didn't know it;
José María, the logger, for so many years hard
As death, grew rich, and wealth
Stupefied him. He ended up in Mérida useless and afraid,
Poor and dignified, a little bit,
By the cancer that wrecked his throat.
That left me alone to argue
With the sea, though knowing
It wouldn't be enough because everybody
Would have ended up suffering its dominion.
Blessed Virgin, pray for the anxious men in boats
That the horizon carries away.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

The Broad Bed

You want the bed to be a haven
—Between sobriety and the drinks—
Before it's time to part
The moments collected by María Enriqueta
—So tenaciously—to the rhythm of a story
Taking shape in the middle of a bed.

The Story doesn't extend past the bed
Though the Bed (you feel) is a better haven
Than what you'll get from the Story;
Neither sober nor into your drinks,
You stick to the plan devised by María Enriqueta
So that Hallowed Humdrumness won't drive you apart.

And you ask your story not to part
Two bodies united under the same bed-
Spread belonging to María Enriqueta.
Elsewhere, there's no bed as haven,
No intimate sweetness of drinks,
So you proceed with care in this story.

The bed tells such a newly-minted story
That when the time comes to part
Her body from your time, your drinks,
You may not see it coming. You enjoy the bed,
Foreseeing that love won't be a haven
Though you're adored by María Enriqueta.

You've had your doubts about María Enriqueta;
Deep down, you were afraid of this story
And don't really deserve a haven.
Now you ask (badly) that it not part
Your story from the space that the bed
Offers you, though you're well into your drinks.

All right. Here you are. After several drinks.
And trembling before you, María Enriqueta
Undressing at the side of the bed;
You want to stay the course of this story
Believing that any other story might part

What the Bed united. And as haven
María Enriqueta, with or without drinks.
And so on until the Bed do us part.
And so on until another story grants us haven.

—Translated from Spanish by Kathleen Snodgrass

Atahualpa Death Prayer

"Atahualpa Death Prayer" is based on a recent Spanish version of "Apu Inka Atawallpaman," an anonymous Quechua poem responding to Pizarro's murder of Atahualpa—an event (evoked also by Hart Crane in "Imperator Victus") that pulled the linchpin from the Inca empire. That was in 1533. No one knows when the poem was composed. Speculation runs from mid-16th century up through the 18th century. An early date seems likely, as the poem is surely autochthonous. With one possible exception due to a faulty transcription, the original Quechua has no Spanish borrowings.

I've tried to keep original images, metaphors, and attitudes intact. But being ignorant of Quechua, I don't know what slippages may have occurred between the Spanish version and its Quechua basis. This translation, then, has to be considered a version or "imitation" of the presumed original, which would itself be a version of an oral pre-text. The author has a distinctly nuanced sensibility, but this is not lyric poetry. What it renders, most remarkably in its subjectivity, is communal catastrophe. The structure and motifs of the elegy correspond to those of ritual dramas—still performed on occasion in present-day Peru and Bolivia—that replay the upside-downing of the world at the death of "the all-powerful" Atahualpa.

—James Scully

*

What sick rainbow is this
stealing in, so black?
For Cuzco's enemies
a false dawn dances,
a hailstorm of disease
beating on everyone

*

Time and again
my heart
sensed it coming—
and I, sunk in dreams
fitful, half felt
the nasty blue fly of death

*

In one omen the sun
went out, paling
shrouding the corpse of Atahualpa.
And with his death his lineage
diminished
in the blink of an eye.

*

Grim enemies
cut off his head,
already the river of blood
breaks up branching out

*

Already his strong teeth gnaw
anguish they can't stop,
the brilliant eyes of the great Inca
cloud over

*

Now the great heart of Atahualpa
turns bitter cold, now
throughout his four dominions
they're shouting their lungs out

*

Thick mist misting down
amasses darkness.
Mother moon withdraws into herself
as if wishing to be reborn,
everyone's busy hiding themselves,
remorseful

*

Earth refuses to take in
its master—as if
mortified by the corpse
of one who loved it,
loathe to devour
its lord

*

Now the hardness of rock
gives way, hollowing,
the river roaring sorrow
is swollen to overflowing

*

Tears held back gush forth,
river carries them off.
Who human has not wept
for a loved one?
What child would not be
by its father's side?
Moaning, heavy heart struck
joyless

*

What virgin dove would not
care for who courts her?
And what wild stag dying doesn't let
its heartbeats keep it going?

*

Tears of blood
torn from joy, reflect
in shining drops
the corpse,
heart softened,
blood bathed in his country's lap

*

Those touched in passing
by his masterful hands,
those enfolded in

the wings of his heart,
those protected
by the fine mesh of his chest,
wail with the unbridled cries
of inconsolable widows

*

Colorful women congregate
but dressed in black,
the sun priest has wrapped himself
in his most dark cloak,
common people line up
by the graves

*

Death spreads. Sorrow stuns.
Tears of the Queen Mother
burst like spring freshets
over the yellowing corpse.
Her face is cold, pallid.
Her mouth speaks:

*

Where will you in exile
find rest, out of my sight,
leaving our land
abandoned to suffering,
you from my heart
cut out forever?

*

Regardless rooms of promised treasure,
the foreign enemy, your captors,
by nature
rapacious voracious carried on
like snarly beasts in a mad rush.
Those you gave
an easy life with gold and silver
gave you death.

*

Captured
you lavished on them all they desired,
but with your death in Cajamarca
everything stopped.
In your arteries
blood crusts.
Eyes blur. Your look
dissolves into the dark side
of the brightest star

*

Who feels for you weeps, wanders, runs
after your well-loved soul—
your fevered troubled heart
howls
breaking off from the indignity
of your perishing

*

Your gold sedan chair dismantled,
your throne
its canopy woven of gold threads
shredded, is handed out as spoils

*

Ruled by heaped up punishments
cut to the quick
stupefied, estranged, without justice
isolated
weighing how our bodies have no shadows
we cry
to no one to appeal to
ourselves alone together, talking crazy

*

Will your heart allow us,
great Inca,
to be wandered every which way
scattered
at large, to be by others
ground underfoot?

*

Open your clear-seeing eyes,
open them!
reach out your hands
most giving,
and with this good sign
leave us strong

— Translated from Spanish by James Scully

JULES LAFORGUE

Ballad of Little Weak Heart

The doctor said he won't be back—
Mama she died of a heart attack—
    Hi-di-ho,
    Mummy, O!
And pretty soon I'll also be
Where I can lean against her knee.
I hear my heart go tick-tick-tick,
That must be Mama calling me.

People giggle when they see
My funny face and swollen eye,
    Hi-di-ho,
    Weave to and fro.
I look as drunk as I can be,
I feel my legs fold under me.
I hear my heart go tick–tick–tick,
That must be Mama calling me.

And so I wander out of town,
And sobbing watch the sun go down.
    Hi-di-ho,
    Silly, O,
The sun, in setting, seems to me—
Don't know why—a bloody sea;
I hear my heart go tick-tick-tick,
That must be Mama calling me!

If only Jenny took this heart
Before its pieces flew apart.
    Hi-di-ho,
    Will she, no?
How pink and fresh and sweet is she,
But look at pale and wobbly me.
I hear my heart go tick-tick-tick,
That must be Mama calling me.

I've yet to meet with anyone
With half the heart of the setting sun.
    Hi-di-ho,
    Mummy, O,
How I wish that I could be
Where I could lean against her knee . . .
My heart goes tick-tick-tick-tick-tick . . .
Mama, are you calling me?

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

Periods

Coagulate and cauterize
And dot the *i*s
On all the cherry-ripe lagoons
Of failing Infantas,
Feline Ophelias.

Feigned hysterical crises crown
The dropping down
Of regular ovarian supplies
In failing Infantas,
Feline Ophelias.

Deaf to cautious winds that rise,
Supervise
Armadas bound for the ovoid moon
With failing Infantas,
Feline Ophelias.

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

Complaint of a Certain Sunday

She did not understand that loving is the enemy of loving.
—Sainte-Beuve, *Volupté*

Man is not wicked, nor woman ephemeral.
Ah, madcaps kicking up your heels in the casino,
Everyman weeps one day, every woman is a mother,
    We are all filial, let's say so!
What! Have the fates espoused such unhappy causes
That we are in exile, far apart,
Treating one another selfishly,
And wasting ourselves seeking a single faith?
Ah, until nature improves one day,
    I will live on monotonously.

In this village perched on cliffs, off toward the bells,
I go far down, and the children stare
As they take their hot rolls to be blessed;
    And home again, my blessed heart breaks.
The sparrows from the old roofs chirp on my sill,
And watch me eat, without appetite, *à la carte*;
The souls of dead friends perhaps inhabit them.
I toss them bread: wounded, they depart.
Ah, until nature improves one day,
    I will live on monotonously.

Yesterday she left me. And am I not hurt
By that? Of course, that's the cause of all my trouble—
I'm faithfully tied to her apron strings.
    Her handkerchief drifted to me me on the Rhine. . .
Alone I stand: The sunset briefly holds back its radiant
Quadriga in which a gnat ballet performs,
Then, toward the chimney-pots of soup, sinks . . .
And it is evening, imperceptible confidence . . .
Ah, until nature improves one day,
    Must one live on monotonously?

How many eyes, fan-shaped, ogival, or incestuous,
Since man has hoped, have claimed their rights!
Great God, do eyes rot like the rest?
    How lonely it is! How cold!
How many autumn afternoons still to face!
Spleen, cold-blooded eunuch, squats on our dreams.
Unable to return to the primeval coral reef,
Let us, fellow men, console one another
And until nature improves one day,
    Try to live on monotonously.

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

PHILIPPE THOBY-MARCELIN

A Thousand Thin Bamboos

A thousand thin bamboos surround the stream
With a girdle of chastity
In which sunbeams are caught
And the wedding dance of hummingbirds.
It is the setting for Creole idyls,
Mango trees,
Ferns, mosses,
The clear sky of the Antilles;
And, like a sudden flight of doves,
O Black Woman, your white smile!

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

A Great Joy Had Descended

A great joy had descended
Among us, and there remained
Among men
Only reasons for loving

A great joy!
But I was still too weak
To grasp
And to hold it.

As with a terrible hangover
My head was empty and my stomach heavy.
I looked at my hands
And I hated them for being so tiny.

They were not hands that could earn money for food.
At the time I wrote little ditties
To please a wide audience,
And those hands were worth little more than what they would offer
a prostitute.

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

Elegy

It was summer, I remember,
A summer wet, impure,
Steam rising from the earth.
A shadow, as if in mortal agony,
Climbing toward the fountain,
And trees giving forth
The mournful echo of grief,
A woman, one I had dreamt of,
Awaited me until nightfall.

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

Do Flowers Have Thoughts?

Do flowers have thoughts?
They do have pretty names
While that mulatto woman in full flower
Remains the whole blessed day
Seated on her balcony.

Her flesh is soft, as gilded
As the flesh of the banana,
Her belly, smooth and hard
Like a ball of lignum vitae
And the impatient sap of the flamboyant
Flows in vain on her lips.

Lord, Oh Lord, if only
She could free herself
From gazing down on the passers-by,
And come down to join us.

—Translated from French by William Jay Smith

GENEVIÈVE HUTTIN

The Author to Her Book

I—Robinson Crusoe—would speak to you—
directly and with some candor—but *only* after reading one Great Book—

a short and bittersweet romance about the Apocalypse—authored by one
John of Patmos

and discovered in a beat-up Bible I fished out of a shark' s stomach.

Riveting—I couldn't put it down—here on my island I kept turning each
soggy page—
my island where solitude has been circling and circling me—and me—
just floating and sinking—drifting and bobbing—

not your average flotsam washed up by some rogue wave—oh no—
more like a satellite dish calibrated to the End of Days—

thus—I will have been reading History's First Modern Poem—
the author having constructed it around a speaker undergoing a set of visions—
a speaker who is nothing *but* his visions—a speaker plagued, tormented
by them—

who witnesses The Angel with *feet like unto a fine brass*,
with eyes *aflame with fire*, with hair a shock
of bristling white *like wool, a blast of snow*—

that Angel who inspires the author
to write the seven bishops of the seven falling churches—
and though John *is* a man of his time—that dark time of Domitian—
John speaks through time to All of Time.
The whole book—it's a kind of character—

a book so powerful that no one is even holy enough to open it—
except of course that Lamb—that She-Angel with Seven Horns and Seven
Eyes—

the Lamb who never even utters the word *God*
but who burns in her spangle of diamond and ruby—in conflagrations
of black jasper and blood carnelian seated on her throne in a gaping sky—

the Lamb whose eyes burst wide to voices that thunder
yesterday today and tomorrow
damnation and grace—perdition—salvation—

a book throating its ecstasy—that breathes transfiguration—
shuddering its news and throbbing its witness
yet—at times—so calm, so quiet—like Trakl—as in
a golden plank now clatters through the white abyss—

a Book of The Lost—found only in its images—
a book I found again one day—quite by accident—I who address you now.

I forgot—I'd already read it once—a long time ago—as it burst from my body—
and I saw you—my book—written on the wings of a great Lady Seraph—

that She-Angel of the Apocalypse—her tongue a double sword of fire—
her tongue searing your flesh from my flesh—burning bright your letters
in the air—

—Translated from French by Bradford Gray Telford

Islands

—for Nina Zivankevic and for Vladimir

You are standing there alone with your daughter
and all around you—sniffing at you—sensing you as prey—
a Solitude is circling, orbiting—churning up the currents—as in a great
magnetic field—

on New Year' s Eve—the Métro—near the U. S. embassy—
this handsome Gatsby in a tux—his scarf—expensive—white—
now gathers up your baby and the stroller in his fine, strong arms
and you descend the stairs—suddenly a couple—suddenly—he' s gone—

you—an Easter Island statue—your infant daughter forms her sounds—
interpreting your mystery—tries to solve the puzzle of your frown—
no doubt you saw the start of something wonderful—
a current—strong—brimming in desire—in schools of fresh words—
to school and warm your loneliness—a climate change—this Tropic of Alone—

Just the other day you envisioned a deserted island—and you—a god—
looked down on yourself—bright and diffident as a mirror.

When Robinson Crusoe at last returned to London, how he longed for his
lost island—
tearing through the pages of his Bible he hunted for a gust—some breeze—
he had that fatal longing of those who are abandoned—those who then—
abandon—

Island—crisp—the morning light—as Clara forms her words
you hear the absence of her father—a color lush inside her throat—
so sharp—so strong—your daughter is all spirit—cask of rum—
your drink from her—you drown—

you need the island—waves and waves of yesterday that wash up on today—
that lap against your rapture—these beaches of your love—
eroding—vanishing—as in the Book of Revelations—beckoning—
abandoning—
a child on the beach who coins new words for ancient pain—
when you no longer wish to speak—and yet—

amid the vanishing—still—your Island—
you can see it—there—the mountains and green palms—there—you see
that as the vision disappears it leaves a what?—a poem—

St. John—Apocalypse—16:20—look it up—
these clouds and oceans witness us—the hat from Martinique—its sandy brim—
a shimmer of the storm—the after-storm—oh, hurricane—and then it
goes—is gone—

—Translated from French by Bradford Gray Telford

For Georges Guingouin

His voice rising in a song of the world and holding one last note—
singing his song of the Rose—
the bloodshot notes—a bloodshot song—thorns of wax now melting—
dripping—

a voice like light cast from the tapers on a rusted candelabrum—
Third Empire—maybe Second—at least five branches—
each branch carved in bronze and sleek as the leg of a cat—caked in centuries
of wax—
lighting a miner' s hearth deep in the backcountry—

a voice speaking its light—rumbling like a grandpa's—
clap you on the shoulders singing *greetings*—
greetings!

a sacred cow of history—
a red cow dripping nameless from the cave-wall at Lascaux—

meanwhile the city was on fire—
the mob uncoiling—thrashing like a severed lizard's tail—
while beneath a man gave voice to The Resistance—
exhorting—bargaining—refusing—singing every hue of Red—
years later—the shock of fists—trammeled by the prison guards—
all his yesterdays now vanished—a grief that crushed his being—
he made it seem so simple—quaint—a "telltale madness"—
yet merely his red sorrow—mourning red—his love of living through the Real—
cast and struck—a forge—bottomless—his Great Resistance—

like seeds—black seeds—the grains of madness now scattering his name—
arcing—spiraling—flying straight and sharp—the backbone of a warrior—

sailing through the forest trees—sowing legends through the land—
to cast them deep—the psyche of a nation—

amid the raving that appeared and disappeared before him as would dreams—
deep in his terrible rage—in the muck of his abandonment—
his lady lost her breast—the lady *Liberté*—
her red blood trickling—nourishing a stalk of night-blooming jasmine—
and near it—to escape the hunting cat—a lizard dropped its tail—
and left it thrashing in the grass—

—Translated from French by Bradford Gray Telford

MARINA MAYORAL

In Parks at Dusk

Marina Mayoral is Professor of Spanish Literature at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, Spain. Though she is primarily known for her research on the writings of Rosalía de Castro and Emilia Pardo Bazán, her own literary production is extensive and significant. Like the 19th century women writers she studies, her work is suffused with the particularities and moods of the landscape of Galicia. Winner of several literary prizes, Mayoral has published five collections of short stories: Ensayo de comedia, *1982,* Morir en sus brazos, *1989,* Querida amiga, *1995,* Recuerda, cuerpo, *1998,* Sólo pienso en ti, *2006, and fourteen novels* Cándida, otra vez, *1979,* Al otro lado, *1980,* Plantar un árbol, *1980,* La única libertad, *1982,* Contra muerte y amor, *1985,* O reloxio da torre, *1988,* Una árbole, un adeus, *1988,* Chamábase Luis, *1989,* Recóndita armonía, *1994,* Tristes armas, *1994,* Dar la vida y el alma, *1996,* La sombra del ángel, *2000,* Bajo el magnolio, *2004, and* Casi perfecto, *2007.*

"In Parks at Dusk" is the sixth of twelve stories that follow the arc of a life span and chart a common theme of desire through a chorus of voices, characters, and plots. By centering the sexual experience as the organizing principle of the collection, the author establishes the body as locus of subjectivity and memory. The physical object of the book reflects the body as encoded sensory experience; that is, drawing from mythology, literature, film, and popular culture, the stories instantiate a series of defining erotic moments.

The short story playfully celebrates a deviant response to violence by telling the tale of a woman who re-enacts the punishment of her aggressor. The extraordinary habits of this character are ironically contrasted with the tensions of her daily life: she is a spinster, a teacher, ostensibly a virgin, a Catholic, and a caretaker. By fulfilling a stereotype within the village culture, she has an automatic cover for her clandestine activities. The protagonist's double life reflects and distorts the notion that there are two types of women in Spain: the woman who belongs to the generation molded by the forces of the Franco regime, and the contemporary woman

who is in every way a modern European. Our protagonist is an aberration of both types.

The translation challenges I faced included capturing and reflecting the pace and rhythms of the rather more formal Spanish expression into an English that was not stiff. Sometimes this meant losing the grace of Mayoral's writing; interestingly, sometimes the sections breathed more freely in English. Translating from Spanish to English engages a kind of carving experience for me; I both shape and discover the image that emerges.

Original text: "En los parques, al anochecer" in Recuerda, cuerpo *by Marina Mayoral. Madrid: Alfaguara, 1998.*

—Claudia Routon

The president of the Wives for Catholic Action has asked me to write a memoir. They want to publish a short run of a carefully made edition and give it to the members of the association to serve as an example to their daughters in these loose times. It won't be for sale. The town hall has agreed to subsidize it; they unanimously approved the proposal in their last meeting. I'm not surprised: all the council members passed through my classroom and they have fond memories of me, their former teacher. As I understand it, the book is supposed to be a tribute to my many years of dedicated service to children, as well as a recognition for my work and talents.

While I thanked the president for the initiative of the Wives for Catholic Action and the town hall for its generous support, I also tried to make them see the negatives of the project: the cost, the effort, the few benefits. These days, who is going to be interested in the life of an obscure schoolteacher? Most of all, who'd find the book useful?

I can't say much about my early years. I was a good girl and a serious young woman. My brothers married and went off with their wives. While no one was explicit, everyone assumed I'd take care of my parents and Aunt Sabina, who didn't have a dime to her name. We weren't rich either, but my father had a decent pension and the house was ours—my mother's inheritance. With this and my schoolteacher's salary, we lived modestly but well.

When I was thirty, it dawned on me that I was a spinster. It's not as if I were uglier or more disagreeable than the other girls in the village who did marry; I think I was just unlucky. The war broke out when I was seventeen, and when it was over there were few men and lots of women for them to choose from. I was shy and a bit dull—not saucy—and that was probably the reason I never caught anyone's eye.

Since teaching left me plenty of free time and my parents were still able to take care of themselves, I began studying languages: first French,

then English, Italian, German. Learning foreign languages was key to my feeling like a complete woman, a complete human being.

When I was thirty-three—the age when so many great men died—I decided to go to France, to Paris. I could read French already, and I was looking forward to speaking it and getting to know a city that seemed like the center of the world.

In Paris I was kissed for the first time. It was a strange and troubling experience—*bouleversante*, I thought, in my incipient French—but I can't remember it clearly in spite of the strong effect it had on me.

I saw the man in a café, in the Latin Quarter. When I realized he was watching me, I turned completely red, as usual. I pretended to be busy studying the map of the city, but he came to my table anyway and offered to be my guide. I was shy and hadn't had many occasions to speak French and I accepted. Together we left the café and we walked along the banks of the Seine to the Vert-Gallant where he put his arm around my shoulders and told me some story about a Knight Templar burned alive. I couldn't listen; I could only hear the frantic beating of my heart. Suddenly he pushed me against the wall and forced me to the ground; I was terrified. I tried to scream but his tongue penetrated my mouth and his body immobilized me. It was all very dreamlike. I couldn't tell if it was my tears or a mist, but I remember everything covered in a thick, gray fog, solitary and silent; you could only hear his panting, then the sound of my footsteps. I ran to the hotel and tried to hide my torn stockings, my messy hair, my bloodstained clothes. I gathered my belongings and immediately returned to the village.

But then I calmed down and I realized that I'd liked it. I remembered with shaking pleasure the taste of his mouth, his breath, his violent embrace, and above all, his surrender. Yes, his surrender: the pressure of his arms and his body imprisoning mine and then his sweet yielding, his slackness. That complex sensation, exciting and surprising, overturned my tranquil existence as a village schoolteacher. And I knew I would have to feel that again, that life would be insipid and bland if I couldn't season it, couldn't light it up with the pleasure that enthralled me, that carried me to a world I'd only tasted, but couldn't give up.

The next step wasn't easy. It took me a while to decide to make another trip. At the beginning I was satisfied with the simple recollection of what happened, but after a few months I felt a demanding need to relive it.

I returned to Paris under the pretense of practicing the language because I could leave my parents and aunt for a few days with no further explanation.

I began to look forward to the trip, enjoyed preparing for it, even though I was plagued with the worry I might fail. What if the first time

had been pure chance? Maybe no one would ever look at me again with desire, or throw himself on me like a starving wild animal. But my fears were unfounded. I was lucky; or perhaps, far from the village, darker desires were awakening and unleashing a subtle attractiveness in me that the routine of work and shyness had hidden.

I should say, without false modesty, that during my travels it was never difficult to attract a man and that I even allowed myself to choose. Right away I understood that to reach the height of pleasure, complete satisfaction, I had to do it with the kind of man typically considered the most virile: someone robust and muscular, bearded and hairy, with a strong smell, and above all, someone violent. I felt indescribable pleasure when held down, flattened, and crushed by a powerful body, knowing that at the end he would surrender, yield to my body, and I would drink his breath while he languished in my arms on the humid grass: I liked to do it in parks at dusk. It was my little vice, from my first experience on the Vert-Gallant. I haven't always been able to arrange the ideal scenario, but when I do, my pleasure is perfect, absolute, incomparable.

After the second trip I began to study English seriously and six months later I felt ready for London. Then came Rome, Berlin, Cologne. A large city every time, after studying the corresponding language.

These trips gave me more pleasure than I'd ever had, and they also allowed me to be good to others. The children at school learned the basics of languages that, as adults, made them stand out in their jobs, or at least find better ones. Their contribution to my homage shows their appreciation for what I did. And I should mention how patient and affectionate I was when caring for my parents during their long illness, as well as my invalid Aunt Sabina in her demanding old age. My own sisters-in-law were embarrassed that the burden of the family fell on my shoulders and encouraged me to travel—knowing that I always returned in better spirits.

This is not an apology. I know what I did could seem morally reprehensible, but that is a matter for God and me, and I won't discuss it with anyone else. I only revealed my occasional need to possess a man to my confessor, Don Luis—a pure soul, a true saint who understood that I had to draw strength from somewhere to live shut up all year with three sick old people and a mob of raucous children. But he never understood completely.

"My child," he said, "since you can't go without that, why don't you do it with one of the villagers? Maybe you'd work things out and get married, and you wouldn't have to go to those godforsaken places."

But it was precisely the anonymity I liked—the quick animal encounter, two bodies desiring, fighting each other until one wins. Only that. And when it isn't like that, when someone insists on talking about his life and asks about mine, then I can't. All I can do is sacrifice myself,

as with the children and the old folks, and let him have his pleasure, while I have none.

Don Luis couldn't understand, and I didn't want to go into detail, but it was clear to me especially after what happened with Eusebio.

One day, after my parents were already dead, when I was in my forties, Eusebio, the man from the specialty shop who had returned from Germany with money, came to my house with some silly excuse and cornered me in the hallway, next to the stairs. He panted and blathered on while pulling me against his body. He smelled of stale sweat and his open collar revealed a crop of lustrous black hair. I liked it. I've always liked running my fingers through body hair, feeling humid skin, the beating of blood in the neck, in the sex, in the chest. Like the other times, I sought the source of that violent throbbing that passed from his body to mine, and I let him take me. My mouth pressed against his mouth, my anxious hand sought his heart, I was about to possess him when suddenly he stepped back, looked at me and said:

"Don't worry about your aunt Sabina: we'll send her to my mother and they'll be so happy together, the two of them."

I couldn't go on. I slipped the knife into my skirt pocket and pushed him away. I said people were coming over and never let him near me again.

I wasn't afraid. I could have had my pleasure and said he'd attacked me, that I'd defended myself. Who would doubt my word? Who would think otherwise? But if I wasn't going to be satisfied, why do it? So I had to continue my travels, and every time, I have to admit, it became more and more difficult, because at my age it isn't easy to find a man with the traits I require. Other women seek company, tenderness, friendship, intellectual or spiritual understanding, or even a simple physiological pleasure that can be bought with money. Not me. For me, pleasure means pure and mutual desire, an encounter between two anonymous bodies, the struggle, and then complete, total possession.

I don't think all of this will be understood by the representatives of the Wives for Catholic Action, the council members in the town hall, and the former students who have worked together on my homage. That's why I told the president it might be better just to have a dinner and to give me one of those silver trays etched with the names of those involved, and they can publish this, after I'm dead, if they find it useful.

—Translated from Spanish by Claudia Routon

PAOLA MASINO

Intimate Hour

Sister Arcangela crossed herself and sat at the loom. Sister Anna, the teacher, sat beside her and all around them sat the children at work.

They were in a large, cold classroom under the cruel stare of the white, featureless face frosted on the French window panes. From inside that room the December ice was silent and colorless. The pupils' hands were covered with hard, red berries of blood and they felt the cold burning, deep in their joints.

A bell rang deep within the convent.

"Oremus, let us pray," Sister Anna said. As the children bowed their heads, the cold hit their pale necks.

They stayed like that, looking almost hanged, their stiff heads bowed, chins on their chests, eyes swollen from the needlework.

Black veils protected the two nuns: catafalques in waiting, witness to all that suffering. For a while, a peace like death, spare and without remission, surrounded those poor souls as they prayed alone, without a single thought for themselves.

Then Sister Anna got up. Hands folded on her belly, she went from loom to loom, scrutinizing the children's work. As she moved through the whispered prayers, her skirts did not disturb a single word.

Sister Arcangela moved her lips out of habit and out of habit she selected the gold and silver-colored threads, the purple silk, the red string, the green ribbon and the chips of mother of pearl. She had no rival when it came to those chasubles adorned with inlaid embroidery, the pride of her convent. For that reason she was free to work as she pleased, without supervision or control.

Her piety seemed limitless, silence and meditation sewn together by countless stitches. She had to be pulled away from the loom to eat and sleep and pray in the chapel.

Young and very pretty, no one ever wondered why she had entered the convent. Her face was tired but fervent, her gaze firm but distracted. The other nuns envied her, without knowing why. Perhaps it was because the

work bloomed magically from her hands, without patterns, suggestions, mistakes. Or maybe because she did not need to rest, her steady intimate conversation with God needed no pause for human conversation.

Sister Arcangela's hand reached for a coral bead: it would become the heart of the fanciful flower she was creating. Sister Anna, catching a glimpse, asked herself: How can she come up with that?

It was a flower of black feathers and golden threads with green stains spreading underneath each petal. Almost like the soft growth of hair under an armpit—or worse.

Sister Anna went back to the children's cross-stitch and to the older girls' shadow-stitch embroidery.

And, at last, Sister Arcangela was alone.

With the first stroke of the needle she slipped into her fantasy leaving the frigid classroom behind.

Outside, the air was supple, more vital.

Sister Arcangela, without her cloak and veil, walked with ease. She went straight to a red house (like the coral bead she was working on). She entered, climbed the stairs to a room on the second story and locked the door. (She secured the bead with a knot, cut the thread). She removed her clothes quickly (there, right between her thighs, was that growth of hair), she put on men's clothes, lit a cigarette, left the house.

It was the right time of day, the time when the young maids shop at the market, businesswomen go to the banks, and other women take buses to run their errands.

(Sister Arcangela reached for a little spool of brown silk and began working on a stem.)

In a short time, transferring from bus to bus, checking the quality of the vegetables and whether or not the fish was fresh and even begging from bank customers, Arcangela had stolen a wallet and five change purses. Then she went to a bar, ordered coffee and cognac and smoked a cigarette. She peeked in the wallet when she paid: only twenty thousand lire but, more importantly, a love letter and a young man's picture. The letter, addressed to Emilia Porsetti, 34 Garibaldi Street, read: "My beloved Emilia, tomorrow (today) I will be back with you, in our little home, in your arms for many hours, and I'll hold you close, heart to heart."

Angelo left the bar, took a taxi and asked to be driven to 34 Garibaldi Street. In no time she was transformed back to a woman, had taken Emilia's name, gone to the house, undressed in her room and slipped into bed completely naked. (In the convent workshop, Sister Arcangela traced arabesques with purple thread.) Then, she gave herself to the young husband's avid embrace.

Emilia's breasts were a little withered but the man sank his teeth into them voluptuously, pulling on them as if he wanted to tear them off. She wondered how pleasurable this could be. She got up at once, put on the man's clothes, still warm and thick with his smell, and rushed out of the house on 34 Garibaldi Street. She hid around the corner waiting for the man to come after her. As soon as the man ran outside pursuing her in the street, she hurried back into the room upstairs and flung herself on the bed, on the real, aghast Emilia. Emilia seemed to enjoy the adventure and it was a slow, tortuous and intense lovemaking ("What is going on with these pink petals, why are they separated?" Sister Anna could not help asking but Sister Arcangela did not answer.)

Lost in this woman's body, the organic smell rising from her made her hands crazy. Sinking her face in Emilia's lap she screamed ("Children, who took my box of pearls?" "Here they are, Sister Arcangela. No one touched them.")

She did not know how long the lovemaking lasted. When the man returned she was still entangled with Emilia, biting her breasts like the husband had done to her. Emilia moaned and Arcangela said suddenly: "I am a nun, look at me; we are just having fun." She laughed, pretending to be embarrassed: "Emilia did not believe that nuns are built like ordinary women."

Emilia's husband also laughed, but unembarrassed: "I wasn't expecting this. I am not jealous of women. Wait and I'll join you."

"No!" Emilia screamed. "You're mine only. I don't want you with this whore!"

"You, jealous? Give me a break!" He crawled into bed. "Move over!" He pushed in with his arms and legs. "There. Ah! (How nice to be between an angel and a devil.) And to the nun: "What's your name?"

"Angel, as a matter of fact," she said in a lilting voice "Angela, Arcangela: I am here to take you to the heaven of love."

"All right," the man said, "take me there."

He was about to mount her when Emilia rolled between them and started biting them. This excited them even more and, ignoring the pain, they nipped at her and at each other. At last, exhaustion overtook the other woman and they fell into one another's arms.

Sated with love, a cry came from Angela.

("What was that?" Sister Anna asked from the back of the workshop where she was teaching a difficult stitch to a young girl. "Nothing," Sister Arcangela answered softly, "I pricked my finger.")

"What a pig you are!" The man said, "Are you all like that in the convent?"

"Saints. All saints. All immaculate."

"What about you, do you teach something?"

"Embroidery."

"Don't try to be cute. Do you embroider your students like you did Emilia? With kisses and . . . "

"Emilia is a lesbian," muttered Angela. "You should leave her for me."

"Bitch!" Emilia snarled, leaning on her elbow and punching Angela in the face.

(Sister Arcangela brought her hands to her eyes. "I do not know what color to use here," she whispered to herself. But quickly, with sudden inspiration, she lowered her hands, reached for a thin silver cord, and began stitching on the satin fabric in a circle.)

All of a sudden she dropped to her knees and, grabbing Emilia by the hair, said to the man: "Take her while I strangle her very, very slowly. You'll love it."

The lover gasped: "I'll hold her arms, come on. Do it!"

"Help!" wheezed Emilia. She was under her husband's body and could not free herself from the woman's grip. Angela was strangling her slowly, artfully, the skill of an embroideress and the strength of a pianist in her small, bloodless fingers. The man gave a satisfied moan as he rested on the dying woman. Together they shared a last spasm of pleasure.

Angela lay back and let out a soft sigh.

("I finished another poppy," Sister Arcangela said, pulling tight the silver string before cutting it with a snap of the scissors.

Sister Anna turned to look at the chasuble: "It's like an open mouth." She hesitated. "A screaming mouth."

"It invokes the Good Lord," Arcangela smiled. "Like all things created and destined to die."

Sister Anna did not know if she liked that beautifully made flower. The string around the stem was tied in a graceful bow like two little wings ready to carry the flower to heaven. It was the creation of a simple and happy imagination.)

"All right, let's go. Leave her to rot alone. I do not like death," Angela said to the man.

"They'll catch us any minute," the man complained, shaking now.

"We'll think about jail tomorrow."

("Tomorrow I'll start on the hem, Sister Anna. I'll make a dark border with a knotted mesh and in each space I'll sew an irregular pearl."

"An elegance worthy of the Holy Father," Sister Anna answered. "We will present the chasuble as a gift to our Holiness for the next jubilee.")

"We must escape to a foreign country," the man said. "Do you have a passport?"

"I don't need a passport," Angela answered, "I don't need to go to a foreign country. I'll go back to the convent."

She was getting dressed with the clothes stolen earlier from the man. He looked at her, increasingly bewildered by what he had done. He was so stunned that he no longer realized the trouble he was in and began to joke.

"Well! Here I thought I was sleeping with a woman but I was really with a man. That must mean that the two aren't so different."

"Is that so?" Angelo snarled. "Let me show you what it means to be a man, you bastard."

She felt strong, heavy. She moved her arms like two clubs; her legs were a pair of claws. Her entire being gravitated around her sexual organ, pulling her in and out, like an obstinate shoot that breaks through the December ground and injures whatever is in its path. She pinned the man down and began tearing into him. She had become a knife penetrating a painted plaster fruit, jagged, jerking and rough, exalted and frustrated by the effort. Her lower back hurt deliciously and her spine, from the nape of her neck to her brain, vibrated like a harp string.

("A fruit vine?" Sister Anna asked. "Fruit has never been used on a chasuble."

"Pomegranates have always been an ornamental fruit," Sister Arcangela explained, "whole pomegranates and ones split in half. I will twine tulips and forget-me-nots around it.")

"Now you won't forget me, pretty tulip," Angelo snarled, getting off the bleeding man. "Take care of your wife's corpse yourself."

She left. She was thinking about returning to the convent when she saw a bus going to the airport and felt the desire to get a panoramic view of the world. Why not? Being among angels, talking about angels, embroidering seraphs' wings again and again, Arcangela did not think that the sky would be harder to master than the convent's vegetable garden or the city streets. She arrived at the airport, cleansed of memories, rested and refreshed as if she had taken a bath and changed her body and clothes.

She ignored all the rules of air travel and had no problem getting a personal plane with a seat next to the pilot so she could watch the clouds.

(Sister Arcangela began drawing garlands of little wings on the snow-white satin of the chasuble—she would embroider them with a pearl-colored silk thread—interspersed with gold and silver rays. Big, iridescent drops would cascade down the wings: tears of mortal anguish and memories.)

They were flying. Lost in thought about the passing stand of clouds, she let her hands fall into her lap.

("Are you tired, Sister Angela?" Sister Anna asked, seeing her so relaxed.

"Tired of what?" Sister Arcangela whispered. "Embroidering is such a pleasure.")

She lunged towards the pilot and took the yoke.

"Do you want us to crash?" he said, rudely.

"Why not? A nice wreck, a leg here and the brain over there; a wreck that would command a two-column headline. Wouldn't you like that?"

"Hell no!"

"And yet . . . " she sighed. "If you knew how tired I am of heaven, of the color blue, of ethereal songs, of clouds shaped like angels . . . "

"If you had to make a living with this plane, you wouldn't see angels, hear ethereal songs. You would see the weather turning bad and hear the engine stutter. You would be living with fear in your body, not ecstasy in your heart. I can tell you that."

"What's fear like? Is it pleasurable? Let me taste it. Be nice."

"Are you crazy?" said the pilot, turning toward her.

It only took a second and the plane began spiraling down to the ground. The man started screaming, holding on to the woman.

Flames spilled out of the engine and soon the plane was nothing but a burning ball in the sky with senseless screams coming from it.

The flames allowed Arcangela to see the man's contorted face. He was ablaze, his hands burned to cinders on the red-hot yoke. Fear made his eyes bulge out of their sockets and blood foamed from his mouth.

(As they neared the hem of the chasuble, the human tears in the drawing turned into a rain of tiny flames: our mortal sins.)

The plane crashed in a thousand tongues of fire.

Someone must have seen it because church bells started tolling in a town that Angela, stretched out on the ground, could not yet see.

A bell rang deep within the convent.

Sister Anna clapped her hands. "Put down your work, children. It's time for recess." She moved toward Sister Arcangela: "Come along, Sister Arcangela, come rest."

"Thank you, Sister Anna. But for me embroidering is a pleasure, even during recess. You know that I have Mother Superior's permission."

"But today you tired yourself more than usual. You created exceptional, exquisite work. Truly, it must be said that you are in God's grace."

"Please!" Sister Arcangela defended herself, "I work in humility."

"How do you come up with such lovely designs?"

"I do not know. Really. When I embroider I don't think about anything."

And Sister Arcangela bowed her head, searching for new strands of silk . . .

—Translated from Spanish by Louise Rozier

MALIN SCHWERDTFEGER

My First Eight Thousand Climb

The problem I am about to introduce surfaces early in Schwerdtfeger's story, in fact, in its first short paragraph. The first person narrator, a nameless young female, is awakened by her mother, who has just returned home in the middle of the night: "She bent over me, kissed me between the eyes, and the odor of rancid yak butter, of smoke and sour stomach, made me queasy. Still half asleep, I guessed Tibet or Nepal. Only somebody just out of central Asia could smell that disgusting."

The ring of political incorrectness, as one might say, is jarring here, and Malin Schwerdtfeger risks stigmatizing her story's main character early. Readers new to Schwerdtfeger's fiction might be prompted to question the author's own ethnic sensibilities. As a translator, I considered several ways to render the young narrator's statement in a less objectionable manner. However, I finally translated her political incorrectness as it stands. I did so for the following reasons: 1) the story is narrated in retrospect; that is, the narrator is depicting an earlier version of herself, prior to her first eight thousand climb. At this stage, she still reflects the influence of her father, one who resorts to ethnic slurs in denouncing the unconventional lifestyle of his wife, the narrator's mother. 2) The prejudice of the young narrator, directed against central Asia in this case, is one of several hindrances she has to put behind her in order to "climb" (for example, out of a family morass into viable womanhood). Leading the way is the narrator's adventuresome mother, who fills her daughter with wondrous stories "all night long."

—Wayne Kvam

Once again Mama came back during the night. She bent over me, kissed me between the eyes, and the odor of rancid yak butter, of smoke and sour stomach, made me queasy. Still half asleep, I guessed Tibet or Nepal. Only somebody just out of central Asia could smell that disgusting.

The next morning she sat at the large table in the dining room and stirred barley flour into her tea.

"Morning, sweetheart," she said as I came in. "Aren't you late for school?"

"We're on vacation," I said. I started running around the dining room, gathering up her things she'd tossed in all directions the night before. Mud encrusted Gore-Tex stuff, aluminum pots with the dried leftovers of barley gruel, a special cooker, the photography equipment, and her stinking mountain boots were spread across the entire room. Yet she'd still managed to hang her sleeping bag outside over the porch railing. It was full of lice for sure.

I carried everything out on the porch except for the cooking utensils. I ran into the bathroom with those, put them in the tub and turned on the hot water.

"Sit down," said Mama, as I came back into the dining room. She pointed to the chair next to her.

"Have you brought back anything I should know about?" I asked and sat down at the opposite end of the table. "Lice, scabies, dysentery, dengue fever?"

"I don't think so," said Mama. "Only blisters on my feet."

I slid up a few chairs closer.

I drank my cocoa and watched how she slurped her tea. In front of her she had a lump of yak butter in a greasy plastic bag. With her fingers she twisted off little pieces, dropped them into the cup and stirred before she drank the tea.

"Mama," I said finally, "we have to wash your hair."

While I massaged almost a whole bottle of peach-oil grooming rinse into her snarled mat, Mama, without my asking, talked about falling rocks on Annapurna, floods in Rolwalingtal, and snowstorms in Solo Khumbo. She talked about the forests of eastern Tibet where it rains leeches, about Chinese village prisons and drunken policemen, about buses that smash to smithereens in deep gorges, and about the black, frozen faces of mountain climbers in the dilapidated boarding houses of Lukla, near Everest, waiting for their return flight to Katmandu. She talked about how altitude sickness softened her brain when she tried to climb Mt. Pumori, and about the thin air of the Himalayas that slows the blood down and makes the lungs hurt.

Two hours later I had combed the last knots out of her hair and pricked open and disinfected all the blisters on her feet. Mama was so tired again that she lay down on the sofa and immediately fell asleep.

The telephone rang. It was Arne from Trekking Guides.

"Hello," said Arne, "is she there?"

"She's sleeping," I said, "and doesn't want to be disturbed, especially not by you people."

"She shouldn't sleep so much. Be better off writing," said Arne.

I simply hung up.

I made coffee for Papa. Then I brought a tray with the coffee, a bowl of cornflakes, and his blood-thinner injection in to Papa in bed.

In the bedroom it was cool and dark. But Papa was already awake. His laptop threw a greenish shimmer over the rumpled bedcover. Papa called what he was doing telecommuting, that is, he had an Internet connection with an e-mail account and never needed to get out of bed. I set the breakfast tray down on his bed next to the laptop.

"She's back again," I said.

"So I heard," said Papa.

"Do you want to know where she was?" I asked.

"It stinks here like rancid fat. Greenland?" Papa guessed.

"Nepal," I said. "And Tibet without an entry permit. She had to sneak across the border at night. She had to live in nomads' tents and hide out in deserted mountain villages. One time a policeman found her and put her in jail, but she got him drunk on tschang and took off."

"Got him drunk?" Papa laughed and started to sweat. "More likely she screwed him. A dirty drunken Chinaman."

I took up the blood-thinner injection, pulled the cap off the needle, turned back the blanket, pressed some of Papa's belly flesh between my fingers and gave him an injection in the roll of fat.

"That's a good girl," said Papa. "Could you bring me the videophone?"

Papa had begun his telecommuting when Mama took a job with Trekking Guides. Mama wrote her first travel guide on the Caucasus when I was six. From the mountains we got postcards that other travelers had mailed for her in Jerevan or Tiflis. But sometimes we heard nothing at all from her for weeks. When she came back, she brought along Armagnac by the liter, and huge bunches of an herb with purple leaves. She chewed these leaves constantly and used them with every meal. Nights she came to my bed and for hours talked of her wanderings with the shepherds and didn't let me sleep. She also told me about a shepherd named Dmitri that she'd fallen in love with.

A few months later she disappeared again. This time to spend the winter on Spitzbergen. She shared her hut with Einar, a fur trapper who was half Norwegian and half Eskimo. From this trip she brought back five blue fox pelts that she laid down next to my bed, and this time she told stories all night long about pack ice, about the taste of black seal meat, the terrors of the long polar night, and about Einar's beautiful diversions that kept her from going crazy during the darkness lasting for months.

That was when Papa started with the telecommuting.

In the afternoon I searched through the entire house for Mama. I found her in the darkroom. I yanked open the door and ruined a photoprint.

"Close the door behind you," said Mama. "Did anyone call?"

I didn't answer. Arne from Trekking Guides was the person that Papa and I hated more than anyone else in the world.

Mama switched the enlarger light on and then off again. She took up the exposed paper and laid it down in the tub with the developing liquid. Gradually a face began to appear on the paper. Mama pushed it down with the pincers as though she wanted to drown it. Then it went into the stopper and finally into the fixing bath. I stood next to Mama. The face in the photo was dark and had a greasy shine.

"Your mother is a damn ethno-slut!" yelled Papa, when I told him about Lopsang. "Soon she won't be able to count 'em anymore, the Eskimos, South American Indians, all the different scum. And now she's even got a yeti in her collection. Congratulations!"

"But he's not a yeti, Papa," I said. "He's a Sherpa."

"I don't give a shit what this yakherder is! I'm gett'n' up and giv'n' her a piece of my mind. I want her to call this pimp Arne and tell him she's through bein' his trekking whore!"

He sat upright with a jerk. I was met with the strong smell of Vicks Vapor Rub that I used regularly on his chest to help his heavy breathing. Papa wheezed and brushed a few damp strands of hair out of his face.

"No, you better do it," he gasped and sank back down in the pillows. "And tell her she should come in here and say hello." I left and took the full bedpan with me.

As always on the first day of Mama's return I ran steadily back and forth between my parents. As always Mama spent the day in the darkroom and the evening in the bathtub on the telephone. And as always Papa lay in bed, pecking away like crazy on his laptop.

When I went to get the zinc ointment in the bathroom, in order to treat Papa's open sores, Mama was lying in the tub, talking to Arne on the phone. I sat down quietly on the laundry basket and listened. I had a look at her body: it was thin, muscular, covered with black and blue marks and insect bites, and in many places you could see the veins. Every day I rode the exercise bike so I could get muscles like hers.

"New climbing irons and a down suit from Mountain Equipment," said Mama to Arne, "a three-man tent from Wild East, ice pitons and a hundred meters of rope. My ice pick only has to be sharpened, but I still need two more. And thirty bottles of oxygen."

"Where are you going, Mama?" I asked.

"Just a minute," said Mama to Arne. Then she put her hand over the receiver and said to me, "Up on Everest with Lopsang."

Since preparing for her New Guinea expedition, which had taken her to the cannibals in the swamps of Irian Jaya, Mama no longer had such itchy feet. For two days she sat bent over maps at the kitchen table and marked out the routes. While I cooked and cleaned up, she worked out an acclimatization plan. Paging in her logbook, she scribbled around trying to figure out how she could best adapt her body to the conditions eight thousand eight hundred and fortyeight meters above sea level. At intervals she was always on the phone with Katmandu. The rest of the time Mama spent on the exercise bike or she went jogging in the park. Mornings she took me along to the indoor pool.

She still hadn't said hello to Papa. When he yelled for her, I went in and gave him drops of Saint-John's-wort. Then if he still kept yelling I gave him diazepam.

One night I woke up, remembering that Papa hadn't gotten his bedtime milk. Maybe the scraping, rasping noise coming from the kitchen had a part in waking me too. From time to time there was a screaking sound as though a knife scraped against a plate. I ran down the darkened hallway. There was still light behind Papa's door. Most likely he couldn't fall asleep without his milk. I saw Mama sitting in the kitchen sharpening her ice axe. She sat there in her full Gore-Tex outfit, turning the whetstone with one hand and holding the point of the axe against it with the other. It scraped and rasped and the sparks flew. Leaning against the chair was her fully packed backpack with cooking utensils dangling on the outside. When Mama saw me she stopped sharpening.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "Why aren't you in bed?"

"I'm just getting Papa's milk."

The whetstone started turning again. "Arne's picking me up in fifteen minutes and taking me to the airport," said Mama.

"Good," I said. Then I ran back to my room. I pulled my backpack out from under the bed, yanked open the wardrobe, stuffed sweaters, pants, underwear, ski suit and my snow goggles into the backpack. I changed from my nightshirt into a sweat suit, and over it my down jacket. With the backpack on my shoulders I ran down the hallway. Behind Papa's door I heard wheezing.

"Dear, is that you?" called Papa. "Did you forget my milk?"

I ran into the kitchen, grabbed the milk carton out of the refrigerator, a glass from the cupboard, and poured in such a hurry some spilled on the floor. When I pressed the tablets out of the package into the milk glass, I forgot to count. Mama was looking at me.

With the glass in hand, I ran into the bedroom. "Here's your milk, Papa," I said. Papa was propped up crookedly in the pillows and his pajama top was buttoned wrong. It looked uncomfortable.

"Where you goin' with the backpack?" asked Papa, and no one had asked me that yet.

"On my first eight thousand climb," I said.

As we headed down the road in the Trekking Guides jeep, I looked back once more. I hadn't turned off the light in the kitchen. And just as I looked back, a shadow moved in front of the lighted kitchen window. The shadow filled out the entire window frame. It was very tall and very wide, a huge shadow. It was like a total eclipse of the sun. Papa was out of bed.

—Translated from German by Wayne Kvam

RODOLFO WOLF

From *Battles in a Lost War*

Joining Up

He boarded the 405 at the start of the run. Empty. He sat at the back, in the next-to-last seat and began reading. He had a forty-minute ride to the University where he worked, and the bus wouldn't leave for another five. The five minutes passed, the driver got on and began his slow journey.

There were four or five passengers. Along the way a few more boarded, but the bus remained almost empty. No one had sat behind him. He went on reading.

While driving through the slum in a torrid sun, on the long, straight stretch of Boulevard Aparicio Seravia, the bus stopped.

He heard a chirpy high-pitched voice: "Candy, five for a peso, candy."

He raised his eyes from the book to see a boy 12, 13 years old so thin and delicate he didn't look over ten. He held a bag in his right hand.

He thought of buying. The adage popped into his head: "Bread today, hungry tomorrow." He went on reading.

He'd been distracted. At the next stop, he looked again. The child had seen another bus coming, got off, and was running behind the 405 across the street to catch it.

Through the front window he could see a truck heading at some speed toward the bus from the other direction. He saw the danger, could do nothing. The 405 started up.

Worried, he stood up and turned around. He saw the other truck stop, two men got out, running, picked up a limp body from the gutter, threw it onto the truck bed, and left. It looked like a broken doll.

Passengers and driver continued their journey undisturbed. He saw their backs barely swaying. No one had turned around. Only he had seen.

He thought, "That child should have been in school."

He could no longer read.

That was the day he decided to join the guerrillas.

Death

I had to say it. It was a good occasion. Special visit. Only one in the year. No telephone or glass panes. Bright, warm day. Magnificent.

They lined us up as always. Hands behind our backs. Eyes front, silent. We waited a good while, face to the wall. Then one by one to the place for the visit, the garden. Wire fence, could hardly expect otherwise in a high security prison. They arranged us on benches a couple of yards or more apart. Once seated, not speaking, not moving, we waited.

Relatives began arriving. No more than two per prisoner. We were allowed to stand up to greet them but not allowed to leave our assigned bench.

I saw my mother and my sister coming. I kissed them and we sat down to talk. We were happy. We could enjoy a certain intimacy without interfering microphones and tape recorders.

We talked about the family, the political situation, prospects for the future. The information they brought, though brief and censored, was a lot better than ours, doubly censored.

I had to bring up the subject. I hoped it would not be traumatic, but it was tricky. A pause gave me my chance.

"I want to talk to you about a matter I've been considering for some time. Reagan's win in the elections means we have to be prepared for things to stay as they are with no political solution in the short run. The next four years will see more hopes frustrated, more dreams broken, yet more illusions shattered. Don't think I've given into pessimism or depression and see everything as black. No. I still feel generally optimistic—am convinced it will be very difficult for a government that wants to look like a democracy to keep so many political prisoners incarcerated. As for me, I remind you I've seen many *compañeros* get sick, go mad, die. . . . So that's why—now that life is smiling on you, now that you're to be a mother for the first time and you a grandmother for the second—I want to take this opportunity to say that, although I don't seek or want this, there is a good possibility that this is where I'll end my days. That is what I want to talk about."

My sister stopped smiling, my mother's face darkened. I went on.

"If that should be the case, I don't want a place where you could bring me flowers. I think when a man dies his works are all that's left. Mine are pretty slim, and the construction of a tomb is not among them. Therefore I ask to be cremated, and I'm assigning you to carry out my wishes. As for asking that 'his ashes be cast to the wind,' it sounds a bit grandiloquent, so whoever you turn them over to, Mother, you say, 'He said to throw them on the manure pile.'"

The two exploded in laughter. The tension eased. We went on talking of other things.

—Translated from Spanish by Elizabeth Hampsten

DALTON TREVISAN

Good Night, Sir

Trevisan burns away all excess and leaves the reader with ironic ashes on his lips. Often his sentences lack verbs, often one cannot be certain to whom a pronoun refers. The comfort of familiar grammar and syntax is delibertately stripped away. One is left with painful essentials in painful human encounters.

The most interesting dilemma in "Good Night, Sir" occurs in the ending. "Todas as arvores gotejavam. Ali na porta de casa—o relogio na palma da mão. Ele me perguntou a hora." The trees are dripping with the recent rain. That is clear. They are at the doorstep of the young fellow's house, or so it seems, though we are never actually told whose house they are approaching. Then, suddenly, at the last moment, we are shown an image: the watch in the palm of his hand. But whose hand? Well, since the predatory older man with the gold tooth then asks the narrator the time, we can assume that the watch, which was on his wrist, and which he refused at first to give as a present to the narrator, is now a glistening offering in the palm of his hand, though it could already be in the narrator's hand. And when he "asked me the time" he is in effect saying: "Take the watch. It is yours. Reach down and take it." The story ends at the moment of seduction or transaction. To this point there is no resolution. We cannot know for sure what will happen next, but of course we can imagine.

—Alexis Levitin

He was waiting for me outside the dance hall. He stood motionless in a corner, readjusting his bow tie. From a distance, skinny, age uncertain, he was already smiling at me.

"Good evening."

"Good evening, sir."

Walking beside me, he said that he had seen me dancing with the blonde. He had found her lovely, with her painted mouth. I answered that I hated her. He said he suffered a great deal from women as he gave a

furious tug at the little blue tie. As for his own wife, he was married and had a child, forget it.

He was speaking a lot and very quickly, his voice viscous with saliva. I lit a cigarette—were my fingers trembling? He asked if she had turned me on, but I didn't answer. He understood very well. A pitiless woman can drive a poor guy nuts. Capable of killing the blonde with her treacherous eye.

"It's good I don't have green eyes!"

He kept winking at me. I knew nothing of the world, he said, his voice growing hoarser at each word. The plain trees, the blonde, the damned moon in the sky, he tangled them all gently together. A snail's slime on his gold tooth. . . . He was not speaking of the blonde, of me or himself—as if I knew of whom. Close to the church the anguished squeaking of the bats.

He asked me the time. I had no watch. Pausing at the corner, he attacked the blonde even more, with her painted mouth, that promise of insane delight, but her gaze was of ice, her golden heart was bitter. He knew of other mouths, his own for example, queen of the greatest pleasures. With the tip of a red tongue he moistened his lips—in the corner the foam of one in agony. Had I never seen him, I would have had to wait a long time. He knew all about me, who I was.

"To a beautiful young man I offer the throne of the world."

Even money, he said, treasures I would never gain from any blonde. I protested that she didn't deserve this hatred, a girl from a good family.

He looked at the watch on his wrist. It was three o'clock.

"Good night, sir."

Without an answer, he raised his trembling hands to the knot in my tie—two little mice with warm and moist muzzles.

"You've got hair on your chest!"

In his finger tips the reverent care of one who consecrates the chalice.

"Well, now, who wouldn't . . . "

His eyes were opening wide at the moon; I could have sworn they were green.

"How strong you are!"

My God, that laughter. . . . The squeaking of an old blind bat. Talking of the wind that promised rain, he attempted a gesture—the gesture of the blonde! The tip of his tongue was moving, a note under the door.

"Are you afraid?"

A cat jumped down from the wall. I gazed from the cat to the man and the deserted street, the man on his knees in adoration of the moon.

The steps of a lost child, drops of rain spattering against the leaves.

"Good night, good night, good night."

The golden tooth was crying; the tears were streaking the old wrinkles. He hid them with his hand—the watch glistening on his wrist.

"My present?"

He looked at the watch.

"Sentimental value. In memory of my mother."

The wet leaves glistened on the sidewalk. All the trees were dripping just two doors from the house.

"Better to . . . "

It wouldn't be good to play the boss.

". . . get out of here."

He wanted to take my hand, but I kept it in my pocket.

"Just a little more," he begged.

All the trees were dripping. There at the very doorstep—the watch in the palm of his hand. He asked me the time.

—Translated from Portuguese by Alexis Levitin

NICHITA DANILOV

Excerpt from *Masha and the Alien*

The opening pages of Nichita Danilov's first novel, Maşa şi Extraterestrul *(*Masha and the Alien*), introduce the three principal characters: the widowed Masha, her comic grandmother, and the mysterious visitor from another realm—either outer-space or inner-spiritual life. They also introduce the novel's characteristic narrative style, one that investigates its subjects through the slow expansion of significant detail, the steady accumulation of information leading eventually to a revelation, a patient demonstration that the world is wholly other than it first appears. My approach to translating both of these key points developed from my previous work translating Danilov's extensive poetry.*

Danilov's novels make a natural counterpoint to his poetry, which has focused on characters, sometimes placed within surrealistic settings reminiscent of Eastern church icons, like the one described in the following passage. He establishes character with sparse lines, asking individual words to do a lot of work. The clearest example comes at the end of this passage. The Alien might have said, in one correct translation of "aş vrea," "I would like to be as helpless as you." By changing the modal verb to another option, I was able to better characterize the Alien's aloofness: "I should like to be as helpless as you." This choice also allows readings like "I should like to, but I do not, because of reasons I am hiding." It is important to the opening of the novel that the Alien appears both apart and mysterious.

This atmosphere of mystery carries over to the narrative style. The trash and dirt in Masha's house grow through description. Rather than saying, "The house is covered in an inch of dust" and then describing the detail, Danilov builds the dust from "it was there" to "a thickish layer" to "as thick as one or even two fingers." We are impelled to investigate the dust, seeing more and more of it the longer we look. The translator's task is to maintain the rhythmic pulse of this process. Again, I was able to import techniques from work on similar passages in Danilov's poetry. In the first description of the trash, the Romanian repeats three sc *sounds.*

To compensate for this loss in English, I added and *in three places (the Romanian has none). While this choice does not alliterate, it does complement the narrative style. In English,* and *can signal the last term in a series. As the series in the translation continues through two extra "and's," the added energy it takes to accumulate all of this dust becomes grammatically clear. The thematic import is to show, from the first sentence, that we must always work to see more in this novel; there is always more to dust away before the surface comes clean; the dust lies not only over objects, but also over the nature of the Alien, and over Masha's soul.*

—Sean Cotter

While the Alien babbled on and on, Masha began to poke about the house with a rag. There were bread crumbs on the carpet and cigarette butts, lumps of ash, herring bones, and broken knitting needles, and grease-stained pieces of paper. The trash made Masha uncomfortable, made her obsessed with a single idea: she must clean. In fact, Masha was not bothered so much by the trash as by the clutter. She could not stand clutter. Dust didn't bother her. If things were picked up and put away, you didn't notice the dust. Of course it was there, a thickish layer, as thick as one or even two fingers, but the dust was settled, knew its place; it was calm, not billowing into the air at the slightest touch, when you had nothing better to do and decided to blow on the curtains or draw a finger along the edge of the sofa. Then the dust rebelled, its mottled skin cracked like an eggshell, like a mushroom cap, and a dry mist rose into the air, like steam from a train engine, through every corner of the house. The insurrection spread to the dust on the carpet, the dust worn into the chairs, the dust hidden like a cat under the couch, and the dust on the windows, behind the doors, and the decades of dust ground into the furniture. This seldom happened, because Masha was used to the dust. She tip-toed, softly, like a ballerina, picking up her knickknacks and putting them down in the same place, meticulously. This dance among her possessions made her feel, in spite of her girth and age, still young and graceful.

"Why are you waddling around like a swan?" her grandmother would yell, often, from the doorway into the emptiness. "You'd do better to clean the house instead of prancing around for no reason. . . . Can't you see there's dust everywhere?"

"If it was mold or damp," teased Masha, "would that be better?" She went to the geranium blooming in the window whose leaves were brown with dust.

The dirt did not bother Masha, but now, with a guest in the house, a thought passed through her mind. She ought to wash the dirty dishes piled in the cupboard, and the silverware, mostly unused since the time of her mother, who rested now with God. It was covered with a grey-brown slime that looked to have worked into the metal and stoneware and would not come off, even with wet sand, even with water and lye, even with the new powdered detergents that appeared after the revolution. The silverware was stuck together, as were the plates. You had to pry them apart with a knife, or risk bending a fork or breaking a saucer to pieces.

Masha had already started on the drawers when the Alien, drowsing in a chair, stopped her.

"There's no reason to wear yourself out, dear Mashenka, it's already late. Where I come from, we usually tidy up in the morning, not the evening or night. Furthermore, I know cosmic dust. This is nothing, in comparison. A speck. An absolutely negligible amount not worth noticing." Her guest's voice was mostly gurgling. "Just think what you would do if you were in space and encountered a nebula. Would you dust it? Stop, please. Dust comes from God. Don't wear yourself out. I'm far from picky. . . ."

Masha said nothing. She was so embarrassed, she could not even look at the Alien. She turned out the overhead lamp, to make the filth harder to see, and turned on a warm light below the iconostasis. The bulb's rosy light shone through the dark onto a silver cross with three bars, holding the body of Jesus twisted toward the east, and onto a smoke-stained icon depicting Saint George riding a once-white horse, now shaded with lead, with unusually thin legs ending in hooves red as flames. The horse's muzzle was turned threateningly toward the mouth of the many-winged beast, who was stuck, it seemed for eternity, in the purple swamp of Gehenna, while Saint George delicately pierced its ribs with a sharp spear. Looking at Saint George, the thought passed through Masha's mind that the Alien's origins might not be completely pure. The very fact that he could stand the disorder and filth in the house made her wonder. But Masha pushed the evil thought away, making the sign of the cross with her tongue on the roof of her mouth, and the Alien's words about cosmic dust and nebulae were erased from her memory. Still, the thought of cleaning would not leave her alone. Masha found herself asking, almost without wanting to, "Is it possible for you to explain? I mean, why don't you clean in the evenings where you come from? Is it a sin, maybe?"

The question, it seemed to Masha, was perhaps too bold, so she tried to sweeten the tone with this soft, "I mean."

"Because tidying, like any busywork, disturbs the spirits seeking shelter for the night, huddling alongside the house and hiding in the corners. . . ."

"What kind of spirits are you talking about, what corners? Why do you insist on scaring a helpless woman like me?"

"You are not as helpless as you seem," responded the Alien tenderly. "I should like to be as helpless as you, dear Masha."

—Translated from Romanian by Sean Cotter

HENRI JOUTEL

The Murder of La Salle

Two years after "discovering" the mouth of the Mississippi, that is, after being the first European to lead an expedition successfully all the way down the Mississippi from Canada, Robert Cavelier Sieur de La Salle attempted, unsuccessfully, to reach the mouth of the Mississippi from the Gulf of Mexico. After wrecking along the Gulf coast, he and some of his men, along with the Shawnee Indian mentioned in the narrative below, set out to try to find the Mississippi by land with the hopes of getting help from some French settlement along the Mississippi. His lieutenant on that trek, Henri Joutel, wrote this account of the events and distributed it among friends in 1689.

—John DuVal

On the fifteenth [of March 1687] we continued on our route with our Indians. We found the countryside more pleasant than before. The fields were, or at least seemed, good, though sandy, but they didn't look productive from what we saw of the crops.

We didn't get very far because earlier, when Monsieur de La Salle had come back from the Cenis, he had had more Indian corn and beans than his horses could bear and had decided to cache some of them. He had two reasons for this: first, he couldn't carry all this food anyway; and second, he hadn't found any hunting between there and the Cenis village except for a few turkeys—not hunting that could be depended on. Besides, we were running out of shot.

This is why, seeing that we didn't have enough provisions now to make it to the village, he decided it was best to send people out to look for the cache of corn. So he gave orders to seven or eight men, including Monsieur Duhaut, Doctor Liotot, the Shawnee, Hiems, Tessier, and others, and Monsieur de La Salle's servant, Saget. Some of the Indians who had come with us accompanied them. But when they got there, all the corn was spoiled and rotten, either because the cache had been opened or

because it hadn't been secured right, and water had seeped in. So they started back.

The Shawnee caught sight of two bison, went after them, and killed them. Then they chose a man to come tell Monsieur de La Salle and ask him to send horses for carrying meat if he wanted them to smoke the bison. The one they chose was Monsieur de La Salle's servant, Saget, who arrived at the camp that evening with one of the Indians who had gone with them.

Monsieur de La Salle waited till the next morning to send someone back and then ordered his nephew Lord du Morenger to go, along with Monnier and Lord de Marle, as well as the servant to guide them. He ordered them to send meat back on one horse right away while they smoke-dried the rest.

They left on the seventeenth, and the day went by without any word back from them.

On the eighteenth Monsieur de La Salle looked worried because no one had come back. He was afraid something might have happened to them, that Indians might have ambushed them, or that they were lost. When evening fell, not knowing what to think, he determined to go see for himself. But since he wasn't familiar with the place and since the Indians who were camped near us had gone and come back with his servant Saget, Monsieur de La Salle told them that if they would guide him to the place he would give them a hatchet. One of them agreed to go. (These people are much better skilled than we are at finding the paths and places where they have been—but they are used to it from the earliest years because hunting is one of their chief occupations.)

After the Indian promised to guide him, Monsieur de La Salle got ready to leave the next morning and ordered me to get ready to go with him, which was easy enough to do since we were always on the move. That night, as we talked together about what might have happened to those who had gone, he seemed to have a presentiment of what was about to happen. He asked me if I hadn't heard the men scheming anything among themselves and if I hadn't noticed some plot among them. I answered that I hadn't heard anything except sometimes when there were disputes they complained that there was too much quarreling. I didn't know anything else. Besides, they thought of me as being close with him, and if they did have any plot in mind, they wouldn't have told me. We spent the rest of the night very uneasily.

At last, when day broke, it was time to leave. It was the nineteenth. Although he had decided I ought to leave with him, he changed his mind in the morning because otherwise there would have been no one left to oversee the camp. He told Father Anastase to go with him instead. Then

he told me to give him my gun because it was one of the best we had. I gave it to him, and one of my pistols, too. Then they left, three of them: Monsieur de La Salle, Father Anastase, and the Indian who was guiding them. As he left, Monsieur de La Salle ordered me to take care of everything and make sure to send up smoke from time to time from a little hill near our camp so that if they got lost, it could set them right and they could walk toward the smoke.

So they left. There were just five of us who stayed—not much for defense considering that one was Tallon's little boy and another who wasn't worth much. In short, the only ones left were Monsieur Cavelier, the priest; Lord Cavelier, his nephew; and I.

Following the orders Monsieur de La Salle gave me when he left, during the day I set fire to little batches of dry grass that would burn for a while; but toward evening, as I was going up the little hill I mentioned, I was amazed to see one of the men who had first gone to look for the corn. When he came close, he looked confused, or maybe totally distracted. The first thing he said was he had much news and a terrible thing had happened. I asked him what. He answered that Monsieur de La Salle was dead, and so was his nephew Lord Morenger, and two others: the Shawnee Indian and La Salle's servant.

I stayed still, bewildered, not knowing what to say to this news that they were murdered. The man who had brought me the bad news added that the murderers had at first vowed to kill me, too. I could well believe it, having been always, as I had said, close to Monsieur de La Salle, or having had the command myself sometimes. It's hard to satisfy everybody, or to prevent there being a few malcontents. At this point I was at a loss as to what tack to take and if I shouldn't flee into the forest, wherever the providence of God might lead me. But, whether for good luck or bad, I didn't have a gun. All I had brought with me was a pistol, and all the powder and bullets I had were in my horn. Everywhere I might turn, my life was in danger. True, this man did assure me that on their way back they had changed their minds and agreed not to do any more killing—unless in self-defense if we resisted. The man who brought me this news was named l'Archevesque, born in the city of Bayonne. Monsieur Duhaut had recruited him in Petit-Goave, where he had enlisted. Although he told me no harm would come to me, it was a promise I didn't trust. But since I was in no condition to go far, with neither arms nor powder, I gave myself up to Providence and to whatever might happen. That is why I went back to camp. The wretched murderers had already taken all of Monsieur de La Salle's clothes and belongings and even my personal belongings. They had also seized all the weapons. When I got there, the first words Duhaut spoke—the one who had killed Monsieur de La Salle—were that each

man should command in turn—to which I answered nothing. I could see Monsieur Cavelier praying to God on his knees in a corner and on the other side, Father Anastase who did not dare speak to me; nor did I dare go toward him until I saw what the murderers were up to.

They were like mad men, but very worried, and embarrassed too. I stayed still for a long time without speaking and without moving because I didn't dare turn toward either Monsieur Cavelier or Father Anastase for fear of arousing our enemies' anger. Since they had cooked some meat when they arrived that evening, there was the matter of having supper. They portioned out the meat as seemed right to them, saying that other people had set the portions for them before, but from now on they would do it. They were obviously trying to force me to say something that would bring on a quarrel, but for my part I knew how to keep my mouth shut.

When night came, and there was the matter of sentry duty, they didn't know what to decide because they couldn't do it all by themselves, so they told Monsieur Cavelier, Father Anastase, me, and the others who weren't in on their plot to do sentry duty as usual and that we must not think about what had happened, that it was a done deed and despair and desperation had driven them to it, that they had been angry but they no longer had any grudge against anybody. Monsieur Cavelier spoke up and told them that they had killed themselves in killing Monsieur de La Salle since he was the only one who could get us out of this country and that it did not look likely that we would be able to get ourselves out. Finally, after several opinions were set forth from one side or the other, they gave us our weapons. One of them had kept my gun because it was better than the others. He had taken it from the hands of Monsieur de La Salle. He had also made away with my linens, knives, glass beads, necklaces, and things like that, and my little bag of shot, but then he gave them back to me, too.

So we did sentry duty, during which time Monsieur Cavelier told me how the plotters had arrived at camp and how they had entered in a rage into Monsieur de La Salle's hut and grabbed everything. When Monsieur Cavelier learned of the death of Monsieur de La Salle, he told them that if they wanted to do the same to him, they should give him a little time to ask pardon of God. They answered that they would assist him as much as they were able, just as they done up to that time and that he should forget what was done, that they had been angry, but there was no help for it now, and that it was Monsieur de Morenger who was the root of all these troubles and who had forced them to have to do the wicked deed. Monsieur Cavelier told them he forgave them even though he had cause for resentment, having lost his brother and his nephew.

During the night we consulted together about what we could do. I told him I would never forsake him, not him nor Father Anastase, nor the young Lord Cavelier, his other nephew. We promised to hold together to the death—which could come soon—until we reached some place of safety. We did not go so far as to plan some way to rid ourselves of those wretched murderers. However, we did agree not to say much to each other in front of them so as not to arouse their mistrust or suspicion. That's how we spent the night till morning, without being tempted by sleep because I didn't put much trust in their promises after such a monstrous crime.

When day broke, they debated which route to take, that is, whether to go back to the village or push ahead. They decided to go straight back to the Cenis. For this purpose, they asked the Indians if they would keep on with us for the forty leagues we still had to travel, promising them some knives in return for showing us the way. They accepted. We started out, but after we had gone about a league and a half, the Indians made a show of having forgotten something and went back the way we had come. They signaled to us that all we had to do was keep on going, and they would catch up.

Since the Indians saw that we were missing three men, in addition to Monsieur de La Salle, and since the one who had guided them had seen a dead body, and they knew very well how many we had been because they had walked for some time with us, and they saw that the Shawnee was missing, I believed that they were going back to find out what had happened, and no good could come of that. Even when I looked at the Indians' faces, it gave me a fear that they had some wicked design against us and that they meant to lag behind and wait for an opportunity to ambush us. However, since there was no means nor measure to talk about it, we kept going straight north in hopes of finding a little path to the village we were looking for, one that all the Indians in the region come and go on, whether a good one or not. We passed through lovely country for about five leagues with beautiful fields and with forests here and there, and we camped on the edge of a clump of woods. As soon as we got there, one of our people lit a grass fire which lasted for some time and could be seen from afar in the open country.

As we were unloading our horses so that they could graze more comfortably and choose the best grasses, since we didn't have anything else to feed them, we saw an Indian coming toward us. When he reached us, he made us understand that he had another man and two women with him about a half league from there. They had seen the fire and he had come to see what it was. They were members of the Cenis nation, coming back to their village. We made the Indian understand that we were going there, too, and that if they would guide us, we would give them some knives and

some glass beads. He looked very happy with these and made signs that he would go tell his comrade to come with their women.

That evening they did come and bed down close to us. We spent the night sharing sentry duty again, and it was this night that l'Archevesque related the details of Monsieur de La Salle's death to me. Since I had not had time up until then to speak with anyone, I still didn't know what mean stratagem he had fallen prey to. I will record here the facts as l'Archevesque reported them to me.

Remember the two bison that I mentioned, which the Shawnee had killed, and the news of it that was sent to Monsieur de La Salle, who sent Lord Morenger and the others. The men worked smoking the meat so that when the horses arrived all they would have to do would be load the meat and carry it back on the horses. They cured all the meat, and they grilled the marrow bones and the organs, which don't keep, so that they could eat them then. But when Lord Morenger arrived, he seized the meat, including the organs, and told them he was in charge of the meat from now on and that they would not get to eat any as they had previously done. He even grabbed up the food they had set before them. This enraged them against the lord, in addition to the fact that for a long time they had borne grudges against him because he had mistreated some of them, even the doctor, even though he almost owed his life to the care that the doctor had devoted to him after he had been wounded on the coast. When the doctor found himself being mistreated after so many protestations of gratitude and friendship, he began to hate him. And there was something else: during the first voyage, Monsieur Duhaut had gotten lost, and he blamed Lord de Morenger who hadn't wanted to wait for him, and he still resented it. With this latest offense, the old grudges against Monsieur de Morenger rose to their gorge, and the evil spirit entered into their souls and urged them to do the evil deed. Monsieur Duhaut told them he could take no more and that they must have vengeance. They plotted together, five of them: Monsieur Duhaut; Doctor Liotot; Hiems; Tessier who had been boatswain; and l'Archevesque who later came to warn me.

Having talked it over, they resolved to murder Monsieur de Morenger. Later, even their choice of words should have caused suspicion because that evening after supper (when Lord de Morenger had allotted them very little meat and reserved the rest for himself) they said they were going to go cut some *casse-têtes*, or head-breakers, that is, the kinds of clubs the Indians make for their ambushes when they break the head of anyone unlucky enough to fall into their power. Then the plotters went out to cut sticks for the clubs just as they had plotted; and when Lord de Morenger was asleep along with the Shawnee and Monsieur de La Salle's servant, Saget, these wretches seeing their chance thought of nothing but to exe-

cute their vile plot. They were still considering whether to wake them up first when the Doctor, more inhumane than the others, took a hatchet, got up, and started on Lord Morenger. He struck him several blows on the head, more than enough to kill a man. Then he fell upon Saget. And then on the poor Shawnee who couldn't have had the least thing to do with all that had gone on between them. The wretch killed them all, all three in a few seconds, no time for them to say one word except that Lord Morenger, not being completely dead, did pull himself to a sitting position, not saying a word, and those murderers forced Lord de Marle to finish him off, even though he wasn't in on their plot.

As the Doctor executed his plot, the others were on watch, weapons in their hands, lest someone wake and put up a defense. Once the murder was committed, that was not the end of it. They had accomplished nothing yet because there was no way for them to approach Monsieur de La Salle. So they decided to get rid of him too, seeing that there could be no excuse to cover their crime. Therefore, they concluded they would have to meet with him, and when they reached the camp, they would crack both our skulls—Monsieur de La Salle's and mine—and deal with the other men later. But it had rained the previous days, and the river that crossed their route was so swollen they couldn't ford it, much less carry their meat across, so they had to build a kind of raft which caused a delay in their plans, and that was what caused Monsieur de La Salle to set out in search of them.

And now for what Father Anastase told me about Monsieur de La Salle's murder: As I have already said, the two of them had left camp with an Indian to guide them. When they came close to the place and Monsieur de La Salle still didn't see anybody, he was worried, but then he saw eagles overhead which made him think they couldn't be far. This is why he fired the gun: so that if they were near, they could hear him and make some response. It was his bad luck because the shot warned the murderers, and they got ready. When they heard the shot, they suspected it had to be their leader coming to meet them, and they got ready to surprise him. Duhaut had already crossed the river with l'Archevesque, and when Duhaut spied Monsieur de La Salle from a distance coming straight toward them he hid in the tall grass to wait for his leader who suspected nothing and hadn't even recharged his gun after firing it.

Monsieur de La Salle first spotted l'Archevesque who appeared a little farther off and asked him where Monsieur de Morenger, his nephew, was. L'Archevesque answered that he was "drifting." At the same time, a gun shot went off, fired by Duhaut, who was close by hidden in the weeds. The bullet struck the lord in the head. He fell dead on the spot without uttering a word, to the astonishment of Father Anastase, who was near

and who thought he was about to receive the same. He didn't know what to do—keep walking or run away—that is what he told me later. But Duhaut appeared and cried out to him not to be afraid and that nobody had anything against him, that it was despair and desperation that had driven him to do it, that he had been wanting for a long time to wreak vengeance on Monsieur de Morenger who had tried to get him lost and who had been one of the reasons his brother had been lost and had died, and many other things. The priest said the look on his face was very troubling.

When the murderers were all together, they cruelly despoiled Monsieur de La Salle and stripped him down to his shirt. The doctor especially made fun of him, all naked as he was, calling him the "Great Pasha." After that, they dragged him into the weeds and briars and left him to the discretion of wolves and other wild animals.

When they had satisfied their rage, they thought about continuing their journey back to the camp where they were still planning to get rid of me in case I meant to defend myself. Since they wanted to bring the meat too, they offered the Indians some knives so that they would help them carry it.

To get back to our long march: the twenty-first. We broke camp at about noon. The rain had delayed us for two days on the banks of a large river, where one of the Indians who had traveled with us came with his wife and two horses. We spent the night and the next day there, with sad thoughts running through my head. It was hard not to be always afraid with people like these, whom we couldn't look at without feeling horror. When I thought about the cruelty of what they had done and the danger we were in, I wanted to avenge the evil they had done us. It would have been easy while they were sleeping, but Monsieur Cavelier would not let us. He said he had more reason for vengeance than I did, having lost his brother and his nephew. Leave the vengeance to God, he said: vengeance was God's. The young Lord Cavelier, his other nephew, was just as eager as I to do to the murderers as they had done to his uncle, there being such a good opportunity. But Monsieur Cavelier persuaded us not to, and these thoughts passed.

The twenty-third we continued to the northeast where we found the little path I mentioned, the one that led to the Cenis village. We camped beside a river which was to give us much trouble getting across. It had overflowed its banks; there was not enough forest nearby for wood to make a raft; we did not have enough hides to make a canoe; and it would have taken too much time. The Indians saved us from our dilemma by offering to carry our clothes in return for some knives. And they did. Earlier I described the cured hides that they use by folding them at the corners with thongs and reinforcing them with a few branches. They fill them with as much as they can hold and push them in front of them as

they swim. Thus they transported all our equipage, and the ones of us who could swim swam across.

But several of our group did not know how to swim, and I was one of that number. We were puzzling over this new problem when one of the Indians beckoned to me to come get a seasoned log that he had seen nearby. When we had carried it to the river, he told me to put it into the water. Then he attached thongs to each end of it and made us understand that we should hold onto the log with one arm and try to swim with the other and with our feet. Monsieur Cavelier got into the water first and I followed. Father Anastase got in too. The Indians swam, holding the log steady with one hand. But Father Anastase almost drowned us. He didn't try to do his part, but simply clung to the log. As I was trying to swim, stretching myself out and kicking with my feet, I caught him in the stomach. Immediately he thought he was lost. He cried out invoking the patron of his order, Saint Francis, with all his heart, and I couldn't keep from laughing, even though I realized I could drown. But the Indians on the bank saw what was happening, came to our rescue, and helped us across.

There were still others who had to cross: the young Lord Cavelier, the Tallon boy, and Tessier. We made hand signs to the Indians to go help them but they had been upset during the previous trip across, and they didn't want to go back. This grieved us greatly, but we had to be patient. What made matters worse was that there was a cold north wind blowing, and the three on the other side had sent their clothes across and had nothing but their shirts on. It was hard for them not to shiver from the cold and for fear of the Indians who were threatening to leave them there.

Then the Indians, after we begged them and offered more glass beads and other trifles, agreed to go back. This time they didn't want to take the log, remembering the trouble they had had with it. Instead they took one of those hides with which they had transported the clothes, and into it they put the young Lord Cavelier and little Tallon, who even together were not too much to keep afloat, and the Indians kept them steady and pushed them across, just as they had the clothes. As for Tessier, he knew how to swim a little. He took his chances and did make it across. We rejoiced to find ourselves all together again because we had not acted very wisely in trusting ourselves to the Indians who, if they had meant to do us harm, could easily have finished us off for the sake of our goods once we were separated from one another.

We camped there that night. This countryside did not seem as good to me. It must flood sometimes, leaving sand and mud on the ground. Nevertheless, there were good trees.

—Translated from French by John DuVal

Reviews

X. J. Kennedy, *In a Prominent Bar in Secaucus: New and Selected Poems 1955-2007*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. Pp. 224, $18.95 pb.

Forty-two books ago, X.J. Kennedy published a volume of adult poetry (his first of ten) titled *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1955) after the title poem that, although it has been widely anthologized, in plain fact ought to be included in every anthology of poetry in the American language. Under Kennedy's pen, the kaleidoscopic (partially parabolic) descent of Marcel Duchamps' nude sounds herself downward, albeit silently ("she sifts in sunlight, . . . a constant thresh of thigh on thigh") until the final line when she "collects her motions into shape." If ever an American poem perfectly illustrated language inevitability, Kennedy's description of Duchamps' nude does so.

One other poem in that first volume, "In a Prominent Bar in Secaucas One Day," not quite as famous among American poetasters whose poetic familiarities go back fifty years, but close, serves as the title poem for Kennedy's newest book of poems. Together, for those unhappily not acquainted with this marvel of sensibility, rhetoric, and rhythmic distillation of language, these two poems serve as a perfect introduction, in the early pages, to the most recent book in the Johns Hopkins poetry series.

In an age (The New Awkward Age) when more poetry is being written and published than at any time in our history, much of it badly imitating our less formal poets, Kennedy continues to create his ways through his poems, through meanings working the geometries of rhythm, discursively threading idea to idea (it is how silkworms work), itself a comment on ideational poetry lacking rhythmic and sound counterpoint that too often rides the prosaic rails away from poetry into essay, not assay.

Kennedy is both a conceptualizer and a musician. His poems are anti-romantic even as his language energizes itself from human weaknesses. The human comedy is not funny, it is merely human. The poems lead the reader both inward and outward, somewhere beyond the page. Reread, and they bring one each time to a slightly different jumping off point, each time suggesting more.

Daughter in the House

This sleeping face, not even mine nor yours,
A hard thing to have charge of, not to own
Settled on us through time as ocean floors
Bestow them in long snowfalls made of bone:

A face half foreign, half of some we know,
Borne down on her as a gem occurs
Out of the first leaves ever tree let go
From tons that crushed dead faces into hers.

Smooth as the skin upon a pail of cream,
Her sleep hides ferment. Would we work her wrong
To lift it off and peer in on her dream?
Hasn't she been down in herself too long?
But no—two pools abused by thunderbursts,
We regain balance in her quiet spells.
She is our drink. It was for her our thirsts
Singled out each other's wells.

In "Artificer," each metaphor is a constant of the imagination that probes a new entrance into the poem, then beyond it. We're carried by the poem's clarities into the abundance of language, and if we're temporarily confounded by the literal, we're equally rewarded by the rightness of the unfolding mystery.

Artificer

Blessing his handiwork, his drawbridge closed,
He sabbathed on a hill of hand-tooled wax.
On stainless steel chrysanthemums there posed
Little gold bees with twist-keys in their backs.

Nothing could budge in this his country. Lewd
Leaves could go slither other people's hills.
His thrushes had tin whistles in their bills,
His oaks bore pewter acorns that unscrewed.

Increase perfection! So he shaped a wife,
Pleated the fabric of her chartered thigh,
Begot sons by the exact stroke of a knife
In camphorwood. He told them not to die.

The moment glowed, as did his cellophane
Brook over rollers. All obdurate day
His player-piano tinkled him its lay,
Though on its ivory dentures a profane

Tarnish kept ripening, and where the tide
Slid on ballbearings ceaselessly to shore,
Red rust. All night the world he'd locked outside
Kept thrusting newborn rats under his door.

Because the discursive nature of poetry depends on natural speech rhythms, much of contemporary poetry has been influenced and shaped by a half-century of Master of Fine Arts programs in American colleges and universities, programs that were preceded in the fifties by individual teaching poets such as Robert Lowell at Boston University and Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington, and later, though briefly, W. D. Snodgrass at the University of Iowa. The proliferation of writing programs that followed nourished visible poets with jobs and young aspiring poets with motivation, many of whom published and in turn got jobs teaching in writing programs, ultimately fueling the renaissance in published poetry that both diminished the quality of those burgeoning madding crowd of poets and highlighted the few really good poets who emerged.

What the creative writing programs did and continue to do is foster the idea that anyone can write poems, but the irony is that it is ultimately the simplicity and clean accessibility of the good poem that makes it appear uncomplicated. The rub for the apprentice poet is that everything simple in language expression is, underneath, complicated, and it is only the finished, seeming simplicity of the first rate poem that belies the real complexities inherent in the creative process. The nature of language is such that in the spiritual place where the complexities generate, the poet's accessibility to exact language occurs, the poet waiting upon revelations of sounds and sense, ultimately the real keys to meaning. The best example is Keats' manuscript page that reveals his many unsuccessful attempts to discover the verb to describe Spenserian vowels, then the final line—"Spenserian vowels *elope* with ease."

The transformative element in Kennedy's creative process is the exactitude of his craft. From the beginning of his writing career, his genius has been his bull's eye use of words. His poetry moves within the center of the target even as the merciless eye of the domestic narrator roams, and though his point of view is never funny, it is the essence of the comedic point of view. Domestic peepholes narrow behind turning screws, and Kennedy is a master of juxtaposing a lilting rhythm against a darkening narrative.

Furnished Rental

Brief tenants of a beachfront house
  Battered by winds but built to last,
We jigsaw puzzle solvers piece
  Together fragments of its past

From snapshot albums, pictures framed—
  Somebody's wedding on the pier

With wide-eyed flower girls costumed
In silks like foam from sea or beer—

Dried starfish, outcasts of a storm,
  Abandoned hats we don for laughs,
The son in Army uniform
  Absent from later photographs.

That locked and shuttered room left dark—
  Does it hold things they won't bequeath:
China we'd break, clocks stopped to mark
  The moment of some cradle death?

Sailboats approaching out of mists,
  Their summers haunt us. From their story
We armchair archeologists
  Infer our own *memento mori.*

The comedic perception lies in its realistic accommodation to the human condition, and form enhances the effect of its transcendent result. The essential nature of comedy is its ironic compromise with human frailty, and comedy views the human scene through uncolored magnified glass. All clowns are sad regardless of their facial paint, and there are no kaleidoscopic color fragments in the comic microscope. All peering glass is a looking glass.

Weakness and failure, then, are the essential humanizing elements of comedy. The expansive nature of the comic view belies the inspective concentration on its parts. It is not so much filling in the blanks as it is the magnification of emptiness that reveals the human condition. The genius of Falstaff and the palpable glibness of Polonius, Ophelia's father, clarify Hamlet's self-destructive ruminations.

At the hearts of form's enclosures are the temporary eye/ear engagements that become the ganglia of language itself. Words are mysteriously chromosomic, and Kennedy doesn't flinch in the face of his selected short subjects. He's the poetic naturalist of our time. In "Tableau Intime," the ruthlessness of the rhyme juxtaposes against both the elegance of the French title and the pathos of its moment.

Tableau Intime

The thin-chinned girl diagnosed as hyperactive
Curls in a heap on the couch, limp from the rebuke
Of her large mother who stands imploring, "Practice,
Damn you, practice your violin." A stream of puke

Pours from her mother's live-in lover's lips
Into the toilet crock at which he kneels,
A penitent communicant. Froth drips,
Spins down the drain. His feet regained, he wheels

Back to the parlor, balances the couch
With his slumped weight. Cora kicks off her shoes,
Seizes the cheap, neglected violin,
Scrapes out a dissonance. "Can't hold your booze?"

She jeers. The lover eyes her with disdain,
Aims a sharp swing but misses. "Ma!" she shrills,
"Ma, stop him! Fritz is hitting me again—
He's always hitting me." "Time for your pills,"

Calls mother, reappearing with two bottles,
Capsules for Cora, Four Roses straight for Fritz.
Stunned by a bounding shoe, in its waterless bowl
The paint-mottled pet turtle collects its wits.

Kennedy's poems are carved wormwood; their sculptural counterpart is Donatello's Mary Magdalene. They range between the disarray of loss, not of the past but of past chances, and the modernized complexity of the re-invented nursery rhyme:

A Footpath Near Gethsemane
—for Raymond Roseliep

Child: Mary, Mary wan and weary,
What does your garden grow?

Mother: Tenpenny nails and Veronica's veils
And three ruddy trees in a row.

The comic poet plays the fool, and Kennedy's seriousness brings us to our senses. He is one of our national art treasures.

Donald Junkins, Poetry Editor
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

D'Arcy McNickle, *"The Hungry Generations": The Evolution of a Novel.* Ed. Birgit Hans. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007. Pp. 342, $34.95 hb.

D'Arcy McNickle's novel *"The Hungry Generations"* is a fascinating document that offers invaluable insights into "Indian-white marriages, the life of the mixed-blood children of these marriages, and the pressures of assimilation brought to bear on them" (2). As this work carries strong autobiographical traits, it also provides a new perspective on the life of the author and his experiences as a writer. Birgit Hans, the editor of McNickle's novel, has done a laudable job by painstakingly comparing the earlier work, *The Surrounded*, with which McNickle has been chiefly associated, and *"The Hungry Generations"* to show in what ways these two versions differ and what they offer with regard to the Indian community in question. In her introduction to the novel Hans sketches out the author's life—his upbringing on the Flathead Reservation, his parental background (his mother being a half-blood Cree, and his father a white man), his struggles with cultural assimilation into the Flathead tribe, his mother's divorce from William McNickle and marriage to Gus Dahlberg, his education in public schools and later universities (Montana and Oxford), his sojourn in France and residence in New York, his three marriages, the writing of *"The Hungry Generations"* and its revisions, his position at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and his work on Indian traditions (*The Indian Tribes of the United States* later known as *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals*)—and allows the reader to situate this novel in its historical, social, and political context to raise appreciation for this novel and the cultural implications for Native Americans in the 1920s and 1930s.

Aside from biographical details that pertain to the author's life and his native community, which Hans has gathered through interviews, journal entries, newspaper clippings, and other works, she then examines the manuscript, *"The Hungry Generations,"* from a literary perspective and offers insightful hints as to the making of the novel published under the title of *The Surrounded* in 1936. Although the manuscript was rejected several times and did poorly when it was accepted for publication in the 1930s, McNickle "never lost faith in his novel" (17).

The Surrounded and *"The Hungry Generations"* revolve around the same plot, namely the murder of a "game warden by the protagonist's mother" (17). Hans informs the reader that this murder is based upon a real happening in 1908 when a group of Flathead Indians "was hunting off the reservation on state land at a place called Holland Prairie where they encountered the game warden in company with another white man"

(17-18). In the historical accounts describing this event the deputy warden shoots three Flathead Indians, upon which one of their women shoots him as well. The trial at the end of *"The Hungry Generations"* claiming Archilde, the protagonist, as the chief culprit in this matter, gives the reader an idea of the historical occurrence and its legal repercussions for a Native American.

"The Hungry Generations" is more detailed than *The Surrounded.* It recounts the homecoming of Archilde to his reservation in Montana after he worked as a violinist elsewhere and earned some money. He meets his father again and has considerable difficulties getting along with him. The center of the narrative, however, does not involve his father. In company with his brother and mother, Archilde goes on a hunting trip. "He lifted his head from the sighting and watched the buck with deep satisfaction. He had never beheld such pride and confidence. He decided to wait and shoot a younger buck" (100). This almost mystical moment—he has perspiration on his forehead and claims never to have experienced anything like that—makes the protagonist waver. When trying to shoot the buck he was aiming at, he fires the gun but notices that he has missed it, and "not a deer was in sight" (100). This trip soon turns into a nightmarish experience of loss and grief. While Archilde wisely selects one buck, his brother, Louis, escapes into the woods and indiscriminately shoots an animal and is proud of his exploit. Louis soon loses faith, however, when a game warden arrives and tells the party that it is illegal to shoot a doe. As Louis tries to get hold of his horse and approaches his rifle that leans against a tree, which the warden interprets as a prelude to an impending act of violence, the latter then shoots the Indian. "There was no accounting for what happened next" (104), the text reads. Their mother hits the warden "in the head with a hatchet" (104).

This event endows the narrative with much momentum. After burying the corpses and getting rid of the murder weapon, they ride back to the community hoping that the snow will cover up the deed. Archilde knows, however, that he has to leave. The difficulty arises when his father puts faith in him believing that Archilde can take over his farm. Even the shop owner, Moser, is convinced that Archilde is an honorable and dutiful man and tries to sell his business to him for a token fee. Archilde harshly replies, "I want to get away—completely. Do you understand what it means to me to go away?" (139). What the shop owner does not know is that Archilde's refusal to remain in the community has something to do with the murder and not with his business ventures.

Archilde then leaves for Paris. This episode, which is omitted in the published version, focuses on the protagonist's music skills and friendship with Claudia, an American musician, who shows up again at the end of

the novel. Archilde is able to forget his past as he immerses himself in music. When one of his friends, Feure, who "was too unreal for words," prompts him to play the violin, Archilde becomes aware of his talents: "it was neither the expression of ideas nor the portraying of a character—it was simply the bubbling up of an ecstatic nature always seeking activity and display" (176). His sojourn in Paris shows Archilde from a different perspective. He enjoys his cultural experiences there although he is reminded of his background when, for instance, a shop owner asks him whether his father is a farmer, or when after having a nightmare of an old woman, he writes to an Indian agent with the request of keeping him "posted on everything at home" (167). His Parisian experience comes to a close when he learns of his mother's death.

The last section of the novel is set in Montana. Archilde, who was excited to return to his native place, realizes that he is not able to turn his nephews into white men. Archilde gets arrested for the murder of the game warden. His escape to Paris where he hoped to forget his haunting memories of the murder come back full force and bring him face to face with his past. The trial is probably one of the most interesting sections of the narrative. The reports and speeches from different parties—defense and prosecuting lawyers—show how intricate the matter is and what the social implications are for people of a different cultural and ethnic background. Finally, Archilde leaves the court victoriously. He is acquitted. What his future holds in store can only be speculated upon by the announcement of Claudia's arrival.

Although the narrative lacks momentum at times, especially in its early parts where the protagonist returns home and meets his family, it portrays a culturally rich community in which shifting perceptions of identity testify to the changes and vicissitudes imposed by social mandates. Hence, this narrative is particularly useful for historians, literary critics, and cultural anthropologists for whom Birgit Hans has provided an excellent framework.

Vittorio Hösle, *Woody Allen: An Essay on the Nature of the Comical*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. Pp. 96, $18.00 pb.

In his long essay *Woody Allen: An Essay on the Nature of the Comical*, Vittorio Hösle surveys the work of Woody Allen who, in 2000, was the subject of a special issue of *Film and Philosophy*. The author, who has translated this booklet into German for the 70th birthday of the filmmaker, looks at the filmic oeuvre of Allen from a predominately philosophical

angle. The text is interspersed with numerous references, among other things, to philosophers such as Bergson, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, and to authors such as Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, Rabelais, and Mann, and to filmmakers such as Fassbender, Eisenberg, and Benigni. Although the essay purports to explore the notion of the comical and tackles the most prevalent theories on this subject (Bergson, Freud, and David H. Monro), which the author performs with much elegance and sophistication, he soon abandons this objective for a kaleidoscopic profusion of references and hints.

The introduction provides a focused discussion of the comical—laughter, jokes, puns, and witticisms—and presents an approachable review thereof. While laughter can elicit the feeling of superiority in some subjects, who laugh precisely because they deride objectionable qualities in other people or their demeanor, as evidenced by Johnny Haymer in *Annie Hall* (9), for example, laughter can also have a social function insofar as it makes fun of social incongruities, such as the rift between lower and higher classes. That the subject of derision exhibits certain traits that can be found in the one who laughs—a kind of affinity that is tacitly present between the two—has become a commonplace in studies on laughter and the comical. The person who is ridiculed shows up in literary narratives across all centuries. Hösle again provides copious references to such texts—Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, or Doctor Lupus in Jonson's *Volpone*—and presents a clear idea of what this kind of laughter entails.

On the other hand, there is laughter triggered by incongruity. Hösle touches on Schopenhauer's understanding of incongruity, namely witticism and foolishness (16), and explains how these two operate. While the first presupposes an intentional act and elicits laughter because the object of derision does not concern the person who tells the jokes, the second is not intended and can be discerned in behavior traits and actions. Hösle's discussion of Schopenhauer's theory of laughter is theoretically sound and argumentatively well-crafted. Bergson who popularized Schopenhauer's ideas, so to speak, argues that the comical emerges because it "is society's sanction against those who try to impose something mechanical on the flux of life" (19). What this means is that the subject of ridicule "violates the essence of life" which is elasticity and not rigidity. Examples drawn from *Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, *To Be or Not to Be*, or the short story "The Kugelmass Episode" illustrate this point.

Repetition of a situation with or without alteration is another point pertaining to the theory of incongruity. Hösle resorts to Allen's film *Bananas* in which Nancy breaks off with her lover, Fielding Mellish, only to resume the same relationship later on. Mellish, however, has undergone

a profound transformation. Nancy does not recognize him. When she finds out his true identity, she knows that "something was missing" in her partner. Hence, laughter is triggered because the spectator knows more than the characters.

The last type of laughter, black humor, is malevolent and spiteful. "The legitimate human desire to feel superior even in the face of death explains, though, why black humor could and had to develop, as the remarkable attempt to overcome the fear of death constituting the *conditio humana,*" the author writes (26).

The next section, "Being Funny by Being Witty: The Essence of the Woody Persona," examines the ways in which the "Woody persona" reveals itself. Claiming that this persona "remains astonishingly constant through all the movies" (31), an assertion much subject to debate, Hösle lists some of the main characters—the jester Felix, Boris Grushenko, Hobbes, Zelig, Kleinman, Miles More—and argues that "their psychology does not differ much from that of the majority of the avatars of the Woody persona who live in our time" (31). The author shows how these characters become comical, that is, what they achieve in particular to elicit laughter. Some of the means by which laughter is generated are "inflation and its inversion, deflation, the sudden juxtaposition of something trivial after something sublime" (33). Another point is that certain misunderstandings that play with "homonyms and homophones"—as in *Oedipus Wrecks/Oedipus Rex* (39)—can elicit laughter because, implicitly, they have a bearing on the Woody persona. This persona, the author continues, is mostly intellectual and rather unsuccessful in his ventures—having "an incapacity to enjoy life" (44). This persona is obsessed with sex (49), a trait the author traces back to Greek comedy where the players displayed large *phalloi*, and always experiences hardships with regard to his sexual pleasures. The author then reads this obsession from a Bergsonian angle.

The following section, "The Great Philosophical Issues in Allen's Movies," is, like many other contemporary attempts at linking popular culture to philosophy, notably "The Matrix," "The Lord of the Rings," and "The Da Vinci Code," an innovative move to link two seemingly incompatible fields. The qualifier "great" in the title might be misused here, though, because Allen's work does not lend itself to consistent analyses of philosophical problems. In arguing that Allen's work "corresponds exactly to a certain moment in the history of philosophy, namely that moment in the late twentieth century when French existentialism's concept of freedom and its ethically motivated atheism had become profoundly problematic because they seemed to undermine any belief in an objective ethics" (6), Hösle puts the finger on an inherent problem in phi-

losophy, that is, the notion of authenticity. Yet it is questionable whether Allen's oeuvre is suitable for this kind of analysis because of its notoriously apolitical nature. How can a subject who faces problems of freedom and who has to make ethical choices, as the Woody persona always does, be exempt from participating in the political and social sphere from which he has emerged? The notion of authenticity, at least for certain existentialists, presupposes the implication of the subject in the political order in which certain choices have to be made. And these choices, contrary to what Hösle claims, can never be merely private. Although the Woody persona might show "an interest in the great philosophical and theological questions" (58), this sort of curiosity is prompted, first and foremost, by the protagonist's own incapacity to cope with life. This incapacity ineluctably leaves him in an existential bind and raises many questions as a result of it.

In this section literary, philosophical, and filmic references are presented too profusely. Hösle who possesses great knowledge of the Western tradition tries to cover much ground. In so doing, however, he risks losing focus. It happens that he provides up to five references to theorists and works on a single page without always discussing what these theorists could contribute to the issue in question. At times one cannot help wondering what this overabundance of extratextual sources finally accomplishes for the scope of this essay, which, we remember, is on the nature of the comical.

This essay certainly constitutes the beginning for other studies to emerge with regard to Allen's oeuvre. The overabundance of references might be conducive to such endeavors precisely because it touches on areas that stand in need of further exploration. What is also remarkable about this essay is the stylistic elegance with which it is composed. The essay is certainly illuminating in many respects, such as the introductory notes on the nature of laughter tackled from a philosophical perspective, and offers many possibilities for more extensive research.

W. Scott Olsen, *At Speed: Traveling the Long Road between Two Points*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. Pp. xi + 185, $24.95 hb.

W. Scott Olsen's travel book, *At Speed: Traveling the Long Road between Two Points*, offers the reader a unique perspective on parts of the United States—the Dakotas—that are usually left out of travel reports, road novels, and migration literature. The author takes the reader through many landscapes and describes with a discerning eye what makes the Midwest a

worthwhile subject for literary craftsmanship. The opening, "The Climb," is a particularly enticing piece. The author sets out describing what characteristics count as a mountain. Realizing that the word "mountain" or "hill" defies standard definitions—"in fact, there are no official Federal definitions for these terms" (1)—he challenges expectations as to what counts as a mountain and what does not. With much self-irony the author, a native of Minnesota and probably not used to any elevations higher than an anthill, invites the reader to let go of preconceived ideas regarding cultural and geographical specificities. He has the rare ability to catch cultural highlights and report them verbally by merely traveling through the vast expanses of the Midwest. But the narrative does not remain confined to it.

The first setting in the narrative is Death Valley, California. From the lowest point on the continent, the author travels onward to Nevada, eager to find the highest elevation, the "highest roadway" (3), where he could still drive his car. On his way he describes people he meets and the places he visits. For instance, before entering Las Vegas, he has a fantasy of being in one of the casinos and trying his luck. He vividly describes the lure and temptation of gambling, muses on the possibility of ultimate victory while spending one dollar after another, and realizing that his luck is dwindling. What remains is a bitter aftertaste, "the silliness of gambling" (13), and the view of a merciless sun scorching the roadside of Las Vegas.

What makes this narrative alluring is that the author manages to shed a different light on many places he visits and takes away the cliché of tediousness with which these places are often associated. His visit to Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana is an invitation to view the harshness of the northern winters—it is "17 below in Jamestown," North Dakota (32)—differently, more poetically: "The prairie looks like an ocean in winter—waves whipped up in the snow, crests, small cornices hanging from each other" (33). The author muses, "If summertime on the American prairie is filled with optimism, with springtime rain, summer planting, and then the green of midsummer crops, the gold of harvest time, red combines moving through yellow fields of wheat, if all of that speaks of promise and prosperity, to health and the American dream, what is it our imagination says about the snow-covered and frozen prairie in January when the temperature is many degrees below zero?" (34).

Humorous interludes such as the fact that Rugby, North Dakota, is the geographical center of North America, and North Dakota was a leading nuclear power if one went by the missiles buried in the ground around Minot and Grand Forks, at least a couple of years ago, make this narrative sardonically amusing. The depiction of the prairie—in summer or in winter—provides a view of this geography to make one halt with astonish-

ment at the cultural riches concealed in the remoteness of these states. Although the author spends much time driving his car, there is always something unique that catches his attention. When the radio station plays a song by Madonna, for instance, he wonders whether a youngster from a small place like Glasgow, Montana, does not want to reach for something better, more exciting, and ends on a poetic note, "I wonder if you can grow up in a place like this and not want desperately to get out, and not realize until you're gone what bit of grace it was to be born here" (81).

His narrative does not follow a straightforward pattern as one might expect considering the fact that he travels from one state to another. Even stylistically there are many surprises in store. In the chapter titled "From the Notebooks" the author adds snippets of other narratives (Lewis Carroll, Alexander Jablokov, Buddha, Thomas Jefferson, Stephen Hawking, and others) and leaves them for the reader to ponder their meaning. The last one by Whitman, "O public road, I say back I am not afraid to leave you, yet I love you, / You express me better than I can express myself" (82), elegantly reiterates the author's passion for the open road.

The second half of the narratives takes the reader to the south—Florida—as the starting point for another series of travel ventures. The reader gets some insights into Southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Arkansas, and others) and realizes that the author's driving frenzy—six days on the road—must have been a recent one because the name of Condoleezza Rice shows up when he spots her birthplace. References to historical sites and happenings abound in this section. At the end of his journey he thinks of places yet to be explored and reveals in a rare moment of intimacy that his father has cancer. One wishes that Olsen would leave other moments of intimacy in this narrative to make the reader realize that the author is more than merely an astute observer. Overall, this travel book is a good read, and I emphatically recommend it to people interested in places off the beaten track.

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Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 397, $59.95 hb, $19.95 pb.

Early relationships between diverse European states and Native American nations have attracted a lot of attention, and Juliana Barr's text on these relationships needs to be seen in this tradition. Focusing on Texas, Barr explains in great detail the various forms such relationships took over time, but also depending on the parties involved. She tries to position the Texas history as exceptional because "Indians not only retained control of the region but also asserted control over Spaniards themselves" (7). "Texas was different," she claims, because "not even a 'middle ground' emerged." This argument of difference is a tough one to make. Early contacts all over North America saw Native societies in control over Europeans, and the emergence of middle grounds, however fleeting or long-term, is a necessary transition in the shift of power. Some of Barr's historical accounts of interactions can actually be seen as descriptions of middle grounds themselves.

Peace Came in the Form of a Woman is not simply a carefully researched account of historical interactions, but is also trying to argue a theoretical point: namely, that these interactions "must be understood as a diplomacy of gender" (2). To begin with, Barr asserts differences between European and Native societies: "native polities did not resemble those of Europeans" (8). While "Indians used principles of kinship to classify peoples," Barr writes, "[i]n contrast, by the eighteenth century, Europeans drew on categories of race and class" to achieve the same ends (9). Not only did kinship serve as the primary means of classification for Native societies, Barr says, but also "gender was the organizing principle of kin-based social, economic, and political domains within and between native societies" (10). Therefore, "just as race was a construction of European power in other areas of colonial America, gender emerged as a signature of Indian power in interactions with Europeans here" (11). This is Barr's hypothesis; Native societies associated women with peace, and all diplomatic exchanges, in peace or conflict, were gendered accordingly.

For an argument in which kinship systems play such a central role, actual explanations of kinship systems are severely lacking. Barr simply assumes that gender was the dominant cultural value in Native societies and that European societies had no equivalent gender roles. Her brief discussion of Caddoan kinship left me confused. Their "kinship system was matrilineal, except at the highest levels of leadership" (69), she says. "[P]atrilineal descent of political and religious leadership existed within a larger matrilineal kinship system" (28) because hereditary offices "passed

by descent through a male line but within the matrilineal kinship system—for example, from a man to his sister's son" (29). What she describes, then, is a normal matrilineal system.

Similarly distracting from her conclusion is that Barr describes many instances of calumet ceremonies between men, through which the involved parties created alliances, yet insists that these did not represent peaceful alliances since only "the more female-influenced kinship rituals of alliances and settlement represented by the matrilineal household" could do so (31). Often, Barr's insistence on the primacy of women in diplomatic relationships is contradicted in the historical narrative itself. Describing the relations between Spaniards and Apaches, Barr says that "women of the Apache family bands *stepped forward* in a multitude of ways to pledge that alliance. . . . Lipan leaders like Boca Comida *proposed marrying* some of their single women" in order to create kinship alliances (176, italics mine).

The analysis of the carefully researched historical sources upon which Barr bases her theory seems to be based on too simple and literal a framework. The distinction between race and kinship as the basis for classification, for example, is misleading; Europeans used race to create kinship structures of close and distant relatives as well as non-relatives. Barr also relies on cultural interpretations that are at least ambiguous, for example when she describes how at the end of negotiations with the Spanish, an Apache chief "took the hand of one of the little girls held captive, turned with her to face Flores, and gestured as if to say, 'This is what you want, not peace'" (168). While she elsewhere denounces European interpretations of native gender roles as culturally biased, Barr assumes that the meaning of gestures is perfectly clear (167).

The obvious interpretation of cultural symbols extends to, for example, the image of the Virgin Mary that Europeans often carried with them on diplomatic missions. Barr states that "Caddo responses indicate that they understood the Virgin's image, not as a Spanish assertion of political identity or religious intent, but as an effort by Spaniards to compensate for their lack of real women and thereby to offset any appearance of hostility" (41). On the same page, she explains that "Indians normally put on display gifts received from allies in past ceremonial exchanges as a signal of welcome when those allies returned. When they extended similar gestures to Spanish visitors, objects carrying the image of the Virgin Mary were their choice for display" (41). The question thus is did the Caddo choose these images because they depicted a woman, or because they saw them as a symbol of Spanish political identity? I would be extremely hesitant to assume the first over the second explanation. Barr herself seems to acknowledge this problem when she explains why Cantonas and Payayas

used crosses as signs instead. These peoples "did not choose the iconography of a male Jesus over a female Mary. Rather, they chose crosses based on their own diplomatic protocols. Crosses were the gifts received from more recent, and more peaceful, Spaniards, and their protocols called for a display of past exchange items if and when such peaceful visitors returned" (114). This explanation seems to leave no room for the Caddos having chosen a female iconography over available alternative iconographies.

Juliana Barr has written a detailed history, and the book has to be recommended as such. The cultural analysis, however, falls short because it does not provide and is not based on the detailed cultural knowledge necessary for intercultural symbolic translations in truly ethno-historical projects. Instead, it seems like cultural practices and ideas are interpreted according to a theory in need of affirmation.

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Anne Pierson Wiese, *Floating City*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. Pp. 72, $16.95 pb.

Floating City is Anne Pierson Wiese's first book; it received the 2006 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, chosen from more than 1400 manuscripts. On one level Ms. Wiese may be considered an urban poet; she was born in Minneapolis, raised in Brooklyn, and currently lives in New York City, the "Floating City" of the title. While she writes of urban life in its various aspects, her awareness also includes the natural world, not in any grand sense, but in scenes as small as a public park or a window box. And she writes also of the all-too-human residents of her megalopolis. Always, she is a shrewd and perceptive observer, attentive and aware.

Stylistically, she is in the company of such as Robert Frost, Richard Wilbur, and Ted Kooser. The poems are luminously clear, yet deeply resonant, striking, and memorable. Their apparent simplicity arises from depths of insight and artistic commitment. The poems make no effort to impress, and yet they are indelibly impressive; they are extraordinary evocations of the ordinary.

The first poem in the book, "Profile of the Night Heron," provides a fitting introduction to all that follows. Set in the city—in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, to be exact—it deals with a creature from the natural world: the night heron. Herons, however, have their urban counterparts:

> These birds, they go to the right
> place every day until they die.
>
> There are people like that in the city,
> with signature hats or empty attaché cases,
> expressions of private absorption fending
> off comment, who attach to physical
> locations—a storefront, a stoop, a corner,
> a bench—and appear there daily as if for a job.

While the sense of apparent permanence is marked by superficial change (e.g., "when the Mom & Pop / store becomes a coffee bar"), there remains that which will never change:

> the heartprick of longitude and latitude
> to home in on, the conviction that life
> depends, every day, on what outlasts you.

In language of exquisite plainness Anne Wiese writes of classic themes—creation and renewal, the brevity and immensity of life, loss, death—in fresh and often startling ways. A lyricist, she inclines toward poems of sonnet length; the sonnet form is used with great variety, and it is used frequently, even in longer poems that break into 14-line sections or are composed in multiples of 14. At least 45 poems in the book are so structured, but the variety is such that there is no sense of repetitiveness.

Her craft seems effortless. Of particular interest is her use of rhyme. Not all the sonnet-length poems are rhymed, and only a few approach regular patterns—"Death Has No Place," for example, could be a regular Petrarchan sonnet except for the rhyme of "arrangement" with "strange," "change" and "exchange" in the octave:

> Perhaps the fact of death would seem less strange
> if out my bedroom window and below
> there were a family graveyard in the snow
> where those like me who have gone before change
> only by familiar yards the arrangement
> of their sleep; if my own place I could know
> below such white, specific, well-known snow,
> perhaps my death would seem a mere exchange.

Wisely, the author chose not to hyphenate the word "arrangement." While doing so would have produced an exact rhyme, the better course was to leave the haunting echo, as she does in various other poems where the rhyme is metrically inexact but the sound lingers like a voice overheard.

As noted above, while the poet writes of her city, including all the dreck and litter of urban life, she is as much a poet of nature as of the megalopolis—not nature in its large extents, but in its small immediacies, reminiscent of Theodore Roethke's greenhouse poems. In "Sonnet to Basil," for example, the author plants a packet of basil seeds in her window box. They germinate beyond all expectation, with the result that almost all the many seedlings have to be discarded in order to make room for the four plants that need the space in order to grow and thrive. The poem concludes:

> I plucked the living threads out like a grim reaper
> in training, each uprooting feeling more
>
> brutal than the last, each frail sprout between
> my finger and thumb a dumb reproach.

The tension between the human and the natural is sharply etched. Different purposes cry for recognition; and while in this case the human prevails, it is not without a sense of guilt (as in, for example, Roethke's "Moss-Gathering").

The life with nature in the city is tellingly displayed in "Spring Planting." The title might have come from Frost—it didn't—but the pastoral suggestion of farmers working the fields is immediately dismissed by the opening lines:

> First we clear the winter refuse from the ground
> around the tree. It's mostly small stuff: bottle
> caps, bleached cigarette butts, the odd metro
> card, plastic wraps off unknown objects,
> a shattered crack pipe glinting like ice from beneath
> ivy. We are delicate, as if by noticing
> each item we can forgive its presence.

Frost has written of spring planting, perhaps most notably in "Putting in the Seed," beyond question a superb poem; but it now seems of another age, contemporary with, say, Virgil's "Eclogues." The comparison is no reproach in the timeless world of poetry, but still, Frost's sonnet seems remote from the contemporary world. Anne Wiese's poem—three sections of 14 lines each—provides an appropriate updating for a time when agricultural conglomerates control the farms and most people live in cities.

Throughout *Floating City* the author is deeply conscious of nature's claims and contradictions, especially as they are viewed in an urban landscape. Her perceptions are precise and frequently stunning in the clarity of their observations. The unrhymed sonnet "Lilacs" is tropical:

> Today the snow is melting in the streets, lunar
> gray lumps riddled with dogs' piss and the pulp
> of several weeks' worth of trash—disintegrated
> newspapers, take-out food containers pecked apart
> by pigeons, losing lotto tickets, here and there a trampled
> glove, its five fingers splayed beneath the dingy ice
> like the farewell wave of a dying civilization.
>
> We forget—or never knew—how many of us have come
> and gone, and for how long, but spring is on its way again
> making everything green and clean and new. . . .
> Even in the city, sloshing through the noxious
> leavings of our winter's waste, we lift our faces
> to the blue sky, catch the scent of lilacs blowing
> in from somewhere—blowing, blowing one more time.

The theme—nature's eternal rebirth and renewal—could hardly be more traditional. "Lilacs" takes its place in a long line of poems welcoming the return of spring, but it avoids triteness in various ways: its form (sonnet-length, but in two seven-line sections), its elegiac overtones (spring returns; humans eventually vanish); its sharp descriptions of the detritus of winter (including the brilliant simile of the glove as "the farewell wave of a dying civilization"). Wisely, the author does not begin with a cheery welcome to spring; indeed, after reading the opening seven lines the reader might well wonder where the poem is going. Is this going to be an anti-pastoral poem about urban ugliness, like Jonathan Swift's "A Description of a City Shower"? But no: as the poem concludes, its main theme makes itself known. The scent of lilacs surprises by its soft and unexpected approach.

After nature and the city, the third major focus of *Floating City* is the human. Ms. Wiese is an astute and sensitive observer of the life around her, the life that draws her in and surrounds her. Consider, for example, the sonnet-length "Tell Me":

> There are many people who spend their nights
> on the subway trains. Often one encounters
> them on the morning commute, settled in corners,
> coats over their heads, ragged possessions heaped
> around themselves, trying to remain in their own night.
>
> This man was already up, bracing himself against
> the motion of the train as he folded his blanket
> the way my mother taught me, and donned his antique blazer,
> his elderly, sleep-soft eyes checking for the total effect.
>
> Whoever you are—tell me what unforgiving series
> of moments has added up to this one: a man
> making himself presentable to the world in front
> of the world, as if life has revealed to him the secret
> that all our secrets from one another are imaginary.

And there you have it: a vignette without sentimentality, but moving and deep in its understanding. Its insistence is restrained: not too much, but just enough. It is such as Chekhov might have admired.

The third and final section of *Floating City* moves beyond New York and Brooklyn to range through a variety of subjects, memories of childhood in particular. The section and the book conclude with a striking poem entitled "The Distance":

My mother read me poems before memory,
so maybe that's when it began,
the certainty that seemed already in
place at the time of my first memory—

or at least the two coincided exactly:
the earnest sound of her voice reading
fell like rain on the unmoving
earth of my conviction that poetry

was the highest object of humanity.
It was shocking, how she allowed spaces to fall
between the living words—spaces that started small
but lengthened to such silent immensity

that a poem became the distance
between what we must say and what we can.

In an interview conducted in the winter of 2007 the author was asked, "What would be the one thing you would like a reader to take away from the experience of reading *Floating City*?" She responded, "A renewed relish for the moment-by-moment richness of life." Certainly that relish is there—along with, one must add, a continuing sense of wonder and discovery.

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Carol Bly and Cynthia Loveland, *Against Workshopping Manuscripts: A Plea for Justice to Student Writers*. Edina, MN: Bly and Loveland Press (5537 Zenith Avenue South, 55410), 2006. Pp. 52, $20 pb.

Carol Bly and Cynthia Loveland's *Against Workshopping Manuscripts* calls into question the most common method of teaching creative writing in the United States, at least at the college level. The widespread practice of having students critique each other's work while the teacher acts as a facilitator began in the 1950s and was promoted and pioneered by writers/teachers such as Wallace Stegner (Stanford Writing Program) and Paul Engle (Iowa Writers' Workshop). As Bly and Loveland point out,

> We have thousands and thousands of "creative writers." The best try for the now hallowed Iowa Workshop, and by increments, those of lesser skill get served by lesser schools. All the way down to summer writing conferences a good many of whose teachers write scarcely any literature themselves. Modern phenomena in creative writing include low-residency writing colleges, and high-residency prisons with inmate writing groups. Some good, some deprived of imaginative leadership.
>
> Once people are so inured to a practice that their concern is only to buy the best they can win entrance to, it is hard to change the question from *Which is the best?* to *Should I be doing this at* all? (14)

And whether workshopping is the best method of teaching creative writing is a question worth asking.

In *Against Workshopping Manuscripts*, Bly and Loveland rail against workshopping, calling it a cash cow for universities and questioning its use at all levels of schooling. They rightly point out some of the potential pitfalls of the method. Without firm and compassionate guidance, participants can be snide, even cruel. And it is very hard (another critic calls it semisadistic) to take a new piece of writing to a group of strangers and ask them to comment on it. But having both participated in and led such workshops, I have to disagree respectfully with Bly and Loveland's primary assumption: that these workshops are easy for the instructor. As Wallace Stegner said in *On Teaching and Writing Fiction*:

> A writing seminar exerts criticism ad hoc upon a specific manuscript. A member of the class provides the subject matter, the class the discussion, the teacher no more than a mild Socratic guidance. Instead of a lecture, what goes on is a discussion which, with luck, may lead to some sort of illumination or consensus. It is very difficult to do, actually. After two hours of apparently mild semi-participation, the teacher can come out feeling as if he had carried a piano up the stairs. (60)

The first chapter in *Against Workshopping Manuscripts* is "Five Ways to Replace the Workshopping of Manuscripts." If Bly and Loveland were

students in my composition class, I'd ask them why they started with methods of replacement *before* they established the need to find a better method. Perhaps they think the back cover blurb does that for them:

> No one has composed with more innovation (as in the Quartet in F major, Opus 59) or more lyricism and clamor and surprise than Beethoven.
>
> Now why would anyone ask students to "workshop" his scores?
> Of course everyone isn't Beethoven.
> Still we teachers of creative writing
> can't tell which student will be Beethoven.
> Or Lincoln.
> Or Virginia Woolf.
>
> So let's not "workshop" anyone.

Other chapter titles are "What exactly *is* 'workshopping a manuscript?'" "Some history of manuscript workshopping," "The *real* vs the 'good' reason for English departments' having so universally taken to workshopping manuscripts," "General psychological damage done by workshopping manuscripts," "Harm specific to children caused by putting them into small creative-writing groups," "Psychological harm done youth by middle- and high-school workshopping groups," "Suppression of the imagination aggravated by the workshopping of manuscripts," and "The practice of workshopping manuscripts seen as a toxic environment for re-entry in the neocortex because workshopping obviates empathic inquiry."

The first chapter title is somewhat misleading in that the five "ways" to replace workshopping are really guidelines for creative-writing classes. For example, the first is "No creative-writing class should have more than 15 participants." The third, "In creative work as opposed to scholarly essays, no rough drafts should ever be asked for. . . . Assigning rough drafts cuts off the psychological privacy in which the deepest, happiest, saddest, most charged potential of stories and poems still crouch profoundly hidden in the writers' thickets of neurons." The guidelines are all excellent. In a class of twenty or more, it's difficult for everyone to be heard.

The list of suggested readings in the appendix and the brief discussion of empathic inquiry are also useful. But the best part of *Against Workshopping Manuscripts* (at least for a writer) may be that it points to an earlier book by Bly, *Beyond the Writers' Workshop: New Ways to Write Creative Nonfiction* (Anchor Books 2001). In some ways the more recent book feels like an outline of the earlier one in which an entire chapter is devoted to empathic inquiry.

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William Barillas, *The Midwestern Pastoral: Place and Landscape in Literature of the American Heartland.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Pp. xv + 258, $39.95, hb.

William Barillas knows that finding the pastoral in 21st–century America is an explorer's job and is made more difficult when the hunter looks for it within the sprawl engendered by a bloated metropolis. Discovering a place and a landscape that suggest the pastoral, in fact, requires a good deal of imagination as well as an understanding of how and where a natural state, which we assume was once a site for the pastoral, evinces itself in spite of being industrialized and brutalized for more than a century. Robert Sullivan's *The Meadowlands* (1998) is a riveting journey into the interior of one of the most violated but indomitable natural settings in the United States. But Sullivan's location is along the Hackensack in New Jersey, a spot known to the rest of the country primarily for its racetrack and football team. One would expect evidence of the pastoral to be more common and less complicated in the Midwest than in the Garden State.

But in chapters analyzing the works of authors as diverse as Willa Cather, Aldo Leopold, Theodore Roethke, James Wright, Jim Harrison, and in a closing chapter Jane Smiley, Ted Kooser, and Paul Gruchow, Barillas reminds his readers that this is not so. In the preface, it becomes immediately evident that Barillas, like the authors he treats, has himself explored the pastoral just beyond the monotonous suburbs of his Flint, Michigan, childhood and that he can evoke its meaning for his readers. In a short walk he comes upon a lake shaped by an abandoned gravel pit, then goes further into the deepest heart of the woods:

> In a hidden spruce grove, where skunk cabbages rise in spring, and spotted touch-me-not in autumn, the four cardinal directions and the axis linking heaven and earth converged. As I sat on the exposed roots and soft fallen needles of those trees, the rest of the walk—the hidden spring, the city cemetery with its sweeping vista and Depression-era gravestones—dropped away, along with thoughts of the future and of the past. I was simply there, in the place and in the moment.
>
> . . .
>
> When I return to those woods I seek the spruce grove because no one has "improved" that hidden spot. It is a sad commentary on our stewardship of nature (or lack of it) that the loveliest places are often those that have not been maintained at all, those nooks and bowers that enjoy, for the present anyway, a welcome neglect that allows ecological succession to take its own slow course in restoring the local biota.

Barillas's personal observation here tells the reader a lot about what is to come in the book. His book is as much about the lost pastoral as it is about his analysis of the prose and poetry of Cather, Leopold, Roethke, Wright, Harrison, Smiley, Kooser, and Gruchow.

William Empson's *Versions of Pastoral* (1950)—interestingly a book Barillas did not find relevant for a source—made clear that the pastoral takes many forms and perspectives, from proletarian literature to *Alice in Wonderland*. But by the standards of revisionist critics, Empson would be undemocratic in that he pointed out that while it might be "about the people" it definitely was not "by or for them." This is a subject that Barillas does not broach forthrightly, although his search for a Midwestern pastoral causes him to be more inclusive than Empson. In an incisive essay in which he seeks to define "Midwestern Pastoralism," he effectively parries the arguments of those who would diminish the power of the pastoral as a vehicle for conveying a sense of place, or those who would claim that the aesthetic is more important than the cultural meaning of place, or those whose provincialism would stay them from admitting to the value of place other than what they know.

While knowledgeable about the classic literature of the pastoral, Barillas is most interested in the legacies of those who have shaped the pastoral in America and particularly in the Midwest. Thomas Jefferson's idea of the centrality of the yeoman farmer to democracy was pastoral, Barillas believes; Jefferson's Land Ordinance of 1785, on the other hand, placed a rigid grid template on the country that, Barillas says "configures land into space—impersonal, interchangeable, and profane—rather than place—intimate, unique, even sacred." Such an ideological contradiction carried over into Jefferson's attitude toward slavery and the treatment of native Americans, leading many writers to ignore the recent past in order to extol the present that they knew. This is a charge often leveled against Willa Cather.

In writing about the pastoral in the Midwest as seen by these five seemingly diverse writers, Barillas finds relationships that turn on two strands of pastoral literature: "utilitarian individualism" (an ethic of hard work and inventiveness identified with Jefferson's yeoman) and its apparent opposite, a valuation of "nature's beauty and spiritual significance above its utility" (a more organic American ideal that has its origins in Emerson's "Nature" and continues through Whitman to Roethke and Wright). Barillas makes the point that these strands are neither contradictory nor exclusive. They form the thread that links the novels of Cather, the essays of Leopold, the poetry of Roethke and Wright, and the work of Jim Harrison.

My enthusiasm for this book is tempered only slightly by what seems to be a lengthy hiatus between the completion of the manuscript and publication. The greater majority of the "Works Cited" were published a decade prior to the release of *The Midwestern Pastoral*. This may be a petty observation. But surely the book could have been even more authoritative had it contained references to relevant works such as Curt Meine's *Correction Lines: Essays on Land, Leopold, and Conservation* (2004). Even Barillas's choice of works prior to 1996, when most of his research was apparently done, causes some concern. His focus on his chosen subjects and the pastoral is admirable. But it is curious that he did not cite a work such as Kevin Stein's *James Wright: The Poetry of a Grown Man* (1989), which provides a useful perspective on Wright and his aesthetics and was also published by Ohio University Press.

These curious absences in relevant and up-to-date resources do not obscure the fact that Barillas's *The Midwestern Pastoral* adds a valuable voice to environmental and literary (and even "eco-literary") dialogue. Scholars will be informed by his comments on the environment and the five writers he treats. And his five compelling and well-written chapters on Cather, Leopold, Roethke, Wright, and Harrison will send many occasional readers to revisit their works. Moreover, the book will encourage everyone who reads it to agree with Barillas, who ends with these words:

> We have in the region's literature a vision of a land full of natural resources—fields, forests, rivers, and lakes—which can bring people cultural as well as economic rewards if they learn, as have many writers and artists, to love midwestern places for their intrinsic beauty and spiritual growth.

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Robert King, *Old Man Laughing*. Denver: Ghost Road Press, 2007. Pp. 76, $13.95 pb.

I want to start this review with full disclosure: Robert King is a Professor Emeritus of English at the University of North Dakota, the same school and department for which I teach. That said, I've never met him, and this is the first work I've read of his, which is why I have no issues with saying that this is a fine book of poetry. King's book takes its title from its epigraph by Shih-Te—"Partial to pine cliffs and lonely trails / an old man laughs at himself when he falters / even now after all these years / trusting the current like an unmoored boat"—and he subsequently divides the book into three equal sections: "Old," "Man," and "Laughing." The obvious significance suggests that these poems will equate laughter with wisdom, the recognition that lifelong attempts at control are folly. And in fact the poems do bear out this theme, along with the expected concurrent themes of history, memory, and nostalgia. Interestingly, the form of the poems contributes to these themes: written in free-verse lines (usually organized into two- to four-line stanzas), their tone is largely conversational, but King's use of anaphoraic repetition adds a pattern and cadence that holds these poems together, creates a current for them to follow. Ultimately, this sonic patterning gives a sense of accumulation and/or inevitability that serves these poems well.

For the section "Old," King takes advantage of age's privilege to comment on various topics, including the propensity of everything to equalize over time, how evolving technology both connects and separates us, and the subjectivity and often inaccuracy of memory. The landscapes of these poems function mainly as sites of memory, and while they are often characterized by the ephemeral (moving rivers, snow, clouds), they nonetheless possess substance and weight, both physical and emotional:

> these white clouds, the average fifty thousand
> tons, I read, white being particularly heavy.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Everything comes apart, everything joins.
> I must stop looking up so much.
> Let's not say anything anymore. This is not
> about the clouds. Forget the clouds. ("Not About Clouds")

The poems of "Man" continue this retrospection but seem to focus much more on the connections between people—hence the prevalence of images like knots and atoms, and the use of an often ambiguous "we" which could be read as either specific or general. This section seems characterized more by regret, where connections have failed:

Only now I discover the life span
of spices, one to two years if ground—
the leafy herbs, a year or less. Farewell

to the faded brittle chervil my first marriage
sprinkled into nothing . . . ("Shelf Life")

Finally, we arrive at the poems of "Laughing" in which King seems to delight in the absurdity of his ignorance after all his accumulated experience. Although this approach mainly seems sincere, at times it comes across as self-conscious posturing. What I hope King is doing here, along with this section's poetic attempts to inhabit fleeting moments, is enacting his struggle to become the wise man of his epigraph. Certainly, this is no mean feat and may plausibly explain why his speaker doesn't always "laugh" convincingly. But, as I say, he usually does manage to pull it off, as in the concluding poem, "Faltering":

It's the way you laugh at your own
minor frailty when no one
is around. Being old helps.

Overall, King makes few faltering steps. Occasionally, I think he doesn't trust the reader enough when he overdoes or overexplains a metaphor (as in "Aunts," "Marriage Fire," or "Love Along the River"), which is strange, given his intimate, conversational tone with us. I also find it curious that the jacket blurb disavows sentimentality because I think these poems quite often are sentimental—but sentimental in a way that I think only older writers can get away with, where it's tempered both with the bittersweetness or melancholy of experience, and with self-deprecating humor. To paraphrase poet Richard Hugo, great poetry must risk sentimentality, and ultimately *Old Man Laughing* earns the right to do so.

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Lynn Stegner, *Because a Fire Was in My Head*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Pp. x + 276, $24.95 hb.

Kate Riley, the lead character in Lynn Stegner's novel *Because a Fire Was in My Head*, wants attention and love. In her quest to find both, she's self-directed yet self-destructive, leaving many casualties behind, herself included.

The novel is divided into seven sections, sans chapter numbers, each section detailing Kate's attempts to create her life. In the first section, titled "Kate," we learn Kate is about to have brain surgery, which she doesn't need. Several times throughout the novel, we see Kate using illnesses, created and fabricated, to achieve her goals. Kate's not above faking it, and she's not above orchestrating an illness, either. Once she kissed a man with the flu in order to contract the illness, her purpose to avoid breastfeeding her own child. Kate is not the perfect model of motherhood, not even close.

While preparing to undergo brain surgery, Kate goes on a memory journey, which begins by identifying several defining moments occurring in her childhood and teen years. Kate adored her father, but he died during her early years, that death a first defining moment. Her father's love was never adequately replaced throughout her life, at least not to Kate's expectation. Kate did not have a good relationship with her mother, either.

Sometime after her father's death, Kate discovers boys, one in particular, Jan, who put his hands on Kate's breasts, another defining moment. Stegner describes the event:

> It was the first time since then [her father's death] that she felt something good, something warm and welcome and valuable rush into the dried out hollow his death had made in her life. . . . There in his broad hands she liked it very much; she liked who she became with him, she felt strong and happy. (41-42)

Shortly after her early experiences with boys, Kate decides to escape from her mother, a mother who didn't accept Kate's love for her.

> "A person can just stand so much, Mother, and I think I've tried every way I know of making you feel loved and you just never wanted it." (49)

Yet, Kate was a daughter who "was not ready to give up the illusion of a mother who loved" (50). Then the memory journey begins.

Kate leaves Netherfield—interesting name for a village—and travels first to Vancouver, where she begins her quest in earnest to be noticed and loved. The middle sections of the novel, titled "Vancouver," "Seattle," and "San Francisco," respectively, have a recursive feel, that is, repetition

with a difference. She meets men, marries some, maintains a long-term, hopeful relationship with some, gives birth to four children. Kate gets attention but never quite achieves her goal of love.

Kate's first child, a girl born blind, is born in Vancouver. That birth is not part of Kate's plan because it forces her to drop out of school. She also obsesses over what to do with the baby. This child was the first of three children, each fathered by a different man, each eventually given away. After receiving one of the children into her family, one woman was very straightforward with her opinion of Kate: "Why don't you go get yourself sterilized?" (215).

Kate uses each of the three cities as a locale for escape and a place to find other men who might give her attention and love. But change of environment doesn't work: "Kate struggled against the sameness of the days, time rolling out like a bolt of patterned silk that threatens to go on forever" (135). In one important sense, Kate expected to grow in her life through changes of environment, but change didn't happen, excitement didn't happen, love didn't happen.

> Occasional liaisons with men relieved some of the dullness, but even the liaisons themselves—how they began, how they proceeded, their inevitable conclusions—began to acquire a scripted quality. (135)

Kate spends time with a variety of men, some for a day, others for several years. Children are born and discarded. Kate is always looking for that right man to give her the attention and love she thinks she needs. Of one she said: "He's what I've always wanted. I guess" (231). Stegner's placement of "I guess" is a powerful description of Kate's quest and inability to find what she thinks she wants, but she's never sure and she's never satisfied.

Unfortunately for Kate, she becomes her mother, a wife who didn't feel love from the man she married and a mother who didn't love her own children.

Kate is a driven protagonist, determined to live a good life. She is egocentric, serving herself, yet she's also self-destructive. Kate needs a reality check; she is not a sympathetic heroine. Most readers will likely not admire Kate, but Lynn Stegner's storytelling ability is engaging. Traveling along with Kate and learning about a life lived is worth the effort.

In the novel, three of Kate's four children get the last word. Marie, the blind daughter, sums up her mother's life: "Her condition was not compatible with life" (273).

If reading fiction is to do one thing, it's to prompt a reader to ask: "What's next?" So, what do we learn? As dramatized in *Because a Fire Was in My Head*, life doesn't always offer up what we want, sometimes we don't get forgiven, sometimes we don't forgive ourselves, and some-

times the result of living is a series of casualties. But as Brendan, one of Kate's sons, says: "We had hopes, all of us" (261).

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Johannes B. Wist, *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Translation and introduction by Orm Øverland. Pp. xxxiv + 436, $29.95 hb.

When the three short novels that make up this very funny volume were first published, pseudonymously and in serialized form in the Norwegian-language biweekly *Decorah-Posten*, their author, *Posten* editor Johannes Wist, had long since given up dreams of gaining the notice of critics in Norway—that is to say, of Norwegian-American literature being acknowledged as a legitimate branch of Norwegian literature. By November 4, 1919, when the first installment appeared, offered humbly as that week's output by the satirical columnist "Arnljot" (Wist himself), Wist had abandoned the position he articulated in 1904, regarding the "American-ness" of Norwegian-American literature: "It must all depend on Norwegian influences and is only American in the sense that it is more or less by chance written while an author is residing in this country" (xvii). By then, he was presumably at or near the position he outlined two years later that Norwegian-American books

> are not primarily Norwegian but American literature. They are in Norwegian—to the extent that Norwegian may be written outside of Norway—but they are nevertheless American. These are books designed for the needs of a migrant people, a people in transition from one nation to another. (xxv)

The sad fate of such "transitional" literature is that as the transition of an immigrant population from the nationality of origin to the adopted one becomes complete and the immigrating generation carries to its grave a language no longer needed or used by its American-born progeny, the literature becomes inaccessible to all who remain.

Unless, of course, it is translated. Some of it has been. Among immigrant works written in Norwegian, best known are the novels of Ole E. Rølvaag, the English versions of which have become classics of American immigrant literature. Rølvaag, unlike most of his Norwegian-American compatriots, did attract the attention of critics and a willing publisher in Norway. The novel that would eventually be known here as *Giants in the Earth* was published first in Oslo, divided into two shorter novels (to minimize risk for the publisher) that were released a year apart, in 1924 and 1925. When they garnered international acclaim, Rølvaag himself oversaw their translation into English[1] while he was Professor of Norwegian at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. The English version became a bestseller in America and remains in print today.[2]

Unlike Rølvaag's works, the three novels that comprise *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*, while popular among readers of Wist's *Decorah-Posten*, did

not achieve fame beyond the Norwegian-American community and were not issued by an American publisher other than the *Decorah-Posten* itself. They were neither published in Norway nor, until this volume, in English. Wist died only four years after the first installment appeared, and his work fell into obscurity among all but scholars of Norwegian-American literature. To be fair to both publishers in Norway and English-language publishers in America, Wist's ample use of code-switched, immigrant "Norwenglish" in the speech of his characters would have presented obstacles to comprehension on either side of the Atlantic. Readers in Norway would have been as mystified as the newly arrived Jonas himself by the explanation his Norwegian-American cousin Salmon gives regarding the difference between European and American civil servants: " . . . but *dis'her'* is America, and here they know how to *juse* the time *reit*. This is not as in Europe, *ju no'*, with big *pey* and *liddle* work for *office-holdera*." When Jonas asks what this means in Norwegian, his cousin apologizes: "Oh, *exkjus'* me! I forgetter *reit 'long* that you don't understand English because I think *on American*, you see." He then continues in a "Norwegian" just as mystifying as, and virtually indistinguishable from, his "English" (12).

The challenge of making such bastardized speech comprehensible to English-speaking American readers while retaining the humor and charm and satiric punch of the original is a formidable one. That this volume succeeds so well is a credit to translator Orm Øverland. The English of the translation is highly readable and natural, neither stilted nor recognizably in thrall to its original Norwegian syntax. The dialog, with its degrees of code-switching ranging from the simple substitution of Norwegian words for English and vice versa, to phonetic transcription of English words (*saasægmit* for "sausage meat"), to the conjugation of such transcriptions along Norwegian grammatical lines (*hæpner* for "happens"), is rendered with enough of its original foreignness to faithfully evoke the bewilderment of the newly arrived hero and the linguistic improvisations that characterize the immigrant experience, without hindering comprehension or taxing the reader's patience. On the contrary, untangling the tortured English is one of the many pleasures of *The Rise of Jonas Olsen*. For less adventurous readers, and where necessary to explain references to local politics and ecclesiastical issues of the day, Øverland has provided excellent notes.

The action of the first of the novels contained in this volume, *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer: Jonas Olsen's First Years in America*, begins with the arrival of the naive and ambitious twenty-year-old Jonas in Minneapolis where his cousin Lewis Salmon (née Lars Salomonsen) is, according to his letters to the old country, "manager of public buildings"

and a man of considerable influence in local government. Upon his arrival in Minneapolis, the young Jonas is immediately struck by the ignorance of some local Yankees he asks for directions. They haven't even heard of the powerful Lewis Salmon. Their ignorance is soon explained when Salmon is eventually located on the second floor of the courthouse, dressed in work clothes and pushing a broom: a mere janitor's assistant.

Jonas and his cousin Salmon arrive home late that evening after an extended stop at a tavern, and Jonas is introduced to "the Mrs., my woman," whose response to meeting Jonas is, "I suppose he's as big a fool as you are" (9). Later, mellowed with beer, she asks Jonas what he plans to do here in America. "Oh, that depends," is his reply. "I'd prefer to become a capitalist, or as you say here, a millionaire. But this may be difficult to achieve in the first year or two, so I've been thinking of graduating from the seminary first" (10).

Through his cousin's "influence," Jonas eventually gets a job with the sewer department where he is put to work digging ditches with a crew of Swedes, a class of people he detests because of Norway's subjugation under a Swedish king at that time. He soon finds himself trading insults with his co-workers, and only sheer luck prevents him from being pummeled by a well-muscled colleague. A few days later an ill-considered critique of his cousin's wife's cooking lands him in the street. He takes a room in a boarding house where he quickly joins in the competition among young male boarders for the attentions of the lovely serving-girl Ragna.

Near the end of *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer* Jonas appears to have made it. He has won Ragna's affections. He has also managed to become a *bisnesmænd* (businessman). Through a combination of hard work, resourcefulness, and an underhanded bit of public relations, he has worked his way into an ownership interest in a thriving grocery store. He has even allowed himself to be talked into paying cash for a quarter section of land in the Red River Valley, not because he believes it will ever have any value, but because he has observed that, ". . . all *bisnesmænd* seemed to have land property they could brag about" (96).

In the remaining chapters of *Scenes from the Life of a Newcomer*, though, things quickly unravel. Jonas throws Ragna over for the more sophisticated Dagny Simonsen, daughter of his boss and business partner, and Dagny rewards his attentions by abruptly marrying an old acquaintance of hers who turns up in town one day. Jonas pleads with Ragna to take him back, but she rebuffs him, and rumors soon spread that she is preparing to marry Jonas's longtime rival for her affections (another Swede, no less). The reversal of Jonas's fortunes is made complete when, a few weeks later, the bank in which his partner has deposited all the grocery's capital fails, leaving Jonas unable to pay his suppliers. He is fin-

ished. He slinks back to the boarding house, lonely, defeated. A silhouette appears in a doorway—it is Ragna. She has changed her mind. She will take him back after all, and they will at least have the quarter section in the Red River Valley.

The second and third novels of the trilogy chart Jonas's ascent (not strictly linear) from reluctant farmer and dissident Lutheran to suddenly wealthy landowner to, ultimately, *bisnesmænd* and political boss. That his rise is marked with instances of hypocrisy, ruthlessness, and deceit is not lost on his clear-eyed wife, Ragna, who generally seems happiest when they have lost the most. That Jonas comes more and more to resemble his nemesis, the wealthy, ruthless Yankee banker and political strongman Elihu Ward, would seem to make his story necessarily a tragedy, but Wist avoids this end by employing a few potent antidotes. First among them is humor: the story is plain funny. Wist's eye and ear for local color are exceedingly sharp, as is his understanding of human nature at its best and worst and all the shades in between. His cast of villains is colorful and often comical without being cartoonish. His supporting characters are surprisingly well rounded and human in their quirks and contradictions, and none more than Jonas's wife Ragna. Hers is the voice of generosity and forgiveness that tempers Jonas's own tendencies toward harsh judgment and well-nursed grudges. In the internecine squabble that makes up one of the trilogy's secondary plot lines, Jonas opposes the majority of his fellow Lutherans who want to align the community's congregation with the more liberal branch of Lutheranism practiced in the United Church. Jonas clings doggedly to what he refers to as the "pure" dogma of the Norwegian Synod—even when, initially, he "would have given five dollars to know what the Synod doctrine was" (151). Ragna, on the other hand, felt that "those who saw things differently should also be accepted as good Christians" (213). Similar oppositions characterize the hopes they have for their life together: Jonas is preoccupied with dreams of status and material wealth, but Ragna is more interested in imbuing their marriage with a more "profound view of life" (134).

It is ultimately Ragna who keeps Jonas from becoming a tragic hero. She shows him, in the section in which they are negotiating to sell their farm to the evil banker Ward, that by simply having a conviction and sticking by it, she can prove at least as successful in getting what she wants as Jonas can with his extensive repertoire of feints and bluffs. It is thanks to her that they end up getting far more for the farm than it is worth, despite the fact that a tornado has just leveled their new house and barn, and into the bargain she has secured from Ward and his political machine the nomination of their good friend and neighbor Mrs. O'Brien

for the office of Superintendent of Schools over that of Ward's own brother-in-law.

In the end, Jonas emerges victorious in his toughest battle with Ward, and he breaks Ward's political power, replacing it with his own. There are signs, however, that the battle has worked subtle changes on him—that he may manage to avoid simply becoming another Ward himself. He has pledged to become a man of reconciliation, a pledge that proves timely, given the surprise development revealed in the final pages of the saga.

The Rise of Jonas Olsen remains as relevant today as ever in a world where words like "freedom" and "democracy" are often codewords for business's access to resources and markets. It is easy to imagine this book as required reading for a number of disciplines: political science, business, sociology or, better still, a course that focused on the inseparability of all three. As a primer on how the West was "settled," on how fortunes are made and lost over the placement of a railway depot or a county seat, and on how the often irresistible incentive for corruption those contingencies create, *The Rise of Jonas Olsen* is a gold mine, and a funny one at that. By satirizing the way the pursuit of power and money often travels under the banner of freedom and democracy, and by realistically portraying the admixture of materialism and idealism that make up the American dream, Wist's saga deserves to be read and reread and to occupy a permanent place in American literature.

Notes

[1]Theodora Jorgenson and Nora Solum, *Ole Edvart Rølvaag: A Biography*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939, pp. 364-76.

[2]Orm Øverland, *An American Literature in Norwegian:* "A Literature of Our Own" http://nabo.nb.no/trip?_b=EMITEKST&urn=%22URN:NBN:no-nb_emidata_1198%22. par. 22. (This article is a useful, brief overview of Norwegian-American literature written expressly for the *Promise of America* web page of the National Library of Norway website.)

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Troy Jollimore. *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*. Introduction by Billy Collins. Chesterfield, MO: MARGIE, IntuiT House *Poetry Series*, 2006. Pp. 97, $13.95 pb.

Troy Jollimore has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Princeton, and he wrote his dissertation on "the relation between normative theories of ethics and the requirements of friendship" under the direction of Harry Frankfurt and Sarah Buss. *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*, his debut collection, was selected for the 2005 Robert E. Lee and Ruth I. Wilson Poetry Book Award by former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins and the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry. In his foreword to Jollimore's book, Collins writes: "*Tom Thomson in Purgatory* falls gracefully into the American tradition of the extended persona poem, a pack of contenders led by John Berryman's Henry of his *Dream Songs*." The connection is obvious once you begin reading Jollimore's poems, which often read too much like Berryman's *The Dream Songs*, but Collins invites Henry's ghost to travel with you through this book. And you simply will not be able to shake it.

Tom Thomson in Purgatory is divided into two sections: "From the Boy Scout Manual," the miscellany of poems that make up the first half of the book, and "Tom Thomson in Purgatory," the sonnet sequence that makes up the latter half. Both sections start with epigraphs from Thoreau's *Journals*. In the second epigraph (dated November 19, 1850) Thoreau poses this question: "How can you walk on ground when you can see through it?" This question hovers over Jollimore's book. It is, in some ways, the motivating statement that launches us into the weird inner world of Tom Thomson.

So, who exactly is Tom Thomson? In an interview with Kevin Prufer for the National Book Critics Circle website, Jollimore contends that Tom Thomson is not him. However, he says,

> every thought of his is a thought I have had. He's a projection of certain aspects of myself. Or a sheet of photographic paper on which various aspects of the world he moves through are registered. Or a kind of Emersonian subject, fully embracing the impulses and urges of each moment while rejecting the consistency that Emerson said is "the hobgoblin of little minds." I suppose it depends on when you ask me.

"Trout Quintet," the third poem in the collection, introduces us to the character of Tom Thomson, who is playing solitaire—one of the many solitary activities that Tom pursues in his dream world—when first we meet him. This poem, maybe the best in the book, reads like an homage to Hemingway. "*Who would call a trout an iceberg?*" the speaker asks. The poem is rich with allusions to Hemingway's work, and Tom—who eats

trout fried with parsley and wild tomatoes—comes off sounding like a cross between Nick Adams and Paul Bunyan. In his interview with Prufer, Jollimore explains that "Trout Quintet" marked the first appearance of Tom Thomson in his poetry:

> I first put a character named "Tom Thomson" in a poem called "Trout Quintet." There, he was a semi-mythical figure who has some unspecified relation to the Canadian landscape painter, Tom Thomson, the presiding spirit over the group of painters later known as the Group of Seven (though he died before they officially formed). His death occurred under somewhat mysterious circumstances, and he has come to serve as a somewhat iconic figure in the Canadian imagination—something less than a god but decidedly more than a mere mortal, if I may put it that way.

Later, in the same interview, Jollimore traces the development of Tom Thomson:

> [When] I came to write the "Tom Thomson in Purgatory" sequence, I was having some trouble bringing it together (in its initial stages it was largely composed of leftovers, poetic materials that had been excised from other poems or were never brought to completion and were simply lying about the workshop). Then, at a certain point, my editor offhandedly remarked, with respect to "Trout Quintet," that he felt like Tom Thomson's story was not done. I realized at that moment that what the sonnet sequence lacked was a central consciousness to organize it, and that I could name that consciousness Tom Thomson. Of course it makes little sense, given that the character is very different from that in "Trout Quintet," and any relation to the Canadian painter is gone.

This account may be all the evidence we need to explain why the Tom Thomson of "Trout Quintet" is so much more appealing, at least to this reader, than the Tom Thomson of the sonnet sequence. In the sonnet sequence, Jollimore is traveling a path well worn by Berryman, and Tom sounds alarmingly like Henry from The Dream Songs. (Jollimore, himself, admits to Prufer that Berryman may be "too obvious an influence.") We get Tom Thomson—the "verbal phantom" (to use Collins's term for him)—in denial, fawning over women, questioning religion, in despair, in various states of intellectual reverie, and in other Henry-esque states of crookedness and paranoia. Unfortunately, in poems like "Tom Thomson in Between Women," the speaker sounds less like Berryman's Henry and more like George Lucas's Yoda. Consider this line: "I ought / to call, perhaps. But does not call. For she / ought to have called, and called him she has not. / He shouts it: 'Called me She has not!'" Or this from "Tom Thomson in Limbo (2)": "Time goes on. And ashamed he is to say / how time goes on. As if it might be paused / if only he the password had."

This book aims to be very funny. In "Tom Thomson in Flanders Field," we find Tom Thomson time traveling to 1916, heading to France

". . . to shoot up several Germans." The speaker tells us: "Ignore the fact that he's a pacifist, / and closest he has come to shooting gun / is his excessive use of bullet points [. . .]." Ha! Tom Thomson likes guns not. The academy he prefers. Working on his computer he enjoys. Jollimore is never quite as funny as he tries to be, and, in fact, most of his attempts at humor are terrific misfires.

"Rozencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Ruined by Reading the Cantos of Ezra Pound; Or, Song of my Shelf," a long poem with a disconcerting title (and another sloppy stab at humor), is really just a pastiche of titles and lines from others poets and writers. Jollimore's aim here is to be inventive and witty, but the poem is ultimately quite weak, sleight of hand that goes nowhere, trickery with no real punch. The poem begins: "Under the volcano / in the garden of North American martyrs[.]" Of course, these lines are titles of books by Malcolm Lowry and Tobias Wolff. Imagine a poem that begins: "As I lay dying / the sun also rises." Jollimore reads! He has a whole shelf full of books that he loves! He's listing them! He uses titles and/or lines by Dante, Milan Kundera, Flann O'Brien, James Joyce, Vladimir Nabakov, Oliver Sacks, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Carson McCullers, Italo Calvino, Robert Lowell, Henry Roth, and others. Ooh. Aah. What diverse taste he has! The poem should not be as annoying as it is, but, like so many poems in this book, it goes down like cold coffee that has been sitting out for days.

In "Epilogue: Tom Thomson in Absentia," the speaker tells us that:

> All things that are worth doing have been done.
> (*Gravity's Rainbow*, Rothko's Chapel, Rome,
> "The Second Coming," and the works of Bach . . .)
> And so attempts to fill the days with hours,
> the glass with wine, the empty head with noise . . .

The speaker might have considered adding *The Dream Songs* to the list. It is funnier and more challenging than Jollimore's scrawny imitation, and, in the end, it is almost mandatory. *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*, on the other hand, is almost funny and not at all mandatory. Maybe I am being too hard on this slim prize-winning book, or maybe I am being too easy. In any case, it is difficult to read a collection of poems when you can see through it. In "Prologue: Tom Thomson in Perspective," the speaker tells us to put Tom Thomson down as "Honorable Failure and an Honest Attempt." This turns out to be a pretty fitting description, I think, for Jollimore's debut collection.

William Boyle
State University of New York-Maritime College

Editor's Notes

The State of Higher Education

We have assembled another special issue (for Vol. 75.2 Spring 2008) on higher education in North America. By all signs regarding our topic "It [is] the best of times, it [is] the worst of times . . . " as Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) characterized (in the past tense) the age of the French Revolution. How much is higher education in North America revolutionary, evolutionary, or perhaps stagnant?

Pushcart Prize

We were pleased to submit six nominations from our issues of last year for *Pushcart Prize XXXII: Best of the Small Presses* (2006). And we were delighted to learn that Erica Keiko Iseri's essay "Overwintering in Fairbanks" was chosen for publication in the latest volume, edited by Bill Henderson.

Sea Changes: Books That Mattered

Just as they provide pleasure and prompt criticism, books have a role in the developmental history of their readers. For the impact of a book depends not only on *how* it is read but *when*. Many books fortify or deepen the beliefs of readers; others prompt adaptive responses—that is, the newly read text is fitted to its reader's fund of knowledge and experience. Encounters with some texts, however, amount to a sea change in the lives of their readers. They produce fundamental reorientations of belief, understanding, and purpose. *North Dakota Quarterly* publishes occasional accounts of "books that mattered," books that produced a sea change in their readers. These personal essays have been about well-known books like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and lesser known ones such as George

Morgan's *The Human Predicament*. As one contributor has proposed, books that matter "liberate the reader from a parochial view of experience . . . and usher their readers into a fuller understanding of self, society, and culture." *NDQ* continues to invite contributions of personal essays on a book or books that mattered.

Explore . . . Endure . . . Evolve . . .

Contributors

"Atahualpa Death Prayer" will appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Book of Latin American Poetry* edited by Cecilia Vicuna and Ernesto Livon Grosman.

Luis Miguel Aguilar was born in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico, in 1956 and has published numerous books of poetry, fiction, and critical essays. From 1995 until 2004 he edited the Mexican arts and culture monthly *Nexos*. All but one of the poems whose translations appear in this issue are from his cycle, *Chetumal Bay Anthology* (1983), modeled after Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* and based on stories Aguilar heard growing up in Chetumal. He currently lives in Mexico City with his wife and two children.

Robert Bagg has been translating Greek plays almost as long as he's been writing poems. His first translation, of Euripides' *Cyclops*, was staged at Amherst College in 1956. To date he's done five plays by Sophokles (*Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Kolonos*, *Antigone*, *Women of Trakhis*, and *Elektra*) and three by Euripides (*The Bakkhai*, *Hippolytos*, and *Cyclops*). Information about his and James Scully's translations as well as Bagg's essays on Greek theatre may be accessed at www.staging-greekdrama.com.

Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) was, with Molière and Racine, one of the three great dramatists of France's 17th century. He was born in Rouen where for a time he practiced law before moving to Paris. *The Cid* (1637) is generally considered his masterpiece in the tragic or heroic vein. *The Liar* (1643) was his greatest comic success.

Sean Cotter is the translator of four books of contemporary Romanian literature. He is a professor of Literature and Literary Translation at The University of Texas at Dallas where he is a part of the Center for Translation Studies.

Nichita Danilov is a prolific Romanian poet, essayist, and novelist, and a former Romanian ambassador. His works have been translated into many languages including widely distributed Russian editions and, in English, *Second-Hand Souls: Selected Writings of Nichita Danilov* (translated by Sean Cotter, Twisted Spoon Press, 2003). He directs the Cultural Center of Iaşi in northeastern Romania.

John DuVal won the 1992 Harold Morton Landon Prize for his translation of Cesare Pascarella's *The Discovery of Ameraca* and the 2006 Raiziss/de Palchi Prize in Italian Translation for his *Tales of Trilussa*, both awards from the Academy of American Poets, and a National Endowment for the Arts Award for a play in his latest book of translation, *From Adam to Adam: Seven Old French Plays*. He and his daughter Kathleen, assistant professor of Colonial History at UNC Chapel Hill, are co-authors of *Interpreting a Continent*, scheduled for publication by Rowman and Littlefield Press in the fall of 2008.

Elizabeth Hampsten is retired from the University of North Dakota Department of English and lives most of the year in Uruguay where she has been translating some Uruguayan writers into English.

A producer for France-Culture, poet and essayist **Geneviève Huttin** is the author of *Cavalier qui penche* (2007), *L'histoire de ma voix* (2004), *Paris, litanie des cafés* (1991), and *Seigneur!* (1981). In America her work has most recently appeared in *Poetry*, *Absinthe*, *Agni*, *Lyric Review*, *The Edwardsville Review*, and *Rhino*. A translation of *L'histoire de ma voix* will appear from Host in 2009, titled *The Story of My Voice*. Huttin lives in Paris with her daughter, Clara.

Little is known about **Henri Joutel**. His approximate dates are 1640-1725. He was the chief executive officer of La Salle's disastrous 1685 attempt to find the mouth of the Mississippi River by way of the Gulf of Mexico. After the murder of La Salle, Joutel led the few survivors from Texas back to Quebec. His only known publications are the journals of that expedition, published against his wishes in 1713 and in more complete form in Pierre Margry's *Découvertes et Établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique septentrionale 1614-1754*, v. III, 1876-1886.

Wayne Kvam is an English professor emeritus of Kent State University. His translation of Malin Schwerdtfeger's short story "Leichte Mädchen" "The Fast Girls") was published in *Beacons: A Magazine of Literary*

Translation. His translations from German also include *Conjurations: The Poems of Sarah Kirsch* (Ohio UP) and *Hitchhiking: Twelve German Tales*, by Gabriele Eckart (Nebraska UP).

Jules Laforgue (1860-1887) was a French symbolist poet whose work was an important influence on T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. His work is known to English and American readers through the translations of William Jay Smith: *Selected Writings* (Grove Press, 1956), *Moral Tales* (New Directions, 1985), and *Berlin: The City and the Court* (Turtle Point Press, 1996).

Alexis Levitin's translations from the Portuguese have appeared in well over two hundred literary magazines including *Kenyon Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Chelsea*. He has published 24 books in translation including *Forbidden Words: Selected Poetry of Eugenio de Andrade* and *Soulstorm* by Clarice Lispector (both from New Directions). Most recently he has been co-translator of Wallace Stevens' *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* into Portuguese (Relogio d'Agua, Lisbon, 2007) and Georgi Gospodinov's *And Other Stories* translated from the Bulgarian (Northwestern University Press, 2007).

Paola Masino (1908-1989) wrote prolifically during the Fascist dictatorship and was a prominent figure in the Italian cultural and intellectual environment of her time. Her first novel *Monte Ignoso* was awarded the 1931 Viareggio Literary Prize, and her short stories were published in the most prestigious Italian literary magazines of the time. Masino's last novel *Nascita e morte della massaia* was translated into German, and a translation by Samuel Putnam of the short story "Fame" appeared in the American magazine *Blast*. Her official narrative production includes three novels, *Monte Ignoso* (Bompiani, 1931), *Periferia* (Bompiani, 1933), and *Nascita e morte della massaia* (Bompiani, 1945), three collections of short stories, *Decadenza della morte* (Casa editrice Alberto Stock, 1931), *Racconto grosso e altri* (Bompiani, 1941), and *Colloquio di notte* (published posthumously by La Luna in 1994), as well as a book of poetry, *Poesie* (Bompiani, 1941).

Marina Mayoral is professor of Spanish Literature at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, Spain. While she is primarily known for her research on the writings of Rosalía de Castro and Emilia Pardo Bazán, her own literary production is extensive and significant. Winner of several literary prizes, Mayoral has published five collections of short stories and fourteen novels. She writes in Galician and Spanish, and her work has

been translated into Catalan, German, English, Italian, Polish, and Portuguese. She was born in 1942 in Mondoñego, Lugo, Spain.

Claudia Routon is assistant professor of Spanish at the University of North Dakota. She works with the contemporary literature of Spain and its translation. Her critical work and translations are published or forthcoming in *Absinthe: The New European Writing*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Letras femeninas*, *California Quarterly*, *International Poetry Review*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Romance Studies*.

Louise Rozier directs the Italian program at the University of Arkansas. Her research interests are in the field of translation and in twentieth century Italian literature with a specific emphasis on women's writing. Her translation of Fortunato Pasqualino's *The Little Jesus of Sicily* published in 1999 by the University of Arkansas Press was awarded the 1996 PEN Renato Poggioli Translation Award.

James Scully has completed a journal, *Vagabond Flags*, written in, around, and about a recent excursion to Serbia and Kosovo.

Malin Schwerdtfeger was born in Germany in 1972, grew up in Bremen, and currently resides in Berlin. She was an award winner in the annual competition for the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2000, but her real breakthrough on the German-speaking literary scene occurred in 2001 with the publication of *Leichte Mädchen*, her first collection of short stories, and *Café Saratoga*, her first novel. Her second novel, *Delphi*, appeared in 2004.

William Jay Smith will bring out two books in 2008, *Words for the Water*, a new collection of poems to be published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, and a memoir, *Dancing in the Garden: A Bittersweet Love Affair with France*, to be published by Bay Oak Publishers.

Kathleen Snodgrass's translations of contemporary Mexican poets have appeared recently in *Great River Review*, *Salamander*, *Hunger Mountain*, and *Diner*. She is a regular contributor of essay-reviews to *The Georgia Review*.

W. D. Snodgrass's most recent book is *Not for Specialists: New and Selected Poems* (BOA), and he has an essay on Whitman forthcoming in *Sewanee Review*.

Sophokles was born in Athens c. 497-96 and died c. 406-05 BCE. He was the dominant playwright of his era, winning the annual Festival of Dionysos prize at least 22 times during his career. Seven of his plays survive, the most profoundly influential being *Oedipus the King* and the most often produced world-wide being the easily politicized *Antigone*.

Marin Sorescu, who died in 1996 at age 59, had been considered Romania's finest playwright and possibly its best poet. Many of his finest plays and poems have been translated and performed or published widely throughout the West. He published ten volumes of poetry and prose and received (among others) the International Herder Prize in 1991.

Leszek Szaruga took his pseudonym (which translates as Louis Starkweather) because he is the son of one of Poland's best known poets Witold Wirpsza. For many years he was deeply involved with Solidarity, which led to many years of exile in Germany. He has now returned to Poland, published eleven books of poetry, and teaches at a university there.

Bradford Gray Telford has published work in *Bomb*, *The Yale Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Pleiades*, *Gulf Coast*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Columbia*, *Laurel Review*, and *Bloom*, among other places. He recently won The University of Houston's Verlaine Poetry Prize, a Morton Marr Poetry Prize from *Southwest Review* and, for his work on the poetry of Geneviève Huttin, the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize. Telford's translation of Huttin's *The Story of My Voice* will appear in 2009 from Host Publications.

Søren Terkelsen lived from c. 1590 to 1657 in Denmark and achieved much fame as a performer and composer there, often borrowing melodies from classic sources—Mozart, etc.—for his own Danish texts. The songs here were probably written to his own melodies.

Philippe Thoby-Marcelin (1904-1975), Haitian poet and novelist, founded *La Revue Indigène* (1927-1928). The poems published there—as well as the novels that he wrote with his brother Pierre Marcelin—were inspired by peasant life. Edmund Wilson reviewed the French edition of their prize-winning novel *Canapé Vert* in the *New Yorker* in 1944 and continued to promote their work here and abroad for a quarter of a century. Their books, he wrote, "deal with difficult subjects (voodoo)—material that is controversial in Haiti and unfamiliar abroad; and presenting them without sentimentality or political melodrama bring out in them a human poignancy that is communicated to readers anywhere."

Dalton Trevisan is a well-known, controversial, iconoclastic Brazilian satirist. His numerous short story collections include *Those Damned Women*, *Crazy Virgin*, *Crazy Kisses*, *A Knife in the Heart*, *Disasters of Love*, *King of the Earth*, *Conjugal War*, *Cemetery of Elephants*, and his best known book, *The Vampire of Curitiba*, which was published in Gregory Rabassa's translation in 1972. His work has been translated into many languages including English, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, and German. This story is drawn from his recent collection *33 Selected Stories*. He lives in careful seclusion in his hometown of Curitiba in southern Brazil.

Richard Wilbur was born in New York City in 1921. His most recent book of verse is *Collected Poems 1943-2004*. Pierre Corneille's baroque comedy, *The Theatre of Illusion*, was published in Wilbur's translation by Harcourt in 2007. Two more Corneille translations, *The Cid* and *The Liar*, will appear in 2009.

Rodolfo Wolf was born in 1947 in Montevideo, Uruguay, and began university studies majoring in chemistry. The economic crisis of the 1960s in Uruguay led him to political activism, as happened in countries throughout Latin America in those years. The consequence for Wolf was thirteen years in a military prison, that is, for the length of Uruguay's military dictatorship (1973-1985). The selections in this volume of *North Dakota Quarterly* are from his book *Batallas de una guerra perdida* and tell of that dark period.

Michael Wolfe writes poetry, fiction, and travel books and produces documentary films. His poems and translations have appeared in *Atlantic*, *Kayak*, *Malahat Review*, and other magazines. His fourth book of poetry, "Digging Up Russia" and a novel, "Just Look at You Now," are finished in manuscript. He lives in Northern California.