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ON THE COVER

Kim Bromley's *Wood Duck* is a 72" x 48" (2001) oil painting. Bromley is an art professor at North Dakota State University.

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In Memoriam
William V. Borden
1938 - 2010

Chester Fritz Distinguished Professor of English
University of North Dakota Poet, Playwright, Novelist
Fiction Editor of *North Dakota Quarterly* 1986-2002

. . . When the mockingbird
sings his crazy improvs,
And the courting snipe plummets whizzingly,
And the coyotes howl nearby,
and now and then, when you least expect it,
there's a silence, an emptiness
waiting to be filled,
Remember me.

And when you see
daffodils and tulips
and wild iris in the woods
And lady's slipper by the road
And everything's green,
stretching toward sunshine,
then do, do
Remember me.

—William Borden

—From "Remember Me" in *The Snipe's Death-Defying Leap of Love* (Shire's Press, Manchester Center, VT, 2010)

ROBIN MAGOWAN

James Merrill's *The Seraglio*

A book that changed my life? I could more accurately ask, "What book hasn't?" I can hardly visit a library without raising tremors of expectation. At their most memorable, books offer invitations and detours on the road of life. Henri Michaux's *A Barbarian in Asia* and Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* influenced me powerfully when I was in my early twenties. But the book without which my life as a writer would be well nigh inconceivable is James Merrill's novel, *The Seraglio*. Not many works have the capacity to challenge the foremost assumptions of one's life. In derailing me from the track my parents had chosen for me, and thus rescuing me, *The Seraglio* brought me into the orbit of its author who became the key figure in my young life and who remade me as a writer.

I must add that *The Seraglio*'s author, Jimmy as I shall call him, was my mother's half-brother by my grandfather's second marriage, and *The Seraglio* is his novel about their father, Charlie Merrill. Though my uncle was a mere ten years older than I, and though we grew up in the same towns and even went to some of the same schools, the repercussions of the very public and acrimonious divorce that his parents underwent when Jimmy was twelve were such that I hardly knew him. This may be why the revelations of *The Seraglio* were such a shock for me (and for my parents and their circle, as well). We were not prepared to be so critically observed.

The Seraglio is a roman-à-clef about a series of events that took place in Southampton, Long Island, in 1952, when I was almost sixteen. The harem of the title surrounds the narrator's father, Benjamin Tanning, a stand-in for the man who founded Merrill Lynch and Safeway Stores and who is generally regarded as responsible for bringing Wall Street to Main Street. *Time* listed him with Henry Ford as the two most influential businessmen of the 20th century. The narrator, Francis, clearly represents my Uncle Jimmy himself. In order to explain why the novel affected me and my parents so deeply, it is necessary to sketch out some family history as a kind of "back story."

A SEA CHANGE: BOOKS THAT MATTERED

At the time of the novel, Charlie Merrill was 65, not a great age by today's standards. But for most of the previous ten years Charlie had been incapacitated by a series of heart attacks that followed the founding of Merrill Lynch in 1940. From ten years of absolute misery, and as many as a hundred angina attacks in a day—the child of a doctor, Charlie counted them—he had been resurrected by an experimental radium treatment supplied by the cardiologist Samuel Levine of the Harvard Medical School. Believing that some good had to come out of the technology that had brought the atomic bomb, Charlie had offered himself as a guinea pig to medical science. I remember visiting him in the shielded room at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital where he was recovering from the effects of his atomic cocktail and his remarking on the two-inch increase in his neck size. But, along with the wider neck and the damaged liver from which he would die five years later, came a startling return of sexual potency. He could resume the chasing of skirts and the making of money, the two fascinations that had fueled the better part of his life; a prospect all the more riveting in that he had finally extricated himself from his disastrous third marriage.

One doesn't have to remember Ben Jonson's *Volpone* to imagine how a clutter of old flames, ex-wives, and would-be lady friends might collect around a charming and very wealthy potentate—or how the prospect of Charlie's remarriage might alarm his heirs, not to mention his partners at Merrill Lynch in what was still a privately held firm.

My mother, Doris (called Enid in the novel), was Charlie's favorite child, and the novel opens with a thinly fictionalized account of a shocking event: the slashing of the Brockhurst portrait of Doris in a formal Chinese bed jacket that she had given him for a recent birthday. Presumably, one of Charlie's thwarted hangers-on had attempted to destroy the portrait, an act of such vindictiveness that, when Doris discovered it in Charlie's "Beach House," she burst into tears, feeling as if she herself had been stabbed.

As this whodunit of a kind was being set in motion, my uncle Jimmy had returned from the three years abroad he has described in his prize-winning memoir, *A Different Person*. So much time away required a gift to propitiate his father. Where another prodigal might have brought back a Belvedere or a marble Venus, Jimmy had in tow a Paris-based sculptress of Romanian origin, Guitou Knoop (called Xenia in his novel), whom he had commissioned to do a bust of his father. Guitou succeeded in her task so admirably that, to keep her around, Charlie commissioned a statue of my younger brother Peter.

To this day I'm amazed that I did not understand the events that were happening in plain sight. I remember Guitou, for instance, commenting on the difficulty she was having in capturing the aliveness of Charlie's unusually wide mouth. And I remember her describing how, at my age in Romania, she had fashioned herself a rope made out of bedclothes to exit from her window on many an evening. It would never have occurred to me to see in this henna-haired blowsy fortyish woman the sexual adventuress that she obviously still was, much less understand the threat she posed to my prudish parents.

Behind the whodunit of the portrait slashing and the sexual imbroglio—who will get to marry Francis's Old Man?—lies a serious conflict between the two "sons," the real one, Francis, and the usurper, my father Bob Magowan (Larry Buchanan in the novel). Both see Benjamin Tanning as Midas. But growing up with the Man with the Golden Touch as your father is a very different proposition from coming as my father did from a very poor working-class background and marrying the boss's daughter. Where my father, as a businessman, can imagine no higher Utopia than a world where everything has turned into money, Francis resents being turned into a mark to be grabbed, snatched, and made off with. His first response, upon returning, is to try to persuade my father to allow him to give away his trust fund. When that proves unfeasible—those chains are written in legal adamant—the prospect of passing on his wealth to another generation so revolts Francis that in a moment of self-loathing that we misread as attempted suicide, he castrates himself.

An overly drastic solution? Certainly, in that it represents a fictional intrusion on a work that cleaves to a roman-à-clef veracity. But not, if like Francis, you want your father to recognize the eunuch that his wealth and womanizing have produced. By the novel's end, Francis is freed from the heterosexual rat race. As for Jimmy, to the end of his life, he remained grateful that he hadn't succeeded in giving his money away as he had fully intended. So, it might be thought, are the myriad recipients of his Ingram Merrill Grants.

There remains Francis's responsibility towards the rest of us, "the nephews and nieces" to whom this tell-all novel is poignantly addressed. How, in a society that insists, Saturn-like, on devouring its children, are we victims expected to cope? In this respect, the novel's closing set piece, the dinner at the end of my much younger brother Mark's christening party at which the guests, after a moment's gulp and hesitation, set forth gleefully to devour a dessert of chocolate babies, could not be more germane.

A SEA CHANGE: BOOKS THAT MATTERED

By marrying my mother and going to work for her father, my father was positioning himself to be Charlie's heir-apparent. After several lean years in the outbins he had recently become Number Two and Head of Sales in what he regarded quite rightly as the world's "number one money-making machine."

In my father's eyes, more was at stake than his own succession: he had five sons, just like John D. Rockefeller, Jr. By marrying my mother, he hoped to create a business dynasty that would survive him. All of our training, the churches and social schools we attended, the sports we played, the cotillions and deb parties we graced, everything had been calculated to prepare us to play a role in an increasingly powerful financial empire. Our model in this was my grandfather, always presented by my father as if the two of them were one and the same. It was expedient for my parents to portray Charlie to us in his more professional aspect as a self-made tycoon, and not the disruptive Zeus-like figure that, to a kid, might have offered an almost equally valuable heritage. If I was challenged by my father to "do whatever I wanted to with my life, so long as I succeeded as well in it as he and my grandfather," couldn't that mean being more than a mere dollar machine and rivaling them in their full complexity?

In portraying the familial chaos surrounding his uncontrollable father and my own father's nouveau riche aspirations, Jimmy revealed there was more than one way to view my parents. Though Jimmy was fond of my mother, he satirized her and my father as shallow and preoccupied with their own social advancement.

The Seraglio threw open other family doors as well. I had always loved my grandfather, but I would never have claimed an intimacy of understanding. Now, watching his character unfold, chapter by ever more revelatory chapter, and talking about him with Jimmy, I progressed to a point where I could become his confidant. On the last night of my summer vacation he insisted on my staying up to meet Lady Saint (the novel's Prudence Good), the love for whom he had taken up residence in Barbados. That didn't quite work out: the chauffeur whom he had dispatched to fetch her at the train station failed to locate her, and when she finally swept in, out of sorts and insisting on a bath, there wasn't time for more than a curt greeting. After Charlie passed two days later into a final coma, I received two letters from her basically acknowledging our missed opportunity. Thirty years later—all of Charlie's women lived into their nineties—while living in London, I got to spend some time with her and her husband, who regarded Charlie, amazingly, as his best friend.

As for Jimmy, our acquaintance deepened as the novel was being written. In college, I had the rare luxury of a car. Every month I spent a weekend with him and his partner, David Jackson. Immediately upon arrival at his top floor apartment in a refurbished clubhouse on Water Street in Stonington, Connecticut, or in the farmhouse they were renting outside Amherst, I'd pounce on each new chapter. It helped perhaps that I was not myself in the novel. Jimmy's Freudian casting required not a son but a daughter, Lily, to whom the stabbing of Mother's portrait could be attributed. (In actuality, the portrait was vandalized by Lillian Coe, the novel's Irene Cheek.) But, as a concerned spectator who knew the participants and the Southampton locale, I could have my use.

How the scales dropped from my eyes as I watched the novel take shape! In our house any ascription of sexuality to anything was out of the question. We children did not come into being out of animal need, but were instead dynastic heirs sprung indirectly from Charlie Merrill's godhead. Jimmy knew that the curse of his father's uncontainable sexuality, which had ruined his adolescence with divorce, would go on haunting him as long as its inherited compulsions remained unacknowledged. In this a nephew ten years younger could be helpful. We were both convinced that understanding our sexual imperative (read from our vantages on either side of the gay/straight divide) was the key to our moral development.

Perusing a work in manuscript as it changes from one visit to the next makes a very different experience from reading it in published form. Print itself promotes an undeniable authority; typescript is more malleable. When I opined how, even for me, the satirical portrait of my father bordered on caricature, Jimmy could insert the fictionalized anecdote of a missing fingertip, severed in a Philippine prisoner of war camp while doing something brave.

To this day I feel incapable of rereading the whole of *The Seraglio*, much less judging it. Instead I continue to be distracted or appalled by the fictional transpositions. But I can understand how others winced. My mother was so put off, not by her own portrayal, the demeaning "little" spiking her every remark, but by Jimmy's gratuitous cruelty to his mother, Helen, and to my father, that she did not speak to her brother for two years. My father, flayed right, left, and center as he was, had every reason to talk about the "hateful novel" with a vehement authority. For all his talk, it turned out that he had managed to restrain his curiosity and not read it. He continued to handle Jimmy's investment account—miffed, of course, that it outperformed his other clients'—and found himself on excellent terms with Jimmy whenever they met in later life.

The Seraglio may be too indebted to the example of Henry James to be a good novel. (Jimmy read *The Ambassadors*, alone, six times before he was 26.) But it is a distinguished example all the same, and I'm glad he attempted it. The issues the novel brings up, of overwhelming wealth and what it does to you and to others, are absolutely germane to the Southampton in which we both came of age where every activity, every acquaintance, came rolled out in an accompanying dollar sign.

As to why the novel fails is a somewhat harder question. For anyone inside my family, *The Seraglio* is at best fascinating and, at worst, merely infuriating. But for readers outside the charmed family circle, the novel must often seem either perplexing or plain impenetrable. Then again, growing up as Jimmy did in his father's Southampton mansion, with its 32 guest-filled rooms, its 12 house servants and 8 gardeners, could not have been easy. The unreality comes across in the title of his novel, *The Seraglio*, an Italian word for a Turkish harem. That's a measure of how alienated he felt.

Jimmy's disillusionment may well have prevented his writing the *Buddenbrooks*-type coming-of-age saga that might have been more successful as fiction. Instead, for the revenge he wants he chooses the worst of all devices, the roman-à-clef, because the tyranny of fact keeps the fiction from ever generating a momentum of its own. The novel very quickly runs out of gas once the incident that gives it its shocking start—the slashing of Enid's portrait—becomes a side issue. And the novel's brilliant climax—the castration scene that we first read as an attempted suicide—circumscribes character development by removing the narrator from his role as a player in the marital field.

It may be true that in a chaotic society, where the life-denying forces hold all the cards, the one sane response may be to drop out and not abet them. That was my response as well as my uncle's. But there were in the Hamptons of those very years other alternatives—witness the bohemian scene developing around Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, and in Southampton, Larry Rivers and Fairfield Porter. Even impoverished artists, by creating a community, could effect as big a change in their own way as Charlie Merrill.

One can perhaps see the attractions of the roman-à-clef, for one drawn to gossip, as Jimmy was. But what may have worked for Jimmy's friends, Mary McCarthy and Alison Lurie—Alison's Amherst novel, *Love and Friendship* even features Jimmy and David—doesn't work as well for *The Seraglio*. It may be that Jimmy confuses the need to shock that spurs such works with the need to wound. Either way, an inevitable narrowing of

focus gets in the way of empathy. Jimmy never plumbs the vision that drove my father and other businessmen locked into the Southampton scene. All that golf, that tennis, that one-upmanship; what was it really about? Another way of saying that *The Seraglio*, much as it would like to be, is not *The Great Gatsby*.

JEANETTE ROBERTS SHUMAKER

Catholic against Catholic:
Abjection and Xenophobia in Edna O'Brien's 1990s Triology

Critics have praised Edna O'Brien's stories and novels from the 1960s about country girls encountering the challenges of city life, especially love. Her fiction was long banned in Ireland for its openness about sexuality; however, O'Brien defends its authenticity, pointing out that art must be truthful (Eckley 24). Despite her pioneering treatment of female sexuality that recalls James Joyce's and Kate O'Brien's, some critics have noted that she became repetitive during the 1970s.[1] For example, in 1982 Darcy O'Brien wrote, "Somehow, Edna O'Brien must, in future, break free of the self-enclosure to which all of the virtues of her talents and sensibilities have led her" (189). With her recent trilogy about life in contemporary Ireland—*House of Splendid Isolation* (1994), *Down by the River* (1996), and *Wild Decembers* (1999)—O'Brien departs from her usual style and subject, confessionals of sexual passion.[2]

Written during O'Brien's sixties, these millennial novels portray a wide range of ages, issues, and personality types. *House of Splendid Isolation* is the first of O'Brien's novels to focus upon Irish politics (Graham 19). "Critics have previously cited the lack of an external, public world that might be expected to affect O'Brien's characters, but in *House of Splendid Isolation* that public world directly confronts the private lives of Josie and McGreevy" (Hild 287).[3] *House* deals with nationalist politics—Irish Catholics' reactions to the Irish Republican Army. In contrast, *Down by the River* dramatizes gender politics—incest and the religious factionalism surrounding the abortion controversy. Finally, *Wild Decembers* deals with age-old rural disputes over land rights. In this trilogy O'Brien examines controversial issues such as abortion, incest, changing sexual mores, IRA violence, land disputes, and the conflict between Irish natives and emigrants returning to their Irish homeland.

The trilogy presents men from a more sympathetic perspective than did O'Brien's earlier work. In 1991, Janet Egleson Dunleavy and Rachael Lynch said of O'Brien's fiction that "men are at the worst brutal, at best timid and undependable; and men and women are essentially incompatible" (99).[4] Although O'Brien's 1990s trilogy affirms Dunleavy's and Lynch's assessment at times, it also contains admirable male characters who form meaningful friendships with women. Allison Hild observes of *House of Splendid Isolation* that "in this portrayal of a trained killer O'Brien presents her first sympathetic, emotional man" (286). Men as well as women are unfairly marginalized in O'Brien's trilogy—a change from O'Brien's previous short stories about Irish rural life in which the outcasts are usually female.

All three novels in O'Brien's trilogy portray conflicts between Catholics, rather than between Catholics and Protestants, as is conventional in Irish fiction. Xenophobia among Catholics is directed at a variety of marginalized individuals: an IRA gunman and an aging would-be adulteress in *House of Splendid Isolation*, a teenage victim of incest who desires an abortion in *Down by the River*, and a too successful Irish-Australian in *Wild Decembers*. To grasp the hatred against so-called "strangers" that causes insiders in the novels to label them as abject, I draw upon Julia Kristeva's work. Her psychoanalytic, ahistorical approach to xenophobia is explained in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), and, to abjection, in *Powers of Horror* (1982). In addition, René Girard's theories about rivalry described in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (1965) illuminate the tensions between small farmers dramatized in *Wild Decembers*.

Political Divisions in *House of Splendid Isolation*

As is typical of the Big-House subgenre to which the first novel in O'Brien's trilogy belongs, most of its social commentary deals with religious and class divisions. What is unusual for a Big-House novel is that conflicts occur between Catholics from Ireland and Catholics from Northern Ireland, not between Catholics and Protestants. It seems surprising in *House* that a Catholic from Northern Ireland is seen as a foreigner in Ireland. Partition is resented by many Catholics in Ireland, yet they are exasperated with the IRA violence that protests it. Hence, McGreevy, an Irish Republican Army gunman from Northern Ireland, is seen as a foreigner in the Irish Republic. However, Kristeva points out that a foreigner does not have to come from another country to experience being ostracized as an outsider; for example, in France, people who came from another province are sometimes regarded as foreigners by the natives of the province to which they have moved (*Strangers* 18). Tired of being

robbed, threatened, and sometimes killed by IRA soldiers raising money for their cause, Catholics in the Irish Republic regard Northerners such as McGreevy as psychopaths who should be jailed.

Disputing the stereotype of the IRA as full of psychopaths, O'Brien's narrative shows that the rumors about McGreevy's brutality to a girl whom he kidnapped are false. Such lies articulate the xenophobia that Kristeva analyzes and O'Brien dramatizes. O'Brien paints a disturbing, moving picture of McGreevy as a flawed martyr in the tradition of Yeats's "Easter 1916": "Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart. / O when may it suffice?" Josie O'Meara, the elderly woman who is the protagonist of O'Brien's novel, softens McGreevy's ossified heart while imperiling their lives in the process. Learning to cross the borders of sectarian hatred, Josie is the novel's vehicle for critiquing xenophobia based upon the "us-them" thinking that afflicts Catholics of the Republic, according to O'Brien.

Kristeva writes of foreigners like McGreevy that "Hatred makes him real, authentic so to speak, solid or simply existing" (*Strangers* 13). McGreevy's relentless determination as a terrorist stems from his enmity towards the British, and theirs towards him as the most objectionable kind of foreigner. Similarly, Josie's initial hatred heightens McGreevy's intensity as he prepares for his next campaign. McGreevy takes over Josie's house as his hideout, rips out her phone, and orders her not to betray him should anyone come to the door. He rejects Josie's occasional friendly overtures during the early days of their acquaintance, for, as Kristeva observes, "the foreigner excludes before being excluded" (*Strangers* 24).

At the end of the novel, after McGreevy is finally arrested, he seems unmoved by the taunts and curses of the Irish garda. Hild calls this "the soldier's eloquent, silent endurance of his fate" (286). Kristeva notes of the foreigner that "all rejections are indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond" (*Strangers* 5). In the letter to Josie that McGreevy writes (in defiance of IRA rules) before he leaves, he tells her "I have only one wish [. . .] that all the deaths have not been in vain" (113). He explains that "No one knows or cares about our struggle. They think we're cowboys or animals or worse" (113). McGreevy is isolated by his radicalism. Richard Kearney writes that the experience of "cruel history" has created a cult of sacrifice in Ireland that enacts random acts of revenge; members of the cult feel such acts are just, while others call them terrorism (222). Given the repeated rebellions against the English throughout the centuries of Irish history, it makes sense that McGreevy would feel betrayed by the Irish Catholics of the Republic who call him a terrorist. They are conveniently

indifferent to his people's sufferings since they themselves long ago achieved freedom.

Like most people in the Republic, Josie regards the present IRA as completely different from that of the past. Josie struggles over whether to call McGreevy a terrorist or a hero like her uncle, who died as a Volunteer during Ireland's war against the British in 1921. When Josie shows her uncle's diary to McGreevy, he approves of it, regarding her uncle as part of his own struggle. Josie indignantly disagrees; however, later, she changes her mind. Local garda argue over a similar question when comparing modern rebels such as McGreevy to prior rebels. Cormac, a young policeman, says to an older one, "But if you'd been in 1916 you'd be on their side." The elder policeman responds, "That's different. [. . .] These guys are without conscience, without ideals and with only one proclamation, money and guns and murder, guns and money" (187). Unlike the garda, Josie comes to know McGreevy well enough to see that he sincerely cares about his cause. Unfortunately, McGreevy must steal money, cars, lodging, and food because the IRA does not supply him with what he needs to carry out their orders; instead, they tell him to take what he needs from the locals. He follows their policy of banditry unwillingly, treating his victims politely.

McGreevy's marginalization as a terrorist leads to sadness not unlike that experienced by those who are victims of xenophobia everywhere. Kristeva says the foreigner "is a dreamer making love with absence, one exquisitely depressed" (*Strangers* 10). "Exquisitely" suggests the voluntary, masochistic element of such depression. McGreevy chose his vocation of gunman, therefore choosing the sorrows and risks he believes prove his superiority over the cowards who bear British rule without complaint. McGreevy believes that the sacrificial rhetoric of 1916 still applies today. The pleasure and pain of suffering for his beloved nation raise him above ordinary experience. Kristeva might call McGreevy's nationalistic obsession a form of *jouissance*.

Not only does McGreevy pursue his dream of a united Ireland despite danger, but the ghost of his dead wife haunts him, adding to his depression. Killed in the national struggle, his wife Shiona offers him comfort in his dreams, yet when he awakens he feels the loss of her anew, more bitterly than ever. His little daughter died too, of heart failure, not long after her mother's death. Bereft and lonely, McGreevy, like Kristeva's foreigner, can be seen as "Not belonging to any place, any time, any love" (*Strangers* 7).

Josie predicts that someday McGreevy will form new ties. She gets to know and like the girl, Creena, who hopes that McGreevy will court her one day. Daughter of a dead IRA soldier, Creena helps her mother assist

the cause. McGreevy seems unaware of Creena's interest in him. As Kristeva describes the foreigner, "Arrogantly, he proudly holds on to what he lacks, to absence, to some symbol or other" (*Strangers* 5). However, McGreevy does tell Josie of his wish to have children eventually, after the Northern Irish cause is won. Perhaps his lack of ties allows him to fully dedicate himself to his mission: "Since he has nothing, since he is nothing, he can sacrifice everything" (Kristeva, *Strangers* 19). The anonymity Kristeva implies through "he is nothing" furthers McGreevy's covert aims. In addition, a kind of freedom from everyday morality comes with marginalization; such freedom makes the revolutionary's job less painful.

However, Josie's and McGreevy's developing friendship jeopardizes McGreevy's convenient indifference about ordinary individuals. That Josie and McGreevy gradually become intimate bears out the literature about hostages which observes that they often learn to identify with their captors' positions.

Meals become an occasion for developing the friendship between McGreevy and Josie. Kristeva notes that "the brotherhood of guests [. . .] soothe and forget their differences, the banquet is outside of time" (*Strangers* 11). For although they eat only sandwiches, McGreevy and Josie enjoy her beautiful, if decayed, Big House. McGreevy scrubs the kitchen, bakes bread, and begins to do household repairs, cementing their friendship through domestic tasks. Josie and her husband, James, had opened their house to English fishermen and their families on holiday during previous decades. The former guesthouse still has a certain grandeur, though now its only guest is one whom many would regard as scum.

Josie's past humiliations bring her closer to McGreevy; she knows that outsiders may be unfairly stigmatized by the conventional, rural Irish, as she was. Kristeva explains that it is not only foreigners who are marginalized, for natives "might have the same problems if they were a bit different, a bit special, if they did not play the game, if they were like foreigners from within" (*Strangers* 14). Josie was stigmatized because she did not play the game of compliant wife. In fact, she aborted her only pregnancy, since she did not feel ready to be a mother. As she hated her insensitive husband, why would she want to bear his child? After James recovers from his drinking spells, he abuses her sexually as well as physically. "The prospect of motherhood itself is so horrible to O'Brien's young women that it leads to emotional and physical deformity" (Haule 217). Josie's personality becomes deformed—cold, hard, and aloof. Like the lonely, reserved McGreevy, she pays for not conforming to what her peers expect of her.

Not only did Josie refuse the traditional roles of devoted mother and submissive wife, she fell in love with her priest. This subplot is a vestige

of O'Brien's familiar tales of adultery. Josie's flirtation with her priest verged on an affair until he stood her up. Too proud to admit her rejection to James, who thought she was having an affair, Josie took a beating instead. Earning the reputation of a "fallen" woman from that incident, Josie went a little mad for a while. Later, she shoplifted until she was caught and her reputation sunk even further. In 1988, Tasmin Hargreaves wrote of O'Brien's early works that they show "the fallacy of the love solution, but [. . .] never go beyond it" (295). *House* does go beyond the inadequacy of the love solution. Josie develops a different kind of meaningful relationship decades after the devastating failure of her romance with her priest. Josie begins to see McGreevy as a replacement for the child she refused to have, though setbacks to their intimacy continue to occur.

When Josie repeatedly remembers that McGreevy's purpose in her neighborhood is to kill, then her dislike for him returns. She imagines him as a kind of psychopath, a monster who ruthlessly furthers his cause. As Kristeva writes, "The foreigner comes in when consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities" (*Strangers* 1). Josie acknowledges that she resembles McGreevy after he rescues her. She had feverishly collapsed in the field while looking for him. After McGreevy takes Josie to Creena's home to be nursed, the old lady's attitude to his violence changes. She continues to try to foil his plots through impulsively visiting Creena and through telling the garda lies, but she no longer berates him. Unfortunately, Josie's well-intentioned efforts increase the garda suspicions; sure that she has sheltered and abetted the gunman, they put a watch on her house.

It surprises the garda that McGreevy takes the risk to return to her. McGreevy himself wonders, "What want in him has brought him back?" (182). When he falls asleep in the bed Josie puts him in, the answer is revealed: Josie had stood over him "like a nurse, a nursing mother. A good woman to him" (202). Josie's care humanizes McGreevy as he responds with the enthusiasm for friendship that ordinary people feel. Earlier, he had told Josie how much he missed his mother when Josie "glimpses the secret source of him" (193). Having returned to Josie to meet his need to be mothered, he makes himself vulnerable to getting arrested. His self-protective distance from human ties has been eroded.

McGreevy's vulnerability increases Josie's affection for him. He awakens her from emotional deadness as she has awakened him. Kristeva writes, "Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity [. . .]. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (*Strangers* 1). Josie's identification with

McGreevy leads her to try to intercede with the garda when they demand that he give himself up: "She must remonstrate with them, mediate between him and them which is perhaps why he came to her rather than another" (204). Josie thinks of McGreevy, "His life had many chapters to it and many evolutions. They [the garda] do not know that" (205). From the vantage point of Josie's old age, McGreevy seems young, though he is in fact middle-aged. A mother tries to preserve her child's future, as Josie attempts to save McGreevy's. Josie has learned to value McGreevy's life over her own, despite her dislike of his plans for sectarian violence.

With love overcoming ambivalence, Josie has arrived at what Kristeva seems to regard as the goal of psychoanalysis. "Psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, towards an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable. How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?" (*Strangers* 182). Josie's physical remaking of herself into an androgynous being symbolizes her acceptance of her own strangeness. She cuts off her hair in a symbolic gesture of grief; she finally acknowledges her mistake of refusing to bear a child. Perhaps unconsciously, Josie makes herself over in the image of McGreevy by putting on a long raincoat. Now that she looks like a gunman, the garda mistake her for one. Her identification with McGreevy has become more than spiritual; it is dangerously physical as well. Possibly she meant to die for him, and perhaps her death saves him—for after realizing they have mistakenly shot an innocent, the garda are careful to take McGreevy alive.

As in O'Brien's earlier fiction, love remains the central theme. The garda watching the house had misunderstood the nature of that love, thinking it a perverted sexual one when they saw McGreevy and Josie fall to the ground together in response to an unexpected noise that the garda could not hear. Perhaps it reduces the garda's guilt to believe that the people they must arrest or kill are sexual deviants. But it is a mother-son love that unites these two lonely, marginal characters. Kiera O'Hara observes that "It is, in fact, this moment of allurement, the possibility of union, to which O'Brien's characters seem addicted" (322). O'Hara adds that "that which is most unattainable is most sought" (324). In risking his life to return to Josie, McGreevy bears out that view. Losing her life to preserve his, Josie continues the pattern of valuing the unattainable that she had followed during her passion for her priest.

Like Jennifer Johnston's *The Fool's Sanctuary* (1987), O'Brien's novel posits spiritual union between unlikely opposites as a possible solution to the violence sweeping Ireland. Though Josie is not Anglo-Irish like the owner of the declining mansion in Johnston's novel, local villagers do regard her as a snobbish lady of the manor. At first, McGreevy also seems

to see her in that light. None know that Josie was once a servant in America. Similarly, Johnston's Anglo-Irish characters have disturbing secrets that make it easier for them to identify with the marginal Catholic characters whom they befriend or fall in love with. Stylistically, too, O'Brien's novel recalls Johnston's in interweaving past and present to show how the present is shaped by the past.

The past's influence is seen, among other times, when Josie's guilt over causing her fetus' death, as well as her husband's, encourages her to sacrifice her life for McGreevy's. Josie's husband had hidden some weapons for the IRA years before, along with concealing a gunman who had once worked for them. Josie had written an anonymous letter to the police, since she opposed her husband helping the IRA. However, she did not foresee that her husband would be accidentally killed by the garda when they acted upon the tip in her letter. Due to her husband's death as well as her abortion, Josie may see herself as a type of murderer like McGreevy.

Josie's own death echoes her husband's, suggesting the randomness of sectarian violence. The policeman who killed Josie is Cormac, who feels some sympathy for the IRA because his girlfriend witnessed the police brutalizing Catholics in the North. Cormac wants to kill himself for killing Josie. The garda who have shot gunmen also feel guilty, especially whenever patriotic songs are played. The mental border between themselves and the equally well-armed IRA gunmen is flimsy. The garda know, in Kristeva's sense, that the gunmen are not really foreigners. As a policeman, Ned, tells Tommy, a policeman struggling with his regret over shooting McGreevy's comrade, Brennan: "I know . . . I'd be the same . . . We're all Irish under the skin" (177). The political situation has turned the garda into killers, as it has McGreevy and even Josie, the indirect cause of her husband's death. Through violence, they have all become strangers to themselves, as Kristeva might say.

Not only does the policeman Tommy feel guilty about killing Brennan, but he also fears that his family will suffer IRA reprisals. He and his family have become marginalized—foreigners of a sort—because he performed his official duty. So the cycle of Irish violence goes on. Departing from the realism that dominates her novel, O'Brien starts and finishes it with words from another victim of violence, Josie's daughter: "I thought my mother's death would grant me my life but it hasn't" (215). The dead voice speaks outside of time, about Ireland's past, present, and future. Her words sum up the message of O'Brien's novel, and of Kristeva's study of xenophobia too: "Inside you get to know. That the same blood and the same tears drop from the enemy as from the self, though not always in the same proportions" (216). Josie's daughter was a

casualty of domestic conflict, not political rifts, but both involve turning against the "other" through a kind of xenophobia.

Josie undergoes a revolution of consciousness that brings her too close to the IRA for safety. The garda dub Josie a deviant for breaking from the expected neutrality of the middle-class Catholic Irish in the Republic. O'Brien is pessimistic about the fate of the woman who dares to cross political borders in Ireland. Yet Josie completes a bildung of mental growth during her old age, conforming to a pattern observed in Elizabeth Abel's study of the female bildung during the past two centuries. Like the heroines of earlier eras who rebelled against sexual expectations, not political ones, Josie ends up just as dead. Through creating a tragic fate for her heroine, O'Brien interrogates the binary thinking of post-colonialism that fosters xenophobia and its utmost extension, political violence.

Abjection and Despair in O'Brien's *Down by the River*

Suffering repeated rapes by her father, fourteen-year-old Mary MacNamara also becomes a victim of a Catholic society that unfairly maligns her as a would-be murderess because she tries to get an abortion. The horror of Mary's abjection indicts both the nation that will not stand behind her as well as the father who violated her; O'Brien suggests that child abuse extends beyond Mary's family to her nation in that Irish society puts the rights of a fetus over those of an innocent girl. St. Peter argues that O'Brien fictionalizes a famous case to show the ill effects of the 1983 Irish constitutional amendment that prohibits abortion ("Petrifying" 132). To argue against that amendment, O'Brien transforms Mary, mother of Christ, into Mary, unwilling mother of a possible freak while she is unjustly labeled a Magdalen. Instead of being visited by God the Father through the Holy Spirit, the modern Mary is raped repeatedly by a drunk. The girl's name not only suggests that her fate will be one of suffering, but also implies her purity. Yet, due to the pain she undergoes through her father and later, her society, Mary feels defiled (as anyone would in her situation). Mary's self-esteem declines as she redefines herself as the grotesque, monstrous thing that her society believes her to be. Through portraying Mary's despair as a result of abjection, O'Brien criticizes the society that prolongs it; she also shows that the mislabeling of Mary supports her society's unjust gender structure.[5]

That gender structure depends on the idealization of the Virgin Mother. Such worship results in the ostracism of women who do not conform to the Madonna's example of self-sacrificing maternity. "The political identification of woman and motherhood in Ireland, enshrined in the Irish Constitution of 1937, signals the conjunction of the power of the state, the Church and family ideology in the construction of femininity

and in the coding of the female body" (Rooks-Hughes 84). To Catholic pro-lifers, Mary's pregnant body is ineradicably coded for birth and the maternal role.

The pro-lifers' fight with pro-choice activists over control of Mary's body almost destroys the girl. Mary is figuratively rent—body and mind—between two opposing groups and viewpoints. Like Josie in *House of Splendid Isolation*, Mary pays a high price for her unwillingness to conform to the maternal role that pro-lifers who comprise the majority of the Catholic population wish to impose upon her.

O'Brien's title, *Down by the River*, records the scene of Mary's initial rape: later, she attempts to drown herself in the river after she becomes pregnant, following the tradition of betrayed literary heroines and real women; the river will also be the site of Mary's mother's grieving when she suspects she has the cancer that will eventually kill her. Before describing Mary's violation, O'Brien calls the road to the river a place of "old mutinies and a fresh crime mounting in the blood" (*Down* 2). O'Brien creates a primal scene of violence against the vulnerable that is neither new nor unique. The symbolism traditionally associated with rivers also suggests the way Mary's life eludes her control as she is raped repeatedly; loses her mother and friends; is kept away from the convent school she loves; and, through Irish law, is denied the option of aborting her father's fetus.

After the first rape, Mary's father instills shame in Mary to keep her from revealing their secret: "what would your mother say . . . Dirty little thing" (5). At her father's cue, Mary owns the blame for what has occurred, as though she had invited defilement by choosing to play in the mud of her father's passions. Mary is silenced by the second rape, which involves oral sex. Kristeva writes that bodily fluids such as semen can cause abjective reactions (*Powers* 53). Because of having to drink her father's semen, Mary is forced to admit to herself that she has been violated—her father has invaded her in a way she cannot ignore. Between hysterical fits and spells of nausea, Mary literally cannot speak, as though she is still choking on her father's penis and his poisonous sperm. The lady doctor who examines Mary ignores the clues to what happened; instead, she tries to cure Mary's muteness by cleaning her ears. Invading Mary's body by pouring hot liquid into her ear canals, the doctor unwittingly mimics Mary's rape. Unintentionally, the doctor conforms to Mary's father's view that the girl's distress originates in her own body. Removing its "dirt" will cure the abject creature that she is. But it is not deafness that makes Mary mute, but that what she has felt, seen, tasted, smelled, and heard is unspeakable.

O'Brien contends that the doctor and Mary's mother suspect the truth but, like Mary, will not voice it: "They know without knowing" (32). Through their silence, they collude with Mary's father in hiding his abuse. Still suspicious, however, Mary's mother takes the girl to a kind of witch to whom Mary reveals the truth, along with her dream of violent retribution. Without telling Mary's mother about the rapes, the witch convinces her to send Mary to live at a convent school. At the convent, Mary studies hard and becomes popular with the nuns, escaping the abject state of self-hatred she knew at home. To Mary, the nuns "were not women, they were snow creatures" (37). Enamored with a young nun who returns her affection, Mary imagines becoming a postulant. In the convent, she feels safe and almost pure.

When Mary returns home for her mother's funeral, her father persuades her to stay a few months by asking her to do so in front of a group of mourners; she would be ashamed to refuse her father publicly, for to do so would be to suggest that she is disloyal. Mary makes a second, understandable mistake when she gives her mother's legacy of five hundred pounds to her father to buy a fine tombstone for her mother. Through her naïve generosity, Mary surrenders the chance of independence that her mother had carefully earned for her.

Lizzie, their cleaning lady, discovers that Mary's father is molesting her, but Lizzie's efforts to get a social worker to intercede are foiled by Mary's father. Lizzie and Mary travel to a shrine to pray for her safety, leaving coded letters addressed to the divine, begging for the rapes to stop. Kristeva describes purification rituals that have the incest taboo at their root (*Powers* 58). Lizzie's and Mary's brief pilgrimage resembles such a ritual because Mary feels cleansed and comforted afterwards. As well as through the childlike method of prayer, Mary attempts to protect herself through the practical tactic of staying overnight at her friend Tara's house as often as she can.

The most violent rape occurs one night when Mary is about to go with Tara to a disco. Her father uses the guilt-inducing ploy, "Do you love your father?" (96), confusing filial duty with sexual love. The destruction of Mary's sense of self deepens at this time, as she thinks, "I will not put myself together again. It is broken now. That which was is gone" (98). Though Tara finds Mary lying undressed and bruised, Tara asks and does nothing, for such "things [were] so awful that she blanked them out" (167).

Believing she is pregnant, Mary runs away to Galway where a kindly street musician, Luke, lets her stay with him. Mary writes to him, "I never felt young. Never" (112). Sadly, Mary's period of asylum with Luke is short-lived. When a policeman finds Mary in a mall, he chastises her as though, unwittingly, to drive her insane: "Your poor father gone out of his

mind" (118). Of course, the garda does not realize that Mary has fled her father for that very reason. In the most terrifying scene in a disturbing novel, Mary's father calls her "strumpet" and says he will "de-fuck that bastard out of her" (120). In fact, Mary never had sex with Luke. When Mary attempts to protect herself by threatening to call the garda and reveal her pregnancy, her father pokes her deeply with an old, splintered broom handle, twisting it in a "grotesque rite" (121). At this point, "the madness passed from him then and into her" (121) as she lies stunned and painfully wounded.

Soon after, Mary tries to drown herself, but Betty, a neighbor and a friend of her mother, stops her. Though Mary does not tell Betty the truth, the widow gets the idea through Mary's statements that her child would be "a freak" (142), and that her mother is "better off dead" (142). Betty and Mary fly to London for an abortion but are recalled home by a doctor under threat from the garda; a pro-life activist had discovered their plan and phoned the authorities. The activist, Noni, tries to enlist Mary's father's support in stopping Mary from committing "Murder," "the whole country's business" (152). Mary's father, the would-be abortionist of the broom handle incident, tells the garda that he thinks that Luke is the father of Mary's fetus. But Luke's blood test, plus his letter from Mary, eventually confirm his innocence.

The authorities and other adults misread Luke and Mary as criminals; they also misread Mary's father as a martyr to a wayward child. Mary and Luke's youth and poverty mislead adults, as does Mary's father's respectability as a tax-paying property owner. In addition, the adults pity Mary's father because of his recent bereavement, whereas they detest Luke as a kind of beggar. A policeman describes Luke's "Long, matted hair, that hadn't seen a brush or a comb in weeks [. . .] the lice upon the locks of the nation" (195). Using the language of abjection and xenophobia, the garda blurs the line between actual dirt and moral corruption. Because Luke, whom Mary's father calls a hippie, looks like a degenerate, he must be one. Even after the garda know Luke is innocent, they continue to treat him harshly. Similar abjective reactions lead pro-life activists to assume that Mary is evil because she tried to get an abortion. Her father's cousin, Veronica, whom the courts give custody of Mary, shares the pro-life activists' hatred: at every opportunity, Veronica pulls Mary's hair to "chastise her" (210), and she forces Mary to stay with her at all times in case she might flee. In Dublin, lawyers gossip about Mary's case, calling her "some brat . . . Some little slut about to pour piss on the nation's breast" (190). On a radio show entitled "Magdalen vs. the nation," a caller labels Mary "a slut" (212).

Even Tara's mother, who has known Mary for years, angrily tells Mary's favorite teacher of "a night paradise of foul pleasures which the girl enjoyed" (170). Tara's mother's evidence for her speculations is that she found Mary's knickers on her property. That Mary was raped by her father never occurs to Tara's mother, even after Mary's teacher says that he suspects that Mary is the victim of a lecherous uncle or other relative. Clearly, the older woman's abjective reaction to Mary involves a projection of her own desires; as a defense against her desires, she xenophobically attributes them to marginalized "others." Tara's mother pretends she is above such desires by blaming Mary for supposedly indulging them.

Tara does not join her mother in condemning Mary. With her friend disgraced, Tara fears that she will be humiliated next. Hoping her sexual exploits with a boy will not be discovered, Tara imagines "herself and her best friend the two Mary Magdalenes of the parish" (168). Fearing that she will be labeled an outcast like Mary, Tara has no energy for either protecting her friend or sympathizing with her. Tara does not tell her mother what she suspects about Mary's father, but Betty gives a clue to the garda when she reports that Mary said her baby would be a freak. The garda's resulting doubt about Mary's father accounts for him being asked to transfer custody to Veronica. Eventually, Mary escapes her cruel cousin and the bevy of pro-life women who police Veronica's home. A radio talk-show host finds a lawyer for Mary and a place for her to stay. When Mary's lawyer asks her father for permission to fight for her right to an abortion, he tells her father of Mary's continuous suicidal longings. Her father replies, "Who wouldn't want to be dead?" (247). His global projection reveals the depression that will result in him hanging himself after the garda finally convince him to admit his crimes. The truth had come out when Betty gave Mary's diary to her lawyer, who passed it on to the garda. In it, Mary writes that her father "drugged himself with tablets because of his loneliness and trying, I think, not to harm me but the harm is done" (250).

Part of Mary's harm had come from being unfairly labeled as an evil seductress and baby killer. After the garda realize the nature of Mary's father's crimes, he stimulates their abjective reactions. They call him "vermin" (256) and "an animal" (259), recalling their denigration of Luke. Finally, Mary's father must bear some of the shame that she has unjustly carried for months. Even when the truth about the incest eventually is revealed in the press, it does not deliver Mary from her abject status as murderous Magdalen. She may have been a victim but because she wanted an abortion, she remains a criminal in the eyes of pro-life activists. The leader of the activists accuses Mary of murdering her fetus when she miscarries: "May you rot in hell. . . . You have murdered it" (281).

The leader wants to force Mary to kneel to confess her crime to God, pretending not to see that she is writhing from the pain of her miscarriage. O'Brien shows that abjective reactions, even when unjustified, are difficult to change.

Ironically, on the day of Mary's miscarriage, the judges had voted to give her the right to go to England for an abortion. But by then Mary was no longer certain she wanted one. She had written a letter to her fetus, asking it to miscarry: "I don't hate you, you know I don't. If only you were my sister or my brother but not my child. [. . .] I am asking your soul to fly off now and wait for the right mother" (267). O'Brien makes Mary's wish come true: Mary does not again have to face the wrenching decision of whether to have an abortion.

O'Brien portrays the process by which one of the judges, Frank, comes to vote for Mary's freedom. Frank's teenage daughter, Molly, convinces him that Mary is "a scapegoat" (270). Molly reminds Frank of his own frailties, implying that Mary is a scapegoat for those of her nation. Molly adds that she hopes Frank would let her go to England for an abortion if she needed one. As a result of Molly's words, Frank begins to see Mary as vulnerable, like his daughter. Also, Frank is swayed by Mary's despair, for his own brother committed suicide. Frank observes that Mary's second suicide attempt failed merely because she cut her wrist in the wrong direction. That the judges allow Mary her right to an abortion softens O'Brien's criticism of Irish law to some extent.

By the end of the novel, Mary has partially recovered from her trauma. She visits a disco with Mona, an Irish girl she got to know at the London abortion clinic. Unlike Mary, Mona had gone through with her abortion without interference. At the disco, Mary dreams of love, "such as all people dream and go on dreaming in the cold crucible of time" (293). Youth's ability to recuperate is startling here, and recalls Mary's earlier fantasy that Luke would purge her of her father's violations with his kiss. Mary shares the romantic dreams of earlier jejune heroines created by O'Brien who end up disillusioned as they age. O'Brien's "cold crucible of time" evokes the historical forces of perversity, prejudice, and decay that have already attacked Mary and that continue to threaten her as they do "all people."

Still, *Down by the River* closes on an optimistic note as Mary sings for the crowd: "what they were hearing was in answer to their own souls' innermost cries" (298). Mary's suffering is transformed into music that reaches those who have also suffered. Through her singing, Mary momentarily escapes her loneliness and abjection. However, the reader assumes that this is a rare moment of fellowship, for Mary is not a professional singer. Whether Mary will begin to study music is not mentioned; more

likely, she will continue to look for someone to love, without thinking about the difficulties that love poses for an incest survivor. There is the possibility that Mary might choose a man who resembles her father; then another "fresh crime" could open a sequel to O'Brien's novel. However, O'Brien leaves these dark possibilities unspoken to create a sense of hope for the abused girl. What remains in the reader's memory is Mary's torment by the forces of respectability who upheld her father's rectitude longer than they should have, and who tortured Mary with the label of whore while genteelly imprisoning her to preserve a monstrous impregnation. Whereas in *House of Splendid Isolation* Catholic fought Catholic over political issues, in this novel well-established Catholics unjustly persecute a young outcast.

Ancient Feuds in O'Brien's *Wild Decembers*

The final novel in Edna O'Brien's trilogy about contemporary Ireland, *Wild Decembers*, is regarded by one critic as the most successful of the three. The novel concerns a problem that may become increasingly common as the Celtic Tiger's burgeoning economy draws Irish emigrants back to their native Ireland. When returning emigrants resettle in their native Irish village—or in that of their parents—they may rekindle familial feuds over land. Alternatively, such returning Irish may develop new territorial conflicts with the native Irish or with Europeans who have previously moved to Ireland or bought vacation homes there. Owners compete over rights to scarce natural resources, such as turf, in an increasingly crowded countryside that is growing in value. Perhaps the impending feeling of crowdedness along with the heady rise in property values adds to the territoriality that might otherwise feed such conflicts.

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wild Decembers* depicts a romance destroyed by a feud between Catholic peasants that goes back for generations. O'Brien's prologue refers to the Famine as the origin of Irish peasants' obsessive competitiveness about land: "The enemy is always there and these people know it, locked in a tribal hunger that bubbles in the blood [. . .] wanting to roar again, to pit neighbour against neighbour and dog against dog in the crazed and phantom lust for a lip of land" (8). The Brennans and the Buglers have long fought over their mountain, resulting in at least one Bugler ancestor murdering a Brennan ancestor: "The families, though distantly related, had feuds that went back hundreds of years and by now had hardened into a dour sullenness" (11). However, when Mick Bugler comes from Australia to claim his inheritance, Joseph Brennan befriends him in defiance of ancestral grudges. Joseph allows Mick to park his tractor at Joseph's house, writes down stories about the

area at Mick's request, exchanges confidences, and teaches Mick to hunt birds. "'What's yours is mine . . . We're friends,' Joseph said" (39).

Joseph's younger sister, Breege, is delighted with the young men's friendship that breaks her household's loneliness. Attracted to Bugler, Breege writes in flour, on the range, "My brother and Mick Bugler are best friends" (39). At this point, Joseph and Mick follow the pattern of relationship that René Girard calls "external mediation," meaning that each openly admires the other. Soon, though, a petty dispute about Mick's tractor disrupts Joseph's and Mick's friendship. Just after their dispute, Mick's popularity at a dinner dance makes Joseph jealous of his former friend. Their relationship deteriorates further when Lady Harkness transfers fields that Joseph had rented for over ten years to Bugler. Because of losing the fields he had leased from Lady Harkness, Joseph has to sell some of his cattle at a loss.

From this point onwards, Joseph's and Bugler's relationship can be understood through what Girard describes as the "internal, double mediation" of mutual rivalry. Girard argues that although fictional rivals publicly detest each other, at least one of them secretly admires the other; Girard calls the rival's covert emulation of the counterpart, "internal mediation." Such paradoxical admiration is founded upon self-hatred. Self-loathing leads the rival to think that imitating and ultimately outdoing the counterpart will give the rival the value that the counterpart possesses. The rival learns to desire a contested object through copying the counterpart's desire. In O'Brien's novel, the process of imitating desire goes both ways, with rivals emulating each other while protesting mutual contempt, through a process that Girard calls "double mediation." Constantly on the defensive, Joseph, in his paranoia about Bugler, fits Girard's explanation of newly formed rivalries: "Now the mediator is a shrewd and diabolical enemy; he tries to rob the subject of his most prized possessions; he obstinately thwarts his most legitimate ambitions" (11). Joseph thinks that Bugler is intentionally ruining Joseph's plan to build his herds through stealing his lease of Lady Harkness's land; later, Joseph thinks Bugler is trying to rob him of his sister Breege, too.

Once Joseph hates Bugler, he becomes angry at Breege for liking their neighbor. Hence, gossip about Breege and Bugler acts as a lightning rod to spark Joseph's fury. When Joseph hears that Breege took a ride on Bugler's tractor, he hits her hard across the face (100); he had never hit her before. In fact, Breege recalls Joseph's gentleness towards her throughout her youth. On a later occasion, after spiteful neighbors trick Breege into dressing up to go to what she thinks is a rendezvous with Bugler, Joseph hits her again. This time Joseph uses a clothes brush on Breege's face, drawing blood as her head hits the table. What could

explain such brutality from a man who had previously treated his sister tenderly?

When Joseph was friends with Bugler, he told Mick that he had felt like a father to Breege ever since their father died when they were children; his paternal feeling had increased after their mother died while they were young adults. Along with his avowed paternalism, Joseph may also feel inappropriate desire for Breege that she senses one night when he enters her room while she is sleeping, awakening her (205-06). Such incestuous feelings may have arisen in reaction to losing Catherine, the girl Joseph loved. Fifteen years ago, Catherine broke with Joseph, after his mother talked him out of emigrating with his beloved. Joseph's mother had argued that she and Breege would lose the farm if he left. After losing Catherine, Joseph tried to poison himself with sheep dip. He never courted another woman, putting all his effort into the farm instead. Now, Breege is his only intimate. Other factors cause Joseph's violence besides paternalism and incestuous longings. Girard explains that "In double mediation, it is not that one wants the object but that one does not want to see it in someone else's hands" (102). Letting Breege marry Bugler would mean that Joseph had lost his contest with their neighbor. An additional reason for keeping Breege away from Bugler stems from Joseph's antiquated notion of honor.

A romantic, Joseph reads Irish and Greek myths, Anglo-Irish writers such as Yeats, Irish history, and local genealogy. Given Joseph's antiquated values, it is fruitful to apply Julian Pitt-Rivers's ideas about honor in Western cultures to Joseph. For women, purity traditionally lies at the core of honor; for men, it is the willingness "to defend his honour and that of his family" (Pitt-Rivers 42). A family's honor rests upon the chastity of its women along with its men's ability to protect the women's virtue. As a result, the cuckold is viewed as defiled, like his wife, for he has failed to defend his wife's chastity (Pitt-Rivers 46). Breege is not Joseph's wife; still, because of Joseph's unacknowledged incestuous longings, he acts as if he feels cuckolded by Bugler. In addition, Joseph's paternal feelings for his sister heighten his sense that he must defend family honor through keeping her chaste. After Joseph assaults Bugler, Joseph worries about Breege: "If I go to gaol, who'll mind you?" (159). Given that Breege is 22—a girl no longer—Joseph's question betrays his condescension and also his paranoia about her chastity.

Pitt-Rivers describes such paranoia as explaining the origin of the witch figure in Western cultures. The dangerous associations surrounding the witch figure imply cultural paranoia regarding women whose sexuality is liberated from male authority (Pitt-Rivers 69). Joseph conjures witch-like images when he tells Breege that she is wearing "a Jezebel

dress" to her supposed meeting with Bugler (121), and that she is "No better than a streetwalker" for wanting to meet that young man (122). While berating Breege about her feelings for Bugler, Joseph's unspoken subtext is to blame her for arousing his own improper desires. Joseph projects his lustfulness onto Breege, under the guise of preserving the family honor like a proper patriarch.

Joseph's old-fashioned conflation of family honor with female chastity extends to his female dog. Joseph's anxiety about his dog, Goldie, is a sign that he is approaching insanity. When Bugler leaves his home for several days, Joseph locks up Bugler's dog, Gypsy, under the pretext of protecting Goldie from becoming "corrupted" (102). Since he cannot stop Breege from seeing Bugler, Joseph can at least stop Goldie from consorting with Gypsy, in a ludicrous and cruel gesture of control.

To preserve his honor, Joseph engages in legal disputes with Bugler, first over Bugler's right to cut turf at a bog, and later over Bugler's right to cut a road across their mountain. Pitt-Rivers notes, however, that legal disputes can imperil honor:

> The conflict between honour and legality is a fundamental one which persists to this day. For to go to law for redress is to confess publicly that you have been wronged and the demonstration of your vulnerability places your honour in jeopardy, a jeopardy from which the satisfaction of legal compensation at the hands of a secular authority hardly redeems it. (30)

Since Joseph loses both of his legal disputes with Bugler at a ruinous financial cost, his honor erodes even further. Joseph's solicitor, O'Dea, tells cautionary tales about previous Irish farmers who acted as self-destructively and litigiously as Joseph, but Brennan does not listen.

Part of his sense of rectitude regarding his disputes with Bugler comes from Joseph's outdated valuing of ancestry over wealth. Pitt-Rivers explains that "where status is ascribed by birth, honour derives not only from individual reputation, but from antecedents" (23). Such a traditional way of looking at status has lost favor in Ireland, Joseph discovers. He tells Bugler that his land is his only "because your people worked for the landlords. They were bailiffs. They were hated. That's why they emigrated" (128). Joseph tries to use the same kind of historical argument on the judge: "My family were the first in Cloontha. We've been here forever. His were Buglers from Wales" (155). Because the judge is unconvinced by Joseph's snobbish line of reasoning, Joseph labels him "a jumped-up grocer's son . . . I've looked you up in the records" (155). Like Durbeyfield in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Joseph assumes that he possesses privileges of lineage which no longer exist; nowadays money, which Bugler and the judge have, is what creates status.

Proclaiming "Justice for the little man," Joseph thinks of himself and Breege as "innocents both, pitted against a world that was too smart for them" (205). Like Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Joseph dramatizes the sad plight of the outmoded man of honor made paranoid and dangerous by a citified, legalistic world.

Ironically, Bugler was once a rural man of honor, too. Mick was a shepherd in Australia; it is only his manicured fiancée's money that makes him a "bigger," richer man than Joseph. The lawyer whom Joseph refuses to hire hypothesizes that Bugler resists Joseph because Bugler feels inadequate as an emigrant. Joseph does not believe this explanation, and Breege seems convinced by Bugler's protestations that he is merely protecting his own interests, not eclipsing Joseph's. However, Bugler becomes unpopular in the village because of his continuing contests with Joseph, who is regarded as the victim of a well-heeled, pushy outsider. When Bugler cuts peat on a bog to which Joseph believes he owns the rights, Bugler's motive is entertainment rather than necessity; Mick finds it rewarding to get a sense of how his ancestors warmed themselves. On the other hand, building a road across Joseph's land to reach his house seems a necessity, and Bugler is willing to pay Joseph handsomely for an easement. But by this time, Joseph can no longer see Bugler and his interests dispassionately. Girard writes that "enslavement" is the ultimate result of rivalry over a desired object, though that is not evident to the rivals at first (180); Joseph becomes a slave to revenge because he cannot defeat Bugler any other way.

To repair his damaged honor, Joseph fights Bugler more than once. Their first fight occurs in Nelly's pub. Pitt-Rivers writes that "The ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence" (29). At the pub, as in court, however, Joseph loses. Bugler defeats Joseph, making "a mockery of him" (127). Pitt-Rivers observes that excellence involves "the claim to excel over others" (23) at which Joseph fails yet again after Bugler leaves the pub. Caimin, another neighbor of Joseph's, taunts him with tales of Breege meeting Bugler in the woods, "Their love nest" (131). Joseph hits Caimin, but Caimin pushes him through a trapdoor, adding to his humiliation. Later, Joseph dreams of beating Bugler at hurley, a quintessentially Irish sport. Joseph's fantasy compensates for Bugler's unbroken string of victories.

Breege also feels defeated in her struggle to earn Bugler's love and loyalty. After meeting Bugler's fiancée who has just arrived from Australia, Breege climbs into the church's crèche as a refuge. She cannot speak and will not climb out of the crèche. As a result, Joseph and a doctor commit Breege to an asylum. After several weeks there, Breege recovers her powers of speech and faces the fact that she is pregnant by Bugler.

Bugler tries to visit her and thus inflames his fiancée's jealousy, causing Rosemary to leave him. When Breege emerges from the asylum, Bugler tells Joseph that he and Breege plan to build a committed relationship. In addition, Bugler writes a letter to Joseph promising that he will let Breege's brother win their territorial disputes for her sake.

When Joseph reads Bugler's note and later speaks with him, he becomes infuriated. "The thought that she might have given herself, that Bugler's blood might be mixed up with theirs, drove him berserk" (329). Like the incestuously desiring brother in Webster's Renaissance tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, Joseph cannot stand the thought of his sister making love to another. Although traditional notions about protecting his sister's chastity bolster Joseph's self-righteousness, he acts more like a betrayed husband than a brother. Joseph's deepest motivation may be sexual possessiveness, but thwarted rivalry and concern for family honor are the motives he acknowledges. When he shoots Bugler dead in front of Mick's own house, Joseph knows that Breege is upstairs, witnessing their encounter. Breege's desertion of her post as his housekeeper inflames Joseph into pulling the trigger. Joseph does not care that he will shock Breege with his deed; nor that he will break her heart by killing her beloved; nor that her child will be fatherless. Perhaps Joseph wants to ruin Breege's life, as his mother ruined his when she made him give up his beloved. Joseph punishes Breege for supposedly betraying him, forcing her into becoming as lonely as he is.

It is interesting that Joseph kills Bugler only after Mick attempts to end their rivalry through forfeiting all contested land rights while keeping Joseph's most cherished chattel, Breege. Joseph interprets Bugler's winning of Breege as the final usurpation rather than as the price for Joseph's victory in their land dispute. Perhaps the most insulting part for Joseph is Bugler's implied mental superiority in being willing to lose the land rights that had obsessed them both. That Joseph will not let Bugler out of their relationship of double, internal mediation proves that Joseph is fixated upon his rival, not upon victory, as Girard might predict.

That Breege later forgives Joseph for his crime against Bugler and herself is surprising. Joseph writes her from prison that "One mad minute stretches into a lifetime" (356). That will be so for her, as much as for him, as she cares for Bugler's child and Joseph's farm alone. After Bugler's death, Rosemary moves into his house; Breege "wonders if the old wars are brewing again and will they, as women, be called on to fight the insatiate fight in the name of honour and land and kindred and blood. Will their hearts too turn to treason" (357). Breege's awareness of the dangerous temptation of such rivalry makes her into the type of hero who, at the end of classic European novels of the 19th century, learns to

renounce triangulated relationships: "The hero sees himself in the rival he loathes; he renounces the 'differences' suggested by hatred" (Girard 300). O'Brien inverts Girard's gender pattern by giving a woman the dispassionate vision of tragedy that its surviving male protagonist lacks, in part because of mental illness. Girard points out that at the end of classic novels, the hero speaks for the author; Breege speaks for O'Brien at the end of a novel that questions stereotypically "masculine" cycles of rivalry.

Building on Girard's theory about the triangulation of desire in literature, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick argues that women in novels often function as exchange objects that cement the homosocial bonds between men. Such patriarchal bonds as the male rival's secret admiration for his counterpart are concealed by public competition between them. Sedgewick's model applies to *Wild Decembers*. Breege becomes the exchange object who, like the disputed land, fixes Joseph upon Bugler in a deadly obsession stemming from a passionate friendship. Midway through O'Brien's story, lawyer O'Dea pointedly observes to Joseph that the rivalry between two kings over the wife of one of them caused Ireland's never-ending feud with England. Joseph does not get the point, but the reader does. O'Brien's Bronte-esque novel suggests that the long-term tragedy of rivalry between the Brennans and the Buglers can be compared to Ireland's war with England. While *House of Splendid Isolation* dealt with a similarly violent political dispute, *Wild Decembers* shows that jealousy over love and land, combined with antiquated notions of honor, creates fatal competitiveness between Catholics in the rural Republic.

O'Brien's Female Bildungs

O'Brien's trilogy presents the challenges to the contemporary Irish posed by xenophobia, the partition of Ireland, sexism, changing sexual mores, domestic violence, and outdated customs. With Ireland an active part of the European Economic Community in a technological world of increasing homogeneity, traditional Irish morals, mores, and religious beliefs come into question in O'Brien's fiction of the 1990s. Sympathetic, well-developed male characters are prominent in O'Brien's trilogy, which is a change from her earlier fiction. However, women's growth—or lack of growth because of quintessentially Irish social barriers—remains O'Brien's primary focus.

As Sandra Manoogian Pearce observed in the mid-1990s, "[I]t is Edna O'Brien who brings us the emotional and psychological longings of women brought up in a land where abortion, contraception (until recently), and divorce (or more accurately remarriage) are illegal" ("Redemption" 63). Representing several generations of rural Irish womanhood, Josie, Mary, and Breege grapple with the sexual issues that

Pearce lists, as well as with domestic and political violence. In 1935, contraception became illegal in Ireland; the 1930s was also the era when laws prohibiting married women's employment in certain fields came into play, laws which lasted until the 1970s (Pelan 50). During her youth and middle age, Josie bore the full brunt of these restrictions upon women. Though Breege and Mary mature in a somewhat more liberated age, they face residual prejudices and powerful if unvoiced restrictions upon their gender. Most obviously, Mary is thwarted by her nation's continuing prohibition of abortion. Her judges' eventual leniency comes too late to save her from months of torture as the object of a public controversy. But Mary faces non-legal challenges as well. As Josie was a victim of wife abuse, Mary is a victim of violence against daughters and Breege of violence against sisters. That Mary is the youngest and most vulnerable of O'Brien's three protagonists, yet is the one who experiences the gravest, most horrible violations, dramatizes children's plight. Even when a girl is being raped by her father, no one saves her; and when she becomes pregnant, she is not allowed to free herself from carrying the heart-rending reminder of her rape. In O'Brien's trilogy, domestic violence against girls and women remains unacknowledged by Irish rural communities who leave them to cope with it alone as best they can.

As a result, Josie, Mary, and Breege feel unsupported by their families and communities. Their hopelessness brings them close to madness. Such madness is reactive, recalling Shakespeare's Ophelia's; the women's despair comes from betrayals by trusted relatives and friends. What Rebecca Pelan says of O'Brien's earlier rural heroines applies to those of this trilogy. "O'Brien has consistently taken as her theme the disillusionment of women in society [. . .] . Of primary importance in her work is the crisis of identity inevitably experienced by women in a society which has deprived them of every possible avenue of achievement other than one which involves serving the needs of others" (Pelan 53).

Josie rebels against the example of the compliant Madonna when she aborts her fetus and attempts to have an affair; Josie would serve herself and not her brutal husband and his family line. Decades later, though, Josie embraces a disinterested form of maternal sacrifice when she dies while attempting to save McGreevy, her son in spirit. In returning to live with her father after her mother's death, Mary reluctantly conforms to the model of womanly sacrifice, as Josie ultimately did. Her father's continuing violation of Mary eventually leads her in despair to abandon the traditional model. Breege likewise attempts to be a "good girl" who cares for her brother like a mother-wife. When her brother and her village label her a Jezebel because of her love for an outsider, she rebels and tries to become his wife. But in trying to do so Breege faces impediments to free-

dom that are as crushing as the ones Mary and Josie faced. All three protagonists fail to free themselves from authoritarian structures and individuals. Josie is frustrated by her cruel husband and, later, the local garda; Mary by her self-deceived father and, later, by her similarly denying, cruel nation; and Breege by her mad brother and his small-minded cronies.

Despite the numerous, unjust restrictions that continue to frustrate the women in O'Brien's trilogy, each novel ends with a more optimistic sense of the heroine's growth than exists in many of her previous fictions. Though Josie is a victim of the strife between Catholics from the north and south, she briefly emerges from decades of sterile isolation into a generative, loving state of mind. Whereas Josie's self-sacrifice is beatifically maternal only in spirit, Breege will become an authentic single mother after her novel ends. That Breege abandons the cycle of xenophobia and feuds that destroyed her brother and ancestors suggests a similar mental development to that undergone by Josie. When Mary sings in the pub, she, too, tries to overcome the pain of the past as she attempts to start a new life. Mary's memories are even more troubling than Breege's, but Mary is young and appears surprisingly resilient. In allowing Mary and Breege to survive and perhaps someday surmount their traumas, O'Brien deviates from the typical plot of female development described by Elizabeth Abel et al.'s classic study of the female bildungsroman. The conventional victim-heroine must die, even though she may grow mentally before doing so (Abel 11). By contrast, the persistence and mental generosity of Mary and Breege suggests that contemporary conflicts between Irish Catholics over diverse issues from sexual morality, to land, and recent immigrants may be overcome or at least outlived. Like Juno and her daughter in O'Casey's great play that likewise dramatizes conflicts among Irish Catholics, Mary and Breege are not crushed but live to forgive and flower.

Notes

[1]In 1988, Tasmin Hargreaves wrote that "O'Brien's unquestionable gift as a writer seems to have foundered on an inability to find a centre, to find a self, to find a subject" (304-05).

[2]Sandy Manoogian Pearce regards O'Brien's new trilogy as inferior to that of *The Country Girls* because *House* is too melodramatic and *River*, too sensationalist (20). I disagree, finding the new trilogy much more ambitious and absorbing than the old.

[3]What Michael Patrick Gillespie said of O'Brien's short stories in 1996 is also true of her recent novels: O'Brien shows "a marked partiality for liberating ambiguities" (110), for "a both / and incorporating impulse rather than an either / or exclusivity" seen in masters of social critique such as Swift (109). Instead of seeing *Gulliver's Travels* as O'Brien's model, Gillespie associates her approach with

"the tart, desperate comedy of *Dubliners*" (111). However, O'Brien's recent, serious novels lack the biting comedy seen in some of her earlier examinations of love in rural, middle-class Ireland. Nevertheless, O'Brien's 1990s novels are dominated by the convincing realism and social commentary about Ireland seen in *Dubliners*.

[4]Along similar lines, Lynette Carpenter contends that O'Brien's novels written before 1986 focus upon Ireland's repression of women (279).

[5]Rachel Jane Lynch discusses domestic violence in O'Brien's short stories set in Ireland: "She depicts in shocking detail the routine oppression and brutalization of women in small rural communities" (37). O'Brien's feminist perspective on this theme reappears in her trilogy, particularly in *Down by the River*.

[6]Christine St. Peter's "Petrifying Time: Incest Narratives from Contemporary Ireland" argues for a broader meaning for Mary's romantic dreams in terms of freedom from incest, along with other crimes against children: "Humans made the evil and can unmake it also. Thus, the rebirth of hope in Mary's heart may suggest more than just a romantic dream, although it is certainly that" (141).

[7]Sandy Manoogian Pearce makes a case for the superiority of *Wild Decembers* over *House of Splendid Isolation* and *Down by the River*; *Decembers* is "a classic domestic tragedy, where we care about the three characters" (20).

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AMY MENG

The Strangler Fig

begins almost like love: a seed
shaken off into some dark root,
growth without the realization of growth.
To the elm, it is just another dark
aspect of forest alighting on the body
the first tendril like wind, or a soft

trail of rain still sliding. Need opens the coat softly,
and still the tree barely feels the seed,
the hungry intentions of such a small, pale body.
The white foot, the thin root,
scrapes the flank of elm. In darkness,
legs begin to lengthen—growth

over the mottled bark, growth
into the wet soil, the entry like a moan, a soft
bed, returning home beneath a darkening
sky. How is it that this seed
already holds the leaf and root,
the fever of living wound tight in its body

—the body
that will topple an elm, despite the long growth,
despite the many rings and branching roots?
It must be love that lets the vine tug, /soft/
against the taproot—at least the seed
of longing that allows this twining in the dark.

Even if desire is not the word, the dark
ground will still hold the elm in place: a body
trembling at its tips, forced to feel a seed
unravel in some peripheral crook, the growth

of vines climbing the trunk, softly
asking favors. These leaves and roots

define the tree, but what strange, rooted
things bring desire? Vines arch darkly,
latticed across a torso of elm. Soon the bark softens,
seeming to relent as it dies—the old body
only air beneath this knotted growth. Most seeds

take root in this quiet way—the body
not knowing what the growth
of love can do. Barely even feeling the seed.

Renovation

We decided to paint the rooms before we left
and creased the white walls with color.
We took yellow for the hands and feet
because it is the color of pollen of work
of light before it sleeps of the cusp of dreams
under the lintel with head to one side considering.
And we took red for the belly the synaesthesia the heat
of young legs like horses that climb into cars
through fields and down into water
the lips everyone sees once the good meat
of a grapefruit and all those long strange flames.
We took green for the spine for the peace for the old
who could move toward and away
but nowhere else because their bones
were knotting and we took it for the light
a bottle holds when it waits against the window.
There was orange and brown and gray
for what occurs between the work and heat and peace
and there was blue, blue for what was left.

Realignment

When my mother lost her organs to possibility—
(possible dark matter, possible death)—
the rest of her body shifted downward, to compensate.
For weeks she complained of pain:
not from the incision or the stitches
or the scarring, but from the movement
below muscle, the slip-sliding
landfall that body could not hold back.
Everything that had been
roughly the same all fifty years
were pulling up roots and moving,
a southward migration to where it was warm,
to where there were vacancies.
The house, when your father left, did the same thing—
didn't it? Four heads under the roof
realigned, the boards fastened to different places.
Perhaps this is how the universe was made:
that body caved in when one thing left,
or another thing grew, and a pulse came
out of the nothing that was something
whole. But even *nothing*
has to find its way home. Slowly this
fraction, this part that we call home—
its wheels began to rotate and its waters
began to cycle. The entire mass moving
again, in different patterns, making birds
and tides and gravity around a new logic that grew
out of the thing that wanted still to live.

PATRICK HICKS

The Missing

She found him on the doorstep. He was whole and young, which was impossible because the Army told her he died in Vietnam forty years ago. But when she opened the screen door, its squeak disturbing the morning air, it was definitely her dead son. He was dressed in olive camouflage and a mosquito bite boiled on his neck and—it just *can't* be true, she thought—it looked like he was still nineteen years old.

Martha Erikson knew all of this was impossible but she pulled her son towards her chest and kissed his forehead, she rubbed the stubble of his chin, she framed his face with trembling hands. How can this be? She had the folded triangle of his American flag next to the television. His name had been cut into that shiny black wall in Washington, D.C., and, four decades ago, the United States Army told her a land mine had destroyed her boy. In spite of all of this overpowering truth he stood on her doorstep and looked as young as the day he left for the jungle.

She tried to speak but no words came out, so she ran her fingers through his dirty hair and patted his chest as if to reassure herself that he was really alive. He smelled of sweat and motor oil. His hands were calloused and grimed with dirt but Martha brought those same hands to her lips and wept with a lifting joy. "How did you get here?" she finally asked.

Eugene Erikson looked at the ground and shrugged a shoulder. "I don't rightly know."

She touched his breastbone with her whole hand to prove that her son, that same little boy she breast fed and cradled in her arms, was really standing in front of her. She pressed the whole weight of her palm against his sternum. "You haven't aged a day since 1969. How is that possible?"

One of the neighbor kids biked past and gawked at the soldier on Mrs. Erikson's front doorstep. Someone started up a lawn mower down the street and Eugene turned fearfully towards the noise.

"Come inside," she flustered. She pulled his hand—it was her *son's* hand, she thought, her *son's*—and she locked the door behind him.

For a long time they didn't say anything to each other. She didn't take her eyes off him for fear that he might vanish and she watched him examine the walls of his childhood home. On the fireplace mantel was a photo of him in Vietnam. It had yellowed and wrinkled with age but there he was with an arm around a buddy and in the background was a Huey with a big red cross, its rotors were drooping knives. Next to the photo was a folded American flag in an oak case and he leaned in to read the polished inscription. *Eugene T. Erikson 1950-1969.*

"That was a strange day," he said without looking up. "There was an explosion of dirt and I had this weightless feeling."

Martha put up her hands as if to push away the dark memory. She didn't want to talk about his death because she worried it might change the glowing reality that he was now standing next to the sofa and breathing in the air of the living. If they started to talk about how he was ripped away maybe he would disappear when she blinked, perhaps the glimmering thread of mystery that brought him back would be snipped. It was at that moment Martha wanted to tell her son about the day her world ended. It happened when a lieutenant and a chaplain showed up on her doorstep. She could never forget how she opened the screen door and how, when she saw their hanging faces, she knew, she *knew*, her boy was dead. The weight was too much to bear so she fell to the floor and gripped the braided rug to her chest. She yowled to the ceiling and rocked back and forth. The two men tried to pick her up but her legs wouldn't work. She kept falling to the floor, sobbing his name.

Her eyes brimmed with water and she bit her lip. "I've missed you for forty years. But now you're back . . . aren't you?"

She had this sudden and ridiculous desire to make pancakes for him. She would put strawberries and a lathery dollop of whipped cream on top. She hadn't been a mother for so long she backed towards the kitchen and worried there wasn't enough flour in the cupboard. "Are you hungry? I can make breakfast."

Eugene shook his head and continued to stroll around the brightly painted room. He put his helmet on the sofa and picked up things that were new to him like remote controls and a cell phone. Martha watched her boy in camouflage move across the carpet, his thick-soled combat boots left ridged prints behind him, bits of grass were matted to his laces. He looked around, his eyes moved quickly but his head turned slowly, cautiously, like he was measuring up a foreign and dangerous space.

"Your bedroom hasn't changed," she pointed upstairs. "If you'd like to have a shower or . . . "

"I'm fine, Mom."

"I saved your letters. They're in my room if you'd like. . . ."

"That's okay."

He wrote her twice a week and didn't spare her the details about being a medic in Vietnam. It was brutal and awful work. He mentioned the 120 degree heat, the rice paddies, the climbing greenness of a triple canopy jungle. The whole place was fertile and swollen with life. He wrote about what it was like to jump out of a Huey and run panting into the tall grass for the wounded as bullets drilled the air, as trees exploded, as grenades turned men inside out. He saw spleens and livers and chunks of skull and plenty of death. When he carried men back to the furious noise of the helicopter they leaked blood all over the place. Eugene mentioned that when they loaded up the wounded from an LZ there was sometimes an extra leg in the chopper or maybe an unclaimed hand with a wedding ring on it. The floor was greasy with blood and he watched men tremble in wide-eyed terror.

In one letter he tried to explain the swiftness of war. One second he was listening to a pilot describe a bar in Minneapolis and the next second that same pilot was a corpse. It happened in mid-sentence. They were flying over the foaming jungle, just skimming the treetops and chatting about this stupid bar in Dinkytown, when the windshield turned red, like a can of paint had exploded. The pilot slumped over, the helicopter began to spin, and the co-pilot jostled the controls. It happened so fast it made Eugene's whole body pucker. One minute he was talking with a man who dreamed about having a whiskey at his favorite bar and then—then, there was nothing. Just a red windshield. *That's how war goes,* he wrote to his mother, *it's as fast as a car accident.*

Martha looked at her son and wondered if he was a ghost. He hadn't aged a day since 1969—no wrinkles, no bald spot, no paunch, no grey hair—she touched his shoulder and felt the hardness of his collarbone. The heat of his living pulsing breathing exhaling body filled up her whole hand and she wrapped her arms around him. My boy, she thought. "You're really home." She saw their reflection in the television. The room curved into fisheye blackness and she rocked back and forth humming a lullaby. How, she wondered, would she explain the 1970s, Reagan, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war in Iraq? Her scalp prickled when she wondered how she would tell him about the fall of Saigon.

The air conditioner clicked on and she heard him stifle a burp. Martha pushed him away and smiled. *Maybe they're all coming home to us*, she wondered.

Eugene looped his thumbs into his belt (she had forgotten how he used to do this) and he looked at the framed picture of Vietnam again. He was wearing the same clothes: the helmet and earphones were the same, the boots too, he had the same splodge of mud on his chest, his baby face

gleamed against a helicopter. Eugene picked up the folded American flag and touched the brass letters of his name. Without turning around he talked about the day he died in Quang Ngai. It was so muggy even the egrets weren't flying but when they got to the LZ the grass was whipping around from the rotorwash and he could see three wounded men waving the little flags of their hands for help. He jumped out of the Huey and sprinted hard knowing that he would have to put his hands into blood and bone, he would have to grab arteries and reach inside stomachs. And while he was thinking about these unpleasant things there was an eruption of dirt. The ground blew up around him in a tremendous geyser of sound.

"Everything below my pelvis was gone," he explained. "I looked down and couldn't find my legs. My intestines . . . they looked like an octopus and I began to gather them up into my waist. I remember wondering how I would get back to the chopper without any legs."

Martha touched his shoulder.

"I screamed for you, Mama. . . . I was scared. . . . I kept calling for you but you never came. It just got darker and darker and you never came."

She knew it was impossible that her son was standing in her living room but Martha didn't care. She cupped his cheek and felt her throat quiver.

"Oh my baby. You're finally *home*."

Milt Harris drank hot chocolate every night before he went to bed. He usually sat at his kitchen table and looked up at the water tower. *Newgrange. Life is Better in a Small Town.* The red light at the top blinked like a reliable heartbeat. He had been a widower for seven years and his children were now scattered across the Midwest: one in Minneapolis, another in Des Moines, another in Sioux Falls. He sipped his cocoa and, as he did every night, he thanked his Lord and Savior for yet another day of life. Eighty-six years of mileage were on his body but he remained in sturdy health. He had to take a nap in the afternoon but there was no need to share this weakness with his kids, or anyone else for that matter.

When Milt finished his cocoa he put the cup in the dishwasher, he slid his legs into pajamas, and he tucked himself into bed. In the darkness between waking and dreaming, the black volcanic sand of Iwo Jima found his feet and he was walking once again with an M2-2 flamethrower. It was always a hot day in February 1945. He felt the caged heat of his gun and he watched himself run up to a hole hiding Japanese soldiers. A blast of fire scorched into the enemy position and he could hear them scream. High shrieks, like breaking glass, they lasted for a few seconds and then all he could hear was the firecharge that roasted from the tip of his flamethrower. The whole landscape shimmered in invisible waves of heat and

he remembered thinking, as he stood on the black sand wiping his brow, that this was the surface of hell. He felt like an archangel hunting demons.

Milt didn't mind using a flamethrower although he worried about a sniper igniting his backpack full of petroleum gelignite. The sound of sizzling flesh—how it bubbled and cracked as it cooled—that also bothered him. He killed hundreds of men, he fried them like rats, but that sound of cooking skin never left his ears. Sixty years later he could still hear it on the cusp of sleep. He saw the face of one Japanese soldier over and over in his imagination like a film loop that wouldn't quit. He was a corporal with high eyebrows and a mole on his neck. When he came out of his underground cave, he raised his hands and they looked at each other for a moment before Milt bathed him in fire. He corkscrewed flame in a tight circle and watched this delicate man run forward, trip, and land on all fours. He burned like a table and Milt watched it all. He heard the man scream, he saw fire eat out the man's tongue. His eyes boiled away in his skull.

Around this time Milt usually woke up panting.

And so it happened on the morning after Martha Erikson found her son that Milt Harris shuffled outside to get his morning newspaper. When he opened the door, there, standing on his doorstep, was a man in a Japanese uniform. Milt wondered if this was some kind of practical joke. The world was dim in the blue dawn sunrise and crickets chirped in the wet grass. A quilt of light from the kitchen window spread itself on the lawn and the two men stared at each other, unblinking.

Later, when he was asked about this moment, Milt couldn't explain why he invited the uniformed man into his house. It just seemed like the right thing to do. Maybe he did it because Milt was a religious man and the Bible told him to help out strangers but, for whatever reason, he opened the screen door and let the enemy inside.

"Please," he said with an outstretched arm.

They sat down and Milt looked at the man's cap, the insignia on his breast pocket, those familiar high leather boots of the Imperial Army. Milt studied the man's face and realized that, yes, this man looked like the figure in his nightmares.

Milt shook his head. "Why're you dressed like that, buddy? Who are you?"

In broken and faltering English the stranger said his name was Takumi Hashimoto. He was from a small fishing village in Japan and he claimed that he spent summers in Australia during the early 1930s. His accent was thick and his vowels were lodged in the back of his throat. He wanted to know where he was and he asked questions with a calmness that showed curiosity more than it did fear. Milt leaned forward and looked into the

man's black eyes. Takumi, if that *was* his real name, continued to study the room.

"I don't know what your game is here, buddy, but I'm not sure I like how you're dressed."

Takumi took off his military cap and put it on the peak of his crossed knee. He looked at the photos on the wall and spoke slowly as if to himself. "I remember Iwo Jima . . . and lots of fire."

This is the damnedest thing, Milt thought, and he pointed a finger. "Are you telling me you were at Iwo? You're only like—what?—twenty years old. Where'd you get them clothes anyway?"

The slight man ran his hand over the back of his neck and nodded in agreement, he blew out his cheeks and cleared his throat. Then, in a moment of inspiration, he unbuttoned his shirt pocket and pulled out a tattered photo. Bits of black sand tumbled out of his pocket and Milt watched the grit fall to the floor.

"My family."

In the photo, Takumi was standing next to an older woman in an ornamental dress. In the background a Japanese flag was caught in mid-flap and, just off to the side, a battleship furrowed its way out to sea. A seagull was suspended in the air, a blur of wings.

"Let me get this straight. You say you were *at* Iwo Jima?"

"I remember crawling on the ground. I was on fire and my hands," he held them up in wonderment, "they were turning black. The pain was . . . how do you say? . . . unbelievable."

Milt felt an urgent need to pee. His prostate wasn't getting any smaller and the damn thing made him scamper for the bathroom every two hours. He stood up and apologized. "Just a minute, bud. Don't go nowhere."

Relief washed over him as a clear stream spluttered into the bowl. He shook himself dry and looked in the mirror as he washed his fingertips in cold water. Milt examined his sagging jowls and liver spots. His left eye was rheumy and yellowed. *Is it possible*, he asked his reflection. *Did you kill that man in the living room?*

Takumi was thumbing through a photo album when Milt returned.

"I hope you no mind," the soldier said. "Please, what is this?"

Milt had very few photos of his time in the Pacific but there were enough to remind him of what he spent decades trying to forget. He turned one of the pages and pointed to a black and white of himself at a training camp in Hawaii. He wore a flame thrower and there was a sharp look in his eye. "That's me. I was in the United States Marine Corps."

Recognition fluttered across Takumi's face and he took in a horrified breath as he stood up ready to fight. Milt was an old man, he knew this, he knew he couldn't win a bare-knuckle fight so he didn't bother to raise his

fists. Instead, he cinched up his bathrobe and opened his arms in a type of surrender. "Do what you need to do," he said. "I'll understand."

Slowly, Takumi lowered his fists and snapped his uniform tight against his chest. They stared at each other and that's when Milt thought about the sunny day before them, he thought about the azaleas in the back yard, and he liked the idea of sitting outside with Takumi even if they didn't say much. He went into the kitchen and poured out a large measure of coffee.

"Here," he said. "Good morning."

Martha didn't tell a soul about Eugene. She worried he might be taken away or that, if he went outside, he might vanish as mysteriously as he appeared. She bolted the front door and busied herself with the chores of being a mother. She made strawberry pancakes and a marble cake that said *Happy ReBirthday* in large sweet letters. She couldn't help herself because it was just so good to be a mother again. Her hands became lively with work and whenever she passed her son in the kitchen she touched his arm, she kissed him on the cheek.

"It's good to have you home." She closed her eyes and hugged him with the full might of her old sagging arms.

They never talked about the war or, at least, Martha always changed the subject whenever she heard the words "chopper," "M-16," or "rice paddies." Eugene mentioned the black market tranquilizers they used at night in their hooch. It made the whole war calm and smooth. Illumination rounds looked like weird ellipses stuttering through the dark. Firebombs cracked open the night in a kind of foamy orange, helicopters churned the stars, and when Martha heard this kind of talk she quietly gathered up the triangle of his funeral flag and took down the photo of him beside a Huey. She buried them in a closet and, when she came back clapping her hands free of dust, she asked if he'd like cheeseburgers for dinner. "How about a side salad?"

They never talked about that moment when Eugene stepped on a land mine. Martha pretended it didn't happen, as if life had skipped ahead four decades and pulled her son along in a kind of sleepy undertow. Instead, she watched him pick up her cell phone and marvel at its smallness. He boiled cups of water in the microwave and watched frozen hot dogs sizzle magically on a plate. Everything in the house was remarkable and he moved around examining this and that with great care: remote controls, plastic kettles, CDs, velcro straps, a laptop computer. The television, however, was an assault of color and noise. There were so many stations shouting for his attention, like people at a masquerade party, that he finally turned it off.

His mother sat on the edge of the sofa and put her arm around him. "A lot's happened since you left."

Eugene looked at his legs and touched the pulse in his neck. "Has death been cured? Is that why I'm back here?"

Martha raised both eyebrows and breathed sharply through her nose. "There's so much to talk about . . . let me explain over a drink. You want some iced tea?"

"Beer. I haven't had one in weeks."

Eugene got up and went into the kitchen. She heard him foomp open a bottle and then heat up another hot dog in the microwave.

The doorbell chimed in quick nervous blasts but Martha ignored it. It jangled again and again, cutting the air in the house, so she put the chain on the front door and opened it a crack. Milt Harris was outside rubbing his blotchy face.

"Oh good you're home. Question for you, and I know it sounds mighty strange, but there's a rumor going around that your son's back from Vietnam. That true?"

"What?"

"Your son. He back from Vietnam, yes or no?"

"Don't be ridiculous. He died forty years ago . . . you know that. You were the VFW representative at his funeral, for goodness sake."

Milt leaned in. "I *know* he's back, Martha. My newspaper boy—you know, the Curran kid—he told me he saw a soldier on your doorstep yesterday morning. Says this soldier wore green camouflage. Whole town's talking about it."

"Gibberish." Martha began to close the door.

The old man who fought in World War II wasn't so easily put off. He put up his hand and gave out a low whistle. The leafy bushes next to the house rustled and a young Oriental man in a uniform stepped forward.

"This here's Takumi Hashimoto. He showed up on my doorstep this morning. Says he died at Iwo Jima. You know, back in nineteen-hundred forty-five."

Martha blinked a few times and made a grunting noise in her throat.

"Maybe we could come in and talk?"

The four of them stood in the kitchen and discussed what to do next. Milt wondered if veterans from the Civil War would return next. What if a Nazi or a Holocaust victim returned? What then? Takumi wanted to know why he wasn't in Japan and he kept looking at the photo in his breast pocket. As night fell they decided not to tell anyone what happened because both Eugene and Takumi needed space to learn about their new world. As for the media—"Well," Martha barked, "the media would be a

flipping circus. Can you imagine if they found out about this? We'd have no privacy at all."

The two missing soldiers went into the sitting room where they talked in hushed tones about the final minutes of what they called their "first life." They jolted whenever the toaster popped up because it sounded like the ching of a hand grenade before it detonated. They breathed in the air of the living and worried their hearts might stop beating. It was a ridiculous fear, but Takumi wondered if he might disappear as easily as he appeared. Eugene leaned back in a recliner and said he felt like Rip Van Winkle. "It's like I'm in this fairy tale and I've slept through the last forty years. What happened to 1969?"

"Maybe a mistake happen?" Takumi asked. "I should be in Hiroshima."

Milt glanced up from his hot chocolate. "Hiroshima? You told me you were from a place called Kure."

"Kure, *hai*. It next to Hiroshima, only five miles away."

Everyone in the room looked at Takumi and agreed, wordlessly, that no one should tell him about the miniature sun that had been dropped on his city in August 1945, at least not yet. How could they explain the million degree heat that turned people into shadows, how their clothes burst into flames, how bicycles melted? How could they explain the relentless pace of history?

"No," Milt whispered to Martha. "Things must be revealed slowly to these guys, like bandages coming off a burn victim."

They decided to spend the night, so Martha busied herself with a pan of lasagna. It was good to have guests in the house and she hummed *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* as she stirred a pot of bubbling tomato sauce. She reached for oregano and realized to her surprise that she was crying with joy. She wiped away tears with the heel of her palm and began to set the table. Life was good, she thought. People were in her house again and she felt . . . yes, she felt useful for a change.

Across the room, Eugene held the heavy drapes open and looked out at the night. Strange cars floated up the street behind their headlights. Lightning flickered in the distance, a rumble of thunder spread across the sky and shook the windowpanes.

"Get away from the window," Martha flustered. "Someone will see you and then we'd have questions to answer."

But Eugene kept squinting into the night, wondering what was out there, wondering with intense curiosity what he had missed.

The phone rang early. It was Lara Stensgaard and she announced that she was coming over because she had some amazing news.

"Now isn't really a good time—" Martha began to say but the phone went dead.

A few minutes later the doorbell began to jitter and Martha shuffled over in worn slippers to answer it. Lara was in a sweatshirt and a little girl, perhaps a granddaughter of some kind, stood next to her. The girl in white socks looked at the ground and gently kicked a leaf.

"I heard this impossible rumor about your son coming back from Vietnam and—oh, it's just *too* fantastic to believe—but I know it's true!"

Martha began to shut the door.

Lara Stensgaard put both arms around the little girl and spoke quickly, as if the words were pouring out of her, as if they couldn't be held back. "No no wait this is my twin sister who died in 1957, you remember? She came back this morning."

Martha stared. "Agnes?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Lara squealed with a little clap. "I thought about her last night and she came back this morning."

Martha bunched up the neck of her bathrobe and let out a snort. "Oh for God's sake. The dead don't change their mind about being dead. Once you're dead, you're dead, honey."

The woman in a Minnesota Vikings sweatshirt stiffened. "You calling me a liar Martha Erikson because I'm *telling* you this is my twin sister. I mean, look at us . . . we're identical. Okay we're separated by sixty years of age but even you can see we look the same. See?"

Martha sighed and held out her old hand for the young girl. "Come on, honey. We'd best get you inside."

As fields of light were poured onto the world, Lara Stensgaard sat on the sofa and explained how the people of Newgrange wanted to believe this rumor that Martha's son had actually come back to life. If gossip in the Huddle Café was anything to go by (and it often was), the whole town wanted to believe that lung cancer, heart attacks, twisted metal, explosions, kidney failure, and leukemia could all be reversed. According to Lara, people went to bed and willed the dead back to life. All of Newgrange thought about who had been stolen from them and, in every house, on every tree-lined street, their stories floated up into the dark. The dead hovered in the thick moony air, tethered to the living. A ghostly crowd filled the night sky and in the morning everyone went to their front doors, buoyant with hope.

Lara went on to say that she went to bed and didn't think about her ocular migraines which made her see weird flashing spots in the corner of her eye, nor did she think about the dripping hot-water heater downstairs,

nor did she worry about the unpaid bills. Instead, she climbed into bed and thought about the sunny days of her childhood. The next morning her dead twin was crying on the doorstep. The little girl had drowned in 1957 and for most of Lara's adult life she felt like part of herself had sunk to the bottom of that muddy lake. She still spoke of *our* birthday—never *my* birthday—and she wondered what Agnes would be doing if she hadn't died. When the little girl appeared on the doorstep, she mistook her sister for her grandmother and threw herself into Lara's arms. It was an odd reunion, but Lara carried her identical twin inside the house and made some oatmeal.

She looked away from her story and smiled at Eugene. "Everyone will be so happy to know you're home. We'll have to throw a big party—huge!—to welcome you back from Vietnam."

The old woman pointed her finger. "Now look here, no one's going to find out about this, you understand? This needs to be a secret. We can't go around saying the dead are coming back to life because everyone will think we're kooks. Besides, Eugene and Agnes need time to adjust. How would *you* feel if you were dropped fifty years into the future? It'd be unsettling, yes?"

Lara stopped brushing her twin's hair and opened her mouth to say something but instead she nodded at some inner thought and went back to straightening Agnes's hair. The swish swish swish reminded Martha of a scythe cutting grass and for a long moment it was the only sound in the room.

"Has anyone else come back?" Eugene finally asked. He leaned forward and cracked his knuckles. "Other soldiers maybe?"

"Not that I know of. Just yourself and my sister is all."

At that moment Takumi walked blurry-eyed up the steps for breakfast, scratching his groin. He pulled out a bag of rice and a tin of sardines before he realized he was being watched. Lara pointed into the kitchen and mouthed the words *who's that?*

"You can't stay here," Martha said getting to her feet. "Things have been complicated lately."

But the twin sisters separated by sixty years did stay. Agnes wanted to know if she had entered heaven and she talked about what it was like to drown in Long Lake. Her lungs filled up with water and the world turned into a dark apple-cider brown. She kept sinking and sinking until there was nothing but cold black. When Martha heard this she brought out some old toys and went into the kitchen to make some tea. Lara followed her and gossiped about the Currans, and the Rommerheims, and that strange teenage boy from the Kliekvet house, the one who wore black eyeliner and listened to death metal. Martha smiled and brought out a pot of sugar.

Yes, she considered, it was better to have Lara inside the house than outside it. The woman's mouth ran like a faucet.

The six souls became a community within a community. They knew it wouldn't be long before neighbors came to the door with questions, and the phone was already beginning to ring off the hook. Martha answered each call patiently and said that, yes, her son was still dead, then she glanced at his healthy body and imagined it being blown apart. The world had ripped him away once and she wasn't about to let it happen again.

After thick helpings of wild rice soup they went into Martha's backyard and breathed in the night. Fireflies created constellations of light and the moon burned up from the horizon. Milt went back to his house for some Churchill cigars and the three men gazed up at the stars. Smoke fumed the air and they sat in Adirondack chairs, the tips of their cigars floating in a black sea.

"When you boys were dead did you see a white light?" Milt asked. "Did a lifting beauty soak your skeletons like the Good Book says? I need to know what you boys *saw*."

Takumi took a long sip of beer and shrugged, so Eugene smoothed the stubble of his crewcut and thought for a moment. "It's not unpleasant . . . it feels like a syrupy warmness, like you're moving away from yourself, like you're disintegrating into something bigger and mysterious."

"No white light? No God?"

The two young men puffed on their cigars and said nothing.

"No God?"

"All I'm saying is I didn't see him."

Milt looked at his cigar and rolled it between his fingertips. "What's it like to die? What are those last moments like? Were you scared?"

Eugene said he thought dying would be peaceful, like going to sleep, but that's not right at all. "Your body experiences a lot of things over the years and you know how your muscles work, how your chest pumps, how your ears ring, all that daily stuff . . . but dying is brand new to everyone. The last thing I did on earth was a totally new experience. *What's happening to my body? What comes next?*" Eugene looked at Milt and tried to smile. "That scared the shit out of me. But it was okay afterwards."

What to do next was a question on everyone's mind, so they put Agnes to bed and gathered around Martha's table to discuss the future. Takumi wondered if this was happening all over the world. Was this a pandemic of life, a kind of plague in reverse? Maybe the missing were returning in Japan? Or Australia. Or everywhere. Or nowhere. What if it was only in Newgrange, Martha argued. What then? And while they talked and discussed and bounced ideas off each other, the phone continued to ring.

Martha peeked out from the heavy drapes and worried that people might knock on the front door. Milt suggested they leave town until they figured out what to do. He had a cabin in northern Minnesota, it was secluded by pine trees, it had plenty of grub in the pantry and they could weigh their options there. "It'd give us time to think and, you know, to cogitate on the situation," he added.

And so it was decided: They would leave tomorrow.

But when the sun rose over Newgrange the next morning Agnes couldn't be found. They searched the whole house but she was gone, she vanished into the night as mysteriously as she had appeared. Lara picked up the teddy bear on the missing girl's bed and sank to the floor. She concentrated on her sister's face and listened to the ceiling fan whir overhead. *Will I ever see you again?* she asked herself. Martha tried to comfort Lara, but she also prickled with a wild fear that Eugene would fade away. It made everyone gather in the sitting room and talk excitedly about what to do next. Lara whimpered in a chair and, during a lull, she announced she wasn't going to the cabin because maybe—just maybe—Agnes would show up on her doorstep tomorrow.

The woman daubed her eyes with a tissue and blew her nose. "It could happen. If my sister came back once she can come back twice. It's not crazy to believe it can happen again."

Lara got up, marched back to her house, and planned for tomorrow. She would have oatmeal waiting on the table. She would take sleeping pills in order to pull a new day towards her more quickly. "You'll see," she said crossing the street and holding up a finger. "My sister's not dead. She's not even really gone!"

Milt wasn't so sure though. He sat in the corner of Martha's house and clenched his fists in prayer until his knuckles turned white. When he was done he crossed himself and twirled the wedding ring on his finger. Slowly, he looked up into the distance and adjusted his dirty glasses. "I've been a widower for seven years, and if you ask me death is a design flaw in the universe. No other way to describe it . . . a design flaw."

Martha flapped around the house and closed all the blinds. She kept asking Eugene if he felt sick and she touched his forehead as if testing for a fever. She brought out toast for breakfast and, together, they sat in the calm space of a circle and listened to each other's bodies: teeth moving, throats swallowing, stomachs burbling. The whole room vibrated with the warm business of life.

That's when Martha began to sob.

Eugene stood up and put both hands on his mother's shoulders, he drew her close and told her not to worry. She begged him not to leave and, in that moment of raw grief when the old woman broke down completely, Milt decided that he and Takumi should leave mother and son alone. They walked gently to the front door.

Martha leaned into the muscle of her boy. "I don't have the strength to lose you again. I *don't*."

The front door closed and the house—which had been so full of life only a day before—now filled up with silence.

When Takumi didn't appear for breakfast the next morning, Milt sat in the kitchen and put his hands over his eyes. *Takumi's dead*, he kept whispering. He didn't even know why he felt like crying but the tears came hot and fast. He missed cooking rice for breakfast, and playing checkers, and he especially missed talking about the war. They shared stories about fear and lice and mortars and barbed wire and steel. Takumi was the only person in Newgrange who understood Iwo Jima and it was only last night over a bottle of saki that Milt said something so preposterous they both doubled over with laughter. "I'm sorry I killed you," he said, "but I'm glad we're friends now."

And so it was that the dead began to fade back into the pale murk of dawn, and this made Lara Stensgaard and Milt Harris concentrate all the harder. They believed an act of will might bring Agnes and Takumi back to them but they also had to admit that a reversal of some kind was happening and they were powerless to stop it.

"This is what the Black Death must have felt like," Milt told Martha on the phone. "It's a thief in the night. . . . Takumi's gone and you might want to tell Eugene to prepare himself. I'm very sorry, but I don't think your son will be here tomorrow."

Martha hung up the phone and withered, the roots of her hair tingled, and she remembered back to that summer when a draft notice arrived. That flimsy piece of paper set unstoppable events into motion, events that terminated with a land mine in Vietnam—that metal disc of explosives was the omega of her world, it was a dark hole she was still trying to climb out of. When it detonated, its concussive force rippled all the way across the Pacific Ocean, across the Mojave Desert, it cut through vast grasslands and fields of corn, and it knocked her to the ground. It was an overwhelming and punishing evil.

Martha heard her son in the next room, she listened to the weight of his healthy body move across the floorboards. She wiped her face clean of

tears and smoothed her hair. Then she reached for a photo album. She called his name.

They looked at pictures from his childhood and talked as the sun went down. Martha stopped the clocks, they drank coffee and ate sugar cookies, she told her son glowing things that nested in the pulsing fabric of her heart. They reached for more caffeine and tried to outlast the coming dawn. And as the moon swam across the sky, a strange calmness filled Martha's bones. Years later it would be this second goodbye she would remember, not the polite hug outside a bus station in 1968. Now, she could tell her son exactly how much she loved him, that he was a gift which gave purpose to her existence.

"I don't want you to leave," she said touching his face. She kissed his palm and began to weep. "I just got used to having you around . . . don't go."

As she looked at him, she couldn't believe this young breathing man had grown inside her womb. Why did she ever let him go? Had she known his loveable body would be ripped apart in Vietnam she never would have let go of him. Never. Never. Never.

Dawn was coming. Birds began to lift the sky.

"It's not too late," she said standing up. "Get in the car. I'm not letting go of you again."

She grabbed some fruit and two bottles of water. She talked in a flash about driving into the west and keeping him safe.

"Mom, I don't think—"

She reached for the keys and let out a shriek. "Get in the car!"

It happened in the gathering blue world of a new day. At first she thought he went back into the house so she moved through each room looking for him. The old woman brimmed with tears and patrolled the streets in her car shouting his name, she imagined him riding his bike around the park, and she saw him as a teenager when she drove past the football field. His memory lived on every street corner but she couldn't find him anywhere. Eventually she wore herself out and came home where she sat in the driveway and listened to the engine. Martha turned off the car, covered her face, and sobbed in ragged gasps.

After ten minutes she went inside. She had no idea what to do next so she reached for the folded American flag and plodded outside with it clutched to her chest. The grass was wet against her slippers as she walked into the park across from her house. She sat on a swing and felt herself breathe. The dawn was too beautiful, too calm, and she wished for a thunderstorm, something dark and windy and violent that promised destruction.

"Oh my baby, where have you gone?" she asked.

The world was silent and she watched the red light of the water tower beat gently against the sky. Oak trees shook in the wind, and Martha stared at her doorstep. She thought about that impossible moment when the missing soul of her boy returned. And now there were so many empty doorsteps in front of her waiting to be filled. Each one glowed in a pool of hopeful light. She pulled the flag closer to her chest.

Come home to me again, she demanded. Come *home*.

SCOTT BANVILLE

Desert Rising

This then is the desert rising
across the sea valley floor
strewn beneath a nervous
sun—the desert rose
abloom with great patches
of furtive green and
amber;—the desert rose
slowly, the sun nervous
shimmering overhead
across the valley floor and
beyond.

then the moon corpulent in
its glory skidding as the
waves lapping salt across
and chapped cheeks, a tender
hand at the bungalow window
overlooking the desert. the
ripples imprinted and salt
etched as—the desert rose
beneath the nervous shimmering
moonlight—at the window passing
the desert and two spoons on
the table; rock and sand and
brush where the desert spiraling
south and east rising into hills
and then high, the desert rose
into; ever grasping worshiper of
the shimmering nervous sun—a

quaint brick ranch—the window
sitting close; the desert rose;
beautiful in mauve and grey—
the sand and rock rising
grey among patches of verdant
tufts—she paces and fritters.

this then, is the desert rose
slowly unfolding itself, uncurling
secret depths and deaths,
pruned and cutting wickedly.
the hand and lips—caked
in desert salt sweat, rising beneath.
shimmering sea star moons.

Word by Word

The night before; she
having been asked,
sunlight drifting dust—
a belly white, furred softly
kissed and faintly leopard
spotted, purring—sunlight softly
kissing the opposite wall, the
bed curled and luxuriating this
morning softly sunlit window
drapes glass glowing, the wall
opposite, and purring bellow—softly
kiss, faintly leopard spotted belly—
the night before, a week or the
window ablaze and softly sunlit
a box red velvet white satin lined
a month or more; that meaning
she pondering—gently forcibly
kissed—and the night before
having been, asked,—a kitten purring
the bread having been made; the
light from window ablaze kissing
ruby red—the window—the wall
and drapes swaying gently
dust lingering in sunlight kissed
wall opposite on the morning after—
having been asked the night before.
hand tucked under cheek.
the sheets white blaze in sunlit room
this morning after having been asked;
the night before, she. grey kitten
eyed, having been asked she . . .

North and East of Boise

We know we know the
clear blue crystal high
sky—we know we have the
burnt umber brown hills
aflame with flowers purple
and yellow ablaze with the
crimson red and odors
of spring sliver springs and
slipping summer light until
9:30 or later the further
north and dawning brilliant
lights at night over the
horizon we know we the
slow stamp and seep. of
moisture from brows and
we know this landscape now
the river gushing gullies and
rocks turned pebbles smooth.
floating across the bottom we
know. the slow erasure of ourselves.

TERRY W. THOMPSON

"They Had Everything They Needed":
Autonomy as Sub-Text in Du Maurier's "The Birds"

In "Don't Look Now," Gina Wisker declares that Daphne Du Maurier's literary canon "is undergoing a full scale revival today," but "chief among the work of this great writer of romantic fictions to undergo such re-examination is her work in the Gothic and in horror" (19). One of the author's horror tales that merits such renewed interest is "The Birds," a story which captures, according to Richard Kelly, "the sense of dislocation" (143) that marked the first half of the 20th century, a turbulent time when millions perished in conflict, and millions more were turned into starving, hollow-eyed refugees. Yet despite its popularity, or perhaps because of it, this 1952 short story—upon which Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film is very loosely based—has been largely ignored by literary critics. There have been but a handful of efforts, most done in passing, to examine this grim narrative of nature turned suddenly and inexplicably murderous. The few critics who have written about Du Maurier's fiction have preferred instead to focus on her bestselling Gothic novels, *Rebecca* and *Jamaica Inn*, both of which were also made into popular movies by Hitchcock.

According to Brad Leithauser, a successful horror tale "is at once unsettling in its aims [yet] comfortingly old-fashioned in its conventions" (20). Jack Sullivan, in his seminal *Elegant Nightmares*, adds that all of "the better stories" in the horror genre "have larger reverberations" lurking just beneath their outwardly placid surfaces (10). Although "The Birds" is commonly consigned a low rung on the fiction ladder and seen by most as mere escapist thrill, just another tale of doomsday, there is nonetheless a subtle and "comfortingly old-fashioned" sub-text—"a larger reverberation"—in this account of an isolated family on the Cornwall peninsula who must survive long nights of terror when besieged by gulls, sparrows, starlings, finches, et al. The important principle underpinning the author's "straightforward and clear" (Kelly 142) prose concerns the autonomy of the common people—not San Francisco attorneys and

designer-clad socialites as in the film. According to biographer Richard Kelly, Dame Du Maurier was an outspoken champion of "the traditional values [and] the fierce spirit of independence and patriotism of the people of Cornwall," the author's adopted home county for more than fifty years (117). She even became a member of *Mebyon Kernow* (Cornish for "Sons of Cornwall") and worked to bring self-rule to the remote peninsula, so distrusting was she of centralized government in faraway London. In this, her most famous short story, Du Maurier offers a paean to those uncomplicated Cornish citizens whom she called "an earthy people with an earthy knowledge" (*Vanishing* 22), flinty men and women who could triumph over hardship through self-sufficiency, resourcefulness, and common sense. And the author demarcates sharply between those few hardy souls who survive the feathered insurrection and the vast majority who perish by beak and claw in "this unexpected reversion to a Darwinian world of the survival of the fittest" (Kelly 124).

As the tale opens, an incredibly cold winter has come early to the rugged coast of Cornwall; and the frigidity arrives suddenly on a single night, December third, plunging all of the windy county into Arctic temperatures. Nat Hocken, the working-class protagonist, is a married father of two who works as a handyman on the large farm of a well-to-do neighbor. A man who has known troubled times—a decade before, he was badly wounded during a Luftwaffe attack on Plymouth—Nat is a quiet, unassuming, but insightful fellow who makes his living with his hands; he does "hedging, thatching, repairs to the farm buildings [but] he liked best to work alone" ("Birds" 33). He is most contented when "given a bank to build up, or a gate to mend at the far end of the peninsula, where the sea surrounded the farmland on either side" (33). In short, he can—without aid or supervision—skillfully repair, patch, craft, assemble, or fabricate whatever the situation demands. Hence, from the opening paragraphs of the story, Nat's Emersonian aura of self-reliance is brought to the fore, and this stubbornly autonomous approach to living will hold him in excellent stead once the birds commence their attacks.

Unlike the Triggs—the husband and wife owners of the large farm on which he labors—Nat is serious and observant, is a quiet student of nature. He studies the tides, watches the waves, marks the arrival of the seasons, and pays especially close attention to the weather. He can quickly divine, for example, if a dark cloud heralds sleet or snow, hard rain or drizzle. Because he spends so much of the day outdoors and always takes the "time to look about him" (52), Nat is the first to notice that the birds of southwest Britain have begun to behave oddly after the sudden cold snap, have changed their behavior patterns ever so slightly—an event that goes unnoticed by others, especially those who live hurried lifestyles

filled with bustle, noise, gadgetry, and other such distractions. In marked contrast to them, Nat—who lives a simple life close to the soil—is attuned to "the rhythm and ritual" of nature, often "sitting on the cliff's edge" to eat his lunchtime pasty and "watch the birds" as they swoop and soar in the gray sky (33). And while observing their aerial maneuvers this December day, he begins to intuit that something is not right. The birds seem "more restless than ever this fall" (34); and he has never beheld "great flocks like these," nor heard "such clamour" ringing down from the heavens (35).

Three attacks come on the first night, and each escalates in size and ferocity. The initial one occurs when, just after two o'clock, the howling of the east wind awakens Nat: "It sounded hollow in the chimney, and a loose slate rattled on the roof" (35). He pulls the bedcovers tighter around himself, snuggles against his wife for extra warmth, and tries to go back to sleep, but he cannot shake his odd sense "of misgiving without cause"; he then hears a faint "tapping on the window" (35). Nat goes over to check for the source of the noise, and upon raising the sash, a tiny bird pecks "his knuckles, grazing his skin" (35)—and drawing the first blood of what will metastasize into a life or death conflict involving countless numbers of combatants. After licking the cuts on his hand, Nat dismisses this bizarre bit of aggression as merely a frightened bird striking out in panic after being blown to the sill by the east wind.

The second skirmish occurs at the same window just a few minutes later. A louder tapping, "this time more forceful, more insistent" (36), awakens Nat's wife. At her urging, the dutiful husband again rises and goes over to drive away the little trespasser. When Nat opens the window, however, "there was not one bird upon the sill but half a dozen; they flew straight into his face, attacking him" (36). This time, more angry than surprised, Nat fights back, "striking out at them with his arms, scattering them; like the first one, they flew over the roof and disappeared. Quickly he let the window fall and latched it" (36).

The third attack on the opening night of the bird war is the most vicious, the most terrifying, and it comes but a moment after the two initial probes by the feathered vanguard. Still baffled by the aggressiveness of the birds on the window sill, still rubbing his wounded knuckles, Nat and his wife hear screams coming from the bedroom across the hall where their two small children sleep. Nat rushes to their room, throws wide the door, and is immediately enveloped by dozens of flapping, screeching invaders: "The window was wide open. Through it came the birds, hitting first the ceiling and the walls, then swerving in mid-flight, turning to the children in their beds" (36). After pushing his son and daughter to safety in the hallway, Nat grabs a heavy blanket and begins to whirl it around his

head like a flail, downing birds by the score: "The blanket became a weapon of defence" (37). When the attackers try to peck his eyes, he turns the coverlet into a makeshift helmet and beaver, cleverly wrapping it "about his head" (37) for protection; he then makes fists and whirls his arms like bolos, killing bird after bird until "the whirring of the wings had ceased" (37).

"How long he fought with them in the darkness he could not tell," but upon removing his improvised headgear, Nat gazes down "at the little corpses. . . . there must have been fifty of them lying there upon the floor. There were robins, finches, sparrows, blue tits, larks, and bramblings. . . . Some had lost feathers in the fight; others had blood, his blood, upon their beaks" (37). In this first battle, because of quick thinking and inventiveness, Nat saves his children and inflicts heavy losses upon the enemy. Although he is badly "shaken, dazed almost by the events" (38), he does not scream, panic, or flee, does not undertake ineffectual measures—nor does Nat wait for rescue by the authorities as his more docile, dependent countrymen will later do. Instead, he uses means both simple and efficient to slay fifty adversaries with a logical, low-tech, and adaptive response to a threat.

When morning arrives, after making sure that his wife and children will be safe without him for a while, Nat hikes over to the Trigg farm to see if his employers encountered any problems with birds during the night. The husband is away on business, but at the main house, Nat finds the "beaming, broad" Mrs. Trigg cheerfully "singing in the kitchen," completely oblivious to what is going on in nature—in large part because she has her omnipresent "wireless making a background to her song" (41). Nat describes to Mrs. Trigg "what had happened, but he could see from her eyes that she thought his story was the result of a nightmare" (41). Even when he tries to express the gravity of his fears, she only smiles and quips, "'Sure they were real birds . . . with proper feathers and all? Not the funny-shaped kind that the men see after closing hours on a Saturday night?'" (41). Politely but dismissively, she turns and goes "back into the kitchen" (41), there to resume her sing-along with the always-on radio. Exasperated by her indifference, Nat starts the long trek back to his cottage. Along the way, he encounters Jim, a cowherd employed by the Triggs, but "Jim was no more interested than Mrs. Trigg had been" (42). Nat alone interprets the omens in the sky and discerns that something "unnatural, queer" (43) is taking place in nature; so humans must prepare to meet the challenge as the once "familiar turns into the monstrous" (Wisker 24).

In Book Four of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the title character is marooned on an island inhabited by the Houyhnhnms, a species of

highly rational horses. At one point during his stay, Gulliver struggles to explain to his equine hosts—in one of the most memorable lines in the entire book—the convoluted interdependency, and thus weakness, of English society: "I assured him that this whole globe of earth must be at least three times gone round, before one of our better female *Yahoos* could get her breakfast, or a cup to put it in" (Swift 275). In her signature short story, Du Maurier is clearly stressing a similar theme; for when the birds turn murderous, the people who do not survive lead frivolous, dependent, and distracted lives, lives focused upon style but not substance, upon ephemeral desires rather than essential needs. For instance, when Nat goes to a public telephone and endeavors to "pass the message on" concerning the urgency of the bird threat, the "laconic, weary" (50), and preoccupied operator on the other end of the line is unimpressed, seems more concerned with diversion and entertainment than emergency. Frustrated yet again, Nat concludes that "She hopes to go to the pictures tonight. She'll squeeze some fellow's hand, and point up at the sky, and 'Look at all them birds!' She doesn't care" (50). Meanwhile, in the big cities, Nat knows that "There would be parties tonight . . . like the ones they gave on election nights. People standing about, shouting and laughing, getting drunk" (46). Still others—even after being told of the bird attacks—will "laugh at the whole thing" or simply scurry off "to a dance or a whist drive" (45).

Nat, the very quintessence of autonomy, complains that in London and the other urban centers, the people are not attuned to nature and are not self-sufficient. They are fed by farmers, clothed by woolgrowers, protected by constables, and watched over by government; thus, they are eager to rely upon others for aid, information, direction, and security. In short, most of his city cousins cannot think or do for themselves in times of crisis, preferring instead to look first to the civil authorities. In contrast, Nat's Cornish lifestyle is marked by self-reliance, common sense, and very few frills. In his modest stone cottage, constructed long ago, the bedroom faces due east to catch the warming rays of the rising sun and thus conserve energy. He has no electricity and few modern conveniences, but with his simple needs he does not feel disadvantaged. He has only one concession to modernity in his home: a battery-operated radio, a small "wireless," but, ever practical, he turns it on only to hear news from the BBC, not to be entertained by music, like Mrs. Trigg, or distracted by background noise. Although formally unlettered, he is a voracious reader, and for that he is teased by others, like Jim the cowherd who snickers that Nat "was said to be superior. Read books and the like" (40). Ironically, such sentiments turn out to be accurate: for blessed with "energy and resourcefulness" (Kelly 125), this Cornish handyman is far superior—in

the true Darwinian sense—to his less observant countrymen when it comes to the skills needed for survival in a world suddenly filled with millions of birds intent on restructuring the hierarchy of predation.

After subsequent attacks and a BBC announcement from London warning of "birds flocking above towns, villages, and outlying districts, causing obstruction and damage" (44), Nat again walks to the farm hoping to persuade his carefree employers to take precautions—board their windows, reinforce their doors, or even evacuate inland. This time, he is met by the "cheerful, rubicund" Mr. Trigg, who remarks happily, "'It looks as though we're in for some fun. . . . Have you seen the gulls? Jim and I are going to take a crack at them. Everyone's gone bird-crazy, talking of nothing else. I hear you were troubled in the night. Want a gun?'" He then proffers Nat an invitation: "'Why don't you stop behind and join the shooting match? We'll make the feathers fly'" (51). Appalled at what his employer plans to do, Nat can only walk away thinking "What use was a gun against a sky of birds?" (52). He knows there are not enough shotguns in all of Britain to bring down the huge numbers of "calculating predators" (Kelly 126) that are forming into ranks above them.

Later on, when the birds begin to launch coordinated mass attacks, Nat's employers, as well as the faraway city dwellers, are too unnerved, too frantic, to pay attention to their feathered adversary and decipher any subtle clues which could help them survive the onslaught. But by remaining undistracted and ever "watchful" (35)—no music, cinema, dances, or whist for him—Nat soon begins to discern a pattern, a rhythm, in the assaults, and he is the only one in the story who does. He notices, for example, that the flocks only launch their strikes when the tide is high: "That explained the lull: the birds attacked with the flood. . . . He reckoned the time limit in his head. They had six hours to go without attack. When the tide turned again . . . the birds would come back" (61). This bit of tactical knowledge gained through careful observation gives him time to forage for extra food and fuel as well as to improve the fortifications to his cottage: "His work had been thorough. Every gap was closed. He would make extra certain, however. He found wedges, pieces of old tin, strips of wood and metal, and fastened them at the sides to reinforce the boards" (56). Moreover, he realizes that the birds are not launching indiscriminate strikes as the BBC believes. Quite the contrary, like a well-disciplined army, they are forming into cohesive units that are mission specific: for instance, the smaller birds, "the death and glory boys" (66), specialize in suicidal first-wave attacks designed to terrorize and disorient; in the meantime, "all the bigger birds [are] making for the towns" (54) where their strong beaks and heavy bodies will help smash open the larger buildings.

Whereas Nat's rational, low-tech approach to self-preservation eventually proves successful—"'We've just got to adapt ourselves, that's all'" (65)—the impulsive and "fatally inadequate" (Wisker 24) attempts at self-defense carried out by his slow-to-react countrymen fail miserably. During one of the six-hour tidal lulls in the fighting, when he and his family walk across the downs to check on Mr. and Mrs. Trigg as well as to forage for supplies, Nat discovers that the birds have already visited the farm, and because his neighbors did not heed his warnings, even mocked his working-class counsel, they now sprawl dead and disfigured. Nat finds Jim's body—or "what was left of it" (69)—in the yard, mangled by the birds and with his empty "gun beside him" (70). Inside the house, Mr. Trigg's corpse lies "close to the telephone. He must have been trying to get through to the exchange when the birds came for him. The receiver was hanging loose, the instrument torn from the wall" (70). When he should have been fortifying his home to withstand a siege, Trigg was instead making a desperate call to the authorities in hopes of being rescued—while Jim was outside blazing away at the sky with both barrels. When Nat goes up to the second floor, he finds Mrs. Trigg's "legs protruding from the open bedroom door. Beside her were the bodies of the black-backed gulls, and an umbrella, broken" (70). She is certainly not smiling and singing now. Absurdly defending herself with a furled umbrella—surely a reference to the inept Neville Chamberlain and his trademark accoutrement—she died a useless and silly death.

Since nothing can be done for his employers, Nat commandeers their automobile. Using it as a makeshift lorry, he begins to scavenge the farm for supplies: "'I'm going to fill up the car with stuff. I'll put coal in it, and paraffin for the Primus. We'll take it home and return for a fresh load'" (70). Later, as they pull away in the heavily laden car, Nat and his wife spot the mutilated corpse of the village postman slumped in a ditch near the gate to the Trigg farm; this horrific image symbolizes the breakdown of government and the general "inefficiency of the authorities" (72) to deal with the crisis. Exhibiting the clear-headed "thinking of a survivalist" (Kelly 124) during the reprieve between bird attacks, Nat makes "three journeys altogether, backwards and forwards between their cottage and the farm, before he was satisfied they had everything they needed" (70-71). He loads rolls of barbed wire "for the windows" (73), assorted tools and heavy planking, as well as "nails, tinned stuff," bread, flour, oil, and other such staples; then before leaving for the dash back to his well-fortified cottage, "he milked three of the cows" so that his children will have fresh milk (71).

Once the epic scale of the threat is at last realized by the federal authorities in London, their high-tech responses prove just as foolish and

ineffective as Mr. Trigg's telephone or Mrs. Trigg's umbrella. Squadrons of RAF fighters are sent out to engage the avian enemy, but the airplanes are disabled and crash as soon as they approach the huge flocks of gulls, magpies, rooks, and starlings: "What could aircraft do against birds that flung themselves to death against propeller and fuselage but hurtle to the ground themselves? That was being tried now, [Nat] supposed, over the whole country. And at a cost" (60). Unlike the calm, logical, and self-reliant Cornishman, "Someone high up [in government] had lost his head" (60) and ordered an impulsive, ineffectual counterattack: "'It's always the same . . . they always let us down. Muddle, muddle, from the start. No plan, no real organization'" (72). At about the same time as the planes arrive to do battle, Nat hears "gunfire out at sea" (59) and assumes that Royal Navy ships of the line have arrived off the coast to join the fray; but even if they fire their main guns into the "vast black cloud" (46) of birds, just like the Mosquitoes and Spitfires before them, they can do no real damage. Nat knows that naval shells will be as ineffectual at repulsing the avian attacks as slingshots are at driving back a gale.

According to Du Maurier, "There is in the Cornish character, smouldering beneath the surface, ever ready to ignite, a fiery independence, a stubborn pride" (*Vanishing* 19). This intense admiration for Cornish strength and autonomy often went hand-in-hand with her dislike for most things American. She deeply resented the idea that Great Britain—before, during, and after the war—relied so heavily on American aid, both military and economic, and as a result allowed so many Yankee ideas to adulterate English culture, from movies and fashion, to literature, language, and architecture. Instead, she wanted all of Britain to emulate the passionately autonomous attitudes of her hardy Cornish characters. She bristled at the idea that the United Kingdom, once a reigning superpower, had to solicit help from the other side of the Atlantic whenever in crisis. And there is a brief but subtle hint of this ethos in "The Birds." Near the close of the tale, when Nat and his family are hunkered down in their stone cottage and enduring one salvo after another from the attacking flocks, Nat's wife pleads, "'Won't America do something? . . . They've always been our allies, haven't they? Surely America will do something?'" (73). However, this momentary lapse into weakness and self-doubt passes quickly, and then the Hocken family once again turns inward, remembering they are more than just British: they are Cornish.

The sparsely inhabited setting of Du Maurier's best known story provides a meaningful canvas for apocalyptic events because it serves to further emphasize the enduring worth of self-reliance and resolve. In Cornwall—toughened by hard lives, geographic isolation, and brutal weather—the people have for centuries prided themselves on their rug-

gedness and independence. Nat Hocken exhibits the best traits of this hardy breed of yeomen: "[W]hatever 'they' decided to do in London and the big cities," he declares at one point, "would not help the people here, three hundred miles away. Each householder must look after his own" (47). But even more importantly, the isolated setting highlights the lack of an escape route for Nat, his family, and his neighbors. Throughout the story, the peninsular topography is repeatedly referenced, underscoring how these people literally have their backs to the sea. No daring military thrust, British or American, is going to rescue them, so on this windswept Thermopylae, they must make a stand, with no quarter asked or given. There will be no retreat or redeployment, no ceasefire or surrender. And only Nat Hocken—the lowly handyman who loves to read books, walk the land, and watch the sky—realizes this, accepts it; early on in this new Battle of Britain, when he tries to alert the slow to react, in person or via the local pay phone, he is ridiculed, ignored, viewed as an alarmist, a crackpot: "'Never heard of birds acting savage'" (42); "'Birds? What birds?'" (42); "'Lot of nonsense'" (52); "'Garn. You're windy'" (53). By the end of the tale, amidst the expanding "darkness and disorder" (Sullivan 131) of the bird revolt, those scoffers who called him "mad or drunk" (44) will pay for their stupidity with their lives.

Dame Du Maurier was very well acquainted with the Thomases—Malory and Bulfinch. And beneath the surface horror of her best known tale, there are subtle literary echoes, reverberations. For instance, she declares in *Vanishing Cornwall* that "Arthur is to Cornwall what Theseus is to Greece. His myth is everywhere" (30). The once and future king, she insists, "was born and lived, fought and died on Cornish soil . . . despite the claims of Brittany, Somerset, and Wales" (30). Near the town of Camelford, in the epic Battle of Camlan—"which put an end to the Knights of the Round Table" (Bulfinch 893)—the followers of Arthur and those of Sir Modred, the King's illegitimate son and nemesis, joined in furious struggle until the bodies of slain nobles from both armies littered the green fields of Cornwall. Much like the fall of Rome, the death of Arthur and of Camelot meant an end to the prevailing social and political order: a dark age marked by chaos and disorder would soon rise to fill the void. By the end of Du Maurier's blood-spattered tale of avian insurrection, the old order will be swept away, and a new and restructured world will await those few self-reliant humans who manage to survive the upheaval.

Well educated, widely read, and "obsessed with the past" (Kelly 1), Du Maurier knew her Bible as well as she did her Arthur legends. The forename of her tough, determined, and adaptive protagonist carries an important Old Testament resonance. "Nat" is the diminutive for Nathan, and in the Book of Second Samuel, it is Nathan the prophet who strides

into King David's throne room and warns the ruler—in no uncertain terms—that a day of reckoning is coming, for David, in a transport of lust, has taken Bathsheba, another man's wife, as his mistress. Even more damning, David has arranged for Bathsheba's husband to be placed at the front of the army so that he will be slain in battle. Once Nathan learns of the King's treachery, the prophet becomes the resolute voice of conscience and reason, a male Cassandra warning of the suffering to come if David does not confess his sins and seek redemption. So, too, does Nathan Hocken try to prophesy to those in high position, but he is likewise ignored, dismissed: "'Thank you. Yes, the matter has already been reported'" (44). Also, and most tellingly, it is Nathan the prophet who presides over the transition from the rule of David to a new monarchy under Solomon. Therefore, the Biblical Nathan proves to be a key transitional figure when the world changes dramatically; and so does his namesake in "The Birds."

Like a Roman road, Nat's stone house was built for endurance; so it stands up well once the birds begin their high-tide pummelings. Despite their enormous numbers and their eagerness to sacrifice themselves, they cannot breach the rock walls or the thick slate roof; and once Nat has skillfully reinforced the windows and doors, he and his family have a miniature Gibraltar to protect them. As dead and dying birds pile up around their house, "He scarcely heeded the attack . . . let them beat their wings, break their beaks, lose their lives, in the attempt to force an entry into his home. They would not break in. He thanked God he had one of the old cottages, with small windows, stout walls. Not like the new council houses" (63-64). As the attackers hurl themselves by the "tens of thousands" (43) against his stone home, Nat grieves for the many local families who live in the insubstantial and recently built cottages across the way; their inhabitants relied upon centralized government to provide for their needs, for their protection. The birds easily break into the taxpayer-provided row homes and kill without mercy all the people therein. "Heaven help them up the lane in the new council houses," Nat prays (64); for since they gave up their autonomy and grew dependent upon the state's largesse, he knows all those families are doomed.

As the story approaches its conclusion, on the table in the Hocken family's small but secure kitchen, "the silent wireless" (74) sits as idle and useless as a doorstop. The mighty BBC has been knocked off the air in what appears to be a widespread uprising, and so Nat whispers to his wife, "'There isn't going to be any news. . . . We've got to depend upon ourselves'" (68). He and his small family are thus completely cut off from the outside world. However, this "logical, sensible father figure" (Wisker 25) who survived the German Blitz can cope, can provide for himself and

his loved ones: "Food, and light, and fuel; these were the necessary things. If he could get them in sufficiency, they could endure" (68). Unlike the dependent and conformist majority of the population, Nat does not need to hear an Oxford-accented voice broadcasting from London to tell him what to do or where to go or how "to get his family through the harrowing hours" (Kelly 125). He does not seek to be coddled by a centralized government that cannot save even itself, much less hordes of dependent citizens. Left to his own devices, Nat will prevail, will survive this brutal mutiny by the bird kingdom against the dominant species on the planet: "The boards were strong against the windows, and on the chimneys too. The cottage was filled with stores, with fuel, with all they needed for the next few days" (73).

Chris Hopkins once said of Elizabeth Bowen's short fiction, "her multiplicity leaves the reader with much work to do in the way of understanding the text" (114). Much the same can be said of Daphne Du Maurier's most celebrated tale, for as the story ends, Nat, seated by the blazing hearth of his stone-built cottage, asks his wife to bring him the last cigarette left in the house. He lights it up, takes a deep draw, then crumples the empty packet and tosses it into the fire. According to the standard interpretation of the closing scene, this is the final cigarette given a condemned man just before his execution; and so the implication is that the tough little family from Cornwall is doomed. In the opinion of Gina Wisker, the angry birds will annihilate the four of them the next day, or perhaps the day after: "[T]he people will be destroyed, not rescued" (22). Richard Kelly agrees, saying "the conclusion of the story clearly suggests that the birds will destroy all the people on the earth" (125). In short, judgment day has come, and the extinction of the human race is at hand. As the "ordered and reasonable" (126) world is overthrown, Nat's heroic efforts on behalf of his family can merely postpone the inevitable, not prevent it.

Yet, given Nat's intelligence and self-reliance, his keen ability to observe, intuit, and adapt, Dame Du Maurier's ending is actually ambiguous: there is enough suppleness in her language to interpret this closing tableau by the blazing hearth not as a symbol of resignation or despair, but as one of stubborn defiance and gritty determination. Indeed, even though the dominant species on earth may be deposed—and thus a pitched battle in Cornwall will once again plunge the world into a dark age—Nat's "small world is secure" (Kelly 125); so savoring this last cigarette by the fireside can be read as a celebratory act after his latest victory over the wolf at the door. Against all the odds, via rational thought, human ingenuity, and Cornish toughness, Nat Hocken—the handyman bookworm—just might save his wife and children. And he will be the

father Aeneas figure who leads a handful of the hardy into whatever strange new world awaits them after the coming of "The Birds."

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WARREN SLESINGER

The Net

Of course, the net
comes open: mere cord
in the cold soak of nothing,

but a thought
runs through the words
into the net

that settles on something
in or about the stream
caught in the webbing

when the line dips,
and the knuckles on the hand
that cast the net

tighten on the line,
and a flash of silver
strikes the mind with nothing

to weigh and measure
the actual catch

but the tremor in the webbing
and the strain on the net.

Morning of the Mind

This is an inward morning,
A dream-haunted white
While his mind is idle,

And the sun is yellow,
A fluttering light
On an inward morning,

When the clouds are moving
Wind-torn and weightless,
And his mind is idle,

Head on a pillow,
And losing sight
Of the same morning,

Sun going
Over a bridge of clouds,
Mind idle,

Fingers with nothing
But a crumpled sheet

Between the morning
And his mind.

—for Donald Justice
1925-2004

Oracle

The water worried me
when the gray face that floated over it
in lines and patches to the shore

lapped and slavered at the edges,
and sucked at the sack of its tongue.
The water worried me

for a scud of white saliva was its spit,
and the gray face that floated over it
in lines and patches to the shore

tugged at the ruptured fundament;
its teeth, pebbles overgrown with moss.
The water worried me

when it muttered a riddle of bubbles
and duff as the gray face that floated over it
in lines and patches to the shore

crumbled at the corners of its mouth and eyes.
The water worried me

for it ground its teeth on the truth
that drew me to it.

White Blossoms

They overhang
the roadside in the dogwood's dark,
the reddish branches that separate and stretch
ahead of us, the sense of them suspended
like a breath

(the noise
and the noiselessness of motion:
the windshield wipers catch and click
the beads of water like minutes on a clock)

the sense of them
suspended like a breath, the moment
when the branches bend with them as white
and wet as we expect

(the space
beneath us splashed; the centerlines
appear and reappear behind the tripped
mechanic motion)

as white and wet
as we expect, the petals ripped and splattered
in the dogwood's dark while the wind

that snatched the blossoms
from the branches whirls around us;
the road so wet, it shines in the darkness.

Winter with Migraine

On the window, the flowers of frost
from your breath:

a glass

that glitters with petals and buds
while you write about roses

and thorns.

It is winter where you walk:
quiet buildings on a crooked street

to a frozen pond.

So you return to your room
where the table is set with silver

and crystal on a white tablecloth,

but the closet is locked, the clock stopped,
the mirror cracked.

You lift your hand, and it disappears.

MICHAEL COHEN

On the Road Again

"A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see—that's my idea of happiness."

—Isabel Archer in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*

I.

I don't like driving as much as my friends and family say they do. I'm happy to let others take the wheel, and I often think while driving about the things I would rather be doing. But this reaction is mere churlishness on my part, because driving is the Great American Birthright and long ago replaced baseball as the National Pastime. We Americans affirm our passion for driving by burning twenty million barrels of oil per day, a quarter as much as the whole world consumes.

Recently, I decided to reread Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* to try to recapture some of the feeling being on the road used to have for me. It took me a few days of searching used-book shops to find a copy that was beat enough. Eventually I found one so worn the pages were disintegrating as I finished reading them. My son Matt, visiting for the week, noticed I was reading it.

"Didn't you read it back in the day?" he asked.

"You mean the sixties?" I said. "I was a little young for it when it came out in 1957. I was only fourteen."

"Whenever," he said.

"You know I'm not sure. I was pretty sure that I'd read it in college, but not much of it seems familiar to me."

"Why is it," Matt asked, "that whenever I ask someone about the sixties I get that kind of answer?"

This was a rhetorical question, I decided, and didn't need an answer.

Truly, Kerouac's book did not seem like familiar territory to me. I read through Part One, in which Sal Paradise meets Dean Moriarty and they both travel, but separately, around the country. They are hitchhiking and encounter each other briefly in Denver. Neither has a car of his own, and

the only real driving that's done by Dean Moriarty is in the mountains above Denver where he steals a car and drives back down the mountain to Denver at ninety miles an hour.

I began to muse about what it was like to drive at the age of twenty. Did the early appeal of driving for me have to do with speed and danger? At least I can say for sure that as driving has gotten more comfortable and safer, I have grown out of fondness for it.

II.

When I was in college I had my first car, a 1960 Ford Falcon. My drive home every few weekends was a two-hour transition from the high desert of Tucson to the low desert of the Salt River, through tiny desert towns. Picacho was hardly more than a few trailers and a gas station, but memorable because of the strange little mountain there, Picacho Peak, visible from the road seventy miles away as I rolled through the Santa Cruz Flats, a basin area untypical of generally mountainous Arizona. Another town, slightly larger and once a railroad stop but by this time dying, was Eloy. ("Aptly named," said my priest friend, John Fahey, "after that despairing cry of Christ on the cross—Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani!") Farther north, around Casa Grande, some concrete slabs half-covered in sand were all that remained of the Japanese internment camps of WWII. Finally I would come to the cotton fields of Maricopa County and the little town of Chandler where I had gone to high school. I drove fast, much faster than was reasonable or prudent. The Arizona speed limit, as the drivers' manual said in those days, was "Reasonable and Prudent" when not posted, and those words were traditionally given a liberal interpretation by Arizona drivers, if not by Arizona cops.

Then my parents moved to California. After their move, on my less frequent visits, I would head west to the Arizona-California border at Blythe and then on through the Mojave, through Bakersfield and onto the old San Bernardino Freeway, the first one built in the country. Gradually the traffic would speed up, even from the highway speeds of the desert west.

The sensation of speed, by itself, does not seem in retrospect to have been a big pleasure of mine. But what got my blood pumping, I do recall, was *driving fast while everyone around me was close and also driving fast*. On the approaches to Los Angeles on the San Bernardino Freeway, the old freeway was level and mostly straight. Gradually, as I neared the Hollywood Hills and the eventual merging with the Santa Monica Freeway—I was going to Santa Monica, where my parents lived—the traffic would increase, and eventually I would be surrounded by cars, all

going faster than seventy miles an hour. Then the roadway would lift and turn as we approached the interchange where we crossed the old Hollywood Freeway as it turned into the Santa Ana Freeway. The formation of cars around me would lift and turn as well. In *The Outermost House*, Henry Beston talks about flights of shorebirds that "rise as one, coast as one, tilt their dozen bodies as one, and as one wheel off on the course which the new group will has determined." Our freeway flight also seemed to have a group will—the will of the roadway, at whose bidding we tilted and turned.

As it approaches the great East Los Angeles Interchange, the San Bernardino Freeway passes over, under, and through a series of connecting ramps that shuttle thousands of cars an hour among eight huge arteries of the most extended city in the country: the Golden Gate Freeway that comes down from the San Fernando Valley and hints at the whole expanse of northern California above it; the Hollywood Freeway, with its suggestion of the "real" Los Angeles; the Harbor Freeway that takes you straight south to the shipyards of Long Beach; the Long Beach Freeway that sends you on a more leisurely trajectory to the more touristic parts of the south coast; the Santa Ana Freeway that projects you down into Anaheim and Disneyland, which somehow models all of Los Angeles—what Kerouac called "the whole mad thing, the ragged promised land, the fantastic end of America"—in cleaner pastels and rides that only slightly exaggerate the highway cloverleaf swoops. Finally there was the Pasadena Freeway that ended practically at the door of the Huntington Library in posh San Marino and the road I was looking for: the Santa Monica Freeway, a straight shot west to the beach. At this point, my own formation of cars sped through similar formations whizzing to right and left, overhead and below. At the point where the freeways cross there are seven levels of independent, blurring speed in all directions through the air. Driving at speed on this interchange bears the same relation to ordinary driving as landing a fighter jet on an aircraft carrier must to sitting in the economy cabin of a taxiing commuter airliner. At the speed my 1960 Falcon and the cars around it were moving, a blunder probably would have meant an unsurvivable crash, without seat belts, with hard dashboards, in cars whose steering columns did not collapse—a safety engineer's nightmare of steel that was rigid where it should give and thin-pressed sheet where it should rigidly enclose. Of course I didn't think about crashes. I loved it. I felt jolted awake as if from a drugged sleep inspired by four hundred miles of straight and level, nearly featureless desert driving.

III.

As we find out in Part Two of *On the Road*, Kerouac's narrator Sal Paradise hates to drive and doesn't even have a license. He drives carefully, he tells us, but Dean Moriarty makes up for Sal's caution with his own speed and recklessness. By this time Dean has acquired a huge brand-new Hudson whose bench front seat easily accommodates the four people who are often riding there.

I got my first driver's license the year *On the Road* was published. I was fourteen years old. Because of a perverse Arizona law that put the most dangerous vehicles in the hands of the youngest drivers, my license was only valid for motorcycles and scooters like the Vespa I drove to and from high school. It was 1957, the year I started high school. That was also the year work on the Interstate highway system began.

According to Tom Lewis's 1997 book *Divided Highways*, a history of the Interstate system, around the time I was born in 1943, the number of highway miles in the United States passed the number of miles of train tracks. The Depression had spurred federal work projects to build state roads and highways. The Pennsylvania Turnpike opened in 1940; the New York Thruway was begun in 1948; the New Jersey Turnpike opened in 1952. But it became clear that these individual state efforts would never catch up to the national need for good roads for the hugely expanding car travel of the post-war period. In the 1956 law passed at the end of Eisenhower's first administration, the Interstates were supposed to be built in thirteen years; it took forty. Eventually there would be more than 40,000 miles of Interstate, each with access only by ramps, at least four lanes, a concrete roadbed, gradual grades, and turns so contoured that they can be taken at speeds of seventy miles an hour or faster.

Few people have written about the aesthetics of freeway driving, though Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays* comes to mind. Generally the charm of American highways is a wholly nostalgic one—like our strange obsession with Route 66—or is imagined to lie in the smaller roads, the "blue highways" on the map that William Least Heat Moon traveled for his book of that name. But in an odd book called simply *Roads*, Larry McMurtry makes the case for Interstate driving. I call his book odd because McMurtry's method seems to be to think about or describe places as he *drives by them*. The book is full of sentences like "I also passed up a chance to revisit—." "I wanted to drive the American roads at the century's end, to look at the country again, from border to border and beach to beach," McMurtry writes, and so he does, often driving 700 miles a day across the country on Interstates 10, 40, 70, 80, or 90 or down its length

on 5, 25, 35, or 75. Not interested in poking into strange places, he drives "the great roads" as he calls them, "whose aim is to move you, not educate you." He shares my prejudices for warmth and open spaces, preferring the south to the north and the west to the east, refusing to drive on I-95.

McMurtry is old enough to appreciate the difference the Interstate roads made in enabling us to get around this huge country quickly. Getting there is the point of the road, McMurtry suggests. Though they have adventures along the way and travel before Interstates, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty also have this attitude about roads. They are always looking for the "final" cities, the end of everything at the end of the road: New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and finally Mexico City. Unlike McMurtry, they hardly even talk about what they pass by, so hurried are they to get to the end.

IV.

"He gave a flick to the horses, / and with streaming manes / they ran for the open country" recites Derek Jacobi on the audiotape in my car. It is Book Three of the *Odyssey*, the original on-the-road story. I am driving east toward the rising sun in southwest Missouri on Highway 60, a road so narrow, winding, and old that it is all being replaced. I have just been visiting my mother in Springfield, and I am on my way back to Kentucky, where tomorrow I will be teaching the *Odyssey* to two humanities classes. I will also be chairing the English department at my college.

When I took on the chairman's job, I found I had little time left for reading and class preparation. Recorded books saved me during my tenure as chairman; I listened to them on the drive separating home and work, and the six-hour drive to my mother's house every few weeks let me hear whole books. I listened to Seamus Heaney read his own translation of the Old English epic *Beowulf* on that route. *Beowulf* begins and ends with a voyage. In fact, many of the works of the European and American literary heritage are on-the-road stories: *Don Quixote*, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

At the moment it is Book Three of the *Odyssey* in which Odysseus's son Telemakhos rides in Nestor's beautiful inlaid chariot, yoked to swift, willing horses, accompanied by Nestor's son Peisistratos. They rush from dawn to dusk for two days from Nestor's palace in sandy Pylos to Lacedemon and the hall of Menelaos. Later they return in an almost identical passage, at the identical speed. It is a young man's pace, and Homer's lines assure us that Telemakhos is enjoying himself. Telemakhos

doesn't do any of the driving; like Sal Paradise in Part Three of *On the Road*, he leaves the driving to his young friend. Dean Moriarty drives a travel-bureau Cadillac from Denver to Chicago without stopping; Peisistratos drives the chariot from dawn to dusk without pause for two days. Meanwhile Odysseus's own travels continue, but there is nothing to indicate he feels the pleasure of traveling for its own sake. He doesn't want to be on the road; he wants to be back in Ithaca in his own hall with his wife. "There is no boon in life more sweet, I say, / than when a summer joy holds the realm, and banqueters sit listening to a harper / in a great hall, by rows of tables heaped / with bread and roast meat." So Odysseus says in the hall of his host, Alkinous, but it's his own hall he's thinking about.

The Missouri road I am on is traversed with cracks badly filled with asphalt. Every half second the wheels jolt over the cracks, first the front wheels, then the back—klunk-klunk! Being on a bad road ought to be a metaphor for more important things. One has a feeling of not being able to escape, of being trapped, of having to go down this road, because of course one must: this is the road one is on; there aren't alternatives that go to the same place. After a while the steady jolting where the asphalt has been slopped across the road to fill separations becomes routine and I anticipate the regular rhythmic jolts, but every once in a while a new and bigger one will suddenly surprise me. I move out into the passing lane because it offers the illusion of escaping the worst of the bumps, but then I discover that lane has some of the same horrors and a few special potholes of its own. I can speed up, of course. That won't lessen the nastiness of the road, but it will add the element of danger.

Meanwhile Telemakhos has made it back to Ithaca, warned by Athena of the dangers ahead and so escaping the ambush planned for him by his mother's suitors, evil men who are . . .

A car changing lanes ahead brings my attention back to the road, and I begin to muse on how complicated is the notion of attending to the act of driving. "Paying attention" is at all times a very selective process. We constantly filter the information from what we hear, see, smell, taste, and touch or we would suffer a sensory overload. The mind that takes in everything is not the normal mind, but the autistic or obsessive-compulsive one. What you do pay attention to is the road, but "watching the road" is already an abstraction because you don't watch the road as a whole but portions of it, coming at you and receding from you in the rearview mirror. You don't watch the road as far as you can see (unless you are driving at night) or directly in front of the car, but a middle distance,

and even that you don't watch continually, because "watching the road" means being aware of what might come onto the road from the sides: cars from side streets or deer from woods and ditches.

Where is your attention during those moments when you are thinking about something other than what is before your eyes? When I'm driving and listening to a recorded book on the tape player, I sometimes suddenly find myself aware of having missed several minutes of the tape. My full attention was commanded by something on the road, this truck pulling into my lane in front of me, for instance. That need for my full attention may last only a few seconds, but my attention stays on the road exclusively for some minutes until I suddenly become aware again of what I was listening to and that I have missed several minutes.

The converse experience is driving and suddenly realizing that I have traveled some distance, perhaps a couple of miles, without being aware of the road at all, having been absorbed in listening to a tape or the radio or simply in daydreaming. Maybe a mile, maybe more. But I must have been watching the road; I have to assume I would notice a dangerous situation and react to it because I *have* come out of such reveries to brake at an obstruction or to react to a car I was approaching too quickly. I could come back to full road attention at a signal alarm stimulus like that, but in such a reverie I would have missed a turn I had been intending to take. My thoughts were somewhere else, and I couldn't tell you what roads I had passed, or stores or houses. What does it mean not to be attentive in this way? How many miles have I driven not really paying attention to the road or the passing scene?

V.

"We know time," Dean Moriarty keeps saying in *On the Road*; it's his mantra. He means that we know time is passing and the moment must be seized and lived: "we know time—how to slow it up and walk and dig." But this version of his refrain he speaks standing in the rain, as Sal Paradise is about to go west, leaving Moriarty behind in New York. "Damn! But the mere thought of crossing that awful continent again," says Dean, not finishing the thought. The road is the master metaphor for life, and the road goes on whether we are on it or not. At points in *On the Road*, the American road becomes both too much and not enough. It is too much in a scene late in Part Two where our travelers—Sal Paradise, Dean Moriarty, and Dean's wife MaryLou—are driving through the swamps of western Louisiana. These hep roadsters who usually dig everything about the American scene are suddenly freaked out by this part of America, so

much so that they reject it as America at all. "We were surrounded by a great forest of viny trees," writes Sal, "in which we could almost hear the slither of a million copperheads." Suddenly there is an "apparition" of a black man by the side of the road with his arms raised "praying or calling down a curse." They gun the Hudson and don't slow down until they reach the polluted air of the refineries outside Beaumont, Texas, where they can relax because they're back in America. "We wanted to get out of this mansion of the snake, this mireful drooping dark, and zoom on back to familiar American ground and cowtowns." But the American road is too little in Part Four, as Dean and Sal drive in a '37 Ford through mountains and jungles into Mexico, encountering marijuana cigarettes as big as cigars and whorehouses full of teenaged girls. Mexico City, where they are headed, is the dream city of this barely post-adolescent pair, "the great and final wild uninhibited Fellahin-childlike city that we knew we would find at the end of the road."

VI.

During this last Christmas season we managed to get the whole family together. I was driving my two sons—both in their thirties—in from the airport when Matt, the elder, began to criticize my driving: I was following too close, I was going too fast, I was running yellow lights turning to red. Dan, the younger boy, nodded in agreement. The next time we got in the car I handed Matt the keys. It never bothers me to hand over the reins—I don't feel the need to be in control whenever I get in a car.

I sat on the passenger's side and remarked, with hubris that now makes me wince, that I'd been driving for forty-six years and never had an accident while the two boys had already had two each. They were indignant. "But those were not our fault," they said, with perfect truth. Yet the actuarial tables don't make this distinction between the innocent and those at fault: young men, especially between eighteen and twenty-five, have more accidents—*have* here being a term neutral as far as assigning blame—than women in that age group or than men and women in any other age group.

I began to think back over those forty-six years and what I had avoided. What, I wondered, had the chances been of my being killed during all that driving?

I started driving at fourteen. My Vespa motor scooter took me all over the area south of Phoenix where we lived. No one wore helmets; in those days the proposed law mandating their use, ultimately voted down in Arizona's libertarian legislature, had not even been thought of. When I

left for college in Tucson I had no car, but I soon acquired my stepfather's 1960 Ford Falcon. In graduate school I had a used Peugeot 404, eventually destroyed by a drunk driver as it was parked in front of my house in New Orleans. I drove my wife's Chevy Malibu for a while. In 1974, with two young boys now, we bought an American Motors Hornet station wagon, the only new car I've ever owned. Later I drove a 1979 Lincoln Town Car, another hand-me-down, and a 1992 Camry bought used. Each of these last two I drove more than 200,000 miles. Other people's cars that I have driven for shorter distances, from a few hundred to a few thousand miles, include an old Volkswagen bug, a Volvo sedan, and a Plymouth Voyager.

As nearly as I can figure it, I've probably driven more than 700,000 miles in those forty-six years. Coincidentally, that's about the number of miles of highway in the country built with the aid of Federal dollars, including the forty thousand miles of Interstates. Almost three-quarters of a million miles.

According to California's Department of Motor Vehicles, drivers from the ages of thirty to sixty are at their lowest risk of having a fatal accident, which happens in this age group about once every million miles. After the middle sixties, the chances start going back up. Teenaged drivers are about four times as likely to have a fatal accident as those in the thirty to sixty age group. If a teenager drives as much as a hundred thousand miles, he or she has about a fifty-fifty chance of being involved in a fatal accident. Twenty-five-year-old drivers are about twice as likely to die in an auto accident, given the same number of miles driven, as their older counterparts from thirty to sixty. I worry about my sons on the road, though not nearly as much as I did when they were in their teens and not yet home at two in the morning. But I still worry and try not to think about the road's dangers. But I have it backwards, I reckon. They are right to worry about me—they are coming out of the high accident age. I am going back in.

VII.

Such a project as the Interstate system was an expensive and monumental undertaking, requiring 200 feet of right-of-way and many building's worth of poured concrete for each mile. Eisenhower was convinced of the need, but he had to convince the Congress and the country. He did it with national defense and the Cold War: the Interstate system was to be used not only to transport military supplies and troops quickly across the coun-

try, but also its wide roads would be escape routes from population centers in the event of nuclear attack.

As *On the Road* draws to its end, Sal Paradise for the first time mentions The Bomb, the other child of the fifties growing up in the sixties, the ultimate Baby Boomer. He says the peasants of the rural Mexico they're driving through have no idea that now there is a bomb that can destroy all of them. Hearkening back to a time before the bomb is a part of the book's elegiac tone; all the adventures Sal is relating are themselves now in the past, Sal has settled down, and Dean is gone from his life.

During the sixties I remember two recurring dreams. In the first I am driving to the north, from Tucson back to my parents' home (though by that time they had already moved to California) and ahead I see the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion. There is nothing to be done. I turn and drive the other way.

The other dream I still have occasionally. In my dream I am still in my twenties. It is in the west, somewhere, probably Arizona. I have a car—I don't know what kind of car. I apparently have money enough that it does not figure in my dream—what does figure is *time* and the *road.* I am free from school or work for some weeks, perhaps months. I realize I can go in any direction I choose. I can go south to stay with Dave in Tucson or Pat in Ajo. I can go west to see friends on the coast or just wander in California. I can go north to the cool mountains or the Grand Canyon, or east to the whole rest of the country. The road is all before me. I also have a sense that I will not take real advantage of this freedom.

LISA McCOOL-GRIME

Gathering Seed

This is a land of sprawling skies and roads
that never curve. Here summer tells its lies
in shades of green: *oh sure, the Northern Tier*
could learn to love you, child. Just plant your seed.
Me, I don't buy it. Even Junes that end
in lavender and gold, the fields of flax
beside canola, even these were won
with knuckles split red raw from cold. Forget
it. I am scouting roadside brush for wild
carrot. I am remembering the lace
that lined the hiking trails when I was eight
and nine and ten at camp, my tentmates still
sleeping while I was whispering my way
through the long grass. All paths led to the lake.
My face a moon over water, I let
the daisy petals drop. *He loves me. (Please!)*
He loves me not. The chanted: Mike, Mark, Jay,
John. Not enough in any name to cling
to the child's tongue. We were too young for that.
When Queen Anne's Lace curled brown, we called it Bird's
Nest, planted pebbles there as eggs. Today
I clip the dried flower. I crush the seed,
each teaspoon mixed with water drunk as birth
control. Summer can't fool me anymore.
Soon October will kill the green with snow.

The Bright Blueness of the Sea Dream

She wakes to a lightness, a bright blueness
on the walls, a fluttering of curtains,
something heady like saltwater on the breeze,
and it is late, late morning for there to still be,

on the walls, a shadow of fluttering curtains.
She drapes the bedsheet over her shoulders
though it is late, late morning for her to still be
holding embroidered starfish to her breast.

She drapes the bedsheet over her shoulders
like a ghost, walks through the empty kitchen
holding embroidered starfish to her breast,
a stitched seahorse on her back.

Like a ghost, she walks through the empty kitchen,
the screen door, the weeds at her calves.
The stitched seahorse on her back
would be closer to home in the river mud.

The screen door slams. The weeds at her calves
chafe, little switches of the untilled ground.
Closer to home in the river mud,
her toes dig, dig until her feet are buried.

Little chafing switches of the untilled ground,
this is her dream: to lie down in water, to smell
her toes dig, dig until she is buried,
drowned, final out-breath carried by the current.

This is her dream: to lie down in water, to smell
something heady, like saltwater on the breeze,
to drown, final out-breath carried by the current,
to wake to a lightness, a bright blueness.

Rising above the March Snow

When our yard was August green, not mud,
we lay on our backs gazing past midnight
to Aquila. Was it you or a nuthatch I heard whisper
what what what? We needed blankets.
Your shivering covered me like feathers, like flight
singing on the edge of spring.

Tonight our bones feel hollow. Our fingernails
itch to kill the frost. We scrape at windshields
barehanded, but the sky keeps its downy gray.
Our curses swoop earthward and rip
at one another. You spend two nights
with a sleeping bag inside our van.

On a drive along highway 40, I point out two
eagles feeding in the snow. One flies north,
the other south, when the blades of snowplows
come at them from the east. Both circle back
once the low growl has passed.

Poems Addressed to Trees in My Backyard

Aspen

I hear
you like
the ocean.
You know
my roots
have drunk
from soil
near the shore.
And though
I could brag
of the salt
in my veins
I must admit
you have
the dazzle
down.

*

Willow

In summer
do you wish
you were not
the only ghost
on the prairie?

Or are you jealous
come winter
when your cousins
like you are
sheeted in white?

*

Chestnut

I thought you blazed
yellow in the fall.

But here you are:
a crimson wall of stars.

What do I know? Perhaps
you aren't a chestnut at all.

MIKE FREEMAN

Postpartum

The snow had finally given way and the stream ran high. Up ahead a hummingbird elevated and descended amidst the blueberry branches, boring its needle bill in and out of the church-bell blossoms like a derrick. Unmindful of my approach along the bear trail, it sucked its nectar with aplomb while a spear of sunlight rotated the green-orange incandescence of its throat. The spruce lording overhead dripped what was left of the morning rain, the drops slipping into the mosses warmed by the needled canopy. Sun-shy, the blueberries thrive in the forests along with the witch-finger spikes of devil's club, and at this time their snowy bloom sustains the hummingbirds, among the first migrants to return. The trail was smooth. Brown bears wear it down all summer and fall, chasing sockeye, pinks, and cohos where they find them. When the snow lets go in spring the trails look nearly human-groomed before the vegetation leafs out. The bird let me get within feet, then raised itself out of the bush, flying to the snow-beaten salmon berries in the meadow across the stream. Unguarded by the spruces' thermal press, the sun-happy berry stalks were still bent over by thick clumps of stubborn snow made dirty by the thaw. The hummingbird, *Selasphorus rufus*, or Rufus, bounded from one stem to another, looking for the starry pink blossoms that weren't quite there, retarded by the lingering snow. It gave up, lifting above the twisting willows before buzzing upstream. A little further and I came to an opening, the first of several in the hop-scotched forests and meadows banking the winding current.

Bear droppings, wet and slick, lay spaced along the last of the spruce-shaded trail. Dark and fibrous, they reflected the vegetable-rich diet of spring. I looked down, where the sun met the shade. A wolf had been here. Four torqued tubes of moose and beaver hair, vole fur and bone fragment, criss-crossed one another in a fresh bear print. The canine's own deep pads had left tracks in the mud where the willow clearing began, the sharp, curved claws breaching the top soil to the glacial gravel below. By late spring moose cows range thick along this watershed.

Willow growth is lush in the soggy ground and they come here to drop their calves. *Alces alces*, the twig eater. They nurse them as best they can on milk and buds but losses are high. Wolves and bears have their own young to fret, and a thousand generations of knowledge along with ever keener noses lead both species to these same broken meadows, to sniff out the humid musk of moose placenta and track the easy, weakened feast at its source. I looked up. Five ravens, the land's myth-makers, its carrion-eaters too, perched high in a cottonwood. Their sable feathers absorbed the sun and threw it back in a gloss, and they simply sat, watching. They, too, knew what played out in this country.

I had my own stomach. I dug an energy bar out of my pack and chewed its gummy substance while a fox sparrow whistled deep in the willows. A ruby-crowned kinglet warbled its own croon atop the wall of spruce across the meadow, and I screwed the lid off my plastic jar and felt the year's first heat relief as cold water filled my throat. A salmon sandwich sounded nice, but there's no sense provoking the bears. I crumpled the bar wrapper and tucked it back in the pack along with the water. Stepping further into the sun I looked down at the fresh bear and wolf sign, then out to the willow expanse.

We're rather new at this, aren't we, this being out of the kingdom? Children, really, almost infants. Fifty thousand years? A hundred? Twenty? There's not much we can't do now, that I do know. We purify water and drink it from petroleum-spun containers. We live in cozy homes without much bother over heat and light. We transport processed wheat and oats, sugar and raisins, from ten thousand miles and more, sometimes through the air, the only mammals, in fact, that fly much at all, and this even to the moon. The stars, now, are sentiments to us, the satellites among them our guides. We capture every animal on the planet, every insect, bird, and fish, and study them down to their finest membrane, the smallest particle, then coin them in dead languages partly retained. But there are deader languages, aren't there? There was a time when I wouldn't have fussed much over sparrows or hummingbirds. There was a time when I wouldn't have been alone either, but in a band, tight-knit and stitched by kinship. It's no energy bar we would've brought to this meadow but knowledge, the same knowledge as the wolves and bears lurking out there as we lurked right here. We'd breathe in, deep. Words would've been in that air. Another breath. There it is, sticky and fresh, a sentence. We fan out. She's lying down, the mother, worn, licking the slick calf floundering in birthy grasses. The bears are out there—here actually—and the wolf packs, too, but we find her first. A couple quick yips by the discoverer and the rest come running—barefoot, hungry, strong. The mother tries to rise but can't. She is speared and the calf clubbed. Some members

cut the animals up and others spread out in the brush, crouching low, protecting both the fact and dream of this sweet loving meat we'd found. We're grateful, and express so in some old, abandoned way. Divinity, I'd imagine, meant something else then.

I shuffled the pack on my back. A pair of orange-crowned warblers, competitors, had joined the kinglet and sparrow. Upstream, over the spruce tops, the sun caught the snow on the distant mountains in fiery white lights. I enjoy this, all of it. I'm comfortable, even deeply moved here, but I don't belong. None of us do. That world is gone, the language lost. I picked my way through the willows, wondering if we've really found our legs yet in this strange, new place we've come to.

JOHN FAWELL

Film That Survives Literature

I once attended a performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II* put on by a theater company well-known for its high concept stagings. This version of Shakespeare's play about the king around whom suspicions of homosexuality have always swirled (despite the skimpy evidence history affords to substantiate those suspicions) began and finished with acts of sodomy. Throughout the play a naked man hung from the ceiling, twisted in rope like an abandoned marionette, a symbol, I suppose, of Richard's repressed libido. Despite these expressive features, the play was marred by all the standard deficiencies of a modern production of Shakespeare: hyper-declamatory readings, tons of spittle, and a general stomping over all the subtler aspects of the dialogue. The play was yet another example of how much easier it is to hire an expensive avant-garde director than it is to get actors who can read Shakespeare with ease and discernment.

The next night I saw Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* at a revival movie theater just a few buildings down the street from the theater that had produced *Richard II*. It was striking how much subtler and more charming this piece of low-brow entertainment was than the Shakespeare production I had seen the night before, how much more sophisticated in its rhythm and subtle in its detail. The film seemed steeped in a wise and lyrical world-weariness whereas the play seemed to shout with the bombast of a small child.

This experience of these two productions on subsequent evenings reminded me more forcibly than ever that film need not feel a sense of inferiority towards the other arts. In the 120 or so years that film has been around it has taken quite a beating at the hands of the higher arts, particularly literature, the practitioners of which tend to sneer at the gross sensationalism and popularity of film. And who could blame anyone for being suspicious of film when so much of its resources today, particularly in the West, go to making sure that teenage boys of questionable aesthetic standards feed well at the trough of popcorn and cherry cola. But that said, Billy Wilder's films still exist, as do those of Ernst Lubitcsh, Andrei

Tarkovsky, and Jean Luc Godard, to name but a few, and when we size up those films next to the other arts the playing field levels again.

Film's seeming inferiority is not due alone to its relative novelty in comparison to the other more ancient arts. I think it is due as well to a misunderstanding of its relationship to the other arts, all of which it draws from, as it is an aural, visual, and rhythmic medium—the great new jackdaw of the arts. It has suffered in particular by comparison to literature. The wordsmiths have always sniped at film the most. Just look at the long tradition of intellectual screen-writers who feel demeaned by their experience in the film-making industry and frustrated by the lack of celebration for their contributions.

Film should feel no shame vis-à-vis literature. In fact, it might, in turn, complain that its integrity has been damaged by an undue and excessive pressure born upon it by the world of literature. When I reflect on film's relationship to the other arts I see a variety of failures and successes. I would like to arrange that variety into a kind of hierarchy that works from the bottom up, discussing, first, where film has gone awry in aligning itself with the other arts and then discussing where its marriage to the other arts has been more beneficent and fruitful.

Film and the Novel

For example, I would like to nominate the relationship between film and the novel in general (the 19th-century novel in particular) as the most disastrous of all the relationships between film and the other arts. Because the novel and film are two favorite forms of entertainment in the modern era, the idea occurred early in film history that the two should be conjoined, despite the fact that condensing hundreds of pages of text into two hours of dialogue (and dialogue, moreover, that contends for space with music and visual images) defies common sense. The history of novels turned into films is a sordid one, a story of one failure after another. These films are doubly cursed. Not only are they bad films, they also tend to represent insults to the work they translate. Just as annoying as the films themselves is the cackle, left in their wake, of indignant literati voicing the eternal truism that the film is not as good as the book. Perhaps the most damaging effect of the novel turned into film is how successfully it confirms our sense of film as in inferior art form in general, and to literature in particular.

The most successful film adaptations of novels are those where the director and screen-writers had the guts to bowdlerize the novel, to find the slight, glancing take on the novel that would fit the abbreviated nature of film. Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* is one of the few novels successfully turned into film. Why? Because Howard Hawks kept the

atmosphere of the book and threw everything else out. On the other hand it is a pretty arduous task to summon the name of a film that was faithful to the book *and* a good film. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* comes to mind but that was released as a serial television show and is nearly 16 hours long. Even making films of exorbitant length is not a guarantee of success. Sergei Bondarchuk's justly vaunted version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is 507 minutes long in its fullest version, and though one of the most breathtaking spectacles in film history, it skitters along the surface of Tolstoy's tome. It seems more an expression of a lush 1960s mysticism than a representation of anything Tolstoy had to say.

In the world of literature turned to film, François Truffaut's dictum that good books make bad films and vice versa seems to hold eternally true. Film creators are more comfortable eviscerating less venerated novels and contouring them to the limitations of the film medium. Good novels turned into film result in numbing genuflection, lumbering pacing, and an annoying preponderance of British accents.

Film and the Theater

The other great tragedy in film's relationship with literature has been film adaptations of stage plays. Theater is a medium of words set against a background of imagination. In film words are just one of the ingredients in the mix, and the world in the background is quite real. Consequently, drama turned into film tends to come off as talky and static, and the background that film applies to the play often seems distracting and to be saying something of its own, quite distinct from what the play has to say. The most glaring examples of this phenomenon are, of course, stage musicals, fanciful entities that they are, which find themselves set, in film versions, among trees and hills that are all too real and earthbound to suit the genre. Think only of the film version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* where a cast that dominated the stage seems small and shrunken, and to be leaping around foolishly in a world that looms above them mutely and derisively.

Taking musicals inside and staging them on a set is not much more successful. Joseph Mankiewicz's film version of *Guys and Dolls* is a pale, lifeless reflection of the real thing. There is a compact between a theater company and its audience that does not translate into film. That small group of actors on the stage of a Broadway musical fills up a theater in a way they cannot a cinema. In film their presence is muted, not only because of the recorded nature of the experience, the loss of a live connection to the audience, but by the increased presence the physical world assumes when it is recorded on film, even when that physical world aims for the patent artificiality of the stage.

This is not to say that there are no intelligent translations of plays into film. Hitchcock, for example, was very articulate on the trick of transferring theater to cinema. He recognized that it was important not to open the play up to the world too much, that much of the success of theater had to do with unity of time and place, important virtues in cinema as well. There is a certain hot-house environment to drama that works well on the screen. Hitchcock saw that the energy of a work often dissipates when you set it, arbitrarily, among hills simply because now hills are available to you. But even his adaptations of plays, like *Rope* and *Dial M for Murder*, while often notable for their unity, are among his most static and talky works. The serious theater is responsible for a huge quantity of Hollywood's most laughable films and has mortally wounded even some of Hollywood's better efforts. *Philadelphia Story* is a marvelous film, but it does not reach the lofty heights of Hollywood's very greatest screwball comedy because it lists here and there under the weight of Philip Barry's lumbering dinner theater.

There are traditions in theater (and opera) that have had a more advantageous effect on film but I will reserve discussion of those for later when I get to the more fortuitous relationships between film and the other arts.

A More Successful Relationship with Words

Once you have cleared the field of the bad adaptations of novels and static, message-laden translations of plays, the relationship between film and literature seems healthier. As Truffaut has noted, the history of film translation of light fiction is not so tragic. Tolstoy may not have fared well in the cinema, but Patricia Highsmith has. There is a kind of innate sympathy between the short story and film as well. A gem like *Rear Window* owes at least part of its success to its source being from a short story, a piece of fiction with an interesting little story, but one that is short enough to allow Hitchcock to work his imagination upon it, to dress it up and play all sorts of games with it till it reaches, in his film, a Shakespearean level of complexity in structure and meaning.

The relationship between poetry and film seems to be a fruitful one as well. Tarkovsky's long takes and amplification of quiet sounds seem to represent just the right environment or context for his father's poetry in *Mirror*. Godard has created a cinema that builds itself around aphorisms and snippets of conversations that are as brief and fragmented as his images and sounds. In short, cinema seems more suited for the slighter forms of literary expression. It sinks under the ponderousness of thick novels and the heavy rhetoric of serious theater.

In the end the greatest literary accomplishment in film has been scripts written specifically for film. When we survey the most literate work in

Hollywood we do not, for the most part, discover the handiwork of transplanted writers like Fitzgerald and Faulkner but the clever craftsmanship of home-grown talent like Billy Wilder, Preston Sturges, and the Epstein brothers, or old newspapermen like Jules Furthman and Ben Hecht. These were writers who understood the place of words in cinema. They were tutored by the rigorous limitations the Hollywood studio assembly line placed on story construction and which required that a film should keep itself afloat, that it should maintain its grace and rhythm and not allow itself to be weighed down by a superabundance of words and ideas. Their writing respected the understanding, so vital to the success of classical Hollywood, and born from the art of the silent film, that film should, whenever possible, show rather than tell, that it should tease an audience's interest, make them puzzle out the meaning of the film visually rather than heap that meaning on their lap in a pile of words.

We hear various literary echoes in these screenplays. In the clever street lingo pitterpatter of gangster films and film noir we might hear the populist slang of Hemingway and Ring Lardner. The wild banter of the screwball comedy recalls the charmingly absurd dialogue of Wilde and Shaw, its manic but graceful pace recalls Viennese operetta. The more lasting literary influences have tended to be from the lighter side of the literary spectrum, not from the literature of epic proportions and great ideas, but from that literature the chief virtues of which are wit and vivacity, a musical charm and an ear for clever and allusive dialogue.

Film and the Visual Arts

If film has suffered from too much comparison to "serious literature" it has also suffered from not enough comparison to the non-literary arts. The influence of painting on film is, for example, routinely under-analyzed. Film-makers as varied as the avant-garde Peter Greenaway or the classical Hollywood director John Ford owe, in great part, their greatness to their lovely sense of Renaissance composition. Hitchcock, despite his reputation as a meticulous, even claustrophobic planner of shots, uses bright colors in the instinctual way of the German Expressionist painters he revered to convey feelings that are difficult to translate into precise meaning. The strange layout of space in Sergio Leone's films is due in part to his fascination with the off-balance compositions of the Italian Surrealist painter Giorgio de Chirico and the French Impressionist Edgar Degas.

Some of Hollywood's very good directors, like Frank Tashlin, have been cartoonists first. Anyone who story-boards their film first is looking at film as a series of cartoon images. And one of the distinguishing aspects of many great film-makers, Orson Welles for example, is that every image of the film seems to have been thought out in terms of its

visual impact. In Welles' films, for example, no matter where you freeze the film it seems you find a fascinating, meticulously executed shot.

Of course the emphasis on the visual significance of film can be exaggerated just as the literary significance of film can be because striking images, like baldly stated messages, are easy to see. But just because a shot is stylish or expressive does not mean it is a good shot. Orson Welles, despite his reputation as a visual show-off, was emphatic that a stylish shot should always have a reason for existing. Jean Cocteau noted that Welles' shots always seem to be from the point of view of destiny. Welles had unerring instincts as to where to set his camera. But he did not sprinkle his expressive shots through his film willy-nilly. When Kane's second wife leaves him his abandoned image is reflected infinitely in dual opposing mirrors. The shot is an extravagant one, just one of the many in *Kane* that take our breath away. But it is also the right shot for the scene because, at this moment, Kane begins to fall into a vortex of fear and loneliness that is well expressed in his infinitely diminishing image in the mirror. This kind of shot would have made no sense earlier in the film when a youthful and idealistic Kane sets up his newspaper. There, the hope and good nature of the scene is reflected in a fairly classic up-tempo bit of Hollywood film-making.

In other words, striking images, in and of themselves, are not effective. They are accorded significance by the logic of the story. They have to find their right place and time. Hitchcock was fond of speaking of the visual aspect of film-making in musical terms. "Don't," he would say, "put a great big close-up there because it's loud brass and you musn't use a loud note unless it's absolutely vital."[1] Powerful images have to be doled out with circumspection and in the context of the larger rhythms of the film. A film-maker commits the sin of self-indulgence when he has no longer thought out carefully the placement of his expressive shots, when the viewer drowns in a deluge of "striking shots." In these cases you have a kind of artsy parallel to the numbing effect of special effects in contemporary action films. In both cases one large, purposeless "effect" after another. In both cases a good deal of sound and fury but, in the end, little significance. It was one of the triumphs of the studio era in Hollywood to create films that were striking visually but never showed off or called attention to themselves pointlessly or excessively. Striking shots, yes, but only when they were called for.

Film and Music

Hitchcock's comments on the musical nature of film reflect what is the deepest relationship between film and the other arts, that is, its relationship to music. A musical rhythm is the most necessary ingredient of a

good film. A film can survive without particularly artistic shots. Preston Sturges, Billy Wilder, and Luis Buñuel are just three examples of great filmmakers who are not particularly notable for their visual style.

Language, too, is only one ingredient in film, and one that should, and often does, take a background to image and sound. A film that does not have something to "say" in words can still be a great film; the masterpieces of silent cinema, particularly those of Murnau and Chaplin, where there was an emphasis on using the minimum title cards, prove that. And in the postsilent film era, a dependable (though not infallible) barometer of film-makers' success is how much they wean themselves of a dependence on words and convey their meaning more subtly through sound and image.

But no film is successful without a sense of musical rhythm. And a successful and sophisticated sense of musical rhythm exists in the most disparate variety of film successes, whether it is the abrupt meter changes of Godard's artsy films or the quick, charming rhythms of classic Hollywood screwball comedy.

Certainly, I am not the first to emphasize the musical nature of film. But there is still a stubborn tendency in the most erudite as well as the most popular film criticism to read films in literary ways, to look for content, meanings that we might pull out of the film as we do objects from a box. It is easier to talk about a film in terms of content, in terms of something you can practically hold in your hand, than in the more ephemeral language of musical criticism. And yet many of the greatest films justify themselves not in terms of what they say but in how they say it, the satisfying ride they give us, their uncanny ability to keep the ball in the air for 90 minutes, the sense we have after seeing them of having existed for an hour or two in a world of quick grace and vivacity.

The bias against a musical understanding of film reminds me of the bias in the world of opera, for example, against the light operas of, say, a Rossini or Offenbach. These operas are often considered the more superficial in the repertory and yet they often prove the most difficult to stage properly. The virtues of these light operas—grace, charm, lightness of spirit—are often underestimated, not only in terms of the depth of experience they afford an audience, but in the difficulty of rendering them on stage. Too often the elegant mixture of charm and pathos in a lighter Mozart opera, so similar to that mix in Chaplin's films, is over trodden by a production aiming for belly laughs in the highest gallery or one that aims to redeem what is perceived as light opera with great dollops of seriousness.

There is in film criticism a similar reluctance to recognize the complexity and sophistication that goes into films that masquerade as lighter fare, films whose virtues are not in the volume of their drama or the seri-

ousness of their message but in the musicality of their rhythm. Hence the long history in Hollywood, in the classical era and today, of ignoring comedy and handing out its awards to its stuffiest and most message-laden films and to the actors who are most polished at mimicking the nervous tics of the mentally handicapped. And hence the tendency sometimes to value the visual power in a few striking sequences over the careful craftsmanship of a film as a whole.

As powerful as the work of the great visual stylists in Hollywood is, that is the films of Von Sternberg, Hitchcock, Ford, Welles, among others, the purest products of Hollywood are still, it seems to me, its lighter fare, the graceful comedies that issued from the hands of Lubitsch, Sturges, Wilder, those works that represent that unique fusion of Viennese charm and rapid American slang. These films do not have the visual power that the great stylists' films do, but they are the most whole films that Hollywood has to offer. They have the greatest sense of musicality, charm, rhythm, the greatest sense of unity, of beginning, middle, and end. They have the most spritely movement and the cleverest scripts. They, more often than any other films, avoid the conventional hazards of filmmaking. They do not bog down in melodrama or sermonizing or in artful pretension. They are the most successful at the Dionysian dance of cinema that delights, intoxicates, charms but also purifies and leaves us with a sense of having experienced a realm of lightness and order.

And despite the lightness of their subject matter, these films have surprising depth of emotion. Charlie Chaplin, it seems to me, struck the keynote for the greatest films in Hollywood with the pathos he was able to draw from comedy. Lubitsch, Sturges, and Wilder are all proper heirs to Chaplin in the seriousness with which they approach comedy. They were all masters at accentuating the way comedy can, when slowed down a bit, smile sadly on the foibles of human condition. They specialized in those moments where comedy bottoms out to wisdom and understanding. This ability to take comedy seriously, which is really a mark of a kind of world-weary sophistication, is a rare talent, as hard to find in productions of Donizetti as it is to find in film production. But classical Hollywood film, that provenance of the illiterate and anti-intellectual, had, somehow, that talent in spades.

Of course the spritely rhythms of the Hollywood romantic comedy represent only one kind of rhythm, though maybe the most important one for commercial films in the west. There are, of course, as many rhythms as there are film-makers. Godard's films are reminiscent of contemporary orchestral music in the way they abruptly shift meters, interrupt themselves, and shower us with fragments of sound, image, music, and language. Ozu gently layers one quiet, seemingly insignificant scene upon

another till he reaches a final moment that we only then realize the whole film has led up to and which settles on us with a disarming power and quiet. Bresson's films haunt us with a rhythm of footsteps and doors opening and closing that follows us out of the cinema and seems to impart itself to the world around us as we walk home.

The Musical Soundtrack

When we realize how significant rhythm is to film then we, in turn, realize how significant the musical soundtrack of a film is in establishing, strengthening, or complicating that rhythm. Bresson was a meticulous puritan when it came to film. He so believed in the natural rhythm of sound and image that he came to be suspicious of the rhythms that a musical soundtrack could add to a film. He felt it was too easy to manipulate his audience's emotions through music, and that music obscured the more natural rhythms of sound and image that he edited into his films, rhythms that he felt were more organic to film. Tarkovsky and Bergman are two other great directors who have an almost puritanical mistrust of the musical soundtrack and are very persuasive in arguing for a minimal use of music that is external to the drama of a film. Richard Einhorn's modernist soundtrack has opened many contemporary viewers to the power and drama of Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc*, but to see that film without the soundtrack, glorious as the music is, is to rediscover the natural rhythms of the film, the timing Dreyer employed in making us conscious of Jeanne's thoughts and emotions.

Certainly there has always been a generic soundtrack that deadens the senses rather than accentuates the rhythm of film. Stanley Cavell refers to the non-stop "Wagnerama" of *King Kong*'s soundtrack.[2] Today, a certain heavily amplified John Williamsesque soundtrack seems to be part and parcel of the cineplex experience. Directors often cue us, through music, to feel emotion that they have not earned from us through their script or through the pacing of their film. There is, in short, a long history of bad music in film.

But if I were to follow the admonitions of film puritans such as Tarkovsky and disavow cinema that was too dependent on music, I would have to jettison a huge portion, probably the majority, of my favorite films. Charlie Chaplin's great sense of unity is in large part due to his having written, himself, compositions that so perfectly suited his absolutely distinct mixture of comedy and pathos. Films as disparate as John Ford's *Stagecoach*, De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*, and Carrol's *Third Man* are all highly dependent on their musical refrain but are so rich in all other facets of film expression that it would be hard to find someone to argue that they were *too* dependent on their soundtrack. All three films are blessed with

moving refrains that operate almost like chapter headings, dividing the work into chapters, keeping the pace of the film alive, arriving over and over again, and, with each arrival, expressing a little more, having absorbed the drama that has developed in the film. Most of all these refrains lend, like a metronome, a rhythm to the film, reminding the film to keep moving, to not lose itself in excessive dialogue or introspection.

All three soundtracks serve a very similar function of binding the film together and lending it rhythm and yet all three soundtracks are extraordinarily distinct. *Stagecoach* has a rousing theme that picks up every time the stagecoach sets back on its course. *Bicycle Thief* has a moving, lyrical Chaplinesque (De Sica is another heir to Chaplin) theme that repeatedly returns us to the heartbreak of the father and the son. *The Third Man* has one of the quirkiest themes in film history, the famous zither ditty that seems to convey so well the fractured state of post-war Eastern Europe and which, despite becoming an international hit, does not overwhelm the film, because Reed is so expert in weaving the theme into the rhythm of his sounds and images.

There is, it has to be acknowledged, something artificial or inorganic in the way a musical soundtrack is layered on top of a film, a work of art that is assembled, ostensibly out of recorded images and sounds. And yes this music has the potential for great abuse, allowing film-makers to paint over flaws in their films by basely capitalizing on our vulnerability to music. But when the director has not cheated or overindulged in the use of his soundtrack, when it is matched by superb craft, and used subtly and creatively, then the artificiality of the musical soundtrack is negated, or at least easily forgiven, because it accomplishes the higher purpose of strengthening a film's rhythm, and a film's rhythm is its most important ingredient. Yes, the use of a musical soundtrack external to the action of a film points to film's mongrel nature, the way it is born from a conjunction of arts. But musical accompaniment will never go away and it should not, because film is, above all, musical in nature, and soundtracks make us more aware of that and often deepen the musicality of the experience.

One nifty way to use music in film in a less artificial way is to introduce whatever music you use within the action of the film. Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, for the most part, only uses incidental music, the source of which can be explained within the fictional world of the film. Howard Hawks is also expert in finding places within his drama to plant his music. His little musical interludes, like Hoagy Carmichael's songs in *To Have and Have Not*, are perfectly timed to create a sense of atmosphere and coziness, to knit together his small band of existential loners. And though you have to admire the way in which music does not interfere with the unity of drama in these films, I would be hard-pressed to say either *Rear*

Window or *To Have and Have Not* is a more unified, tightly bound film than *Bicycle Thief* or *The Third Man*, films in which the music is introduced artificially, from outside the fictional world of the film. The soundtracks in these latter two films seem to express the soul of the film, its deepest meanings, operating as contemporary substitutes for the rhythmic choruses in Greek tragedy; only in this case the chorus often has less recourse to words.

Sometimes a film is so deeply rooted in the emotions of the music that it uses that the film seems to grow out of the soundtrack. In these films the composer becomes, with the director, a kind of co-author of the film. Bernard Herrmann's soundtrack for *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, Pino Donaggio's for Nicolas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, Michael Nyman's work for Peter Greenaway, and Ennio Morricone's for Sergio Leone are just a few examples that come to mind.

Leone is a particularly instructive example of a director who understood the significance of music to film. Leone preferred, when he could manage it, to have Ennio Morricone write the musical score for the film before production. Leone then would play the music on the set, pacing his actors and his cameraman's movements to the music. Later he would cut the film so that his sound and dialogue fit into Morricone's musical rhythm. Music, in Leone's film, is not background to the film. It is the substance of the film, hence his love of tying the soundtrack into the film through musical entities that exist within the film narrative—Mortimer's musical watch in *For a Few Dollars More*, Charles Bronson's harmonica in *Once upon a Time in the West*—little musical apparatuses within the film that often trip off or quietly introduce Morricone's larger themes. Leone's films grow out of the emotions contained in Morricone's music and arrange themselves according to Morricone's dramatic rhythms, creating what has often been described as an operatic cinema, a cinema in which the movement and dialogue seems to follow the laws of music.

A Conclusion

In the end I would argue that film has too long been compared to and judged by literature, to the detriment of understanding its relationship to the visual arts and to music. Important as literary qualities are in a film—unity of structure, sharp dialogue, story logic and pacing—it is of paramount importance that the filmmaker express his ideas visually rather than verbally. And neither the literary nor the visual effects of a film are as important as its musical or rhythmic effects. The bias towards literary approaches to film exists because it is easier to appreciate films for their literary content, their themes and messages, than it is for the more ephemeral virtues of rhythmic structure. The bias towards literature in

film analysis is nourished by another bias, that towards "serious" art. The crowning achievement of classical Hollywood is romantic comedy, particularly in its most deftly screwball forms. And yet, except in the more remote regions of film scholarship, you would only annoy or amuse people if you suggested that William Wyler's *The Good Fairy* is a better crafted piece of work than, say, *Schindler's List*, so wed are we to the notion that serious subjects represent serious art and so successfully do portentous topics masquerade weak craft.

In the end, the triumph of the message film represents the triumph, in our era, of social science over spirituality. The message film makes us think, has a point, ties into history, can be taught in the high school classroom, and reminds us to read the newspaper more often. The musical film has a Dionysiac purpose. It offers us a cleansing experience, a sense of clarity born of existing, for a short while, in a world sweetened by intoxication but at the same time still governed by the laws of harmony and balance. It does not spit out a message in the end. It merely enhances our sense of well-being. Its effect is, for the most part, experiential, though it is not incapable of commenting wryly, from time to time, on the most profound ironies of human existence. The message film insists on meaning something, on saying something profound and didactic. The musical film aims for the spiritual refreshment that comes from having dwelt in a world of grace, charm, rhythm, and beauty.

Notes

[1]Charles Thomas Samuels, *Encountering Directors*. New York: DeCapo Press, 1972. 1984.

[2]Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979. 152.

DON JOHNSON

Going to Chatham

My grandparents would take me to Chatham
each May, on treacherous Rt. 60 whose
hairpin turns, my grandfather said, made our
tailpipe visible through the rear window.
I looked. My Virginia cousins said "tote"
for "carry"; "carry" meant "transport,"
as in, "I'll carry you to Martinsville
directly." "Directly" meant "when I get
around to it." They toted water from
a well and lived in a cabin my great-
grandmother had built—kerosene and smoke,
tilted floors, and a dark stair where Myra,
an older cousin, kissed me.

Today sunlight
probes every corner of that staircase like
a new cat, now that my brother and I
have prized off the rusted metal roof
above the steps. Myra no longer lives
anywhere, and the sadness of second-hand-
store mattresses and dust suffuses the air,

four decades of mice.

The fragrance
of honeysuckle that has brought me
so often to this bowed tread where Myra
and I stood is smothered in mid-August heat,
the thunder of roof panels my brother shakes free
from purlins like wet sheets. He needs help.
I'll climb on up and lend a hand

directly.

Heaney on Troublesome Creek

"Sing yourself to where the singing comes from,"
he wrote in my copy of *The Spirit Level*
quoting himself, after I had told him
about the wreck of the old 97,

how, when the engine dragged baggage and mail
cars over Stillhouse Trestle, killing nine,
eight dozen canaries had spilled from the sprung
doors and ruptured siding like poured gold,
gilding the bridge timbers, choiring in the rungs
of scrub pines, so that rescuers located
the carnage by listening to birdsong.

Then he told me about the night along
the bog when he had nicked a doe's hoof
with his car's fender. Bruises, he had heard,
could kill, and he stepped out into a dark
that gave up no sound. "A real William
Stafford kind of a moment," he called it.

At the Hindman Settlement School I thought
of these things on a dark Kentucky night
at the end of four days of writing, pulling apart,
and putting poems back together, when
students congregated after midnight
by the locked assembly hall and passed
their cell phones hand to hand like candles,
illuminating the pages they read
aloud: "Digging," "North," and "At the Wellhead."

JAMES POSTEMA

First (Double) Crossings:

Vikings, Christianity, and the Skraelings of North America

The town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota, typifies one of the most ingrained American traits—beyond, that is, its iconic identity as "the" American small town portrayed in Sinclair Lewis's novel *Main Street*. In a much lesser-known way, Sauk Centre epitomizes the construction of a European-American identity on a vast scale, reaching back a thousand years but still very much with us. The physical site of this construction is just a little ways out of town, in a clearing to the north, where lies a boulder that once served, it is said, as an altar for a Christian mass conducted by Viking explorers in the 14th century. In 1975 three clergymen, including George Speltz, presiding bishop of the local Catholic diocese, performed a religious ceremony in which the rock was "rededicated"; the Sauk Centre Lions, in a mixture of religious and civic commitment, still maintain the site (Gilman "Viking Trail" 4-5). This purported altar stone is one of many pieces of "evidence" used to assert that Vikings explored the region several hundred years ago, and although hotly debated, the idea of such ancient Viking visits was and to this day still is taken seriously in Minnesota.[1] But while many inhabitants of Sauk Centre know the stories of a supposed Viking presence in their region, few would know the history of the Sauk, or Sac, or O-zauk-ee Indians, a handful of whom, the history books say, had only a temporary and fugitive presence in the area (Upham 51, Hildebrand 20).[2] So on Main Street, USA, at the falsely proclaimed "Centre" of Sauk country, the Sauks themselves are dismissed from the town's history, while inhabitants of European descent cherish the notion of an early, and specifically Christian, Viking presence.

The displacement of Native Americans by (Christian) Viking explorers in written histories is nothing new. The 13th-century *Grœnlendinga saga* or *The Greenlanders' Saga*, arguably the first European text about America, narrates Viking explorations of what we now call Newfoundland and Labrador, asserting a Christian Norse presence in

America even as it displaces and belittles Native peoples. This narrative, and the closely related *Eiríks saga rauða*,[3] or *Eirik the Red's Saga*, have received much attention within Scandinavian studies, especially after the discovery of authenticated Viking artifacts at L'anse aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland in 1967, as well as subsequent other finds in Greenland.[4] Even before these archaeological discoveries, many scholars assumed that the sagas were fairly straightforward narrations of historical fact, and since that time a number of articles have celebrated the apparent vindication of the sagas' historicity.

But examining Sauk Centre's "altar" and *The Greenlanders' Saga* from an American Studies perspective, I would argue that they both illustrate an important American phenomenon: they are part of what Annette Kolodny calls "a signifying system . . . almost obsessively concerned either with isolating Indians outside of history (and, hence, apart from human progress) or with displacing Indian priority as historical fact" ("Fictions" 715). By removing Native Americans and their claims from the land and from history, the narratives of Viking exploration in Minnesota and in the North Atlantic provided a rationale for European-Americans to inhabit and take possession of the country. This is nothing less than the original seed of "manifest destiny."

The subtext of the Minnesota exploration myth is clear: in a land where many people identify deeply with Scandinavian heritage, it implicitly asserts that their Norse ancestors were here first. *The Greenlanders' Saga* also has a "we-were-here-first" quality, which has contributed extensively to the ideological displacement of indigenous peoples. The sagas' basic story has been quite influential in European-American conceptions of the early history of the continent, often in rather unfortunate ways. It is one of the "fictions that get told over and over again," in Kolodny's words, frequently serving as a vehicle for both ethnic and religious prejudice ("Fictions" 715). While the targets of prejudice have varied, the effects of this myth have been most costly for Native Americans. Kolodny takes her cue from Dakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., who told the Society for American Archaeology "that unless and until we are in some way connected with world history as early peoples . . . [Native peoples] will never be accorded full humanity. We cannot be primitive peoples who were suddenly discovered half a millennium ago" (Deloria "Indians" 597).[5] Kolodny agrees with Deloria, saying that "stories about the pre-Columbian accessibility or isolation of the continent ineluctably also became stories about the history and identity of its Native peoples" ("Fictions" 715).

Deloria thinks that there must have been contact between indigenous peoples in America and others from both east and west, well before

Columbus. Pursuing his belief, Kolodny has worked with Native writer Joseph Bruchac to help bring forward indigenous accounts of meetings between tribes of the northeastern continent and visitors from the east, thus linking Native history to world history (Kolodny "Who"). To understand justly the history of Native Americans and European contact, it is also important to examine the other aspect of this issue, to deconstruct the European narratives of discovery. In particular, I will argue that the *Grœnlendinga saga* already is asserting fictions about North America that cut two different ways: the *Saga* pits Europeans against indigenous Americans, but it also sets Christianity against Norse values—even as it co-opts and celebrates the Norse patriarchs' vanquishing of the Native peoples. Rather than being a stable basis for historical claims, as some have used and some do still use it, the *Grœnlendinga saga* is a very conflicted text.

Influence

There is no question of the sagas' influence in European-American conceptions of history. Many claims have been made about early relations between Europeans and Native peoples in America, most of them wildly distorted. Only the claim that Vikings sailed from Greenland to this continent could call upon any extant written documents as evidence in the form of the sagas themselves.

These narratives were first introduced to American colonists indirectly: in 1773, Benjamin Franklin wrote that "a learned Swede" had convinced him "that America was discovered by their Northern People long before the Time of Columbus" (qtd. in Kolodny "Fictions" 699). Both the *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* became known more widely in Britain and America after 1841 when North Ludlow Beamish translated them into English, using Carl Christian Rafn's 1837 Danish translation in *Antiquitates Americanæ* (Fry 18-19, 33-34). Just a year after Beamish's translation, in 1842, the sagas' basic migration narrative was popularized by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in "The Skeleton in Armor," which was inspired by the notion of a 12th-century Viking presence in New England. In this poem, a Viking warrior takes a Norse maiden to the new land (Rhode Island), where she promptly dies with various romantic ornamentations. In "The Norsemen," John Greenleaf Whittier imagines Viking crews sailing up the Merrimac River as he contemplates a stone supposedly left by early Norse visitors. Several reprints of Beamish's text, and later translations of the Norse sagas, were published in America throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Fry 18-22, 33-37). These texts were read so widely that in his preface to "The Norsemen" Whittier could confidently observe, "The fact that the ancient Northmen visited the northeast coast of

North America and probably New England, some centuries before the discovery of the western world by Columbus, is now very generally admitted" (37). Because the sagas were persistently accepted as authentic, their narratives enjoyed a great deal of cultural influence.

But the sagas' influence operated in a colonialist and racialized context. On one hand this influence has given a sense of empowerment to Scandinavian immigrants who sometimes felt overcooked in the melting pot of America. For example, in 1925 at a Minnesota celebration of Norse immigration to America, a crowd of more than eighty thousand responded with wild enthusiasm when President Calvin Coolidge "acknowledged their claim that a Norwegian explorer actually discovered America long before Christopher Columbus." A journalist present at this event immediately expressed the anachronistic and racialized manner in which Coolidge, the crowd, and the reporter himself had appropriated traditional Norse identity and values: "The great roar that rose from Nordic throats to Thor and Odin above the lowering gray clouds told that the pride of the race had been touched" (Schultz 1265). Similarly, Canadians of Icelandic ancestry also used the Viking exploration myths to form their own identity as Norse-Canadian (Wolf). As Jerold Frakes notes, "Via the Vínland sagas, Norse participation in the discourse on the 'discovery of America' could be legitimized, and contemporary Scandinavians who were so moved could in fact derive some pride from that participation" (159). These affirmations of Scandinavian heritage and ethnicity of course embody the Eurocentric view that the "discovery" and occupation ("settlement") of America by Europeans was something to be proud of. But (also of course) things are not that simple: the sagas are, in Kolodny's words, "narrative sites of an enduring conflict over claims to the same living space by radically different cultures" ("Fictions" 716).[6]

Scandinavian-Americans were not the only ones to use the Viking sagas in the ideological conflict concerning European relations to the peoples of America: for some, the sagas were the main weapons in a passionately racial crusade. For example, in the late 19th century Eben Horsford, a wealthy industrialist and retired Harvard chemistry professor, went to great lengths to assert that Leif Eriksson had come to America in his voyages. Horsford "carefully read the sagas, and attempted to place them in proper geographical context, which he argued was the Charles River Basin" (Fleming 1080). Horsford promoted his theories by giving lectures, funding statues, writing books with his daughter on "Viking Boston," and even constructing "commemorative towers" (Fleming 1081). But while he was a progressive thinker and philanthropist in many areas, Horsford was both a racist and a religious bigot, and the purpose of his crusade was to assert that Leif Eriksson, a true Nordic hero, had dis-

covered America, rather than a Catholic from Italy, employed by Spain. Horsford was not alone in his views: it was in this context that a number of like-minded believers set a sensational demonstration of their argument, financing the construction of a Viking ship which was taken to Chicago in 1892, to be shown as a protest at the "Columbian" Exposition (Fleming 1082). Horsford and others used the *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* as a set of master texts with nigh unto scriptural importance, as they asserted a specific kind of religious and ethnic priority in the "New World."

While it is easy to condemn such racist views, we must note that the argument continues today, albeit in different forms: scholars still frequently discuss the accuracy—literally word by word—of the sagas' accounts, and some still argue over who can claim precedence for the "discovery" of America. In a thoughtful study of European views of America, Eviatar Zerubavel, author of *Terra Cognita: The Mental Discovery of Europe*, argues that claims for Columbus's priority "inevitably distort the reality of the process through which America was actually discovered by Europe" (10). But despite noting that any European claims "exclude from [America's] history . . . its entire indigenous population," Zerubavel—in his own words, even—"disregard[s]" the presence of Native peoples (12). He *is* aware of the racialized nature of the whole issue: he comments that "the tremendous prestige given to the person officially regarded as [America's] discoverer clearly rubs off on the group with which he is commonly associated" which is why Scandinavians and Italians, here as well as in Europe, both promote their own champions (20). But in fact, Zerubavel himself places great weight on the Vinland texts, even arguing (though somewhat playfully) that because Greenland is so close to Canada's Ellesmere Island (only 25 miles away), Eirik the Red has a better claim to "discovery" than Columbus, who first made contact with islands several hundred miles from the mainland (26-27). Even Jerold Frakes, whose excellent analyses of the Norse sagas I will use later in this paper, cannot remove himself from the myth of European discovery. He reacts with subtle disbelief when he observes that some scholars "have denied that Norse activity in Vínland itself constitutes 'discovery'" (197). Although aware of the Vinland sagas' colonialist nature, he still sees them as seminal texts.

So the *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða* continue to exert heavy influence on our projections of white contact with indigenous Americans. However, the sagas are not at all fit to serve as historical records, even for Scandinavians, let alone as the bases for Eurocentric claims on America's prehistory. Indeed, while the sagas have given a sense of ethnic pride to Scandinavian-Americans, these texts actually

equivocate a great deal in portraying Norse values as they shape a certain understanding of what happened with Eirik the Red and his clan. In particular, the 13th-century *Grœnlendinga saga*, which is likely the earlier of the two narratives, articulates European values while it exploits the Native peoples, or "Skraelings" as the saga calls them. But even in its presentation of European values, the *Saga* imposes an anachronistic Christian viewpoint on events which undermines traditional Norse values even as it seeks to appropriate them—and in doing so it marginalizes the Skraelings even further. Narrated two hundred years after the purported events, the meaning of the Vikings' story of Vinland is a highly contested one—as it should be.

Textual Contexts: Equivocation

In terms of cultural values, we must begin with the sagas' purposes: they were not written primarily to glorify traditional, "pagan," Norse values. Rather, the saga writers sought to construct a discourse that would promote Christianity and to assert a European identity. To do so, however, the sagas did appropriate Norse values in a syncretistic but equivocal effort to give credence to their own purposes.

The first equivocal aspect is often overlooked because it is almost too obvious: the nature of the *sagas* as written texts. It is a commonplace to observe that the word *saga* means "what is said," but almost nothing is said about the contradiction of presenting "what is said" in written form. Even in this preliminary, paratextual labeling, we see the authors/redactors of the sagas co-opting the authority of traditional oral forms of narration. And indeed, the sagas' very nature as written texts meant that they carried an array of implicit cultural norms. Knowledge of writing was brought to Iceland by Celtic Christians even before the Vikings arrived (Jones 9), and as Frakes observes, "effective literacy had come to Iceland . . . as the handmaid of Christianity and its intellectual culture" (166-67). The best estimates for the *Grœnlendinga saga's* date of composition place its writing at the start of the 13th century (Jones 225-26), and although religion was a hotly contested issue among the Norse for quite some time, Christianity was firmly established when this *Saga* was written (Jones 29). If it was not written by a cleric, then it was written by someone who had been immersed in the Church's teachings.

Further, as Margaret Clunies Ross and others argue, writings by Icelandic clerics also had a nationalist agenda, a "zeal for self-justification in the face of possible foreign disparagement of their origins" (Clunies Ross, "Development" 374). Political tensions between Iceland and Norway had created the need to establish a significant cultural legacy. A number of residents had fled from Norway either for political reasons,

such as opposition to the Norwegian king's governance, or less noble causes—Eirik himself, for example, left Norway to avoid punishment for killing some men. The memory of the Vikings' raids and the slave trade that resulted (including slaves still in service in Iceland) might cause Christian Europe to look askance at this outpost of dubious heritage, especially because it was not governed by a monarch and supporting aristocracy. In short, Iceland was not as textualized as other European countries: "Iceland, because it lacked an institutionalized governing class, also lacked a pedigree, and therefore was essentially without a history" (Clunies Ross, "Development" 375-76). Literary production was one way to supply this lack through written genealogies (no matter how fantastic) and narratives featuring prominent families. "They needed to tell the world, and the Norwegians in particular, that their claim to sovereignty was as good as their neighbours'" (Clunies Ross, "Development" 378). Writing was thus used to historicize Icelandic culture.

This cultural context has important implications for the *Grœnlendinga saga* in two specific areas: the portrayal and use of religious discourse, and the Eurocentric colonialist nature of the text, both of which are obscured by the overt purpose of narrating the history of explorations in Vinland. As a purportedly historical text, the *Grœnlendinga saga* would appear to validate traditional Norse values—and so it does to a certain extent, beginning with co-option of Eirik the Red and his son Leif Eriksson, who are portrayed as patriarchs of Greenland and Vinland. In the sagas, Eirik and Leif and most of their family members act according to traditional, pre-Christian cultural norms; because they follow their destinies, bravely and stoically, sometimes even in the face of certain death, they achieve praiseworthy reputations—the greatest honor for a Viking (Jones 34). The *Saga* venerates these patriarchs of Greenland as illustrious Norse heroes giving the coveted historicized pedigree not just to Iceland but also Greenland.

Not surprisingly, the *Saga*'s assignment of values contains an equivocal element: its praise of the ruling family is textually self-fulfilling. Eirik the Red and his son Leif Eiriksson are honored because they lived their lives valorously, but they are given credit for valorous lives in part because they are named by the text itself as the patriarchs of the community. This equivocal valuing appears when we compare the text's descriptions of Eirik and Leif with those of Bjarni Herjolfsson. Bjarni and his crew were the first to sight the new lands, but they did not go ashore—Bjarni was intent solely on reaching Greenland. While Bjarni is praised as "a most promising young man" (145), he is criticized because he was not bold in seizing the chance to explore Vinland. His reputation suffered as "people thought how lacking in enterprise and curiosity he had been . . .

and he won some reproach for this" (148). Leif, in comparison, is praised as the first Viking to command an exploration party that actually landed in Vinland and spent a winter there. Leif himself highlights the contrast: "At least . . . it has not happened to us as to Bjarni over this land, that we failed to get ourselves ashore" (149). The question of who is deemed to have a good reputation or not becomes a fault line—in two senses of the word—in the representation of Greenlandic community values; we see clear goats and heroes. But good or bad reputations are differentiated by reasons that do not follow traditional Norse values but rather the Christian *Saga* writer's purposes.

One hero's portrayal is very clear: in addition to comparing Leif's actions favorably to those of the lesser mortal Bjarni, the text eagerly pays homage to Leif in other ways. He is described as "big and strong, of striking appearance, shrewd, and in every respect a temperate, fair-dealing man" (150). His famous nickname is assigned to one particular event, featuring superhuman vision: on a return voyage from Vinland to Greenland, Leif's "sight was so much ahead of" others' that he alone of all his crew could see and then rescue a party of sailors stranded on a reef. The text tells us that "he was afterwards known as Leif the Lucky, and had prospered now in both purse and reputation" (151). We are told that his reputation was good even as the purported events leading to that reputation are narrated. It is no coincidence, further, that Leif is given credit for bringing Christianity to Greenland. Even before Leif set sail for Vinland, according to the *Saga*, he traveled to Norway where King Olaf converted him to Christianity; Leif then returned to Greenland "to preach Christianity there" (145).

We see equivocal portrayals again with Eirik, who is also venerated as a patriarch despite a somewhat unsavory past. In the very first sentence of the *Saga*, we learn that Eirik and his father Thorvald had left Norway "because of some killings." After settling in Iceland, Eirik again got into trouble, killing two men and being outlawed by the annual *Thing*, or community meeting. These problems forced him to sail farther westward, which is how he made landfall in Greenland (143-44). While the text includes these actions, it does not condemn them, perhaps because of the nationalist purposes of the writer. Many Icelandic texts are ambivalent about origins such as Eirik's because departure from Norway could be "a kind of shorthand for signaling an individual's espousal of the values of independence and the kind of gritty determination that led people to seek a new life in Iceland" (Clunies Ross, "Development" 383-84). Although such individualism could prove troublesome even in Iceland, as did Eirik's, and thus could be open to criticism, the text instead valorizes

Eirik. This valuing stands in marked contrast, as we shall see later, to the actions of Freydis, Eirik's daughter.[7]

In fact, the *Grœnlendinga saga's* text defers structurally to the patriarchs, taking its very shape from filial relationships in Eirik's ruling clan. Except for the second section, each of the seven segments is focused on different members of Eirik's family. The first section narrates the founding of Greenland by Eirik and Leif, the third highlights Leif's colonization of Vinland, and subsequent sections focus successively on each of the other members of the family as they try their luck in voyages for Vinland. The only section that does not focus on a family member is section II, relating Bjarni Herjolfsson's original sighting of a land unknown to the Vikings. But even in this portion of the text, the narrator makes sure the focus never leaves the patriarchs for long, including information about Eirik and his family. The text pays homage to traditional Viking culture by taking its very form from the patriarchal power structure in the community.[8]

Religious Context: Co-option

In doing so, the *Saga* appropriates that power structure to claim—somewhat disingenuously—that even Eirik himself favored Christianity. Initially the text appears to emphasize the differences between Christianity and traditional culture. The writer repeatedly includes historical markers in the narrative, telling readers whether specific incidents occurred before or after Iceland and Greenland had been converted to Christianity. For example, just after telling us that Herjolf and Eirik the Red had settled in Greenland, the text includes the note that "the people in Greenland were heathen at this time" (146). When Thorstein Eiriksson and his wife Gudrid set out to explore Vinland, we learn that "Christianity was still in its infancy in Greenland at this time." Temporal evangelical references such as these occur at regular intervals throughout the narrative.

While these notes would seem to highlight the fact that Christianity was a new and different way of understanding the cosmos, the writer smoothes over those differences with a fluid concept of history. The descriptions of Eirik's religious views illustrate the shifting historical timeline most obviously. When his son Leif brings a Christian priest to Greenland, Eirik's reaction is to call the priest a "shyster." But while the text reports this charge, the *Saga* writer assures us that "even so by the advice and persuasion of Leif Eirik was baptized, and all the people of Greenland" (145). Later in the text, however, one of the references to the coming of Christianity contradicts this story. After Thorvald's expedition returns to Greenland, we are told, "Greenland was at that time Christian, though Eirik the Red had died before the coming of Christianity" (153). Translation editor Gwyn Jones's footnote on Eirik's supposed conversion

adds to the mist here, suggesting that Eirik may have been simply blessed by a priest, or "primesigned," rather than converted by baptism (145).

But whatever the actual events, what seems clear is that the *Saga* writer wishes to claim some Christian hold on Eirik, co-opting the Viking patriarch of Greenland into his own endorsement of Christianity. Co-option also appears, of course, in the fact that it was Leif, son of the patriarch, who brought Christianity to Greenland, thus giving credence to the new religion as well as adding to the general veneration of Leif himself as a worthy patriarch. The text even brings in a non-Christian who says to Thorstein Eiriksson, "I hold a different faith from yours, though I suspect you hold the better" (154). By claiming support for Christianity from some of the most prominent figures of the Greenlandic community, even non-believers, the author seeks to position Christianity as the proper world view.

Now, the idea that *The Greenlanders' Saga* is working with differing value systems is not a new one. However, other scholars are much more sanguine about the differences than I am; my perspective in American Studies leads me to emphasize the equivocal nature of the text much more than others have done. Margaret Clunies Ross, for example, notes that "a good deal of Old Icelandic writing offers a more tolerant attitude towards paganism than we find in other medieval writings, while at the same time indicating, often in subtle ways, how the society of the time before Christian enlightenment had an imperfect understanding." The Norse writers, she says, "often stress the continuities of belief and social structures through Icelandic history from before the conversion period and into Christian history" ("Conservation" 118). Continuity, of course, would serve the nationalist goals of historicizing Iceland, as mentioned earlier. I would see less continuity, however, from pagan to Christian worldviews; rather, I see an imposed portrait on the early pagan peoples that misrepresents them. Further, I am concerned with the cultural results of imposing a European religious framework on peoples in "Vinland" who were neither European nor Christian.

Religious Context: Imposition

In addition to co-opting the patriarchs of Greenland, the *Grœnlendinga saga* also imposes a misogynist and Biblical framework on both Vikings and Skraelings so that the narrated events themselves are twisted to meet the writer's purposes. As quite a few critics have noted, the *Saga's* narrative draws on the Exodus parallel of discovery, exploration, and colonization in the Old Testament. The new-found-land which the Vikings explore is described in terms reminiscent of the land of milk and honey promised to the Israelites in the Bible. In Vinland, the Vikings "went ashore and

looked about them in fine weather, and found that there was dew on the grass, whereupon it happened to them that they set their hands to the dew, then carried it to their mouths, and thought they had never known anything so sweet as that was" (149). The land was bountiful in every way, we are told, and the parallel between the Promised Land and Vinland continues in the discovery of grapes by Leif's servant Tyrkir. These grapes, which were the source of the name "Vinland," are reminiscent of the grapes found in Canaan in the Biblical book of Numbers, which are so large that two men could carry only one cluster. *The Greenlanders' Saga* was thus the first of many European Christian texts to draw on the Biblical trope of the Promised Land to support the colonization and exploitation of what we now call America. The Vikings, in the role of the wandering Israelites, were destined to claim the land—a parallel that later groups would claim again and again.

But unlike later colonizers, the Vikings did not stay permanently—and again, the writer uses Biblical constructs, with a walloping dose of misogyny, to shape our understanding of why they failed to maintain a successful colony. The last section of the text tells of Eirik's daughter Freydis and her notorious exploits in Vinland, casting discredit on her as a horrible female who, it might be implied, has forever ruined attempts to settle Vinland. In describing her, the text sets up an account that parallels the Biblical eviction of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

From the start, Freydis is described in negative terms. The first time she is mentioned, in the description of Eirik's children, the text tells us that Freydis "was very much the virago" and her "husband was just a nobody" (146): using classic misogynist criticisms, the text immediately labels this woman as a transgressor.[9] At the end of the Vinland expeditions, this point is vividly demonstrated: Freydis repeatedly schemes and then slaughters her way to a notoriously bad reputation. She breaks deals, is dishonest, orders all the men of a friendly Viking party killed for no good reason, and then kills the female members of that party when no one else will. She is even accused of having cold feet in bed! (160). In short, she violates both traditional and Christian values, and after her bloodthirsty exploits, the *Saga* does not report any more exploration of Vinland. With the previous lyrical descriptions of the bounty of the land, this final episode echoes the traditional interpretation of Genesis which blames Eve for humankind's removal from the Garden of Eden.[10]

This is a portrayal influenced by the Christian church, and it does not necessarily reflect even a Viking perspective; the *Saga's* strategic purpose, among other ramifications, changes the way in which women are portrayed. Carol J. Clover argues convincingly that women's roles were not as restricted in Viking society as has often been thought. She praises the

"marvelous aplomb, both social and textual, that is such a conspicuous and telling aspect" of many Norse women's stories, stories that present an "extraordinary array of 'exceptional' or 'strong' or 'outstanding' or 'proud' or 'independent' women" (366). Clover points out, however, that readers were meant to see the behavior of these women as unusual, even horrific. Their behavior is presented from the perspective of Christianity, which constricted the bounds of what was acceptable for women: " . . . the new order entailed a radical remapping of gender in the north. More particularly, one has the impression that femaleness became more sharply defined and contained" (385). And so it is with Freydis. No more would the Vikings avail themselves of the richness of the new land; no more could they take part in the honorable tradition of exploring and exploiting new territories, and Freydis, who apparently did not live in trembling subservience to others in the community, provides a convenient scapegoat. Biblical parallels allow the writer to portray the Viking colonization of Vinland as almost preordained, until a sinful female spoiled things for all.

But the Christian redefinition of female roles also affects another major woman in the story, Thorstein Eiriksson's wife Gudrid. If we have an Eve in Freydis, in Gudrid we have a Madonna, holy and pure in heart. While the representation of these two women fits the classic dichotomy of woman as either evil or pure, once again the *Saga* writer has a very specific purpose. He uses Christianity to rehabilitate the reputation of Gudrid, who was a member of the patriarchal family by virtue of being married to one of Eirik's sons. She is held forth as a shining example also because she was important to the Norse Christian church—or because the writer wanted to portray her as such.

Gudrid figures prominently in the text, both as a member of the ruling family and also in her own right. This holy woman, however, may have been the subject of some controversy because of an extended domestic stay with a man who was not her husband. When she and her husband Thorstein Eiriksson tried to explore Vinland themselves, they were forced back to Greenland by storms, landing in the Western Settlement, farther northwest than their home area. There a man named Thorstein the Black and his wife took them in, but soon a plague struck, creating an awkward situation for the Christian chronicler of a holy woman's life. Gudrid's husband died, and Thorstein the Black's wife died, leaving an unmarried man and woman stranded together for a long winter. The nature of the relationship between Gudrid and Thorstein the Black is described ambiguously in the text, with some rather extraordinary signs of intimacy: she calls him "my Thorstein," and when he comforts her after Thorstein Eiriksson's death, he "lifted her in his arms off the stool, and sat down with her on another bench . . . and spoke to her helpfully in many ways";

during this discussion she is even "seated on his knees" (155). That such intimate relations appear in the text, which was written down two hundred years later, might suggest that the story of Gudrid's stay with Thorstein the Black was so well known that it could be neither ignored nor censored. Whether or not the oral narratives passed judgment on Gudrid, it is entirely possible to see a Christian monk as being squeamish about how the narratives might affect the reputation of a good church woman.

But the writer uses the *Saga* text to rehabilitate Gudrid's reputation with the help of Christian prophecies. Just as Thorstein the Black is comforting Gudrid, Thorstein Eiriksson's corpse sits up and apparently speaks from beyond death. In his speech, Gudrid's dead husband conveniently sets the stage for all of her good deeds later in life:

> I am anxious to tell Gudrid what lies ahead of her, that she may bear my death more resignedly, for I have come to a good resting-place. What I have to tell you, Gudrid, is this, that you will be given in marriage to an Icelander, and long shall be your life together. . . . You shall go abroad, and make a pilgrimage south to Rome, and return home to Iceland to your own place, whereupon a church shall be raised there, where you will live and take the vows of a nun, and where you will die.

Thorstein Eiriksson's prophecy covers up nicely for Gudrid's reputation, placed as it is right at the very start of the time she spent alone with Thorstein the Black (155-56).

It is in the *Saga*'s concluding paragraph that we see perhaps the most important reason why the Christian composer of the text focuses on Gudrid: the *Saga* in fact establishes her reputation as a holy woman whose offspring became very influential in the Church. "Gudrid went abroad and made a pilgrimage south to Rome, and afterwards returned to the home of her son Snorri, who had by now had a church built at Glaumbaer. In course of time Gudrid became a nun and recluse, and it was there she spent the rest of her days" (162). Within three generations her offspring would include at least three bishops of the Church.[11] So Gudrid, whose narrated actions here and in *Eiríks saga rauða* suggest that she was on the margins between Christianity and traditional Norse beliefs, is important to the community and to the church—perhaps even to specific churchmen.

Thorstein Eiriksson's prophecy, and the validating list of descendents that is conveniently provided, certainly serve to historicize one Icelandic family, helping to provide the pedigree so strongly coveted by Icelandic writers. Ólafur Halldórsson suspects that an additional and very particular motive affected Gudrid's portrayal in both the *Grœnlendinga saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*. He reports that "steps were being taken to sanctify

either Jón Ögmundarson or Björn Gilsson," both descendents of Gudrid, and so their champions needed to demonstrate that the two men came from a holy line, complete with "signs or miracles which would authenticate their sanctity" (47-48). Gudrid's rather weird encounter in Vinland with a Skraeling woman who identifies herself as Gudrid, but who then disappears just as a battle breaks out, could satisfy the need for a sign or miracle. But so does the narration itself: Thorstein Eiriksson miraculously supplies the needed miracle, even as his benediction establishes the roots of Gudrid's candidacy for sainthood.

In any case, whether to help a campaign for beatification or simply as an important ancestor linking the church to Eirik the Red and his family, Gudrid is genealogically important, as Mary is in the Bible, and so her actions and reputation are idealized in rather unrealistic ways. Just as Freydis is painted in luridly evil colors, we see Gudrid's purity through a stained-glass filter. Neither portrait is to be trusted as accurate individually, but together they reveal a particular way of viewing women that corresponds to traditional Christian perspectives. Further, they demonstrate that *The Greenlanders' Saga* is shaping even its portraits of the traditional patriarchal family, at the same time that it is holding most of them up as model Vikings. The writer is pulling something of a bait-and-switch move for readers who look to this text for an accurate portrayal of traditional Norse actions and values, as many critics in Norse studies have done and still do.

Eurocentric Context: Exploitation

Readers may notice that until this point I have said very little about the Skraelings. This in itself demonstrates where the European texts about America direct our attention and the number of filters we must see through if we are to attempt to gain a fuller view of American prehistory. The saga writers' purposes were concerned with issues of their own culture, not with the Skraelings. Of course the Skraelings were there all along, but in the Vinland sagas they are a people to be either removed or exploited. This view is in part dictated by the Biblical tropes used in the *Saga*. If the Norse explorers are paralleled with the Israelites in the Promised Land, the only role open to the Skraelings is that of the Canaanites, the indigenous peoples who are to be conquered, killed, or otherwise forced to flee.

Because the main focus of the Vikings was not on the Skraelings but on their land, we see much material exploitation, which is praised by the author. Leif and his company marveled at the bounty of the land, just as John Smith and other European visitors would; after the rocky, unforested

isles of Iceland and Greenland, Vinland seemed incredibly rich to the Vikings. The *Saga* says:

> There was no lack of salmon there in river or lake, and salmon bigger than they had ever seen before. The nature of the land was so choice, it seemed to them that none of the cattle would require fodder for winter. No frost came during the winter, and the grass was hardly withered. Day and night were of a more equal length there than in Greenland or Iceland. On the shortest day of winter the sun was visible in the middle of the afternoon as well as at breakfast time. (149-50)

In now familiar colonialist fashion, the Vikings responded to this bounty by verbally laying claim to it, "bestowing place names far and wide" in lands that clearly were already settled (144). Further, the text is very explicit that the Vikings availed themselves of the material riches before them. We are told that they "took every advantage of the resources the country had to offer, both in the way of grapes and all kinds of hunting and fishing and good things" (157). Thorfinn Karlsefni, for example, sailed from Vinland to Norway with a lucrative cargo: " . . . men maintain that a more richly freighted ship never left Greenland than this one he was captain of" (161).[12]

In addition to material exploitation of the land, the text exploits the land's inhabitants ideologically, portraying them either as outlaws or as dupes. Conflict occurred upon the first narrated meeting of Skraelings and Vikings when Thorvald Eiriksson and his group attacked and killed, apparently without provocation, a group of Skraelings hiding under skin-boats (152). Frakes points out that this attack reveals "the sagas' unreflected presumption of cultural identity—a common Eurocentric assumption—inherent in the claim that the Americans under the boats are 'outlaws' in the Icelandic legal sense and thus subject to execution with impunity" (191). Because the Skraelings are not Icelandic, and thus by definition are not obeying Icelandic laws, their lives are forfeit. Frakes further observes that it is likely for this reason that, although the text highlights the conversion of Iceland and Greenland to Christianity, it seems that no attempts were made to convert the Skraelings (188).

After the initial killings, the Norse traded with the Skraelings but were proud to have bested them in bargaining. The Vikings received material goods from the natives, but in these deals the natives just got milk, with its limited usefulness; the *Saga* ridicules the Skraelings because they "carried away what they bought in their bellies, while Karlsefni and his comrades kept their bales and their furs" (157). The *Saga* also relates a grimly comic—and now stereotyped—incident during a fight between Vikings and Skraelings: one of the native warriors picks up a Viking axe made of

metal and as an experiment strikes one of his own men with it, killing him; the warrior then looks at the axe in wonder and finally throws it into the sea (158). It seems unlikely that an experienced fighter would test a new weapon on his own comrade; rather, this episode comes across to readers almost as slapstick comedy, using the presumed ignorance of the Skraelings as a basis for humorous belittlement. The *Saga*'s story about how the Skraelings panic when a bull brought by the Vikings bellows loudly is also suspect: when we consider that the local peoples would have plenty of experience with bellowing elk or caribou, it seems clear that the panic story is meant primarily to ridicule the Skraelings (Frakes 183, 194). Frakes observes that it was "a common Eurocentric move to infantilize the non-European," precisely the pattern followed in these episodes (182).[13]

Although written hundreds of years earlier than other European exploration texts, the *Saga* shows some remarkable similarities to those later colonialist accounts. By dismissing the Skraelings as buffoons, while at the same time portraying the newly "discovered" land as lush and fertile, *The Greenlanders' Saga* follows a particularly trenchant European-American strategy to remove Native peoples from the land. In other European foreign-contact texts, " . . . the ideal landscape is generally represented as little short of miraculous in its beauty, fertility and climatic benevolence, while its inhabitants are most often conceived as 'primitives' incapable of truly enjoying the natural wonders of the landscape or even of appreciating its bounties" (Frakes 170). This contrast implicitly asserts that Native Americans could neither recognize nor properly cultivate the bounty of the land, an argument that would resound loudly throughout America's history of invasions and forced resettlements; time and again it became the rationale by which whites would seize tribal homelands, even down to the Dawes Act of 1887. The humorous dismissal that denied the Skraelings full status as human beings would, centuries later, lead to physical dismissal of Native peoples, denying their priority in the land.

One especially intriguing parallel between the *Grœnlendinga saga* and later European interactions with native peoples appears in patterns involving the possession of weapons. After seeing how effective the Norsemen's weapons are, the Skraelings try to purchase some for themselves, but this is subsequently forbidden by Karlsefni. When trade doesn't work, a Skraeling reportedly tries to steal a weapon, and the attempt results in a pitched battle. Complete with the portrayal of native people as thieves, this story of conflict over the trade of weapons to Native Americans follows a pattern played out time and again in the forests and plains of North

America. Relations between Norse and Native seem almost archetypal, so similar are they to exchanges that happened later.

And in fact, Jerold Frakes argues that they *are* archetypally Eurocentric, in part because the Icelanders had been Europeanized (or sought that status) by the 12th century. "When the two Vínland sagas were composed, Iceland had already participated in the tradition of learned European literate culture for several generations, and its literate elite knew the ancient and medieval traditions of lands beyond the immediately perceptible limits of European culture" (167-68). While scholars have typically limited the term "Eurocentric" to texts written after Columbus's arrival in the western hemisphere, Frakes maintains that " . . . the *discursive* praxis that is deployed by modern Eurocentrism is much older" and is part of a pattern that "developed to represent the recurring confrontations between Europeans and non-Europeans over the course of the two thousand years *prior to Columbus*" (163). Following Edith Hall, Frakes traces Eurocentric attitudes to "the first extant European drama, Aeschylus's..." *The Persians*, which created "already in 471 B.C.E. a discourse fully formed and available for use in representing the denigrated Asian Other" (163). Frakes argues that "What we have in *Eiríks saga rauða*, *Grœnlendinga saga*, and other Vínland documents is . . . a clearly coded version of Northern European Eurocentrism current in 13th-century Iceland" (166). Further, when we take into account Margaret Clunies Ross's points about Icelandic insecurity because of potential European scorn, we might even posit an intensification of Eurocentrism as part of the Icelandic writers' attempts to prove their claims to sovereignty.

Jerold Frakes is writing as a scholar in Scandinavian studies to other scholars in that field; he is interested in the Viking texts because of their links to European colonialist tropes.[14] But with the *Grœnlendinga saga*'s Eurocentric portrayal of the Skraelings as outlaws, naïve, childish, and inept, we come full circle to Annette Kolodny's observations about American narratives of our continent's prehistory and Vine Deloria's concerns about the historical effacement of Native peoples. From beginning to end, the *Saga* participates in the suppression of a Native presence in Vinland. The unpremeditated killings of the Skraelings in their first encounter with the Vikings demonstrate immediately that in *The Greenlanders' Saga*, the indigenous people "are never . . . accorded full humanity," to use Deloria's words ("Indians" 597). In the end, they are ignored: the final section narrating Freydis's treachery never even mentions the Skraelings. The *Saga*, especially in its final words establishing Gudrid's genealogy, seeks to historicize Eirik the Red's clan, and thus contributes to a larger-scale historicizing of Icelanders as a whole. But in doing so, the text de-historicizes and marginalizes the Skraelings: their

land is the site of conflicting claims about the Vikings' own past, while they themselves are used as the butt of jokes. The Skraelings don't even have a claim to their own land; their presence is literally incidental. The *Grœnlendinga saga* is thus the earliest version of the "fictions that get told over and over again," as Kolodny says, "isolating Indians outside of history and . . . displacing Indian priority as historical fact" ("Fictions" 715).

The *Grœnlendinga saga* can be seen as confirming the deeply rooted nature of European and European-American attitudes towards any cultural and geographical context that is the Other—both the early pagan Norse as well as the Skraelings. The Vikings were proud to have double-crossed the Skraelings, but the *Saga* writer in turn double-crossed his Norse readers concerning religious beliefs. In doing so he also narrates a doubly marginalizing portrait of the Skraelings, revealing some deeper implications of the inherent values held both by the opportunistic church and European cultures. As the "altar" in Sauk Centre demonstrates, the Vikings' attitudes still hold sway today.

We in the scholarly community, however, must also reassess our own assumptions and ideologies. The Norse sagas cannot be used as the sole source of information on early interactions between Europeans and Native Americans. To do so would be to preempt Native viewpoints and to further exclude Native peoples from history. Rather, we must see it within the context of Eurocentric accounts of colonization written from a particular ideological viewpoint. Further, we must do what we can to see and hear the Inuit, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Beothuk contact narratives as well, articulated in such forms as oral history and rock paintings (Kolodny "Who"). But even if balanced with indigenous oral and pictorial histories, the Icelandic writers' anachronistic and equivocal representations do not merit the degree of historical accuracy which some scholars assign to them still today. We may, however, justly give credit to the sagas for one literary innovation: in the systematic, even genocidal erasure of Native peoples from historical accounts of America, the Norse writers could claim, "We were here first."

Notes

[1]An extensive series of supposed clues has been brought forward to support the belief that Vikings came to the region in the 14th century. The most famous object cited as evidence is the "Kensington runestone," discovered in 1898 near Kensington, Minnesota. The stone is marked with runic inscriptions purportedly made by Vikings in the year 1362; the markings end with the letters "A.V.M.," which are taken to mean "*Ave Virgo Maria*" (Gilman "Viking Trail" 4, 6). That the Vikings were Christian, and even Christian crusaders, has been hotly asserted by some believers, and even today the Roman Catholic church in Kensington is named "Our Lady of the Runestone." The State of Minnesota provides official

government recognition of the myth of Viking exploration with highway signs labeling roads in central and northwestern Minnesota as part of the "Viking Trail." The controversy is summarized in a series of articles by Rhoda Gilman with James P. Smith, published in the Minnesota Historical Society's journal *Roots*.

[2]The name "Sauk" comes from "O-zauk-ees," an Anishinaabe/Ojibwa term for the Sauks, who are sometimes called the "Fox" tribe as well. According to Ivy Hildebrand, the Sauks hunted in the region but never lived there; instead, their homelands were to the east, in what is now Wisconsin. The Anishinaabeg called the region "O-zau-kee" after a group of five men who were outlawed from the Sauk tribe had briefly taken refuge near Sauk Lake. Hildebrand makes a point of saying that when whites arrived, no tribal group lived there; the area was a contested and thus unpopulated borderland between the Anishinaabeg and the Dakota/Sioux (12-13).

[3]The orthography of names and terms in the sagas varies quite a bit among critics (e.g., *Eric / Erik / Eirik / Eirík*). In my own text I have relied on Gwyn Jones's English translations and thus follow the Anglicized forms he has adopted. However, when other writers use other spellings (such as *Guðriðr* rather than *Gudrid*), I have replicated those forms in quotations and source references.

[4]Articles by Birgitta Wallace Ferguson and Jette Arneborg provide helpful overviews of archaeological work in this area.

[5]Deloria made these statements in a plenary address to the Society for American Archaeology Annual Meeting, Pittsburgh, April 9, 1992; he was invited to speak to that group decades after criticisms by him had rocked worldviews in the discipline of anthropology (e.g., see "Anthropologists and Other Friends"). Other American Indian writers discuss similar implications of the denial of Native history. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, for example, in her essay "Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner," castigates Stegner's breezy assumptions in *Wolf Willow* that he has a rightful claim to local history before he and other whites arrived on the Canadian Plains. Gerald Vizenor treats this issue in his writings from the perspective of a person of mixed blood, someone denied a history by almost everyone else (including even Cook-Lynn). In "Shadows at La Pointe," for example, he describes himself and others who are of mixed blood as "a new people on the earth" (38); this narrative surveys various forms of historical records and what accurately or erroneously counted and still counts as history.

[6]The influence of the sagas has remained strong into the 20th century: using a somewhat ambiguously personal yet dramatic persona, William Carlos Williams speaks as "Red Eric" in the first chapter of *In the American Grain*. He projects a rugged individualism on to Eirik that is its own virtue: "Rather the ice than their way: to take what is mine by single strength, theirs by the crookedness of their law" (1). Using material from the *Hauksbók*, a slightly later and embroidered version of *Eiríks saga rauða*, Williams sets up Eirik as the first of many to have the opportunity for a fresh start in America. Several decades later, Garrison Keillor also emphasized the priority of a Norse arrival, in his own inimical style: "It saddens Norwegians that America still honors this Italian [Columbus]. . . . And then to name it [the country] *America* after Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian who never saw the New World. . . . By rights it should be called Erica, after Eric the Red,

who did the work five hundred years earlier. The United States of Erica. Erica the Beautiful. The Erican League" (94).

[7]Instead of criticizing Eirik, the text pointedly relates how the Greenlanders deferred to him. When Leif is preparing to set sail to Vinland for the first time, he asks his father to go with them, to lead the exploration party. "Eirik begged off, reckoning he was now getting on in years, and was less able to stand the rigours of bad times at sea than he used to be." The text says that "Leif argued that of all their family [Eirik] would command the best luck," and after persistent requests Eirik does agree to go along. But when making his way to the launching, Eirik falls off his horse—suggesting that indeed he was not in the strongest condition; after falling, Eirik says, "It is not in my destiny . . . to discover more lands," and he orders the others to go without him (145). The narration of this small incident ensures that all are viewed honorably: Eirik is given a good reason for not going, and Leif is seen as being properly deferential, protecting himself from charges of usurping his father's place on the expedition. Further, by including this incident, the text validates the patriarchs' trust in luck and destiny—two important pagan values.

[8]While Clunies Ross discusses the influence of genealogies as a "structure" in Icelandic texts, she does not use that term in a formalist sense as I do here, regarding the division and ordering of content in a text. However, her argument can be usefully expanded in this way.

[9]The *Hauksbók*, one of two sources of the text for *Eiríks saga rauða*, calls Freydis "Eirik the Red's natural daughter" and characterizes her husband Thorvard as "big, strong, dark and ogreish . . . always advising Eirik for the worse" ("Karlsefni's" 188)—hardly the portrait of a "nobody." While the *Grœnlendinga saga* does not impugn Freydis's legitimacy, the *Hauksbók*, "a deliberate 'improvement' of its original" story written by Hauk Erlendsson (Jones 226), further ostracizes Freydis and her husband—and in turn also exonerates the patriarchal family of her actions.

[10]On Freydis as Eve, and parallels to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, see also Walter Baumgartner, "Freydis in Vínland oder Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies."

[11]Thorstein Eiriksson's speech is also convenient in letting Gudrid marry again, to a different man yet, and literally with her dead husband's blessing; it may even be useful by removing from Gudrid the onus of having forsaken the memory of one of Eirik's children for another man—especially if the cause of death for Thorstein Eiriksson was doubted in any way. Since the *Saga* writer goes out of his way to assure us that the prophecy came true, all is saved; in true traditional Norse fashion, Gudrid's good reputation is preserved, albeit by Christian foreshadowing in the midst of questionable circumstances.

[12]While we have no reason to doubt that the Norsemen harvested everything they could, even here the text is unreliable. After the discovery of grapes, the *Saga* relates that Leif ordered a boat to be filled with them, which in the spring they took back to Greenland. But as Jerold Frakes points out, this is laughable: "Such a harvest schedule and storage of the grapes (and *vines!*) could only be imagined by someone who knew nothing of grapes, their growing season, or effective techniques of harvest, storage, and use" (176).

[13]If not ridiculing "the natives," the European tradition often portrays inhabitants of foreign lands as monsters. While we see less of the monstrous in the *Greenlanders' Saga*, *Eiríks saga rauða* does contain an account of a uniped creature that hops up to Viking crews and fires arrows at them; the Vikings even compose a ditty about the "one-legger racing" (*Eiríks saga*, 184-85).

[14]Frakes is actually resurrecting an argument first made by Fridtjof Nansen in an address to the Royal Geographical Society in 1911 which "has been quietly all but forgotten." Although Nansen reassured his audience that he did believe Vikings had reached North America, "he nonetheless maintained that the sagas' *representation* of that exploration drew heavily on earlier travel literature and geographical lore of the European and particularly learned Latin tradition." Frakes observes that not only in Nansen's era was this view frowned upon but also "within the confines of medieval Norse studies, it is still by no means broadly accepted" (157-58).

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DONALD GUTIERREZ

Greyhounding the South, Encountering New York:

Post-Berkeley Memoirs, 1958-1963

Dedicated to the memory of Virginia Dehn, great American artist, d. 2005.

I.

This memoir continues one concerned with my 1950s years as a student at the University of California at Berkeley (see *North Dakota Quarterly*, v. 71.4: 32-49). It provides a glimpse of New York in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well as a bus trip across the South memorable to me as a confrontation with personal identity. Further, the experiences of my wife Marlene and myself in New York involved certain job and cultural sites as well as residential circumstances that might harbor period interest.

This journey was not the traditional European paradigm of, say, the young Frenchman from the provinces headed towards the big world of Paris, considering the character and ethos of the San Francisco Bay Area, Texas and the Deep South, and Manhattan. Going from libertarian Berkeley through the still lynching South to the possibly most dynamic, ruthless, impersonal city in the world of the late Fifties was an experience of psychic variegation and dislocation peculiarly American. Marlene and I had lived in California all our lives and now felt it was time to spread our wings. New York City, pulsing and glimmering in the distant east, seemed, if not entirely alluring, at least a significant change from Coit Tower, fog and fog horns, the Berkeley campus campanile, and occasional earth tremors.

We left Berkeley in January 1958 by Greyhound, following a route that would take us through the South. We were relieved to be getting out of Berkeley and the Bay Area, having had almost eight years of them as University of California Berkeley students and semi-bohemians. The Fifties Eisenhower Era (the Korean War, HUAC on the prowl, the U.C.

Loyalty Oath, gray skies) seemed to put at least Berkeley under a kind of ideological smog; it felt like high time to leave. Marlene even hoped we could use our destination—New York City—as a hopping off point for Europe, a plan and hope that never materialized.

A Berkeley English major, I had grown tired of the English Department and what I took to be its affectations of anglophile sophistication and erudition. Thus, after getting a B.A. in English, I had enrolled in the University's Library School. Though I earned a master's degree in Library *Science* (sic), a few of my Library School instructors had doubts about whether I was really dedicated to applying the Dewey Decimal cataloging system.

Indeed, the only course I enjoyed and did very well in was one involving literary censorship. This course piqued my interest sufficiently by its libertarian, anti-repression character to motivate me to write a paper that the instructor wanted to use for a professional symposium on library censorship. Also, my two mentors, Hubert Crehan (my stepfather) and Kenneth Rexroth, the self-declared Cham of San Francisco culture and a great poet, were intensely and almost comically anti-academic. Crehan had helped persuade me that being a librarian would be less stifling for someone wanting to be a poet—or, at least, write poetry—than going into graduate English studies and becoming an English professor. Perhaps he might have been right if I could have landed a job such as librarian at U.C. San Diego (La Jolla) working half time while supervising their poetry-magazine collection on a livable salary. My two New York library jobs were full time and utterly different.

At any rate, we left San Francisco on a cold, gray day and headed south to San Diego where I had my first "border" encounter. Before reaching San Diego, however, we stopped off in Inglewood (just south of Los Angeles) to see Marlene's parents. Her mother equipped us for the trip with a string bag of food, an object which might have had something to do with the encounters because it made us look suspiciously poorer than we were.

Marlene and I had gotten out of the bus at San Diego to stretch our legs and were about to re-enter the bus when what is called in New Mexico an Anglo, a large, slightly official-looking "white" man, approached me and asked for some credentials of identity. This was my first such encounter. Perhaps reacting improperly, but certainly with outrage, I looked at him as if he were an irritating lunatic and stalked off onto the bus. Curiously, he didn't persist.

My next identity incident occurred in a small town somewhere in Texas. We had ridden for what seemed forever and it was obviously time to stop somewhere, even if somewhere was a small, shabby town in the

southern part of Texas that looked like a setting for a lynching. Shortly after beginning the last lap of our walk around a rather typical block, desolate, scattered houses and numerous weed-filled lots reminding one of the dreary scenes of urban and spiritual desolation in some of T. S. Eliot's early poems, I noticed that an old black sedan was following us, driving on the street British fashion that thus put the car close to us. Looking to my right, I could see a black, tall, middle-aged male at the wheel and Hispanic (probably Mexican) male in the front passenger seat. The latter was speaking to me, talking in Spanish. I didn't know Spanish, despite my father being Guatemalan and my mother Nicaraguan, so I was in the dark about both the message and its meaning, friendly or hostile. My sense and memory of the event, however, was that his words were not friendly; there was something harsh, derisive, or accusative in the tone of his voice. As I looked in the direction of the talk, I saw the barrel of a rifle sticking up in plain view by the driver's door. Certainly nervous, Marlene and I just kept walking. Soon, to our relief, the car drove ahead towards the bus depot, perhaps another fifty yards. When we entered the depot a few minutes later, I recall seeing the Black man in the crowd there but he paid no attention to us.

Many years later, a politically liberal academic colleague who had grown up in the South told me, upon hearing the story, that I was lucky I had not been seen escorting my "Anglo" wife along the street by white men—I could have been attacked or even killed. This made me wonder if the two men in the car might actually have been attempting to protect me from some of the customs of the country, trying to wise me up. Emmet Till had been horribly beaten and murdered just a few years earlier in Mississippi for flirting with a white woman on a bet with friends, and Texas (including the Texas Rangers) was thought by some to be as infamous for lynching Hispanics as Mississippi was for lynching Blacks. I had no regrets when we bussed out of the Lone Star State.

Next stop, New Orleans. Getting off the Greyhound, I was approached again by a Border Agent (this time, unlike his San Diego colleague, the official produced *his* credentials) and asked me to show an ID, which I did. We stayed overnight in a place that must have been a brothel because males were coming and going throughout the night on our second floor lodging located over a saloon wherein Sally Rand had just performed, and in the morning there were what must have been forerunners of Frederick's female garments hanging on clothes lines.

Deciding to partake of the Big Easy's popular culture, we boarded a street car. Getting into the car, we noticed that there were "front" and "back" sections; front, whites, back, "colored." Now that sectioning posed some problems and soul-searching, not for my wife who is German, but

for me, with my GuatNic ethnicity and personal sensitivity. The crux of the matter was skin color; I was neither black nor white, but sort of in-between, brownish, reminding me later in life of the graduated racism of "White—all right, Brown—stick around, Black—stay back." My dilemma resulted from both a certain lack of confidence about myself psychologically and racially as well as a sizable sympathy for and identity with Black people and their atrocious treatment by white institutions and individuals. I couldn't sit in the back black area, not being black (nor could my blonde, blue-eyed wife), yet I felt guilt at sitting with the whites. Possibly the best thing to have done under these confusing circumstances would have been to exit the streetcar, but that didn't occur to me, and Marlene would likely have opposed it.

So I made a compromise. We sat in the white section seat adjoining the black section, almost a kind of border. However, it was not border enough. A relatively young black woman sat down right behind us, and, as I put my arm around my wife's shoulders—thus unintentionally crossing the border—my left arm was suddenly and rather violently knocked forward. The woman behind us had abruptly put up her "Colored Only" seat sign, knocking my arm off of her territory. I'm darker than some blacks but to this woman I was "white" by virtue of my seating location and my intrusion into her territory was fair game for a little payback, whatever my attempt at compromise which she couldn't have known or, possibly, and justly, have cared about.

A similar situation of confused racial identity arose the same day on a local steamboat where the different rest rooms had "colorful" names like onyx, jade, and agate, leaving me utterly confused about which one it was correct ("Racial Correctness"?) for a brown man to enter. In my confusion I made the worst possible mistake by entering the women's rest room, but instead of being confronted by a pack of glaring white males, I only encountered a smiling woman indicating "wrong place."

Eastward Ho. Mobile, Alabama, next stop. The usual procedure—people exiting the bus to get coffee, a sandwich, or a donut, to head for the toilets, or just to stretch their legs after hundreds of miles sitting in seats that would compete in discomfort with the coach seats of passenger airplanes today. After a reasonable time for a meal break, all of us bus citizens got back into our temporary metallic womb on wheels. The bus driver, our savior through thick and thin, sun and rain, night and day, got back in his authoritative command seat, passengers settling their buttocks as comfortably as possible for the long jaunt to Jacksonville, Florida, when suddenly the driver opened the front door again. A man wearing a coat and tie clambered on, said a word to the driver, then began walking down the aisle. I felt he was coming *to* me and *for* me—and I was right.

Leaning over me from the aisle, he asked for an ID Being by this time conditioned to being treated like a possible illegal alien, I produced my driver's license without protest. This didn't quite satisfy this persistent agent who then asked me something like "When were you last in Mexico?"

This question was not hard to answer because of its content; I had visited my Nicaraguan-American Mother and Irish-German stepfather Hubert Crehan in Guadalajara around 1951 when Hub was attending the University of Guadalajara Art Department on the G.I. Bill. What was harder to understand was why the question was even asked; I certainly had not the least tinge of a Spanish accent in my English. Anyway, what business was it of his when I'd last been in Mexico? I don't recall questioning *him* about his question as I possibly felt that the other passengers wanted to get going. But perhaps I also didn't question the agent out of anxiety or fear that I could be "detained." It's hard to be sure—almost fifty years later—what my real motivations were, but it made me wonder whether those Americans who take their civil liberties so for granted would find their layer of citizen self-assurance much thinner if confronted by hostile or even physically violent interrogation by the official "detainers" many American Mid-Easterners have encountered in our time. This interrogation took its place in a pattern of analysis and guesses by Marlene and I that came to a head when, "de-bussing" in Florida, I was again approached about my identity, and, when I blurted out that I was not an illegal, met with more hostility than in all the previous border-cop encounters.

Thus, it was quite refreshing and liberating when Marlene and I finally stepped off the bus in mid-town Manhattan that no one confronted me officially or asked for proof of who I was. After all, this was New York—no one cared who I was, as long as I didn't collapse on the street with a heart attack and block their path to their various urgent destinations. Even the cold and bluster and anonymity of New York—it was snowing moderately—seemed attractive; one could disappear in this mini-universe of indifferent crowds and endless blocks of tall buildings, streams of automobiles, and snowflakes. The FBI, Border Patrol, and political wing of the Berkeley police could not track you down, at least, not easily; surveillance cameras were not yet mounted anywhere and the National Security Agency, already operative, seemed nothing to worry about quite yet, few even knowing of its existence.

Thinking at the time about all these confrontations with immigration officials brought to mind a major event about to explode in a year just south of the United States: Fidel Castro's Revolution. We wondered whether there was a thought in the minds of Border officialdom that I was

either a fleeing anti-Castroite, a pro-Castroite revolutionary intending to spread Fidelismo north of the Caribbean, or just a Mexican illegal. Considering the anachronism indicated above, the last conjecture is probably closest to the truth. We were carrying our sandwiches, oranges, crackers, cheese, and apples (poor Berkeley students) in a straw bag like campesinos, possibly another clue to my border-crossing aided for a fee by my cleverly disguised blond female Coyote-spouse.

II.

Well, New York! Where can one start? My stepfather Hub once said that New York was an inferno. It didn't feel like one on this cold late January morning in 1958, but perhaps Hub was talking figuratively about the powerful pulsation of energy, ambition, and competition so incessantly moving through the city that the city itself seemed like a vast blaze or even a manifestation of Hell. But Hub comes to mind because our immediate line of advance after spending the first night in the Big Apple in a dismal midtown hotel was to head for his art studio-loft on East 23rd Street (once the lair of man of letters and social activist Paul Goodman). Though it represented a retreat from the city's monstrous yet beguiling energy, Hub's apartment-studio was only a temporary refuge while we looked for our own apartment and I tried to find a job as a librarian. Hub was living with a bright, engaging young woman he later married, and thus for a few weeks Hub's artist loft, not exactly designed with an eye towards resembling a *Sunset Magazine* interior, became home.

It was good indeed to have family of sorts as a point of contact in one's first arrival in New York. Nevertheless, finding an adequate lodging of our own and without means was not easy. Marlene and I became rigorous students of the "Rental-Vacancies" section of the *New York Times*. Finally, a possibility emerged, a fifth floor walkup on 33rd Street close to Third Avenue and three blocks east of the Empire State building. Though the apartment was on the fifth floor, it seemed like the tenth, because there were two flights of stairs between each level, and at a rent of $65.00 a month, this was not a residential establishment endowed with an elevator. The building manager was interested solely in collecting the rent (on time) and the building janitor or "super," a black man who lived in the basement, was often either drunk or morose or sometimes both, once urging that he and I go up to the roof together to get better acquainted—as George Foreman once meant the euphemism—fisticuffally.

The best thing about the apartment, called in Manhattan a railroad flat, was that it was located close to a subway. One could sail down the endless flights of stairs and be in the subway within five minutes. I can't think of anything else attractive about this miserable set of rooms except for what

transformation youthful imagination and energy could achieve by painting the walls and, yes, the floors exotic colors. One went from the kitchen to my small studio-library room to our bedroom (mattress on floor) to Marlene's small art-studio room to the living room which looked out and way down on 33rd street. We had no air-conditioning because we couldn't afford it, so we coped with the intense New York summer humidity by keeping the kitchen window and the two living room windows open, providing a channel for a north-south breeze. We used orange crates for book cases, and made our living room sofa with boards and cement bricks. We furnished our apartment with furniture and other items found on the street until we were finally able to buy some secondhand furniture at the Salvation Army on the West Side.

The air-circulation design also provided something else—the incessant electricity of the city's noise and energy. One could hear the inferno roaring and crackling continually through the living room windows. From the kitchen window, though, we also heard the world of lower-class and lower middle-class New Yorkers—mothers hoarsely calling or berating their kids, husbands shouting at their wives or intimidating other husbands or males in nearby apartments with gruff challenges. The kitchen sink was also the bathroom sink. Our bathroom only had a bathtub and a toilet, no sink or place to comb one's hair. All grooming had to be done at the kitchen sink. But we felt lucky that our bathtub was not under the kitchen sink, as was the case in some cold-water flats on the lower East Side.

A side window of some kind of factory was situated around twenty-five yards from our kitchen window and so directly positioned towards it that male workers there could look in and see us brushing our teeth in the morning. These working stiffs, enjoying a cigarette break, would ogle Marlene, and they and I would have a few verbal exchanges until we finally found a secondary use for the Sunday *Times*, pasting its pages over the window until we got a window shade.

The "railroad," which we lived in for two years, had one other salient feature—bugs, lots of them. Those we can recall and identify were cockroaches, bed bugs, a huge water bug, and, of course, flies, spiders, and a few fleas. The serious ones were the cockroaches and bed bugs. I recall the cockroaches occasionally walking upside down on our kitchen ceiling in broad daylight and a cockroach plummeting into my soup one night. The bed bugs were even more annoying, assaulting us in our sleep until their bites and the resultant itch would wake us up. They say that New York being New York, one needs a place to retreat from it too. That is true, but it is also true that there were then, and surely are still, plenty of places in the city where one wants to retreat from his abode to his job, the nearest coffee shop, bar, or movie house.

On the other hand, New York being New York, there were of course then, as now, residences palatial in character, with one-inch-thick red rugs, thick walls with gorgeous silk curtains, exquisite furniture, man servants, maids, butlers, chefs, etc.—and no bugs. We apparently asked for help with the bugs from the management because one day a rather grim-looking man appeared at our door (somewhat breathless), claiming he was the exterminator. We had possibly forgotten our request, and at first wondered if we had accidentally offended some local grocery or restaurant owner who consequently had put in a hit request with some Mafia relative.

Indeed, it was that very contrast between, let us say, 33rd street near Third Avenue and Fifth Avenue north of 59th street (among other posh regions) that made Manhattan so exciting and heady for some. Some New Yorkers carried a class and ethnic map of the city in their head, different areas, regions, even streets having a strong class significance far more complicated if no less rigid (and snobbish) than the right and wrong side of the tracks in smaller cities and towns.

III.

Brandishing my Berkeley School of Library Science degree, I got a job within weeks at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library as a reference and cataloging librarian. The pay, $4000.00 a year, was normal at the time, at least for a beginning professional librarian. However, it was not enough for us to make ends meet, the $65.00/month rent for the railroad flat notwithstanding; Marlene also had to work. The subway was, I think, a quarter, as was a Nedick's hot dog, and the ride on the Staten Island Ferry the same or even less. And there were cultural events that were free such as the Sunday Frick Art Museum chamber concerts which were classy performances in ornate surroundings. Poetry and jazz performances abounded in Greenwich Village and elsewhere. For a moderate charge one could see and listen to significant and even famous poets (such as T. S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell) at such places as the YWCA as well as hear jazz artists like Miles Davis, Thelonius Monk, Coleman Hawkins, and Gerry Mulligan at bars and even in venues like the Museum of Modern Art. Still, $4000.00 + barely got us through the month.

The Metropolitan Museum was at first certainly an attraction with its elegance and enormous collection, much of the latter, it was said, resting in its huge basement vaults. Besides its impressive collection in many areas, the Met also had an elegant restaurant with handsome metal tables situated around an elongated pool in the midst of which stood a troupe of greenish-blue metallic statues of nymphs with semi-pornographically pointed breasts. Did men dine at the Met because of the food, the pool, or the exaggerated tits—perhaps all three? Who knows, but one wonders

what kind and motivation of esthetic judgment went into this sort of sensationally vulgar erotic display which seemed so at odds not only with what was displayed in, say, the Vermeers in the 17th century Flemish art room but also with the hard, pretentious elegance and cultural pomposity about the Museum that hung so heavily in the air.

The Met Art Library itself was a fairly elaborate place, a large, handsome, wood-paneled study room with a sizable area of books in stacks upstairs and in a basement. The library had a problem unusual for most libraries—it had too much money, and had no hesitation in putting out hundreds of dollars for, say, a Goya sketchbook. It never occurred to the wealthy supporters of the library (all those mid-Fifth-Avenue types) to contribute part of their extreme wealth to increasing the salaries of the staff slavishly Dewey-decimaling several costly new books on Tang Dynasty jars—no name glory in that!

The library was run by a pompous man named James Humphrey III and his squirrel-like assistant named Elizabeth Usher, whose main librarian talents were a handsome tan and a fragrant sun lotion. The III addressed us all by first name and we were expected to address him as Mr. Humphrey. This after all was 1958 and the Met was a place where social and class distinctions were pronounced. One woman in another department, a volunteer, was a White Russian aristocrat who looked down on more than a few fellow workers. Marlene and I were rather surprised to hear indirectly that another individual in that department (Prints) looked down on *us* because we were Berkeley grads. ("They let anyone in these days!" was apparently how the woman put it.) This sentiment revealed typical East Coast ignorance about, and condescension towards, the West, considering that UC Berkeley in the 1950s was very highly regarded academically, whatever my own dissatisfactions with the school (as indicated in my Berkeley-in-the-1950s memoir) might have been.

D. H. Lawrence in his richly imaginative little travel book called *Etruscan Places* expressed some opinions about museums worth citing here:

> If only we would realize it, and not tear things from their setting. Museums . . . are wrong. But if one must have museums, let them be small, and above all, let them be local. . . . Museums, museums, museums, object-lessons rigged out to illustrate the unsound theories of archaeologists, crazy attempts to co-ordinate and get into a fixed system that which has no fixed order and will not be coordinated! It is sickening! Why must all experience be systematized?

I disliked the Met. Assigning systematic numbering to books was boring and psychologically pernicious. (Look what it did to J. Edgar Hoover, whose career and secret-files practice began as a catalog librarian.) Thus I found my work generally dull and wandering around on the vast marble

floors of the Museum's enormous collections during lunch time fatiguing and depressing. Looking at lavish Rubens nudes or a Tintoretto or Grecian vases (behind glass) or, especially, the sarcophagi of very ancient societies seemed to reflect my own captivity in an unfulfilling job. After all, most of the Museum's collections have either been bought or even stolen from their native contexts; their pride of place, separate from yet lined up with other art possessions, could make a viewer feel quite the opposite from Malraux's "Museum-Without-Walls" thesis of a majestic cultural continuum of the world's art. Indeed, they could strike one as a line of prisoners, art trophies of war, the victors' spoils. The marble floors, the stone benches without a back support, the roaming, bored, gloomy museum guards, the art-browsers so intently ignoring other browsers in their occasionally mannered art observings—all made me decide after a few months to spend my lunch hour in the basement stacks reading a few of the library's excellent books.

At least there were more than a few good Museum stories to liven things up. One concerned a curator in the Greek and Roman Antiquities Department who was given to chasing secretaries around long funerary urns. Another involved a female Etruscan warrior phallus thief who was nabbed, embarrassingly enough, as she exited the Museum with her prize—though her embarrassment surely was not as deep as that of the Met's personnel responsible for buying the Etruscan warrior statue in the first place when it became clear that it was a fake. And then there was the Met's occasional Marilyn Monroe Day. The Museum was closed to the public on Mondays. Monroe lived at the time a block or two from the Museum, so it was easy for her to have a special private VIP run of the deserted museum. It seems like something out of a late Fifties Fellini or Antonioni film to imagine this celluloid goddess swishing through the empty halls, probably with a small entourage of Met officials much envied by the rest of the Museum's male staff. It was said as well that Greta Garbo used to come to the library—looking designedly nondescript—but I never saw her.

IV.

The Met job didn't work out. I wasn't really cut out to be a librarian. I lacked the public-servant persona desired in a reference librarian and, during my cataloging hours, felt more like reading than cataloging the books. My alienation from the work gradually dawned on my bosses and finally, after almost two years, it was mutually agreed that I'd be happier working somewhere else. Nevertheless, library work was my most likely job possibility so I had to keep looking for librarian jobs, like it or not. I soon got a job offer to be head librarian of a prestigious private institution called the

University Club. The Club occupied an entire, handsome three- or four-story gray stone building on Fifth Avenue midtown. The place oozed quiet wealth and elegance—thick wall-to-wall dark-red carpeting; dark-brown, expensive wood-paneled walls; plush chairs and couches; burnished tables for magazines, newspapers, and (probably) drinks; a soothing hush throughout the long, interconnected rooms—a handsome retreat where commercial, military, political, and professional male VIPs could lounge free, except for the hired help, of women.

I would be in charge of all this, at least, of all the (expensive) books, journals, newspapers, Ivy League alumni bulletins, and journals. Though there was some family urgency in my taking the job as our first son, Hector, was soon to be born, I turned the job down because one condition of employment at the University Club was that all hired help (including the head librarian) must enter the premises by the back door of the establishment. My objection was not that I would be forced to enter this club through the same derogatory portal as cooks, maids, waiters, and desk personnel; I felt all of us "help" should be allowed to enter by the *front* door. After all, the United States was a democracy, was it not? Well, living in New York City, let alone in the South or elsewhere in America, one realized sooner or later that all too many Americans felt they were, or wanted to be, superior to someone else and that democracy was too often just a politically romanticized idea declaimed by politicians and prattled about by newspaper editorialists.

I was fairly sure I could land another job, and before long, I did. And a unique one it was—assistant head librarian at the Tamiment Institute Library. My title was not really as impressive as it sounds. There were really only two full-time librarians: a British female fellow-traveler named Louise who was the head, myself, and a regular part-time retired actuary named Oscar who wore a bow tie and was something fairly rare in America by the 1950s: a middle-class socialist.

But more interesting than the library's personnel was the library itself. Later an appendage of the Social Sciences Division in New York University's Library, Tamiment once had a unique status and character as a library. Tamiment Institute was a social-political-cultural organization serving as a venue for unionized workers, working people generally, liberals, and left-wing radicals. An institution going back into the early 20th century, Tamiment was oriented towards liberal and left-wing radical political interests, as the first name for its library—the Meyer London Memorial Library—might suggest (London was a prominent early 20th century New York Socialist). The institute even used to have Sunday "sermons" by people like Bertrand Russell and local radicals; further, Charles and Mary Beard were on the teaching staff. While I was there,

such vintage left-wingers as Max Eastman or ex-radical anti-Communists like former NYU philosophy professor Sidney Hook still kept in touch with the institute, sometimes even donating books (as Eugene Debs also did decades earlier).

The library itself was an invaluable repository of labor and radical history and associated subjects, possessing books, manuscripts, journals, diaries, magazines, and newspapers like the Yiddish-American *Arbeiter Zeitung* and the Socialist *Forward* that were invaluable for research and hard to find elsewhere. Founded in 1906 by the American Socialist Society, the library was originally part of the Rand School of Social Sciences, a workers' education institution. During World War I, the school was harassed by the politicized New York City police and state troopers, some of the library's records being confiscated and never returned. In 1956 the school and library were bought by and renamed after Camp Tamiment, a socialist summer camp in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

Michael Harrington's first book, *The Other America*, was partly based on Tamiment's archival material as was the work of other researching authors such as Martin Duberman who were later to become well known in the book world. Equally interesting were less famous individuals who nevertheless contributed invaluable oral histories, like one six-foot-four-inch former Industrial Workers of the World member who had stories to tell about the very violent old days for the Wobblies out West in the 1910s and later—such as union organizer Frank Little being tied to the back of a car by anti-union vigilantes and dragged to death in Idaho. On one occasion I was delegated by the head librarian to tape record a celebratory occasion of a number of radicals and professional dissidents that included, among others, Norman Thomas and Roger Baldwin. I don't remember much about the speeches but do recall a sense of fine camaraderie among the men based on their confronting the same institutional behemoths (such as Hoover's FBI) for years, even decades.

Tamiment Library was under the direction of *The New Leader*, a weekly liberal magazine located on the floor above the library. An Ivy League-educated liberal named Norman Jacobs was the *Leader*'s editor during my time at Tamiment. Though he had authority over the library, he pretty much let the head librarian run it; one wonders if he would have given her as much rope had he gotten wind of her frequent backbiting of him. This was probably unfair to Jacobs whose heart and soul, so far as I could tell, was in conveying political liberalism through his magazine and, come 1960, boarding the Kennedy train, or, to use the emerging metaphor, either entering Camelot or at least residing within the palatial vicinity.

There was a lot of excitement, quite evident in Jacobs, about the great good things that were now going to be possible in Washington with the dashing, youthful JFK in the Oval Office. Liberal intellectuals like Jacobs felt close to power perhaps for the first time in their lives (something they certainly couldn't feel with Truman and Eisenhower), and it was power infused with a large dose of glamour and elegance, heady stuff for sheltered academics whose power hitherto had been restricted to grading students and determining the academic fate of tenure-track assistant professors. By the time Kennedy was killed, I was no longer working at Tamiment and thus had no opportunity to register the impact of that death on people like Jacobs. However, I imagine it must have been devastating and made worse by the successor being as alien and hostile to Ivy League and New York social and political culture as Lyndon Johnson was.

My immediate boss, Louise, was an English fellow-traveler who, however, had no patience with Irish complaints about the English squashing them for centuries. She would at least once a week come to work in a very bad mood, possibly, judging by her aroma, having taken a few nips of firewater during her ferry-boat ride from Staten Island. Having opened the library at 9 A.M., I would already be there when she arrived. I usually knew when she was coming because walking up the stairs to our second-story location, she would be making a racket—hard things falling over, the noisy result of an angry person encountering objects annoyingly in her path: a wooden crate, a metal wastepaper basket filled with old *New Leader* copies.

She would come storming into the public section of the library, kicking things out of her way, her deep-blue eyes (her best feature) blazing at me from her beet-red face or at Norman safely distanced on the third floor or at nothing in particular: "*Why* are these *New Leaders* out in the hall? When are we going to *finally* catalog the Debs collections?!" then stomp off somewhere such as to the women's restroom, not waiting for an answer. This would be followed by an hour or two of intense librarian quietness and increasing concentration. By 1 P.M. or so she would have mellowed, helped by coffee and several cigarettes, and we, along with any part-time help around, would sit down for a matey koffeeklatsch. Our morning interactions felt a bit like the rhythm of a marital row. Nevertheless, Louise was a librarian strongly dedicated to developing and preserving the library and to maintaining its integrity as a unique research institution.

I remained at Tamiment for two years and probably could have stayed there indefinitely or until it was taken over and relocated whole by NYU some years later, but I more and more felt that I was marking time and not fulfilling myself in my work. So I began to look around for different work

with Louise's encouragement in part because she claimed she too was tired of the library and of being under the pressure, however gently applied, of Jacobs and the *Leader*. Yet when she found out that I was actually serious about getting another job, she came on as if I had behaved disloyally and moved to fire me. Nevertheless, she generously threw a farewell party for me, which included a flowery delicatessen cake, more coffee and cigarettes and a symbolic gift of Bernard Malamud's latest novel, *A New Life*. Soon I had a new, if modest, post as librarian/editorial assistant in the Library and Schools Department of Grosset and Dunlap Book Publishers Inc., easily my best job during the New York period.

V.

By this time, Marlene and I had moved to Brooklyn Heights. A stunning change from 33rd Street and Third Avenue, the Heights was a moderate-sized section or sub-borough located on the northeast side of Brooklyn facing north towards Manhattan across the East River. It was generally composed of middle-class and upper-middle-class homes, many of them brownstones, some quite handsome and suggestive of affluence. In many ways a safer, quieter, and far more attractive area than our previous residence, yet a gay male was murdered by his companion on our street, and one day as I looked into the back garden next door from our living room window, I saw a cop beating an adult male (probably a burglar, handcuffed to a metal pole) with his flashlight. I let the cop know that his conduct was being observed which led to his freeing the captive and taking him into the basement.

Brooklyn Heights was a sedate residential area with small business stores, restaurants, grocery stores, and bars within walking distance. Norman Mailer's walk-up residence was within walking distance. Marianne Moore also resided somewhere in the Heights west of us, but by and large the area seemed filled with professional people—doctors, lawyers, successful businessmen. Right around the corner from us was a sizable apartment building which fascinated me because Bertram D. Wolfe, author of *Three Who Made a Revolution*, lived there in what I had heard amounted to monastic and definitely covert conditions. It was said (probably at Tamiment Library) that Wolfe had a female housekeeper who handled all communications at the lobby and doorbell for him, a kind of moat of flesh or domestic bodyguard. The reason for this interceptor is that Wolfe feared some groups or individuals—Stalinist in bent—might be trying to assassinate him because of his book being critical of Stalin. This was not necessarily paranoia. Oscar at the library, who knew something about the sub-society of political radicals in New York City, claimed that more than a few anti-Stalinist radicals (especially

Trotskyites) had been murdered in the city, their probable political killers never brought to justice. Indeed, the famous Italian anarchist, Carlo Tresca, was gunned down in the early 1940s right on the block on which Tamiment was located, though some felt Tresca was more likely killed by Italian fascists than by Spanish Civil War Stalinists still hunting down the libertarian Left after that grim war had been concluded. Wolfe's caution might well have been sound.

VI.

If one was interested in the arts, the New York art scene could be a powerful magnet. Aside from the glamour, excitement, tension, and snobbery of the galleries and museums with their openings, parties, wealthy buyers, publicity, rivalries, and so on, the artists themselves embodied more than casual interest. We had an aperture into this world through Hub, who, once a managing editor of New York City's *Arts Digest*, was not only an artist but an art journalist, visiting galleries and other artists' studios with his companion Anne, both of them occasionally reviewing modernist art shows for art magazines. Hub knew a number of prominent artists and personages, on one occasion chatting in his studio with what struck me during a visit as a small, non-descript, aging man. This mild-mannered individual turned out to be Marcel Duchamp, quietly listening to Hub who was prone to dominate conversations.

The artist scene itself was rather tough and boisterous. Much has been made of how rowdy and exhibitionist the Beats were around this time, and while that's true enough, it is probably not as widely known and glamorized how electric and crudely colorful the microcosm of New York artists was. The artists in this little world, mostly males, weren't, unlike Ginsberg, Kerouac, and other Beatniks, likely to take off their clothes in public or grandstand neo-Dadaistically in other ways. What was conspicuous about some of them was a kind of semi-proletarian, semi-Bohemian dress style and social manner, a marked fondness for liquor and cigarettes, and in some a virility spilling over into a misogyny that regarded women as "chicks" and fair game. Their rather rough-hewn social style and clothing were probably less an affectation—at least, at first—than an indication of living close to the bone during the earlier years of their art careers which in some cases spanned the Depression years.

It was only the exceptional woman artist that these male artists respected as artists (Louise Nevelson and Helen Frankentheler, among a few others, come to mind); like many male social revolutionaries, some of these male abstract expressionists were as male chauvinist as they come. And the sexist attitude was extended by both male *and* female owners of important galleries who supported the males for gallery exhibitions and usually ignored the female artists.

Going into the Cedar Bar, a popular artist hangout in Greenwich Village, one encountered in a throng of artists, friends, and hangers-on a certain infectious intensity and excitement of chatter through a fog of cigarette smoke and the reek of beer, wine, and spirits. One might see the Great Ones there like Franz Kline, maybe taking a break from some big show coming up in a few weeks for which he perhaps still needed to "knock out"—a common verb among this set—nine or ten very large canvases (the huge dimensions of the paintings often taken as another sign of the virility and machismo of some male Abstract Expressionist artists—despite the fact that women artists were also "knocking out" big ones, a friend of ours, Jane Bolmeier, creating gorgeous canvases so big that they could not be carried out through her apartment door). There were also stories of a manic/drunken Jackson Pollock having trouble one night getting the Cedar's men's restroom door open and so either tearing or kicking it off its hinges.

This sort of raw energy and aggression was exemplified in an event Marlene and I attended around this time. One of the key if offbeat cultural venues of Manhattan was the 10th Street Artists' Club. Artists and others would gather there once in a while for rather informal discussions about the arts, specific art movements or artists, the New York gallery scene, and so on. We attended a particular meeting (on a cold winter night) mainly because Hub was going to be on a panel that included the then abstract expressionist artist Philip Guston, Allen Ginsberg, and the Chicago Art Museum curator Peter Selz. The room, large enough to seat perhaps sixty people, was packed. Also present in the audience was Alfred E. Barr, the current director of the city's Museum of Modern Art (or MOMA) and author of a study of Matisse.

The panel had met earlier at Hub's loft and had been chatting and, quite likely, drinking with some vigor. The drinking continued during the panel, probably a second fifth of bourbon being comradely passed around from panelist to panelist. The discussion had something to do with the state of American abstract expressionism but also wandered away and into terrain that allowed Hub to mention the Yin and the Yang, suggesting his proclivity to sexualize or "genderize" modern painting—and everything. When the floor was open to comment, Barr stood up and made a reference to a sign behind the panelists clearly designed to mock Hub's Y and Y discussion. Hub, not one to turn the other cheek or get easily ruffled when insulted, said in a stern yet calm voice: "I'm glad something has made Alfred Barr get off his ass." This was not the sort of thing lightly said by any artist, art critic, or art official to Barr's face as Barr was considered a VIP in the New York art world. But Hub's counter-offensive had point and purpose, as some felt that Barr was not a very enterprising

or adventurous force in the world of contemporary art, despite being the director, at the time, of the most influential and prestigious American institution of modern art. Thus Hub's "ass-sitting" retort, Hub himself being a stout, sometimes overbearing, defender of Abstract Expressionism.

To aggravate an already charged situation, some derelicts had entered the premises less out of fascination with the state of modernist art than to get out of the winter cold. This contingent became aware, as did most of the seated audience, that a short, rather scruffy-looking young man was yelling sentiments at the panel like "Abstract painters are dead. You're dead, dead, dead!" It turned out to be Gregory Corso, a good friend of panelist Ginsberg and a ranking Beat poet in his own right. Corso seemed (as he often was in two or three art and poetry gatherings I'd witnessed) unstoppable, but the bums, putting two and two together, realized that a lot of people in the hall were getting very annoyed by Corso's rants. Perhaps, too, the bums might have really been—who knows?—abstract-expressionist fans. Whatever the case, they soon began to get physical with Corso, pushing him, even raining a few blows down on the torso of the author of the powerful long poem "The Bomb." (For that matter, as Pop Art was already replacing abstract expressionism as the dominant art style in New York, Corso's rant was not necessarily off the mark.)

I'm not certain whether this commotion brought the panel to an end, but it might as well have, because, besides the unfairly balanced battle raging at the back of the hall, the fifth of bourbon being passed around was almost empty, and the impact of the booze was now becoming apparent. It was apparent especially in Ginsberg who suddenly went on the attack. First, he hysterically accused Hub of being a type of sadistic homosexual who would brutalize his partner, an absurd charge on both counts, Hub's sexual proclivity emphatically and exclusively being towards women young and old. Then Ginsberg's rage focused on Peter Selz, who besides his museum position had also, according to Ginsberg, had something to do with censoring a new vanguard literary magazine called *Big Table*. Frequently the champion of libertarian causes, Ginsberg saw Selz as the reactionary enemy, and, I heard (for we had left before the following occurred), physically attacked Selz. He was restrained by a large black man, towards whom, it was reported, Ginsberg suddenly turned amorous. Such was the ending of this particular Artists' Club meeting.

VII.

Someone bought the Remsen Street house, and all the tenants were evicted. We ended up in another rental not too far from Red Hook, an alleged Mafia residential area. Our backyard, all concrete, was exposed to a col-

lege fraternity located in a building on the third floor from which soused "brothers" would drop empty beer bottles on weekend nights. About this time, I picked up my third and final job in New York in a book-publishing company. Grosset and Dunlap made much of its money out of publishing books for children and grade schools. My job was to establish library lists of grade-school books and do research on the authors and titles that would lead to recommendations the house could use for them.

The Grosset and Dunlap job was generally more satisfying than the other two by providing such leeway as occasionally allowing me to do work-related research in the great City Library or even spend a half hour in a book store pursuing my own interests. I began to think that if I spent my evenings mainly reading and writing poems and essays, why not return to college and enroll in a post-graduate program and work to become a professor of English literature? This would allow me to spend more than just evenings reading and lead to a professional stature I could respect more—whatever my former Berkeley employer Pauline Kael might think about English professors being just a niche above pimps and thieves. This idea worked itself more and more in my mind and Marlene's during 1963; soon I was sending for an entrance application and, not too long after, received notice of acceptance into the UCLA English Graduate School Program.

We arrived in New York in early January, in the heart of winter. We also left the city around the same time six years later. I was not fond of flying at the time, but it was a thrill to see from the tiny airplane window that we were high above Manhattan's skyscrapers, leaving them and the city on terms that meant I'd be free forever of the heat and humidity, the intense winter cold, the grainy, metallic smell of subways, the cold splendor of Fifth Avenue north of 57th Street and the tenements of the lower East Side. In a few hours we were to land in a Los Angeles that stunned me with its sheer greenness in winter, its profusion of blue and turquoise swimming pools as seen from the plane, its splendid array of trees, bushes, flowers, and oleander-blossomed freeways. Los Angeles was already in process of being overwhelmed by cars, more freeways, smog, and "development," but compared to New York it looked to me in 1964 like a paradise. Four and a half years of city housing and student housing projects and of graduate English studies at UCLA on the road to a doctorate and a tenure-track assistant professor post at Notre Dame in 1968 lay ahead of us. It felt very good to get back to my home state, and especially to sunny, hedonistic Southern California.

Reviews

Edmund Danziger, Jr. *Great Lakes Indian Accommodation and Resistance during the Early Reservation Years, 1850-1900*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009. Pp. xiii + 322, $60 hb.

Daniel Lancaster, *John Beargrease: Legend of Minnesota's North Shore*. Duluth, MN: Holy Cow! Press, 2009. Pp. x + 174, $14.95 pb.

An independent way of life was submerged by United States and British-Canadian expansion in the latter half of the 19th century. Native American societies, sovereign since time immemorial, had to adapt to United States and Canadian control of their lands, resources, governments, and even their daily existence. Reservations replaced national territory. Private property, wage labor, segregation, Indian agents, being outnumbered by Americans and Canadians, and restricted movements marked a totally new world.

But Indians did "not go gentle into that good night." Native American leaders learned the new requirements. They constantly insisted that Americans and Canadians follow the rules laid out in treaties, ideologies, and laws. Indian leadership and individual Indians as well were engaged in an unequal struggle with the paternalistic American and Canadian governments, but they struggled anyway. Individual Indians like John Beargrease pursued individual adaptations. In the long run, Indians defied the intent of the imperial powers and survived as Indians. Although the narrative of survival echoes with many variations throughout the Americas, quite a bit of scholarly attention focused on the northern Great Lakes region has become available.

Many Americans and Canadians are vaguely aware of the large reservations like Navajo and Pine Ridge but know little about the dozens of Indian communities that were inundated by the flood of American expansion and only survive in postage stamp-sized islands in their ancestral homelands. The Chippewa and other Great Lakes tribes share a pattern of land loss and marginalization within the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In Canada, the reserves form an arc comprised of even smaller First Nations communities in southern Ontario. Although allowed to remain on miniscule reservations, these Indians were swept aside by the large logging, fishing, and mining operations that took away traditional lifestyles and denuded their land of resources. Indians had to figure out how to survive as Indians in this world.

Two 2009 publications highlight and explicate the world of the Great Lakes Indians.

Professor Edumund Danziger is an acknowledged scholar whose works about the Ojibwe (Chippewa, Anishinabeg) have become *de rigeur* for students. Daniel Lancaster is a North Shore Minnesotan and freelance writer who clearly knows how to do effective research. Independently, these scholars produce a blended picture seldom seen: The Indian World After the Loss of Sovereignity.

Professor Danziger provides a wide ranging examination of Indian responses to the overweening power and determination to implement a cultural genocide on the Iroquoian and Ojibwe by Canada and the United States. His thesis, well supported by wide-ranging sources, is that Native Americans were tenacious in their efforts to maintain their collective identities supported by culturally relevant practices, but that they accommodated to the demands of their imperial overlords and the realities of a new way of life. Continued Native cultures existed no matter how veiled by apparent conformity to the demands of colonial powers.

Although Danziger overdoes his metaphor about Indian moccasins in the mainstream and insistence that Indians have to live in two worlds, he should be forgiven the conceit because he provides so much information and eye-opening interpretations. One area that I felt received unaccustomed attention was the new economy. Danziger devotes three chapters to "Making a Living." Natives on both sides of the border readily entered the wage-based economies of the Great Lakes, pursued agriculture if their particular reservations were conducive, and continued age-old patterns of hunting, trapping, and gathering. He also emphasizes that many bands did all three. Danziger provides a nuanced view of Indian responses to efforts to compel education and Christianity. He offers a plausible explanation of how Native communities retained much of their traditional approaches to governance in a kind of shared governance scheme that emerged on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

The excellence of *Great Lakes Indian Accommodation* can be better understood when combined with *John Beargrease*. This book examines the realities of a shared American-Indian legend. It also complements Danziger's study particularly about "making a living" but also about the tenacity of Ojibwe culture in a world of Christians.

John Beargrease (1858-1910) has attained legendary status on the North Shore of Minnesota akin to that of Paul Bunyan; he even has an annual dogsled race named after him. In the heroic trope, he was a herculean figure whose dog teams carried the mail through blizzards and provided help to settlers and Ojibwe alike. He died saving another from the frigid waters of *Gitchee Gumee* (Lake Superior). Unlike Bunyan, John Beargrease was real. This gem of a biography describes the life of an

Ojibwe man who, while not quite the superhero, did play a major role in the transition of the North Shore from Ojibwe Country to life within non-Indian controlled mining communities.

His life illustrates the adaptation of tribal people to the world dominated by others. During his lifetime, the copper and timber of traditional Chippewa country brought a new economy and new relationships to the Chippewa. Tribal leaders had signed land cessions, paradoxically, so their bands could remain on the North Shore even if only in tiny enclaves. Americans either ignored the Chippewa or hired them for menial jobs so they drifted through North Shore life, always on the periphery. Their existence was hand to mouth throughout most of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Beargrease and other Ojibwe became wage earners for the companies that now controlled the North Shore. Beargrease not only delivered mail on contract but worked in mines, did a little farming, and continued to hunt, fish, and trap. He also developed into a traditional religious leader.

Beargrease and his family became the hub of a vital Ojibwe community that was intermingled among the more numerous Americans. He maintained an Ojibwe cultural life that included ceremonies and prayer. He maneuvered to maximize his treaty benefits as most Ojibwe did and he accommodated to the Americans. There was little choice for Indians on the North Shore but they adapted on their own terms.

Daniel Lancaster has utilized a plethora of sources to stitch together what is known about Beargrease and rendered a unifying North Shore historical framework. Readers receive a sense of the bewilderment and dogged tenacity that characterized life on the North Shore for Indians and Whites alike. Those unfamiliar with the North Shore can gain an impression of the omnipresent challenge of the weather from numerous anecdotes.

American marginalization of the Chippewa is another theme driven home in the narrative of Beargrease's efforts to make a living by constantly blending jobs while continuing hunting and trapping. Another theme is the interrelated, sustaining pattern of Chippewa families. John Beargrease and his wife, Louise, followed the common pattern from being dependent and living with his parents when first married to nurturing children and grandchildren in their turn. Chippewa families eked out existence by combining resources within the richness of family support. Lancaster also traces what happened to Beargrease's children and grandchildren which, coincidently, serves to highlight the tragedies common to North Shore Chippewa.

This local history omits the historical context of the Indian-American tragedy and the despoliation of the environment by the mining and timber companies. But one can see the daily impact of the rough and tumble of the late 19th-century robber barons in the lives of an Ojibwe family and even in the vicissitudes alluded to in the lives of whites and Indians alike.

Many local histories omit the warts of history. For instance, Beargrease's daughter Mary married Sheriff John Mercer who had grown tired of "arresting the young, headstrong Indian woman for violating segregation laws." They had ten children. What an insightful, illuminating picture could emerge from this hint of what life was like for Indians!

If all politics is local, so is all history. Books like *John Beargrease* along with works like Danziger's *Great Lakes Indian Accommodation and Resistance during the Early Reservation Years, 1850-1900* increase our comprehension of what happened on the ground while governors, Indian leaders, and congressmen spun out their policies. Either book is a good addition to a library but, in combination, they are valuable pieces of the history of the Great Lakes Native Americans.

Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. viii + 500, $35 hb.

Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S. Mexican War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. xxii + 473, $35 hb.

All historians, professional and amateur, need to read these two books. Professors Hämäläinen and DeLay alter the way the histories of the Southwest, American Imperialism, the Mexican War, Texas, Indians, and Mexico should be incorporated into history. Their work is a culmination of the trends exemplified by the scholarship of Gary Clayton Anderson, particularly his *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land* (2005) and of James Brooks in *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (2002). Each of the authors fully deserves the awards and praises received from the history profession.

The pivot around which this reinterpretation revolves is the Comanche nation from about 1780 to 1875. Both Hämäläinen and DeLay focus on them as one of the determining forces of history. According to Hämäläinen, the Comanches created an empire featuring an economy of buffalo, horses, plunder, and commerce. Decisions made by a Comanche government decided the fate of northern Mexico, fostered the expansion of Texas, amended the histories of Native American enemies and allies, and created a milieu for the American successes in the Mexican War. Comanches displayed a violence and *realpolitic* rivaled only by the Texans and the Americans. Comanches justified their wars by their commitment to ethnocentrist views of the rest of the world and by the need for

revenging deaths caused by others, particularly Mexicans. As revealed in both books, their somewhat hypocritical justification for conquest pales in comparison to the "Texas Creation Myth" as described by DeLay and the American expansionist sophistry that justified taking half of Mexico. At least Comanche deaths were real even if they were excuses for war.

Readers should analyze these seminal works for an understanding of the apparently grandiose claims I have made for them and the marvelous, bold interpretations based on sound scholarship presented by DeLay and Hämäläinen. They place the Comanche in the context of continent-wide history with facility. . . and convincingly.

On another level, their collective works are a major contribution to Comanche ethnohistory and to American Indian history in general. *Comanche Empire* has the best description of Comanche government that I have read. Hämäläinen draws on ethnographic sources combined with Spanish-Mexican-Texan-United States sources to describe a society that was internally fluid and externally united. This description is worth the time to read the book but other ethnohistorical exegesis magnifies its value.

Few scholars are able to grasp how a non-coercive, non-state society that is operationally based on kinship could possibly have a foreign policy. The answer is that the common culture, frequent interaction, and reinforcing institutions like dance and military societies provided a common front that led to collective decisions. For example, the entire Comanche nation agreed to treaties and agreements with Mexico, Kiowas, Osages, Wichitas, Pawnee, and the United States that lasted for decades. The author's explication of Comanche external policy is beautifully presented.

Professor DeLay's book focuses on the Comanches but includes more attention to decisions and actions of other tribes than Hämäläinen's does. *The War of A Thousand Deserts* focuses on the 1830s through 1875 when the Comanche fury laid waste to much of northern Mexico and created a Comanche dominance of the entire slave, horse, buffalo economy. Each of the communities destroyed by the Comanches became deserted. According to DeLay, Comanches deliberately destroyed resources they could not use and killed what they could not take. They were not just stealing horses. DeLay explains well how this desertification was needed to hold Comanche society together internally.

In turn, Comanche decisions affected the future of the other polities in the area. He supports the contention that Comanches had a unified policy with exhaustive research in Mexican sources. For instance, this decentralized nation sent forty-four major expeditions into Mexico between 1834 and 1847. Each had more than 100 men and several were at least 1000! Conscious, collective, tribal choices marshalling resources created a war

on northern Mexican provinces. The same combination maintained peaceful trade with the United States, Pawnees, Wichitas, and New Mexico.

As with Hämäläinen, DeLay provides a great deal of ethnographic information. His descriptions of the work load of Comanche boys, the impact of horses, the commodification of women, the rules of trade in Comancheria, and the utilization of resources is unmatched. He offers exemplary ethnohistory. The sweep of history, chronologically and across the whole of the Southwest is equally articulated.

Each of the authors explains the demise of Comanche hegemony as not just the arrival of the U.S. cavalry and Texas rangers as some tropes would have it. Comanche economic choices, combined with other factors, gradually reduced their domination. From a high of about 30,000 in 1800, the Comanches suffered a precipitous population decline: to 20,000 in 1840; to 10,000 in 1850; and to 5,000 in 1870. They could neither adopt nor breed fast enough to make up for war and disease losses. Their giant horse herds, maybe 120,000 in the 1840s, competed with buffalo for grass and water. Slaves were trade goods as well as laborers, but acquiring them required more war, and surrounding populations were not inexhaustible. A drought compounded matters in the 1870s. Given the reality of resource depletion, the concomitant challenge of the much larger forces of Texas, the United States, and other tribes was insurmountable.

As an aside almost, DeLay provides examples of American actions during the Mexican War and the Catch-22 situations Americans faced and created. For instance, Americans said they would protect Mexicans from Comanches, but then they disarmed Mexicans because they might be guerrillas. Comanches were attacked by American forces for attacks on Mexicans while Americans were attacking Mexicans. The only constants in this bewildering world were that Americans were sure they were superior and all others should be forced to do their bidding—so, too, were the Comanches sure that they were endowed with the right to dominate.

The history of the Comanches demonstrates that American Indian nations had societies that did much more than simply react to defend their homelands, cultures, and families against the vastly superior forces of Americans and Europeans. This, currently in vogue among scholars, "Resistance" model is not supported by the facts. Comanches altered the histories of the colonial-imperialistic powers and they forced Europeans and Americans to court them, to deal with their hegemony, and they did so deliberately. Comanches fought for glory, wealth, and domination.

Comanche hegemony had disappeared by 1875, and these paragons of a Native American warrior society, feared throughout the southern part of the West, northern Mexico, and much romanticized elsewhere, were supplanted by the Lakota after the 1876 Battle of the Big Horn. Crazy Horse,

Sitting Bull, and Red Cloud became the models of what Indians were, not the Comanches. Ironically, *Dances with Wolves*, the book, was written about the Comanche, but the movie substituted the Lakota. The Comanches were a vastly more formative force in North American history. Thanks to the brilliant scholarship of DeLay and Hämäläinen, at least their historical place is restored.

Gregory Gagnon
University of North Dakota

Scott Richard Lyons, *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Pp. 248. $22.50 pb, $67.50 hb.

It's tempting to describe Scott Richard Lyons's *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* as a dose of good common sense, and to extend the compliment by noting how little common sense we find among ourselves these days. Of course, the term has been too well deconstructed to be of much use among the academic Left (a good portion of the audience to whom this book is addressed), and, practically speaking, it is a term that has lost its saliency as the larger culture—in a sense, a prevailing world culture—has moved to neo-liberal individualism. We, whoever "we" may be, seem to have less in common than ever. And "sense" is what any individual can construe after a diligent search on Google.

But this state of affairs is one of the reasons to get yourself a copy of *X-Marks*. In this book on Native American history, culture, and politics, Lyons argues against the "culture cops" that attempt to purge the impure from their tribal registers, the better to hold onto the traditions of their forebears. Lyons counters with a plan for Indian nationalism that foregrounds the tradition of accepting citizens for "what they do" rather than "who they are." What they do includes making "X-marks"—that is, their signatures—on treaties. The "X-marks" and treaties are actual historical traces that are used metaphorically in the book. They stand for Indians who neither reject their past nor their future, which Lyons insists must be a modern one. Like 19th- and 20th-century Indian men who signed these treaties, however flawed the agreements may have been, and however coerced and constrained the men who signed them may have been, today's Indians can likewise "make their x-marks" in such a way as to preserve Indian culture and tradition without rejecting the Good and goods (and inevitability) of modernity. The link to modernity suggests that these Indian nations as well as Indian identity will be anything but pure. Lyons calls this a "realist" as opposed to a "utopian" call for community, one that accepts the Indians as they/we currently are, rather than as some have wished they/we would be.

As we might expect, the book carries forward the work of the American Indian Movement in its heyday of the 1970s but also overturns its excesses. Out of AIM came those who concocted a new traditionalism that Lyons says sometimes worked through, and to the benefit of, colonialists. Racial purity appears to have been invented by the colonizers, who continue to insist on a certain level of "blood quantum" in order to pay out (often treaty-conferred) government benefits. Similarly, the tribal religions of today's Indian foremothers and forefathers were in many

cases open to amendment. To oust the tribal-inflected Christianity that offers solace and community to so many contemporary Natives is not just non-traditional, according to Lyons, it is simply ethically wrong.

However, Lyons supports, and has been a party to, Native linguistic revival. This movement to teach Native languages to the English-speaking young by aging Native-speaking elders has not only been a boon to endangered tribal languages like Lyons' own Ojibwe, it has given a voice to the elders who still carry a living memory of the traumas of colonial conquest, including the much-despised Indian boarding schools. Lyons' sanguine (and gently argumentative) temperament even finds some good in the boarding school regimes which, in the testimony of some of his elders, at least provided modern structure and education in those difficult, not to say, horrific, times.

Lyons first came to professional prominence as a rhetorician in 2000 with an article published in *College Composition and Communication*, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" The article was influential enough to warrant anthologizing in Susan Miller's *The Norton Book of Composition Studies* (New York: Norton, 2009). One reason for its influence was the almost complete lack of any study of Native American Rhetoric. But another reason is Lyons' expository talent. He often explains by storytelling, and even his use of some pretty high-flying theories (for example, those of the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari) comes off as conversational. Some may worry about the reductionist possibilities inherent in such a project, but what I see is a man who makes his mark (to borrow Lyons' own metaphor) on whatever he reads, shaping the edifice of his argument through nearly constant reference to others' theories, to multiple accounts of history, and even to his own autobiography. The fit amongst all these parts is seamless. As a piece of criticism, it is a good palliative for those who think that only the words of literature can heal a broken life.

Of interest to the readers of this journal will be his rendering of "Literary Nationalism" as it pertains to that arm of literature known as "American" and the sub-species deemed the "Native American Renaissance" as well as to future inscriptions of these literatures. Lyons is surely not the first to note the centrality of Indianness to the first generations of "white" American literature, even though most of the early boosters of the American national literature were more likely to find "nature" or "the wilderness" to be defining and differentiating features of this literature to its Continental counterparts. But then again maybe he is. It has certainly been the practice for some time now to place one's focus "on the margins" and therefore to elevate the references to Native Americans and their cultures in the key journals of American literature and criticism.

Lyons is bolder than most in his willingness to call the sheep back to the fold, to reign in the forces of entropy. He clearly likes the "x-mark" move of reversal, for example, in Jace Weaver's declaration, "English is a Native language" (158). Without doubt, readers will find new discussions of Native American literary critics and theorists like Gerald Vizenor in these pages as well as a new context within which to receive them and to make them matter.

Natives and non-Natives will doubtless receive this book differently, but as the book argues, the reception will not break down neatly into those two categories. Instead, many non-Natives for whom Indian history and culture has made only a slight impression can nonetheless hear the sound of—dare I say it?—common chords. Think, for instance, of feminist political scientist Wendy Brown's assertion that the game of identity politics has worked against its stated quest for greater freedom; in fact, "political correctness" has straight-jacketed and infantilized us all, while simultaneously calling forth a profoundly divisive mainstream political culture (*States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). When Lyons declares "Indian identity is something people do, not what they are, so the real question is, what should we do?" he emphasizes an existential and communal responsibility that devolves to us all. The audience for *X-Marks: Native Signatures of Assent* should be broad indeed.

Kathleen Dixon
University of North Dakota

Holaday Mason, *Towards the Forest.* Moorhead, MN: New Rivers Press, 2007. Pp. 70, $13.95 pb.

The poems of *Towards the Forest* are, with few exceptions, divided into sections of one or two lines each. The form is appropriate, since the poems are best described as loose meditations, frequently sentimental and emotional, on the natural world, on memory, on interior landscapes: words appear like fragments of thought, seemingly fallen from the air. Connections are indistinct; the reader is asked to follow drifting lines of quiet thought. Throughout there is an atmosphere of calm. Seldom is the voice raised, and rhythms are subdued.

The style has both its strengths and its weaknesses. There is nothing wrong with calm meditations—think of Wordsworth or Tennyson—but there remains a critical question that involves the requirements for providing poetic interest and bringing the reader irresistibly into the poems. Whatever its merits, this book lacks the compulsions of tight structure or dramatic rhythms or intricate forms; there is instead a placid meditative calm that may at times seem listless. A useful contrast is the tightly coiled energy of Emily Dickinson, a poet who knew how to use rhythm and rhyme (or off-rhyme) and formal structure to distinct advantage. This is not to say that Holaday Mason should imitate Emily Dickinson, if that were possible, or be anyone but herself. The comparison, however, should bring into focus the kind of force that is lacking here. Striking figurative language would help (again think of Dickinson), but that is not a significant presence in these poems, and efforts in that direction are often unfortunate (e.g., "I feel you inside me like a gun" or "Like some old man's / coat, our past covers my breasts").

The author seems unusually evasive. Many of the poems are addressed to a "you" out there somewhere: "You hear the before"; "And you have no idea / which way is up"; "You'd expect moonlight like this / to open your chest like a surgeon's knife" (note the questionable simile). Anyway, the references to a vague "you" avoid the direct concentration and focus of a confrontation with a precise self. Imagine if Keats had written, "Your heart aches, and a drowsy numbness / Pains your sense. . . ." Unimaginable. It was, after all, Keats who wrote, "The excellence of every art is its intensity. . .," and intensity is precisely what is lacking in the poems of *Towards the Forest*, where the poet's deflecting practice of addressing herself results in draining her work of urgency and drama. Typical is the opening of "The Trees, the Window":

And then carefully—the movement

toward his mouth, toward
taking and bending his taste

into your own.

The poet appears to be both participant and observer, but the dual roles serve only to diffuse intensity. Imagine how these lines might have been written by Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath. . . .

The author has published two chapbooks before this collection, her first book. She may be seen, therefore, as at the beginning of a career. Despite my reservations about her work at this point, possibilities remain. At their best, as in "Seven Pairs of Swans," the poems are effective, at least in part, but the best is rare. Throughout there is need for focus and concentration; all too often, poems tend to drift off into inconclusiveness, as in, for example, the closing lines of the first poem in the book, "Reciting the Water":

> The child in the house is quiet. The sky is a ship of silver.
> The birds grow large as they dry. Soon they'll go.
>
> I might have been anyone.

The poem moves in too many directions. What is it about, really? The child, the sky, the birds, the self? The poem reaches into a void. We have Yeats to remind us that "a poem [should come] right with a click like a closing box." Too often in *Towards the Forest* there is no click, but rather an indistinct murmur.

Sometimes a fine poem cannot restrain itself. In the closely observed and carefully perceived "A Gift," for example, concerning a gift of ten yellow-stemmed roses, the poem concludes,

> It is the softest surrender,
>
> the way they open in a slow deliberate curl,
> tumble without muscle or bone.
>
> In another room someone drinks a cold glass of water.
>
> I love the way the roses glow like torches in the dark
> and how the blooms tremble with the passing of my breath.

A "glass of cold water" would probably be more accurate—it's the water, not the glass, that's cold—but anyway, where did this line come from? What room? Who? And what's the point? Is this a poem about a gift of roses, or what? This intrusion destroys the flow of this otherwise fine poem.

Often the poems in *Towards the Forest* are marred by self-indulgent effusions as in these opening lines of "Portrait of Clouds Without Sky":

> I hear nothing so am afraid
>
> There is no music so there is nothing
>
> The absence comes as *field*
>
> The woman speaking is the mother
>
> Beyond time

And so forth. Words gather without connection, and they reach no conclusion. The reader is left with fragments: the "I" who "hears nothing," the silence, the absence, the field, the woman. . . . We seem to be moving toward some gray area in which there may be meaning for the poet, but only vague uncertainty for the reader.

The spaces between the words and lines in this poem as well as in many others may be intended to indicate time for thought, a meditative pause perhaps. But spaces are not the same as poetry. In speaking a poem, one may of course pause when appropriate; that is a matter of interpretation. But in reading a text, the spaces seem, at least to this reader, more an affectation than a help.

A final note: especially in a book of poetry it is disconcerting and distracting to come upon errors that should have been caught by an editor if not by the author. On page 43, for example, the reader comes upon "it's own collection of myths, it's stories"; and on page 64, "The swirl of black birds offer. . . ." These unfortunate lapses subvert attention and diminish confidence.

Roberts French
Santa Fe, NM

Lesley Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. Pp. x + 235, $19.95 pb.

When we talk about "poetic voice," what do we mean? Are we referring to works in print where "voice" is used metaphorically, or to works recited, performed, or even composed out loud? Do we mean originality, personality, and the illusion of authorial presence? Aesthetic, cultural, political, or spiritual attitudes toward the speaker? Formal readings or poetry slams?

These issues all stem from poetry's reliance on sound, whether the poet is mainstream or avant-garde, and are explored deftly, thoughtfully, and yet accessibly in Lesley Wheeler's new book *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*. Wheeler focuses on poetry performed aloud, from the Modernists and the rise of radio, through poetry "happenings" in the 1950s and '60s, up to the current split between academic poetry readings and the rise of the poetry slam. In doing so, she simultaneously traces the evolution of the definition of voice, including both "the increasing trend [of audiences] to conflate the performer of poetry with the poet" (4), and the various ways the poet's voice has reached the audience either live or via the distance technologies of radio, recordings, and the Web. The result is a fine study which demonstrates the innovative ways poets have tested the limits of poetry and the relationship between poet and audience.

Chapter 1, which reviews existing literary criticism and the discourses of composition studies, creative writing, and gender and minority studies in order to assemble the major theories of voice, is probably the most densely written for a casual reader. But the rest of the book is quite accessible and enjoyable. Chapters 2 and 3 chart the rise of the poet as performer in the notable examples of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Langston Hughes. Wheeler notes that "many modernist-era poets were schooled in the presumption that the poet would rarely be the best oral interpreter of her own poetry, and that superior recitation required unusual skill and sensitivity in the performer" (4). As a result, poetry was usually performed by actors. Yet Millay and Hughes developed innovations that shaped how poetry was transmitted. Both Millay and Hughes use "sound symbolism and tropes of speech and song" (41) to demonstrate the importance of voice as metaphor and as literal meaning, the slippage between sound and text. Wheeler continues: "Further, Hughes and Millay were highly deliberate in how they physically sounded verse for various audiences" (41). Wheeler explains how Millay was one of the first American poets to broadcast her poetry on the radio. Despite her ambivalence at replacing the immediacy of live audiences with this new technology, she

still foresaw how distance technologies could create a more vivid authorial presence than print media. Moving in another direction, Wheeler describes how Hughes performed his work differently depending on his audience—for instance, emphasizing or de-emphasizing African-American content and slang—and incorporated varying sound and visual elements into his readings, such as a jazz combo, to mimic the blending of the two in his own sonic- and typographically-experimental poems. Chapter 4 explores the complicating of voice through lyric collaborations, in particular in the work of James Merrill and David Jackson in "The Book of Ephraim" from *The Changing Light at Sandover* (1998), and Maureen Seaton's and Denise Duhamel's *Exquisite Politics* (1997) and *Oyl* (2000).

But the real gem of this book, to which Wheeler devotes the large fifth chapter "Voice Activated: Contemporary Academic Poetry Readings and the National Poetry Slam" and two extensive appendices, is the disparity between the forms of contemporary poetry performance and what this disparity says about poetic voice. This chapter begins by describing the mid-century rise of the academic poetry reading in the well-funded universities and colleges of post-WWII. In such an atmosphere, Wheeler argues, readings have changed little since the Sixties: "the poet stands on a stage and speaks from behind a podium to rows of quietly seated students, faculty, and community members. Generally these writers read from books and manuscripts, proffering occasional glosses or background information on the poems in a more extemporaneous manner" (134-35). Audience participation is strictly limited. As an experiment, Wheeler attended a range of performances and readings at the 2006 annual convention of the Associated Writing Programs and found that nearly all of them followed the expected format. In sharp contrast, the slam-poetry movement, wherein authors compete at poetry performance events, draws from the Beat, Black Arts, and Confessional movements along with musical forms like jazz and hip-hop in order to redefine poetry's audience and goals. Wheeler notes that because "Slam is deliberately conscious of its listeners . . . slam poets try mightily to please their non-specialist addressees" (142). What I admire about Wheeler's discussion is that she is able to examine these two dominant formats as phenomena that demonstrate certain attitudes about voice and audience without passing judgment on either. She is clearly excited about the possibilities that the more grassroots slam poetry offers, but she acknowledges that it, too, has become an institution under the auspices of Poetry Slam, Inc., which oversees many of the competitions. And while both formats feed the audience's desire for authorial presence, she describes in the section "Slam as a Poetic Form" how slam judges seem to promote and reward this illusion: "slam, like

confessionalism, encourages audiences to identify the speaker with the poet" and depends on "the performance of authenticity—the manipulation of textual and/or physical conventions that suggest sincerity, factual accuracy, and expressiveness" (149).

Ultimately, Wheeler concludes that the conflicting definitions of voice stem from the underlying conflict over what poetry is or should accomplish and sees voice as the primary site for discussion in contemporary poetry. As a teacher, reader, and writer of poetry who is watching the poetry community fragment and stagnate in unproductive ways, I find Wheeler's study an important contribution to the conversation that I hope will provide a framework by which we may incorporate these many differing methods of performing poetic voice.

Lee Ann Roripaugh, *On the Cusp of a Dangerous Year*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009. Pp. ix + 79. $14.95 pb.

As a follow-up to her successful 2008 series of very short films, *Green Porno*, about the reproductive habits of marine creatures, Isabella Rossellini has created a second series in 2010, *Seduce Me*, which focuses on the sex lives of insects. Despite featuring low-budget costumes, minimalist sets, and posterboard props, with Rossellini alternately acting out the mating scenes and describing them in voice-overs, the films (due in no small part to their enthralling star) come across as charming, witty, and—yes—sexy.

I bring up Rossellini's films because they remind me of Lee Ann Roripaugh's most recent book of poetry, *On the Cusp of a Dangerous Year*, her follow-up to her 2004 volume *Year of the Snake* (also with SIU Press), books which focus on sensuality and longing, often via observations of the insect world. While both collections contain similar imagery, and are informed by both an acute Asian sensibility (from her Japanese mother and the influence of Japanese literature), and a sense of isolation (from her life on the plains of Wyoming and South Dakota), the new book asserts itself with more assurance and daring—perhaps necessary when facing the age of 37, which Lady Murasaki identified as "the dangerous year" for women.

This collection patterns itself on the diaries and pillow books of the famous courtesans of Japan's Heian era, Lady Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shonagon, who detailed their lives and love affairs at the court with a keen and vibrant wit. Sprinkled throughout are poems which, like Shonagon's, are catalogues of "things," with such intriguing titles as

"Things That Leave an Aching Feeling Inside," "Things That Cause a Feeling of Chagrin," or "Luscious Things" such as a peach, which she instructs us:

> . . . rub your cheek up against
> the tender furred curve
>
> of its skin, lightly run your tongue along
> the cleft, break the skin
>
> with your teeth and press your mouth deep into
> creamy golden flesh— (ll. 3-8)

a heady seduction which is immediately undercut by the next item, the banana. I don't want to ruin the experience, so I'll simply urge you to read it for yourself. Roripaugh can't help but give even "Squalid Things" an oddly appealing treatment:

> The crisp Texas
> okra pickles
>
> that one sometimes likes to eat in secret
> are really quite
>
> squalid too, as their green skins are ever-
> so-slightly, most-
>
> disturbingly furred, just like the tender
> flesh of earlobes. (ll. 31-38)

But, as I alluded to in my opening comparison, it is through her observations of insects that Roripaugh displays to its greatest advantage her intelligence and wit. These are the poems I find myself returning to repeatedly, unable to get these images out of my head, as in "Cecropia," where she attempts to describe the effect of pheromones on the male cecropia moth, who,

> . . . if smell were sight and puffs of
> pheromones smoke signals, could pick out a teaspoon of dye
>
> randomly dropped in the vast expanse of the Grand Canyon.
> . . . . . .
>
> Once, I spent an entire summer sleeping with my front door
> unlocked, convinced that through sheer force of will,
> I could make him recognize this silent keening, and come.
> (ll. 17-19, 37-39)

Or, in "Things I Would Do for You," where she charmingly offers to find her lover a Jamaican click beetle,

> . . . and hold it up
> to your book like a small flashlight, so you can
> read by the bioluminescent spots on its thorax. (ll. 71-73)

She manages to make even the silverfish, an insect I find particularly repugnant, seem alluring:

> Once I briefly touched one—cool soft body
> liquid, ephemeral as mercury. It wriggled free, marked
> me with a faint pearled dusting of scales spangling
> the tip of my finger like the powdered glide of frosted
> eyeshadow. Was this the same way you and I marked
> one another? Secretly, and under cover of night?
> ("The Desire for Space Travel Is a Metaphor
> for Escape" ll. 64-69)

Yet it is in the opening poem "Crows Who Try to Be Cormorants Drown," a compendium of trivia which stand in for the desire the speaker wishes to voice, where I find the most enchanting insect image:

> Outside
> the windowpane, a wasp, arms and legs akimbo,
> cleans her satin-banded body with the same
> seductive gesture as a woman smoothing down
> a cocktail dress over the swell of her hips. (ll. 49-53)

The use of the insect motif allows Roripaugh to muse on the single-minded force of sex which, though described in their alien terms, seems all too familiar. She reveals a Rilkean ability to look at an object so keenly that she sees through it. It also lets her indulge in some truly seductive language—not just the traditional eroticisms, but the loveliness of Linnaean nomenclature which populates her poems with words like *Odontolabis femoralis* or *chromatophores*.

I could go on further to try and explain how these poems work, but I'll be blunt: these are simply some damn sexy poems. Read them.

Nicole Walker, *This Noisy Egg*. New York: Barrow Street Press, 2010. Pp. 78. $16.95 pb.

In this debut collection of poetry by Nicole Walker, there's a weirdness of imagery and a density of wordplay and language that results in some oddly lovely poems. Her style risks misfiring and putting off the reader, but the speaker of these poems has a generosity of spirit that invites us in and guides us along. This sense of invitation appears fortunately in the first poem of the collection, "Mistaking Windows for Doors," which draws us into the speaker's world:

> That was a good day. Forty friends gave me cash. . . .
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . . . Thank God they finally
> believed I had the touch and the face and the pockets.
> . . . . . .
>
> I took off my rings—laid them on the table—let everybody
> pick the one they liked the most. (ll. 1-8)

I love Walker's speaker, a person awed and bewildered and dismayed by the world—a noisy egg of a world filled with primal, fetal images whose insistent demands she cannot ignore, and whom she alternately feels drawn to nurture or to flee, as in "At the Local Five & Dime," which begins with the premise "The bargain hunters wanted my shirt":

> . . . they were squawking like baby birds
> and I couldn't let them starve.
> So I took off the shirt—I had to unravel it, collar
>
> then neck then bodice then sleeve
> then I was naked and they were busy making a new skein
> and I could sense the open and close of the door now
> and thought perhaps this
>
> is a good time to make a run for it. (ll. 18-25)

What I find especially appealing about Walker's poetry is that her use of language reminds us, as too many contemporary poets have forgotten, that the tongue is a muscle. It is astonishing to watch and listen to her flex its "luscious verberations," as in the poem "Scandal":

Ships are sordid.
They plow the night
and anything that presses open
reveals a sordid slip.
Slip in slip of the tongue slip the silence
a slip of paper. The slip of a boat as it slips through the night
heads for its warm-water saltless slip. (ll. 1-7)

The danger for Walker's readers is where the language is so glittering that it seems to create an impenetrable surface—for me, this happened with the poems "Forest Floor," "Weather Man," and some of the sections of the sequence "The Unlikely Origin of the Species." But happily, these examples are few and Walker is at her best where her obvious intelligence, imagination, and playfulness come together—notably in poems like "Mammoth," which restores the errata that inspired Elizabeth Bishop's "Man-Moth" or, as Walker puts it:

A corrective, like left shoe on right foot for a pigeon-toed kid.
But it's been a long time coming. Good thing we saved a cell
. . . . . .
. . . . We can all climb on, ride him up and down 101—
a whole country riding on the back of some awakened DNA, hanging
onto the bucking strands of a mappable—believable—dawn.
(ll. 1-2, 10-12)

Or in "Conservation of Matter," which starts off as a clever riff on Sidney, full of visual puns, but which, like the mammoth, is restored—in this case, to its status as fertility symbol:

O you sad sack you moon
leaving a big hole in the blank sky.
Your empty marks the ocean.
. . . . . .
your sleeves without arms, your light without source
your pupilless eye. Full and new, high and neap
you must be tired of counting month-time. (ll. 1-3, 8-10)

I have to make a point of calling attention to the notes on the poems, which appear at the end of the collection. Normally, this is the place where the author gives us additional information about the poems' sources to enrich our understanding of them. Walker's notes read like little stream-of-consciousness prose poems, capturing her personality in strange sips, like the end of her "note" on her poem "Metalepsis":

> a figure of speech in which two things compared are only tangentially related. Like most things. Or nothing. String and swing. They rhyme. Is that it? They also both dangle in the air. They go back and forth. String and swing, integrally related. Really, if you can't make a claim that's more than tangentially or remotely related, then you're not really applying yourself.

Overall, I found these poems rich and strange. Definitely appealing. Walker is a *scōp*, in the original sense of a shaper—of language, of worlds—and I look forward to her continued singing.

Heidi Czerwiec
University of North Dakota

Peter Bethanis, *American Future: Poems 1988-2008*. Washington: Entasis Press, 2009. Pp. 100, $12.00 pb.

The closing lines of the first poem in Peter Bethanis' fine collection *American Future*, the title poem "American Future," sets the tone of the book:

> Something loomed deeper than any basement
> on our block, larger than he was,
> an uncertainty he could not admit was unsolvable
> with a monkey wrench or a handshake
> and a little money down.

The lines are expansive, capturing a sense of time moving up to and away from the climactic moment when the speaker's father signs an insurance contract—"wanting so much to make the fine print / of the world work." The "fine print" of the insurance contract reflects that of the American experiment; accordingly, "American Future," and the poems that follow it, are meditations upon the personal and psychological landscapes of an America that is, at times, hardly recognizable in our modern world. Thus, the collection anchors itself historically as it addresses the future. Yet, in spite of what has been lost, the reader senses the ironic overtones of security being offered by an "insurance man." The tension when reading the poems in *American Future* comes from the conflict of memory and a world that propels itself headlong into the future without a sense of its origins. These concerns are indicative of the craftsmanship of these poems, which have been fashioned and ordered with such care that they become representative of something forgotten in both poetry and America, and in this way, they are conduits to both remembering the past and pursuing the future.

The first section (one of five) documents childhood memories of America in the '60s and '70s. Dusk hovers over these poems—but not nostalgia as much as the lamp-light of childhood. "I once believed; I once believed," Bethanis writes in "American Landscape, 1973." By the last poem of the first section, "Bearable Limits," the speaker remembers the street of his childhood twenty years later. The memory captures the distance between World War II and Vietnam as his neighborhood watches "Chris Rykert,"

> afraid to go to war, shoot himself in the foot
> with a hunting rifle and almost bleed to death
> in the street—the onlookers stunned, his mother
>
> in her housecoat, screaming—stretching this neighborhood
> like an elastic band to its bearable limits.

The lines seem to center around how the war affects the community, but they ultimately capture the virtual disappearance of the neighborhood in America. The generational gap between World War II and Vietnam that stretches the neighborhood to "its bearable limits" seems remote and foreign in 2010 America. The poem conveys the internal and external conflicts of America without making light of the climactic event of the poem. The event speaks for itself and provides its own nightmares. However, the sense of community alluded to in the poem and the eradication of that community casts a dim shadow over *American Future*.

Bethanis recognizes this shadow, and, in one way or another, the rest of the collection addresses how to live in America. In order to convey how life in America could be established, Bethanis looks to the past. The second section, entitled "Li Hua's Messenger," illustrates how the past speaks to the present. The poet Li Po is central to most of these poems, and the painter Li Hua must listen to the message of his poetry. Initially, Li Hua is "jealous of Li Po / whose pictures glide like the moon over dark water." However, in "Li Hua Paints Flowers on Water,"

> Li Hua no longer the center,
> no longer an ego,
> but an otherness
> moving on the water.

The lines are central to the overall context of *American Future* and are reflective of the poet's own journey. Bethanis has clearly seen beyond the ego underlying so many bad poets. Thus, the poet's knowledge of history becomes essential for survival in *American Future*; the otherness of the past is a foundation by which the self can be transcended and transformed.

If a weakness exists in *American Future*, it comes in part four, "The Lion Tamer's Guide." In this section Bethanis falls into the trap of writing poems about poetry and loses some of the force that carries the rest of the collection. When he writes about the events of life, Bethanis' lines are straight and true. This life seems contrived at times in the meta-poetic space of poems like "Fear of Flying" when "strapped into this poem, a life."

In the final section, "Make the World Marvelous," the book rediscovers its form and contains some of the work's best poems. The prominent theme of "Make the World Marvelous" is family and teachers. Appropriately, the theme of divorce forces a re-evaluation of the speaker's sense of the world as it shatters the world of his daughter. The closing lines of "Marlena" are among the strongest in the collection: "and we went our separate ways, like old war buddies, / like people who survive some kind of war." Beyond the sardonic overtones of the way divorce affects America's future, the simile parallels the other allusions to war in the collection, and it is from this wreckage that Bethanis offers a solution

in the final poem, written for his daughter: "To live we've got to make the world Marvelous, / to live we've got to make the world Marvelous." The repetition affirms not only life but the world and a future in that world. Notably, the future in the final poem is infused with images of the American landscape; yet the speaker engages and bequeaths "the world" to his daughter. In this way, the poem recalls the final lines of Robert Penn Warren's "American Portrait: Old Style": "And I love the world even in my anger, / And love is a hard thing to outgrow."

Brad McDuffie
Nyack College

Ian Stewart, *Just One Vote: From Jim Walding's Nomination to Constitutional Defeat*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 282. Illustrations, appendices, and index. $26.95 pb.

Ian Stewart's *Just One Vote* is a fascinating, excellent and, at times, deeply frustrating book—at least frustrating to those brought up with an aversion to "what if" history. The book's central premise, or "hook" if you will, is this: because of a series of seemingly unrelated events, the failure to wrest the party nomination away from one long-serving member of Manitoba's Legislative Assembly in January of 1986—"by just one vote"—ultimately resulted not only in the fall of Manitoba's New Democratic Party (NDP) government in 1988, but arguably also led to the failure of the Meech Lake [constitutional] Accord; a failure which, for better or worse, continues to have significant consequences for the Canadian body politic. For those unfamiliar with Canadian constitutional history, this last claim, the book's most grandiose conceit, relates to Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's attempt to have Quebec "buy into" Canada's newly repatriated constitution and integrate that often disaffected province into a renewed and decentralized brand of Canadian federalism. It is on this point that many readers will find Stewart's work either brilliantly speculative or fatally flawed.

Before examining what Stewart readily admits is his most contentious argument, it is worthwhile considering what else he has brought to the table in this work. To begin with, I would contend that Stewart has made important contributions in two fields. In the first instance, *Just One Vote* provides a brilliant case study of one of the most understudied, yet foundational, facets of Canadian political practice, the constituency-level nomination meeting. Placing the case of one heavily contested local nomination meeting in a swing riding voting district in Manitoba within the broader context of the (admittedly limited) literature of the nomination process in Canada, Professor Stewart has added an extremely valuable chapter to this still emerging field of research: a chapter which notes both the unique features of this particular race and yet confirms the many ways in which that nomination contest verified what other scholars in the field have already observed. The second major contribution is to the field of local and provincial political history. Not to put too fine a point upon it, the author has provided an immaculately researched, eloquently written micro-history of an event which, no matter how one feels about Stewart's other claims, unquestionably altered the political landscape of St. Vital and the province of Manitoba for a number of years.

Stewart's attention to detail is remarkable. As someone who not only lived in St. Vital during the period in question (primarily the 1980s) but

was also a minor participant in some of the events he describes (and was actually interviewed for the book), I cannot help but be impressed by the thoroughness of Stewart's research. His careful combination of oral history interviews with the extant documentary sources has yielded a fulsome and accurate account of the key events and the motivations and feelings of key participants; indeed, as I read chapters four, five, and six (which dealt with the campaign for the nomination, the nomination meeting itself, and the aftermath) I was constantly "reminded" of things I had long since forgotten—which in turn forcefully reminded me both of the frailties of individual memory (my own in particular) and the importance of careful scholarship in recovering an accurate, collective account of any set of events.

It is also the case that Professor Stewart set the stage for this detailed study extremely well. His brief history of the area that became the constituency of St. Vital and his short synopsis of Manitoba politics prior to the 1980s are both scholarly and eminently readable. Meanwhile, his even-handed biography of the protagonist of the piece, the incumbent MLA and sometime Speaker of the House, Jim Walding, and his careful analysis of the reasons for Walding's growing disaffection from the NDP provide a strong foundation for the ensuing narrative. Finally, the care with which the author details the actions of the three camps involved in the nomination battle (those of Walding and his two challengers, Sig Laser and Gerri Unwin) is admirable. Indeed, as one who has known some of these people for many years and has great affection for both of the challengers in that fateful nomination battle, I find Professor Stewart's descriptions of the people and events to be both incredibly insightful and completely accurate.

Clearly, I find this to be a book of considerable merit. As a contribution to local and provincial political history it is first-rate, and as a contribution to the literature on the Canadian political process it succeeds on many different levels. However, I must concede that there is a part of me that balks at Stewart's central argument, which is really an exercise in alternative history.

Like most historians I can appreciate the occasional well-crafted counterfactual argument to illustrate a point. And lord knows I have been guilty of penning a wistful "if only" or two in some of my conclusions (and been quite rightly taken to task for it). But it is just too much for my Thompsonian sensibilities to accept Stewart's argument that there is a direct, even causal, connection between the events at the Norberry School gymnasium on that unseasonably warm January day in 1986, when Walding retained the NDP nomination by just one vote, and the failure of the Meech Lake Accord four years later. Professor Stewart's argument is smooth, and his careful crafting of a counterfactual analysis makes it seem plausible, nay logical, that these two events are linked. Indeed, he

provides answers to several potentially invalidating points (e.g., what about Clyde Wells of Newfoundland and his undying opposition to the Accord? To this Professor Stewart responds: if Walding had lost the nomination, the NDP government of Manitoba would not have fallen and the complex matter of ratifying Meech Lake would almost certainly have been completed long before Wells was elected). But at the end of the day his case is built upon so many assumptions (including Stewart's all too easy assumption that if Sig Laser had won the NDP nomination for St. Vital he would have won the ensuing election) and so many other factors remaining unchanged that I simply cannot buy it. Like any counterfactual argument, there is not a shred of hard evidence that can be produced to validate the case. Still, the argument is not preposterous and it was well, if a bit laboriously, presented—a fun little exercise in "what if" history that does not detract from all of the other elements of the book that are so well done. Indeed, at the end of the day I would gladly recommend this book to anyone. I might well agree with E. P. Thompson's characterization of counterfactual history as *Geschichtwissenschlopff* or "unhistorical shit"[1] (300), but that doesn't mean it isn't fun and maybe even useful to expose oneself to a bit of it every so often.

Note

[1]E. P. Thompson, "The Poverty of Theory" in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*. London: Merlin Press, 1978.

Jim Mochoruk
University of North Dakota

Susan Cummins Miller, Editor, *A Sweet, Separate Intimacy: Women Writers of the American Frontier, 1800-1922*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007. Pp. xvii + 443, $26.95 pb.

At its initial appearance in 2000, Susan Cummins Miller's volume *A Sweet, Separate Intimacy: Women Writers of the American Frontier, 1800-1922* was met with rave reviews. This edited collection of letters, excerpts of fiction, bits of poetry, and documentary writing, culled from previously published sources, filled a significant niche in the resources readily available to the scholar of the frontier. The pulling together of nearly three dozen authors to explicate their understanding of their interactions with the otherness of the frontier found a ready audience among scholars and lay readers alike. Unfortunately, despite ongoing demand, *A Sweet, Separate Intimacy* quickly became unavailable through its initial publisher, presumptively due to its size and expense.

When the University of Utah Press determined to halt production, it was kind enough to allow the publication rights to revert to Miller, who then began the search for a new publisher. In the tale presented as a preface, Miller guides us through her arguably tortuous, but ultimately successful search to return the book to the public, and to do so in a fashion that would not undermine the text's integrity. The result is the present volume, issued from Texas Tech University Press in 2007 as a single book, sans deletions (or additions). It remains a welcome addition to the resources available for interested parties on all levels of scholarly inquiry.

While many of Miller's anthologized writers are familiar to the modern reader—Willa Cather, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Libby Custer, Helen Hunt Jackson—her efforts have rescued a number of other authors from history's infamous dustbin. Works by the likes of Frances Dana Barker Gage, Mary Ann Adams Maverick, Alice Cary, and Alice Cunningham Fletcher have fallen from our canon. Accordingly, we owe a debt of gratitude to Miller for her labors in bringing these women and their works on the frontier, as they lived it, to light. For each of the women included in the anthology, the frontier experience proved transformative, and profoundly altered her writing. Themes of isolation, the power of the natural environment, the drudgery of frontier living and the loss of the familiar rose to the fore of their writings.

Clearly, Miller could have found dozens of authors by which to fulfill her mission. However, beyond focusing her work on the customary European-American tradition, she sought out authors of variant perspectives to help us understand that not all frontier experiences occurred as the Easterner traveled westward. Indeed, some who experienced the awakenings of landscapes, cultures, and personalities were already on the fron-

tier: Native American women. Contributions from women such as Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, née Bame-wa-wa-ge-zhik-a-quay, a mixed-blood Ojibwa who relays oral traditions of her people, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, née So-mit-tone, a Paiute woman who offers an ethnology of a people caught between two worlds, and Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, née Zitkala-Sa, a Yankton Sioux who reflects upon the painful process of acculturation are particularly welcome additions to the literature.

A book that stands at nearly 450 pages is hard to fault for its lack of inclusiveness. However, had Miller been able to include the voices of more Asian women or those of Hispanic descent the text would have been enhanced. Of course, the problem also arises here as with any anthology: reliance upon the printed source. Without doubt, and without blame, this anthology fails to provide a complete picture of the frontier life experienced by the vast majority of women. Not only were considerable numbers of women illiterate or poorly educated and hence incapable of the poetry and prose presented herein, but large numbers of women who were literate, even if semi-so, did not take the opportunity at the end of their overwhelming days to put pen to paper. Moreover, those who did put pen to paper did not always save their labors or have their labors saved for the archivist or editor. Accordingly, the picture presented here is somewhat skewed to the better-educated, upper crust of westering women.

While this fault does not fall upon Miller, I would note her brief introductions and biographies of the 34 authors as being somewhat more problematic. Miller often conflates "west" and "frontier" in these introductions and occasionally draws inferences and makes claims that are not supportable. For example, she notes in the introduction, "I believe it was harder for Elizabeth Custer to await word of her husband's fate that early summer of 1876 than it was for George to take his stand at the Little Big Horn" (5). Interesting and thought-provoking, but not supported. Elsewhere she suggests that Willa Cather found the "muse . . . a jealous partner" and "chose the single life" (5). This scarcely seems an accurate conclusion given that by her own text, Miller observes that Cather's "deep emotional attachments were with women: Carrie and Irene Miner, Louise Pound, Isabelle McClung Hambourg, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Edith Lewis. Lewis and Cather lived together during the last forty years of Cather's life" (359).

Limitations aside, albeit taken into consideration, *A Sweet Separate Intimacy* merits reading by most and assignment to many.

Kimberly K. Porter
University of North Dakota

Eleanor Bluestein, *Tea and Other Ayama Na Tales*. Kansas City, MO: BkMk Press, 2008. Pp. 234. $16.95 pb.

When John Lennon imagined another world or another version of our world he did not imagine heaven, hell, or religion. He imagined a world with no possessions, no need to kill, no need to die for, no need for greed, no hunger; he imagined a world where all the people lived in the present, lived a life of peace, shared all the world. The sentimental or mystical Beatle—however we wish to understand him—reassured us that it isn't hard to imagine such a world. Eleanor Bluestein, the author of *Tea and Other Ayama Na Tales*, would agree, but with one caveat: one must be willing to suffer. In Ayama Na, Bluestein's imaginary world, there is heaven, hell, greed, extortion, selfishness, false prophets, neglected children, abused parents, rape; it is very much like our world. But in Bluestein's doppelganger world, the Brotherhood of Man can be attained through suffering. Suffering is not necessarily a bad condition; the word's etymology tells us that suffering simply means to bear, to undergo, to experience. If we remember this, and not suffer over our suffering, then we can live our lives in peace and harmony.

It is a useful lesson, both for Bluestein's readers and for the citizens of the fictional Ayama Na. Bluestein's characters in this 2007 winner of the G. S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction are seekers undergoing suffering of various sorts, but as Pania, the protagonist of the delicious title story discovers, the trick to peace is nothing but equanimity "to maintain a mood in a steady state" (234). The Hindu Upanishads teach the same lesson via the fable of the two birds: two birds perch themselves on the same tree; one eats the sweet and sour fruits and experiences pleasure and pain alternately; the other bird just looks on and does not eat any fruit. It is neither happy nor sad. Bluestein's characters, for the most part, eat the sweet and sour fruits; some are sunk in pleasure or pain, but a few are wonderfully transcendent, like the bird that remains apart. And a third group, like Pania in "Tea." learns to become aware of the indifferent birds within themselves.

The fictional Ayama Na, a South Asian kingdom with a parliamentary democracy and a military coup in its recent past, is situated in the same neighborhood as Cambodia and Thailand which seems to serve as the main economic and cultural center for the people of Ayama Na. Through this linked set of ten stories we learn that the titular king and queen of Ayama Na have recently welcomed an heir to the kingdom; that the prime minister, the parliament, and the politicians who run the country are corrupt to the bone; that the vice-ridden country is slowly coming out of a bloody coup that all but decimated its intellectuals; that with its several

UNESCO World Heritage sites it is a money-making tourist magnet for Westerners craving Asian culture and attractions; that American automobiles, Japanese gadgets, and Hollywood films remain the lodestar of seduction to the common people of Ayama Na en route to modernity and progress. Pin Dalie, Ayama Na's capital city with the "green and gold cupolas of the Royal Palace dominating the skyline" (137) and its airport with the arrival and departure lounge in a "large room with doors open at each end and an inadequate air-conditioning system" (136), is a sprawling over-grown village beyond whose fringes the "urban asphalt gave way to narrow dusty unpaved roads that cut through the country fields, the earth's fungal odors mingled with the rotting aftermath of the season's dry rice harvest" (197). Bluestein is good at showing past and present in one continuous vector just as the dirt road morphs into the asphalt and the dry rice harvest ends up in the "well-lit, linen-napkin-clad tourist restaurant in Pin Dalie's Sector Seven" (137).

"Pineapple Wars," "AIBO or Love at First Sight," and "Skin Deep" all explore the lives of characters transforming themselves inside out in order to belong to a rosy future distinct from their current undesired contexts and driving some hard bargains in the process. For instance, Koriatt, the hero of "Pineapple Wars," sees himself as Pin Dalie's Serpico, and in his If-I-Ran-the-Country scenarios, he builds "two-lane highways instead of squandering IMF loans on useless cronies who dumped useless dirt into the country's potholes" (18). Bluestein's acute satirical judgment on how we engineer our desires makes Koriatt see no apparent contradiction between his vision of himself as Pin Dalie's Serpico out to clean up the country's mess and his contract hire of a hit-man to finish off his aged father hanging on to life and inconveniencing him with palliative care. Expressing his disgust at an aged neighbor Nee-Poo who cares for his ailing father, Koriatt thinks to himself:

> Were it not for Nee-Poo's having come around with his vitamins and antibiotics when his father had pneumonia last year, his father would have expired in his bed, sparing himself and his children this unbearable end. Who was Nee-Poo to intervene in the natural course of events? And now, when his father attempted to starve himself to death, Nee-Poo shoveled food into his mouth. How dare he force-feed a man who, for all of his life, walked the rows of his pineapple plants ruthlessly culling the ones that bore weak fruit or no longer produced, sacrificing yield for hearty stock. (242)

In a second set of stories—"Hamburger School," "A Ruined World," "The Cut the Crap Machine," and notably "North of Faro," and "Tea"—Bluestein's satire gives way more directly to the problem of peace in the midst of turbulent or secret desire, a theme suggested in the earlier stories.

In "North of Faro" (perhaps my favorite story), a middle-aged fortune-teller and palm reader Rianna struggles to comprehend the error in her prophecy that sends a young man to his death, plunging his aged parents into traumatic sorrow. Khun do Chi, who had grown up on a steady diet of Hollywood films and could impersonate each actor in *The Godfather* and boasted the same good looks as John Cazale, had approached Rianna with dreams of becoming a film star in the neighboring country. Rianna, who read his fortune, predicted his face on the marquees and had advised him to undertake the journey to the neighboring country on foot through forest, mountains, and hilltowns: "She told him it would give him gravity, help him conquer his fears, and bridge his past and his future. He understood the trek as a way to honor his quest for a different life" (187). Khun's death was sudden; trudging along the dirt road leading to the mountains, he'd been struck by a motorcycle and thrown forty feet, head smashed against a rock (188). Bluestein does a variation of "Physician, Heal Thyself" in this tightly crafted story as she sends Rianna on a quest of her own to consult Zho, a diviner who lives high up in the mountains, North of Faro, somewhere close to the cloud line. It is a beautiful resolution: what is a prophecy? Where does it come from? Is there such a dimension where we can know something about each other beyond right now? I like how Bluestein answers these questions in this story.

Bluestein's website hints at a novel entitled "Syntax" in the offing. I look forward to reading that book as well; Bluestein's linguistic dexterity is evident in the lingo that she has created for Ayama Na. It is a testament to Bluestein's intuitive understanding of the human psyche that these stories suggest that peace is difficult enough with the constant chatter in our minds, without its external articulation through frustrated taboo words. What could signify the mind's turbulence more than expletives? Thus it is particularly fitting that this fictitious world complete with an expressive dictionary replete with exclamations and curse words—*purae* this and *purae* that (I assume *purae* is a swear word)—renounce all such expletives in the last two stories "North of Faro" and "Tea," stories that offer us a vision of that bird indifferent to life's pleasures and pains.

Gayatri Devi
Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania

Elisabeth Rynell, *To Mervas*. Translated by Victoria Häggblom. Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2010. Pp. 192, $15.00 pb.

Elisabeth Rynell's newest book was a finalist for the August Strindberg Prize and is her first novel to appear in English. Translated from the Swedish by Victoria Häggblom, *To Mervas* follows a pair of previous prose works—*A Tale of Loka* and *Hohaj*—as well as the poetry volumes *Night Conversations*, *Sorrow Winged Angels*, and *Desert Wanderer*.

To Mervas concerns itself with Marta, a middle-aged woman living alone in the city who is as far-removed from her family and friends as she is from her own crippling past. The book opens with Marta receiving word from Kosti, her long-lost lover, and the message is almost as mysterious as it is brief. Stirred by this sudden interruption, Marta decides to journey to Mervas in search of Kosti, but first she must overcome a measure of stasis in order to come to terms with the more horrific aspects of her personal history. Unfortunately for Marta, she is not merely a victim: she has acted at least as much as she has been acted upon, though what might be bad news for her is a boon for the psychology of her character. This allows Rynell to skirt the specter of melodrama as her narrative technique and use of language serve to create a timeless world that epitomizes the mystery inherent in good storytelling.

Considering her lyrical prowess, it's fitting that Rynell introduces *To Mervas* with an eloquent epigram in three stanzas. "Life must be a story," she begins, "or else it will crush you." And though such a sweeping declaration could easily be misconstrued by a weary reading public, these opening sentiments shine brightly because of the graceful nature of the tale that follows. At least as significant, however, is the way the epigram springs to life in the following stanza and provides an adequate denouement in the third: "I've been thinking that just like a fire, a story too has its place, its hearth. From there it rises and burns. Devours its tale." The stanzas perhaps work best as a brief epilogue, since their success hinges on the elliptical nature of the observations. But the lines also foreshadow an interesting technical decision as author and character will at times crowd the narrative for control over the tale.

The truth is that the words from the epigram seem to originate in Marta since her search for identity directs the course of the plot—and the inclusion of a speaker in stanza two makes its own rhetorical case. But more than this, the language here is Marta's language, just as the novel represents Marta's story. Though the action concerns a fairly straightforward journey, the structure is not simplistic; Rynell switches between an epistolary first-person point of view—in the form of Marta's diary—and a limited third-person that allows her to comment from beyond the margins.

A series of flashbacks allows readers to witness Marta's tortured childhood, concentrating chiefly on an abusive father who forces himself upon her mother in full view of his children. When Marta herself becomes a parent after a one-night stand, Rynell does not shy away from exploring Marta's flaws, a strategy that reminds us that fictional lives are not always meant to brighten the corners of every room. Marta leaves for Mervas in a rickety, recently purchased automobile, an act that registers enormously as she must first give up her flat and reflect on the death of her severely handicapped son. Though his presence defined Marta as a sort of modern-day Hester Prynne, his death destroys her, and the fact that she is responsible creates an unflattering parental parallel. Her memories are presented in detail but without much commentary or judgment, and this analytical approach is as startling as it is lucid: Marta recounts her life with the same unwavering commitment to penance that one might find in a lesser saint—but one, like Augustine, that best understands sin from experience.

Such talk of course returns us to the danger of melodrama, and since Marta does in fact achieve a measure of success in her battle with the past, it's significant that Rynell keeps her protagonist from giving over to histrionics. Marta sees the diary as a process of "assembling, comparing, sorting, and memorizing" her thoughts, as she and Kosti worked previously on archaeological excavations; but the metaphor here needs to be more than an act of thematic convenience, and this is where Rynell's innovative gambles pay off.

The shift in point of view doesn't disrupt continuity nearly as much as it should. The novel is divided into four sections which are split equally between the first-person diary entries and the limited third-person. Stylistically, the prose doesn't change much when we leave Marta's perspective, as Rynell continues to write in the same odd, despairing, and unhappily comic manner that she uses for Marta's interior accounts. Marta sees things plainly, if not simply; she exhibits the artifacts of her past as if she is curator of a museum, thus avoiding the confessional tendencies common to the epistolary form. Instead, the prose is interesting if not exactly lucid, full of wonderfully awkward phrases and descriptions that are easier to comprehend than to see:

> The world is empty, I thought as I walked along. Just that: the world is empty. Here, on these flayed, meat-colored shores, it becomes visible; here it becomes true. The world is empty. The words ran through me repeatedly, although I didn't quite understand them. I didn't even agree.

Since the novel is in translation, credit should be given to Häggblom for her wonderful invention of Marta in English, since Rynell surely created a perfectly forlorn version in her native tongue. Nonetheless, I can only

assume that both writers do a remarkable job mastering the nuance of incantation which is always capable of holding us in a spell. Since Rynell is also an accomplished poet, it isn't surprising that *To Mervas* at times reads like a novel in verse, a fluctuating meditation on the nature of life and living, a wonderfully complex metaphor for trying and failing and trying again.

Brian Maxwell
University of North Dakota

Editor's Notes

Call for Papers

Proposal for special issue of *North Dakota Quarterly:* "Diversity and Its Discontents"
Guest editors: Kathleen Dixon, Professor of English, University of North Dakota, and Magda Michielsens, Professor Emerita of Women Studies, University of Antwerp

Everyone claims to "support diversity." What are they supporting? One university's policy on "Diversity and Pluralism" says, "Policies and procedures of the University oblige its students, faculty, staff, and alumni to foster the awareness and sensitivity necessary for acceptance and understanding of all people in society." But do such policies actually make possible understanding, not to mention acceptance, of others whose beliefs or behaviors some find distasteful or "offensive"? How do such policies deal with the conflicts that human difference often arouses? Is "diversity" this generation's version of the nineteenth-century term *tolerance*? In *Regulating Aversion*, feminist political scientist Wendy Brown reminds us that tolerance arises out of liberal notions of freedom, and means, in part, the freedom from engagement with people and classes of people we don't like. Is *diversity* a "killing concept," as Belgian feminist philosopher Magda Michielsens argues in her paper "The Evolution of Western European Feminism and Its Relation to the New Left"? Is it a general term that supplants other more specific ones, such as blacks, women, or gays, thereby insuring a lack of engagement with any particular form of discrimination? Does the phenomenon of diversity actually make illiberal discourse possible by allowing those with social, political, and economic power to claim that they are being excluded from protection under the big tent of diversity?

We issue a call for essays and creative works from philosophers, social scientists, and humanists, including literary authors, who can shed light on the real conflicts that lie behind the current political and institutional uses of the word *diversity*.

Submission deadline: August 31, 2011. Submissions should be sent to

The Editor
North Dakota Quarterly
Merrifield Hall Room 110
276 Centennial Drive Stop 7209
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7209

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

Scott Banville lives and teaches in south Louisiana. Sometimes he misses the desert at night.

Before retiring, **Michael Cohen** wrote academic books. His last was *Murder Most Fair: The Appeal of Mystery Fiction*, published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press in 2000. Now he writes personal essays. Two recently appeared in *The Missouri Review* and *The Kenyon Review*. He and his wife Katharine live on Kentucky Lake when they're not in the Tucson Mountains.

John Fawell is a Professor of Humanities at Boston University who writes on a wide range of subjects but has lately specialized in film studies with books on Alfred Hitchcock, Sergio Leone, and most recently the studio-era Hollywood film (*The Hidden Art of Hollywood* Praeger Press, 2008).

Mike Freeman lived in Alaska for ten years. He's published recently in *The Gettysburg Review* and *South Loop Review*, as well as being the author of "Drifting: Two Weeks on the Hudson," a nonfiction book scheduled for print in November 2011 by the State University of New York (SUNY) Press.

Donald Gutierrez, a Professor Emeritus of English from Western New Mexico University, has published six books of literary criticism and scholarship and well over one hundred literary essays, papers, book reviews, and memoirs. His most recent book is *The Holiness of the Real: The Short Verse of Kenneth Rexroth*. Since retirement in 1994, much of his work has focused on issues of social justice and human-rights abuses.

Patrick Hicks is the author of five poetry collections, most recently *Finding the Gossamer* (2008) and *This London* (2010), both from Ireland's acclaimed Salmon Poetry Press. His fiction and essays have appeared in such journals as *Ploughshares*, *The Utne Reader*, *Indiana*

Review, *Natural Bridge*, and others. His stories have been nominated several times for the Pushcart Prize, and he recently won the *Glimmer Train* New Writers' Fiction Award. A citizen of Ireland, he has also lived in England, Germany, and Spain.

Don Johnson is a professor in the English Department at East Tennessee State University. His latest book is *Here and Gone: New and Selected Poems* from Louisiana Literature Press. He recently stepped down as poetry editor for *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*.

Robin Magowan's newest book of poems is *Internal Weather*. He has been collaborating with Reza Saberi on a "Galaxy of Persian Poetry from the Tenth Century to the Present." He lives in Salisbury, CT, where he copes with a large rock garden.

Lisa McCool-Grime spent five winters in North Dakota and received a grant to work as a North Dakota poet-in-residence in Jamestown. Her publications include *Splinter Generation*, *Poemeleon*, and the Tupelo Press *Fragments of Sappho* poetry project.

Amy Meng is an MFA candidate at New York University. She currently lives in Brooklyn.

James Postema is a Professor of English at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. He teaches American literature, Native American literatures, and courses in critical theory.

Jeanette Roberts Shumaker is a professor of English at San Diego State University, Imperial Valley. She publishes articles on Victorian fiction and Irish women writers. In 2009, she coauthored a book with William Baker on Leonard Merrick, an Edwardian novelist (Fairleigh Dickinson UP).

Warren Slesinger has an MFA from the Iowa Writers Workshop. His poetry has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, and *The Georgia Review*, among others. He teaches at the University of South Carolina-Beaufort.

Terry W. Thompson has taught at universities in the United States, Asia, and the Middle East. He has published more than sixty peer-reviewed articles in such journals as *The Southern Humanities Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Papers on Languages and Literature*, and *The CEA*

Critic. He has new articles forthcoming on Edith Nesbit, H. G. Wells, and Elizabeth Bowen.