

LIVING LITERATURE

●

RECORDINGS IN 5 LIVES

Film; Poetry; Fiction; Drama

●

Autumn 1965

14th

Year

58

\$1.25

JAMES BOYER MAY

TRACE

EDITOR

TRACE

No. 58

Living Literature

Essays & Articles · Poetry · Reviews

1965

Edited by James Boyer May

A READING EDITION

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This reading edition preserves the issue's poetry, fiction, essays, correspondence, reviews, and other literary writing in their printed order. Advertising, subscription matter, mastheads, the magazine's own contents pages, annual indexes, address lists, and the running trade directory are omitted as reference apparatus.

The text was checked against newly rendered source pages. Poetry lineation, stanza spacing, shaped indents, and hanging continuations for long lines are retained; prose continuations are joined without false paragraph indents. Conjectural readings are enclosed in square brackets, while original spelling and punctuation are otherwise kept.

CONTENTS

Towards Print (self-reflections of the Literary Tomorrow) . .	5
The Failure	7
<i>(An Autobiographical Essay)</i>	7
From 1964 Letters of Thomas Morrill	16
Extracts from the Journal	20
‘action’ Autobiography	28
<i>(an excerpt: Chapters Viii & Ix — June, 1965)</i>	28
Editors (and others) Write	37
<i>Free Poems Among Friends</i>	37
One Lovely Butterfly — Not a Swarm of Moths	38
Murder & the Genteel Whore	42
<i>... in the 1830’s</i>	42
A Breach of Dialogue	49
Art of the Sonnet: 208	58
Masterindex : 21	59
Kandinsky	62
Death as a Movie	67

Dante Ammazzato (a Fantasy in Three Acts)	74
<i>Act II, Scene 3 – That Night, in Front of the Portinari Palazzo.</i> .	79
A Revival of Blood	83
<i>(from an unpublished novel)</i>	83
Sortie	87
Some Reflections	95
Devil Crone (oni/baba)	97
Except for Poetry	111
The Darker Side of Sex & Other Forebodings	112
5-viii-65: a Comment on Culture	123

TOWARDS PRINT (SELF-REFLECTIONS OF THE LITERARY TOMORROW)

by the Editor

WE TAKE FOR GRANTED THAT the tracing of clues to literary trends entails prefiguring alleys of thought; but fictions themselves—as the ensuing inventions and expressions—aren't always sociologically penetrable. Much may be interpreted by noting conjunctions of events, since what goes on in minds is largely sprung from environment (what's happening and reports of what's happening in the culture, the economy, and in human relations). Still, each man is uniquely complex; each individual's personal experiences of life (the different circumstances of being in what therefore isn't really a common world) form the important elements. So, autobiographical materials (in the broad sense) offer basic data.

An extremely small percentage of these materials is formal autobiography—or even usually referred to in that connection. All people produce records of their existences—self-tellings—even though most of them do so only through their reflections on others, or rudimentarily and unintentionally. Artists, writers, workers in the sciences compose an influential minority studiously recording as many reactions as their various inhibitions permit. These recordings take numerous forms.

Those exhibited in this TRACE are among the more obvious types, although they most often are regarded as raw stuff for autobiography, not autobiography itself. However, the truer probabilities of finding moving existential factors lie in personal letters, doodlings, jotted daily recountals, and spur-of-the-moment or offhand responses.

The first is an essay, if a very informal and frank one. It has the tone of an honest attempt at self-understanding in a man whose feelings about his society bear close relationships not just to those of a majority of freelance writers, but to those of hundreds of thousands of people in a hundred other walks. The next—taken from letters which, at the times of their writings, were addressed to another individual without slightest notion of their future publication—offers quite uninhibited recountals of a scientist's thoughts concerning his origins and personal milieu. The drawing may be the most revelatory of all—by a poet who perhaps has come as nearly to terms with himself and his world as anyone may. The journal excerpts are those of a long little-published philosopher whose tendency toward mentalized abstractions does not, here, predominate. And the two chapters of what purports to be actual autobiography were turned out on quick-draft daily schedule, revealing occupations and attitudes of one seeking reevaluations after big 'success' as a writer of stories which he says no longer are his reassuring answer to existence.

THE FAILURE

(AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY)

by John Tryford

MY GRANDFATHER'S PERSONALITY protected him against a world in which he could not succeed. He was not torn by the stresses and strains of the 'rat race' that so many complain of today. In a way, many of the qualities of my grandfather are the qualities which people are trying to put back in their lives, having lost them during this overcomputerized, overroutinized time.

Just at the juncture when my family reached its long-sought goal of complete 'Americanization,' symbolized by my grandparents' becoming full citizens—just at that exact same juncture, Americans were discovering the folkways and customs of Greece. The film, *NEVER ON SUNDAY*, though not a true picture of Greek life (*ZORBA* is a much better film in this respect) stirred up a lot of enthusiasm. Then, too, with the ban lifted on Henry Miller's 'dirty' books, *TROPIC OF CANCER*, etc., the American public finally got around to reading his *COLOSSUS OF MAROUSSI*, an excellent presentation of Greece.

In San Francisco, a smart operator turned the El Cid Restaurant into a Greek-type cabaret, with the traditional music and dance. Later, two other night clubs followed suit. This was surprising to me at first, this sudden rediscovery of things Hellenic. I had always taken them for granted and had thought they were just a continuation of the old country customs among the immigrants—assuredly not something of value to native Americans. On further thought, though, this is not at all strange. Americans are beginning to question the infallibility of their values. They are looking for a more

meaningful existence. Greek life is the antithesis of Puritanism, the business ethic, and the 'rat race.' It is a life in which passions are not denied, but rather socialized; and the zest for living is expressed through dance, music, good food, love, and—yes—even hate. The Greek does not need constantly to question his own existence, his value as a human being. The problems of epistemology are compounded where cafeterias and computers dominate the landscape.

Perhaps Greece represents that lost Eden we all are seeking, and which our writers have been describing for years. But we are living after the Fall, and can only approach such a concept with less than perfect innocence. Life seems more complicated every day; there are more forms to fill out — and we don't even know whether we want Eden, or what we would do there once we'd arrived.

In some ways, I am more like my grandfather than any other member of my family. That is why I must write something about him, now that he is departed. For instance, I am impractical, just as he was. I've always been aware that the books I read and the things I thought about were of no real use to the world. The books I liked were not schoolbooks. It wasn't until I was in college that I discovered that textbooks could be interesting too. I hated school — both public and parochial. The routine, the discipline, the enforced study of subjects one disliked, were foreign to my nature. Yet, I always expected that one day I would be magically transformed and become adjusted to the 'normal' world. This never happened. Even today, I am burdened with the impossibility of choice which I would like to think is universal with Americans. I do not know whether to go all out as a writer or to work at a dull job and write in my 'spare time.' I want the best of both worlds: the practical and the dream worlds — and so I wind up not knowing what I want.

It is difficult to speak of the night, as the poet, Jack Gilbert, has said. What he means, I think, is that it is difficult to tell about the 'dark' experiences, those fears and longings which we try to hide by assuming masks and poses.

Childhood is a part of that dark experience, perhaps that to which we are most sensitive, the part most difficult to talk about; for me, at least, it always has been far from easy to speak objectively about my childhood. That was a monstrous and brutal time, a time of fear and of much discomfort. Exactly what caused this fear, I can only attempt to explain. Memory is not a perfect instrument.

As a child, I was subject to convulsions. I can recall only one of those incidents now, although I have been told that there were others. Perhaps those convulsions had something to do with my bookishness and daydreaming. I never cared much for sports or games, or association with other children of my age. I became embarrassed easily, and was often just plain frightened.

I have not been in Boyes Springs in many years. My grandfather dying, I could not bear to go to his funeral; I detest such affairs. I also really would dislike any reunion with the family at this late date. I have grown too far apart from them. The experience would be traumatic, to say the least. I am now completely alienated.

Boyes Springs was the only rural place I knew as a child. Later, much later, we did go to Clear Lake in summers, but I was then in my late teens. No such deep memories are attached to Clear Lake. I am sure it was at Boyes Springs, for example, that we heard the news of Germany's surrender. I could not have been even five years old; but I recall my mother's telling me of the event. Also, I definitely remember Mr. Nielsen's painting the house on a hot summer day which must have been earlier — though I'm not quite sure. Mr. and Mrs. Nielsen owned three houses on Central Avenue, two on one side of the street and one on the other. The two on one

side were called Rocky Haven and Sleepy Hollow; the other had no name. We stayed in all three of them, at one time or another. Finally, in 1951, my grandparents moved there permanently, renting the unnamed house. The family had been coming to Boyes Springs since the early Twenties, but in all that while never had bought property.

It must have been my Great-uncle Louis, who, of our family, first discovered Boyes Springs. He was the patriarch by default. He was also clearly a schemer and organizer. He came to America first, learned to read and write, and became a citizen. Then he brought my grandparents here. Out of love? Hardly. Rather, they were a source of cheap labor. He started out selling peanuts at Haight and Stanyan Streets. This must have been before 1906, but no one in the family is sure about dates that far back. Then he opened a candy store and soda fountain on Fillmore Street. My grandfather made the candy. Louis was the brains of the outfit; he did the bookkeeping and took cash. My grandmother stayed home and raised the children, of whom there were five: Christopher, Martha, William, Louis, and Helen. William was my father.

Everyone hated and feared Uncle Louis. He was such a tyrant. He disciplined the children severely. More important, he made sure that no one in the family got smarter than he was. He never encouraged his brother to learn English in order to get citizenship papers. He never taught him how to drive either; so he had the only car in the family, a big 1927 Buick of which he was sole chauffeur.

My grandfather was weak in many respects and too kind to put his foot down against his brother. He permitted this state of affairs to continue; and his children grew up without knowing him as a father.

I also was afraid of Uncle Louis. I used to cry when he came into the room. Perhaps it was his big bushy moustache — though Grandpa, too, sported a moustache, and I didn't

cry at his. Actually, no one knew why I was afraid. My great-uncle accused my parents of poisoning my young mind against him; but this, they vigorously denied.

Another thing that scared me was having my hair washed. Once, while in Boyes Springs, this had to be done. They all grabbed me and led me to the sink. While I squirmed and fidgeted and yelled, they shampooed me. After the ordeal was over, my Uncle Aleck painted a moustache on me to make me laugh. He wasn't really my uncle, but my Aunt Martha's husband — much older than she. He died in 1962, after acquiring some property adjacent to the Nielsens'.

That was the first property any of my family had in Boyes Springs. When they first came, they rented a little shack farther up Central Avenue; this place was still there, the last time I visited. We used to take morning walks, and as we passed it, my father would exclaim: 'God — is that run-down shack still standing?'

The main attraction for us in Boyes Springs was the bathhouse. On hot days there wasn't much else to do but to take a snooze or to go swimming; and it was hot for most of the summer in Boyes Springs. Of course, for the townspeople, there was a 'ritzy' Sonoma Mission Inn — but not for us. The Inn is still there, though fallen on seedy times. At any rate, we always stayed at the Nielsens' and swam at the bathhouse, a large, ramshackle structure with two pools: a large cold pool, and the hot pool. My sister and I loved the large one, but dreaded the hot one. To us, it was horrible; the water was so hot that it took at least ten minutes to get used to it. Even then, there was nothing to do but to stand and wiggle around in the water from time to time. The heat fatigued us too much for swimming.

A third attraction of the bathhouse was the mineral baths, supposedly very good for both soul and body. My grandfather was fond of these and used them often. I

remember his preparing to go to the bathhouse, saying: 'I'm going to make a bath now.' (The Greeks never said: 'I'll take a bath,' because in Greek the expression is: 'I'll make a bath.' As they carried this over into English, they conversely used Anglicisms instead of proper Greek to describe familiar things; for instance: 'carro' for car, instead of *aftokinito*; 'restaurant' instead of *estiatorio*.)

The food was always so good at Boyes Springs; and my fondest memories are all connected with mealtimes. When I read Henry Miller's hilarious passage on the quality of food in America, I was delighted to find that he praised the Greeks for their high culinary standards, even though he said they served the usual pap to the patrons in their restaurants. My grandmother was an excellent and very ambitious cook; I can never remember going up there without being regaled with delicious stuff. Not only throughout the summer, but at Thanksgiving and Christmas. There was roast lamb, okra cooked in butter and olive oil, rice, grape or cabbage leaves stuffed with meat, olives, feta (a type of cheese), and *retsina* (a wine with a resinlike flavour). Especially good, though very rich, were the various Greek pastries she made: *baklava*, *courambedes*, *koularkia*, and others.

Always, after eating, my grandfather took his afternoon nap. This was an invariable ritual. He would lie down for two whole hours and snore away. The noise in the house would not seem to bother him. Then he would get up, listen to the Greek radio program, and drink that thick, strong Turkish coffee that he liked so well. Sometimes, if the radio played a tune that reminded him of his home town, he'd get up and do a little dance. (The Greeks love to dance; and it is part of every celebration, baptism, wedding, etc. This dancing is nothing in the least like American ballroom dancing, but is in the form of a broken ring, four or five people together. Men dance together, and the best dancers are the men. The leader usually does a virtuoso performance.)

If there was no music to dance to, my grandfather would put on an apron and wash the dishes. He did not mind doing this; in fact, he insisted on doing it. Since my grandmother did the cooking, this was his contribution to the household.

In a sense, my grandfather was a failure. At least, my father believed so; and his whole life was an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of an immigrant background. He experienced the crisis of the second generation in a real way. 'We couldn't even communicate with our father when we were kids,' he used to tell me, in justification. 'Why, we hardly ever saw him; he was always working at the store.' Because he had to prove that he was not just the stupid son of a stupid immigrant, he was a driven man, always restless, seeking to improve himself by some means.

Soon after marriage, my father subscribed to the Book-of-the-Month Club. Then he took a course in radio repair. Then he studied drafting at Healds College at night and became a draftsman engineer. For him, education was the key to overcoming his 'poor' background.

But he could not sympathize with pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. 'What can you do with French and English?' he would ask me. 'Take something practical, why don't you, like business or accounting.'

By turning away from his family and heritage, my father lost some good qualities—as humor, patience, good-natured politeness. These were qualities which my grandfather had. He really liked people. Often, he used to greet visitors to Boyes Springs by kissing them, even though they were strangers. This embarrassed my aunt and my grandmother. They would shout: 'Afise!' (leave him or her alone). Or when he'd say something they would rather not have heard, they'd say: 'Mi fonazis!' (quit making noise), or: 'Mi to les! ' (don't say that).

He took this all in stride, chuckling and twirling his moustache. He could accept things because he knew, I

think, his own value as a person, his own place in life. He also could poke fun at himself. ‘Well, I’ll die pretty soon anyway,’ he always said. This might sound macabre, but what he meant was that now that he was old, what people said about him no longer made any difference.

As for my own position, to my family it is unconscionable. ‘Aa writer, w’at d’ya want to be a writer for?’ Or: ‘Go ahead, be a writer and starve to death—but don’t say we didn’t warn you.’ And on and on. I am ridden with the abuse they used to heap on Grandpa, except that I should know better. I’m smart, I’ve been to college. ‘Why can’t you get a job? You don’t even try!’ Try, indeed. I have tried, and failed. The worst is when I actually do get a job for a few weeks, and they finally find out what an incompetent I am.

For my family, there is no such category as writer. Doctor, yes, lawyer, certainly, accountant, perfectly all right—in short, anything where one can make a fast buck. But not a writer, not a man who takes sustenance from his imagination. They will not give the category of writer consideration because then they would have to admit that it is valid for everyone, not just for writers, to explore his or her sensibilities fully. This is too painful for them; their minds have been set.

The writer, especially the poet, speaks with the voice of dream and symbol. My family fails to recognize how much dreams and symbols are in things familiar to them—in their religion, in their customs, in their song and dance. They are only marginally aware of this. They perceive only part of the total significance.

I am not casting a moral judgment on my family. Rather, it is they who moralize about me. They castigate me for going against the code, for laughing at the conventional wisdom.

I am a dreamer and an idler. So be it. Only now, am I coming to greater acceptance of the mainsprings of my life. The patterns were set for me, as for everyone, in the earliest

years. These are the dark years of which it is difficult to speak. Most of my life I have been trying to improve upon, to escape from, or to confront those patterns. I cannot deny them. The most tragic results have ensued when I have tried to deny them. In those dreaded moments, I stood part from myself and struggled, repeating over and over: 'No, no, this is not I, this is someone else.' But it was I; and now I realize how vapid I was, how utterly inarticulate of my real desires, when denying myself in that way. To accept the patterns requires complete honesty; in the end, this is the only way. I now see my grandfather in different aspects of our life together — as for instance when I watched him saw wood in the yard at Boyes Springs, or when he baby-sat with my sister and me when my parents went to the films, or when I visited him in the hospital after his operation, or as he picked greens in Golden Gate Park (the Greeks actually cook this stuff and eat it like spinach). In all of these instances, he displayed an abiding patience which few people have. Without such patience, and a sense of humour, he would not have survived until his eighty-ninth year. He took a lot of undeserved abuse from others; many of his important life decisions were made for him. However, he was not just a pawn. In my mind, he remains an unforgettable figure — even a noble figure. He was the unacknowledged patriarch, in spite of his windbag brother. If there must be a lesson from all this, it is that the best human beings, the best lives, often pass unnoticed and unwanted.

FROM 1964 LETTERS OF THOMAS MORRILL

MY DAD WAS OF OLD NEW ENGLAND stock, all farmers, except for Justin, the Vermont senator, and a soldier or two. My mother's people were Scottish, the Armstrongs, and English, the Ackermans. The Armstrongs came west to Phoenix, Arizona via Fox Lake and Portage, Wisconsin. I believe her mother's people, the Ackermans, had some place in New York near Poughkeepsie. My Grandfather Morrill was head farm-supervisor of the poor farm at Tewkesbury, just north of Lowell, Mass. There are lots of Morrills today in Maine. I visited there, about 1946. Rolling country, birches, meadows — met a distant cousin on his hill near where Dad was born and went to a one-room school. We walked in the pasture, and I felt I'd come home a little.

Funny how we all seem to be passing through, and have too many places behind us. Where are you from? Is any American from anywhere, or for anywhere? When, about five years ago, I read all about John Muir, he became (and is) one of my heroes. I wrote my mother, hoping to find that she was related to the also-Scottish Muirs, or at least knew them. John was 'from' Wisconsin. No, the answer came, no relation.

I'm always looking for ancestors — and, no, the answers come. We are all doing that. And we can't come home again. During the war, I came home to Winchester Street, Glendale, California, a block from the Verdugos, my Mount Zion, Olympus. My folks were gone. 'Everything in California's for sale.' The then-owners had cut down a huge incense cedar I'd planted that had grown up to my second-storey window while I'd lived there. The 'sacred mount' was shrouded in smog, burned over and over, and slopped all over with houses. Where are you from? Maybe heaven, or maybe hell. I

know it isn't 'Glendale,' for us Americans. It is somewhere mythical and very strange. We wander. We gather, glean. I, from that little upstate New York town, and back to Scotland, then Phoenix, Los Angeles (my birthplace), New York, and now, Tallahassee, Florida.

Speaking of gleaning, when I was a kid in Glendale, I dreamed of walking along a path in the Verdugos and stooping down suddenly finding an arrowhead. I think I looked many times, but never found one. Then, last Sunday, a half-mile from here, walking along a recently-bulldozed road, unpaved as yet, I looked down and there it was, an almost perfect point. Yesterday, almost effortlessly, I found another — this, of a lovely rose with a brilliant streak of white. The Indian must have valued that point very highly. And all this is part of it, our strange lives on bulldozed trails of old wild men, the incredible conjunctions.

Do you still hear mourning doves in California? Silver Lake, as I remember, is around Griffith Park Hills, not far from Chavez Ravine. The mourning doves used to call, when I was a boy; and they call me yet, I think. I hear them here sometimes. They say something about eternity, the pure wild notes that came down from heaven like the hermit thrush's song in the Indian legend. I hope you will listen for me some time, on the hill where you live, for the dove. On a foggy morning, here, the wood thrushes come up out of the woods, even around the house. Then their flutes seem to be going all through the air, their bells ringing as the sun gently breaks through.

I was born in Good Samaritan Hospital, October 11, 1921. We lived in Highland Park, half-way up a hill. My two vividest memories were: (1) At three or four, sitting in the dirt by the fence watching the children come up the hill and go over the other side to school; (2) one morning, when I was in first grade, myself, the two-horse milk wagon at the top of the hill broke loose, the whole shebang rushing down to

crash into our garage where the road turned right. I suppose those images are like life and death, but mostly I remember the children trudging up the hill past me in the dirt, bound for far-away wonderful things.

In 1927, we moved to Glendale. It was still vacant lotty up by the Verdugos. Mr. Brand, the 'James J. Hill' of Glendale, had just recently closed down his airport across Mountain Street from his white-walled Moorish 'Brand's Castle.' I grew up there, before the town, just ahead of 'civilization.' If I had been born in the city, I'd be a completely lost soul. I grew slowly with my dreams, and they were better than the 'civilization's.' I never knew that 'nature' was caput, evil, in my youth. Before I knew the name, it was beautiful and delightful. Sex was dirty, in our family. I was extremely shy, so I had no girls, no female prince charming ever came to wake the sleeping tomcat. He prowled in his fantasy, only. I suppose all that waste of energy and fantasy is the mortal side that must accompany the immortal, manuring it, so to speak. I tend to think of female beauty and charm as evil, dangerous, and also very wonderful and pure.

We seldom had parties or 'went out' to dinner. My dad loved to putter and work in the garden. We had pigeons, ducks, bantams, rabbits. When I was fifteen, I had quite a love of the redtail hawk, a big feeling of his masterful soaring and breakaway glide. On top of the Verdugos, I could see over the Griffith Park Hills and the ocean shining, on a clear day.

As I said, I didn't then, understand about Nature being fallen. I always thought it was risen; and, venerating Darwinism and evolution, I thought they were in consonance with Nature. I said the Darwinian catechism, but didn't know what I said. Or rather, it was a foreign tongue I hadn't learned, and I invested it with what I myself knew of Nature. I think, now, that having that long period of development in the universe with the culture out of it, gave me the faith and

confidence and knowledge to one day oppose the culture and go beyond it without being destroyed, as other sensitive people are.

After a year and a half of Glendale Junior College, I went to work in the Lockheed Burbank plant, then at the old Ford plant in Los Angeles. There, I met one of the three or four persons most influential on my life. Frank and I were ‘riggers’ installing pulleys and cables, on the graveyard shift (this was in 1940-41)—and I didn’t give a damn about that. He told me how all wet I was about Science and how sublime Beethoven was. Science and Darwin and Beethoven fought; and Beethoven won, of course. Well, I value science. In fact, I think I am one of the last scientists. I haven’t turned my back on it, but have taken it along to help explore the bigger world. Frank had me read BEETHOVEN, His Spiritual Development. That must have been the first book I loved. The idea of a spiritual development then became my guide.

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL

of Louis Gallo

*The reader perhaps sees that a man will not only lie and cheat in the game he plays with himself in his journal; he'll play coy coquet. The last place to look for the truth, it follows, is in journals; where a man 'takes off his mask' . . .
(from entry of July 8, '64)*

30 April 1964. The existential encounter is specifically with the impossible. I need bread; I got to the Shoprite and buy a loaf; there's been no existential encounter; I have not come face-to-face with the impossible. Torture Y, I don't want to die — the ground beneath me is uncertain. I begin to panic, I'm entering the realm of the impossible, there's a chance of an existential encounter.

What I'm saying is very simple, but I'm talking to someone very stupid, so I'll say it again. You grow a psychosis — this is how you avoid making the existential encounter. You believe in God. You populate your brain with phantasms called Democrats and Republicans. There's a Moral Order in the universe. You'll go to any extreme rather than make the existential encounter. Even to the extreme of erecting a Science. But nothing works. You're afflicted each day with torture Y, you don't want to die. They're going to amend the Constitution to compel prayers and bible readings in the public schools — but it's just not going to work, it's only a psychosis, nothing can solve the 'real' problem, torture Y, you don't want to die.

10 May 1964. A package of proofsheets mailed yesterday morning; a walk almost to the end of Lyndhurst and back with Dan last night; and lemon ice. And before going to bed I read a dozen (twenty, to be exact) pages of I'M NOT STILLER.

Today is Sunday. Night hours, earlier today, reading proofsheets. The Mets split a double-header with the Cardinals. In this morning's paper, the story of an airplane crash. Pilot and crew shot in midflight by a man who had lost heavily in the Las Vegas gambling casinos and had insured himself before boarding the plane, to recover his losses. Forty-four dead.

And it all makes sense when you consider that billions are spent every year in this country to sell cancer (cigaretts). Also child suicides. The rate of child suicides in New Jersey recently has gone up alarmingly. I read about it in this morning's paper (during lunch). I say it makes sense in a country where cancer is sold over the radio — and that's why you've got to have a constitutional amendment compelling prayers and bible readings in the public schools. Oh, yes.

12 May 1964. I awoke this morning with nothing I absolutely had to do. I could have taken the day off — gone to the World's Fair — for all anyone might care. Free. Summer afternoons fishing on the Sewanee. Or I could have stayed home, written a poem.

The line from a play by Bertolt Brecht: 'To laugh, is to be someone who has not yet received the frightful news.' But it's possible, I say, to have received the frightful news — and still to laugh.

25 May 1964. Between three and four hundred were reported this morning killed in a riot in Peru, yesterday at a soccer game. Including children. I refer to this event to emphasize the idiocy of my present state, brought on ostensibly by proofsheets, as easily attributable to an overindulgence in watermelon. I can't blame the heat: the spell was broken last night; the day could not be more beautiful.

I feel really quite sad. It may not come through in this entry: my life is hopeless. Those people killed in that riot: I can't seem to imprint the image on my brain. I keep hearing

the insane indignant critique: 'That's what they wanted.' . . . yet people are dying like flies — everywhere. Pick up a newspaper, turn on the radio — a train disaster in Indiana, a family wiped out in an auto crash in New Hampshire. . . . World War II — fifty million killed — and yet, if people cared, it could have been stopped. That's just it. That's what I mean about the riot in Peru: That's what they wanted!

Because, if they didn't, they'd be like me. Sitting at a desk in a back room on a quiet street in a small town somewhere, moaning on blank sheets of paper about life's unmeaning. Slobbering about the utter hopelessness of it.

Really you just can't imagine what a beautiful day this has been. Especially after that oppressive heat wave. Breezes like those I remember coming in off the ocean in the evening on Oahu, in July, 1944. Then, the first week in August, we boarded ship for combat exercises on the island of Maui. The night of the day we landed, I saw the ocean under the moonlight. I could have worn my under-shorts, but I didn't. Maybe I'm lying, but I'll say it anyway: I was happy. I won't insist on it: let me just say, this morning I read proofsheets: all day I've been in this peculiar state: sad, with a feeling that I'm never going to find life's meaning — and yet, happy.

1 June 1964. I'm trembling. Hot flashes rip through me. I'm brought back in memory to a G.I. I knew in 1944, in Ford Ord: from Pennsylvania, a tiny thing, maybe five feet two (Napoleon's height), who at the USO and Service Club dances won all the prizes. They called him 'Baby.' We were on guard duty at the motor park one night, looking up at the stars. I may have been coming off duty, he going on — I don't recall, except our confab and his confession. But he told me something that struck me dumb. Whenever The Star Spangled Banner is played, he said, he trembled from head to foot, hot flashes raced through him, he didn't know why.

Maybe for you it's not our National Anthem, but you know the sensation. You're a virgin about to be deflowered. And

you're all for it — you want to be penetrated, imbued with the power that comes with being deflowered. It's better than sex, because sex is real. This deflowering is mythical, psychotic, unreal. And it's indefinitely renewable. You're a virgin each time it happens. The trembling. The hot flashes.

... A manifesto of indomitability — of man's eternal quest for liberty. 'Bombs bursting in air.' 'What so proudly we hail.' 'That our flag was still there.' He couldn't have known what the words were saying — we never do, in our myths — but he trembled from head to foot. 'Baby.' He never got to screw the girls he danced with — and (to tell the truth) didn't want to — but they loved it, getting out there on the floor with 'Baby,' everybody turning around and watching — their myths 'working.'

16 June 1964. This morning, I'm not mad at those people in California who swap wives. I've read the article — it's none of my business. First of all, I'm not married: I can't bring a wife and swap her. Second, I'm too old: these are mostly young people . .

If you want the truth, I'm jealous.

In college, the idea may have struck me. It's impossible, now, to say. Group sex. I'm not against it. 'They're better off,' I said, 'dead,' only because they were married. The article is not strictly, furthermore, about wife-swapping. But even there, I don't care (this morning). It's none of my business.

I feel dead. Five centuries ago, when I was living on the planet, people weren't doing such things. In high school, in my senior year, when Pierre announced proudly that he had a date with a girl who 'put out,' I was scared out of my wits. I had the idea (perhaps) that . . . But I can't remember. It happened five centuries ago.

Today makes the seventh without any (proofsheets). I'm not sure (I never am), but I may be second-dimensional at the moment — something in me wants to sing. For no reason. . . . Let everyone have sex with everyone else —

whatever they please — it's none of my business. I'll go off and sit by the water, and watch the waves break on the rocks, and sing.

It's now 9.15. If they don't arrive by 10.00, they won't arrive at all. Life without proofsheets. A guaranteed income, say, of three thousand a year. Yes, I'd like that. I was never meant for proofsheets. I see myself on a hill — singing. It's hard to believe — I was once nineteen — my life was filled with this odd, overpowering exuberance — I was often (for no reason at all) singing.

Yes, forgetting they're married, I'm all for Mrs. — and her California crowd. Group sex. Yes. Married sex — I can't imagine anything more degrading. But group sex sounds wonderful.

I'm beginning to dissociate. That thing in me wanting to sing — it's disappearing. It's no fun reading about sex parties. The imagination soon exhausts itself. Exhausted, sex is the last thing you want to be reminded of.

It's now 10.45. No proofsheets. Do you know what that means? Life makes sense. If you don't have to work for a living. If all you do is get up in the morning. Maybe you can't stand it. The boredom. You bore yourself to death. Your brain is filled with thoughts of sex orgies. You're wondering how you can meet Mrs. — and become part of her gang. It's unbearable. But, so you don't have to work for a living. It makes sense.

Anne called last night. I may go to the beach with them, Saturday. They were at the beach, last Saturday; only after a half-hour had passed did it dawn on her — they were surrounded by queers. They had plopped themselves at a quiet section of the beach reserved for queers. 'But it was so nice,' she said. Everywhere else — crowds, chaos. Here — 'they were, like a bunch of middle-aged genteel ladies.' They behaved so beautifully, how could your heart not want to go out to them? 'That's right,' I said, 'they're trying.'

And she told me a story about a friend living as an expatriate in Europe; they hadn't seen him in fourteen years. He called from Kennedy Airport; it turned out 100 per cent real. They didn't allow him into the house; it was a shattering experience: 'Why are people that way?' she said. And fourteen years before, it had been so wonderful! . . . 'I feel so old,' she said. 'But I just can't allow it!' From my children, yes, I'll take it. But I'm becoming intolerant toward everybody else. I insist, in my livingroom, they behave!

Everything. Good. Why not? Go right ahead. I don't care. So what? It's none of my business. Sex. In California, in Canada, in Copenhagen — I'm all for it. Only this: Why do they first have to be married? Something sick in that. (And sickening.) Sex, yes, all you want — but married, no.

17 June 1964. People find it difficult to comprehend that I deny myself pleasures. I'm invited to spend weekends (even weeks) places. All expenses paid — a vacation. Yet, sleeping anywhere except in my own bed is a convenience I avoid with fanatic insufficiency. If a bus will get me home, even at 3.00 (even at 4.00) in the morning, I want to be on that bus.

Mrs. — and her 'gang bangs' (we'll call them) in California. Existence is enough — until! (you have a mission).

It's true. It's not. Existence is not enough. To fill the gap, we tele-vise presidential assassinations. And there's the New York World's Fair. Sex, for D. H. Lawrence, was not enough — so, in fifty books, he rants about sex (saying it's enough, meaning it's not enough). Etc.

But not a 'mission.' After I've been dead fifty years, assuming the documents are artily or clinically interesting enough, a student of my particular disease may conclude: 'Existence was not enough for him — and at the same time, was too much: It scared the shit out of him!'

20 June 1964. The frigid Julika in Max Frisch's I'M NOT STILLER.

Why do men bother? Max Frisch, I assume, knew a real-life, sexually-frigid Julika — intimately. What was wrong with him? He bothered!

I'm not sure I want to talk about sex this morning.

But something struck me when I was reading the book, three weeks ago (I've reach page 85): we don't 'see' one another. Inevitably. The experience is too terrifying. It means I'd be looking at my mother — and I wouldn't see my mother! I'd see this odd old woman. What was this nonsense she was saying to me? 'I want you to wash these curtains.' And all the rest of the show, the role I play as her son, the psychotic I become, 100 per cent convinced it's real: she's my mother.

This is better. The subject is not strictly sex (I mean screwing). It has to do with the roles we play: wife, father, friend, sister, brother, credit manager. These are artifacts. 'Allow me to introduce you to my mother' — and you introduce me to an artifact.

Another example: Anne called, last night. The beach party scheduled for today has been canceled; I'll see her, tomorrow evening. While we were chatting, I had no mother, no sisters, no brothers — nothing. Everything was turned off in my life, except Anne. Sitting hidden in the next room listening, you'd have seen red. 'It's love,' you'd have said . . . It's not love. She's not my mommy (I'm not hers) . . . We may never in ruthless actuality 'see' the truth (of her, she of me), but we come closer . . .

24 June 1964. Don't go jumping to conclusions. 'Romance' is not altogether dead in me. 'Lou,' I've heard it said, 'is a romantic.' I'm thought ridiculous exactly because I manufacture 'meaning' ('romances') . . .

4 July 1964. I've said on numerous occasions: 'Every scene is a love scene.' This is of course nonsense, but nonetheless I insist on it. I'll give you an example. Don Douglas called, two weeks ago, and told me the authors of the opus I had finished proofreading ten days previously,

had requested that he convey to me their deep personal gratitude for the superlative job . . . not in locating printing errors, but in bringing to their attention factual inaccuracies.

Every scene is not, it goes without saying, a successful love scene. This is where the stupid ones become stubborn—they insist ‘love’ means ‘sex.’ So, it’s better to drop the subject. No, just forget it.

ALL UNDER THREAT OF MUSHROOM BLOOM

Russell Salamon

Water glistens in your face.
Flocks of ravens over cornfield wind
fly in your hair.
Japan printed all around.
Cold, I shiver snows for you.
My teeth chatter and I babble.
Water glistens in your face.
The sun turns mosquito pink and bites.
You rub my back:
All around such snowslides burst!

‘ACTION’ AUTOBIOGRAPHY

**(AN EXCERPT: CHAPTERS VIII & IX — JUNE,
1965)**

Robert Lowry

FOR JUST ABOUT THREE WEEKS now, I have not gotten up and dressed and taken the bus for the twenty-eight-minute trip downtown to the office. I am, as I told you, out of work — though I have hardly been the stay-at-home kind of out-of-worker. On the contrary, I have been off and running, fully dressed and usually wearing a bright tie-pin, every day . . . occasionally for an employment interview (I’ve been following the help-wanted ads in the daily papers pretty regularly), and recently to the Ohio State Unemployment Compensation Commission, or some such name, where one applies for unemployment compensation — which can amount to \$42.00 a week in my case, as I understand it, though I have not been O.K.’d for it as yet.

I also have discovered, during the past week, Lori’s bar in a small downtown hotel. The lights are dim, the smiles of Bartendress Lori, bright . . . and the jukebox records are reasonably easy to drop a dime or a quarter for (or, in a flush moment, fifty cents for a long-play album by Al Martino or somebody).

Let us examine the progress of the week:

Monday, June 7, 1965: I dressed and went to town on the bus fairly early in the day. It was shortly after noon when I walked into Lori’s bar — the second time I had been in the place, the first time having been a couple of weeks ago when I was walking uptown to Ninth and Elm Streets to put in an application at WLW, the television and radio stations. That had been a hot morning, and I had seen this little isolated

hotel with a smooth, neat-looking little bar to the left of the entrance. I had dropped in and ordered one beer from Lori, a smooth, neat-looking redhead with a Maria Schell smile, who served you so quickly that the bottle seemed to be empty before you had ordered it.

The spot had hardly crossed my mind in the interval (redheads, after all, are not everything in life); but, on this day — and thinking that I would not go into any Cincinnati bar that I had ever been in before — I suddenly saw Lori's again. Well, I will make an exception of this one, I thought. And I went in — to find the place completely empty and very dark after the bright glare of the street outside. Even Lori wasn't there. Then, suddenly, she was — coming in from the hotel-corridor entrance.

'Well, we're all alone,' I said. 'Can you make a stinger — or shall I order something simple?'

'I know — I know how,' she said, with her quick friendly smile.

And a stinger it was — that sweet tricky combination of brandy and white creme de menthe which can get you drunker than a skunk in an afternoon of drinking; they slide down so smoothly and easily, especially when a quick little bartendress like Lori is serving them up.

'How is it?' she asked.

'Parfait,' I said; and I held up my A-O.K. parfait sign — a circle made with thumb and forefinger.

Others began to drift in, and I heard one call her Lori.

'So your name is Lori.'

'Yes,' she said. 'And what is yours?'

'The same,' I told her, 'except that it's spelled Lowry.'

She looked at me in serious consideration of this coincidence.

'Really? It's true?'

'And except that it's my last name,' I told her.

'And your first name?'

‘Bob.’

‘Ah — Bob!’

‘You have a slight accent, Lori. Are you from Cincinnati?’

‘No,’ she smiled, ‘I am from Berlin.’

‘Are you a war bride? A soldier’s girl?’

‘Yes, I married an American soldier in 1953, and that is how I came here.’

‘All the way to Cincinnati from Berlin.’

‘Yes, all the way. But first I lived in Cleveland. Then I came here.’

Lori kept my glass so well filled and my money so neatly deposited in her cash register that I stayed all afternoon, left around four-thirty, and stayed home all the next day, sobering up.

Or rather I should say that I did not exactly stay home the next day, Tuesday, June 8th — I went to the unemployment compensation office and filed my claim. I had been late in doing this.

And then I simply came home and did little else the whole day, except for reading a book which the GROVE Press of New York had recently sent me for my comment: namely, *THE MARQUIS DE SADE*, a collection containing *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, Justine, his letters, and comments on his life and work translated from the French, for the most part. There is no question about it: Absolutely anything may be published in this country, now that *Philosophy in the Bedroom* has been put to bed here in every bookshop between the hard covers of a fifteen-dollar edition.

On Wednesday, June 9th, I went back to Lori’s bar again. This time: beer, only. I had come there via a mild and not really very amusing job interview on the twelfth floor of a building on West Fourth Street, in answer to a newspaper advertisement for a sales correspondent. The pay had turned out to be ‘fifty or fifty-five dollars a week.’ Mr. Hess had said: ‘Now, you know you’ll be leaving me very soon if you take it

for that small amount, and then I'll have to go through all of this again.' Finally, he'd raised it to sixty; then, in the course of our conversation, came back down to fifty-five, with a promise of sixty in six months. I'd found this entire conversation about money incredible; for, apparently, I was talking to the head of a large and successful custom shirt-manufacturing company. The end of it all was that I left him with his job and the promise I would call him if I felt able to work for fifty-five dollars a week, with a promise of sixty dollars in six months . . . and the implied promise that, although I would have no future whatsoever with the company (just the job of sales correspondent), I would work for him for the rest of my life.

Of course, I did not call him. Instead, I went up to Lori's bar and talked with Lori. At four-thirty, when she was tallying up the cash register, I said good-bye and left, walking up the street to the public library where a girl librarian I knew was about to come off duty. I took her to the Kasbah in the Terrace Hilton Hotel for drinks (she drank stingers, on my recommendation, and I continued with beer) and then on to Wiggins' for dinner. I put her on the bus after dinner — she was going out to one of the suburbs to visit her parents.

Thursday, June 10: MONDO PAZZO, a potpourri technicolor movie made by the Italians, conglomerating shots of dogs being vivisected in England with takes of kisses being sold on a New York City street, opened at the Albee — and I took it in as the first thing I did when I arrived downtown. Then I went to Lori's bar.

Lori asked if I believed in extrasensory perception.

'Of course. I believe in extrasensory perception, instinct, destiny, and all of it, Lori. That's my whole life. I've lived by the most incredible inspirations.'

'Because, I have had one such extrasensory perception experience,' Lori said, her red hair swinging a red curtain as

she turned to put somebody's dollar into the cash register and give him change. 'My father was a major in the German Army in Italy in World War II, but he did not die until 1953.'

'And you were already here in America in 1953.'

'Ah, you remember, then, what I told you.' 'Yes, Lori. I remember everything.'

'It is true. I was here by then. But, at 7.15 on a certain evening in 1953 . . . Come up here, Bob, to the end of the bar and sit next to me. I want to tell you this.'

I went up and sat next to her at the end of the bar.

'On this certain day in 1953, at 7.15 I had a terrible pain in my heart and a visitation from my father, who told me that he had just died. And then, later, I got the death certificate from Berlin; and I looked at it — and there was the exact date and the exact hour of his death. It was the hour of my extrasensory perception. The death certificate — and I still have it — said that he had died at 1.15' (7.15 here).

Lori does not like her customers to talk to one another. She likes them to talk to her as she hurries up and down her bar serving them and saying just about anything that pops into her pretty head. When a fellow sat down, a few seats from me, and started talking about the beauties of the wide streets and the pretty girls in Salt Lake City, Lori suddenly announced loudly: 'Don't talk to him, Bob! I know him from the Capitol Bar. He is always talking to people . . . You be still!' she said to the man, although he really had not said anything out of the way. 'When a man comes in here, he does not want to be talked to and bothered. He comes in my bar to relax and get away from all that talk and bother.'

'You're exactly right, Lori,' I told her. 'You're precisely right.'

In truth, it was he who had mentioned the Capitol Bar first — had mentioned, in a whole flood of conversation that he had suddenly flung my way, that Lori had used to work at the Capitol Bar. And that was the first time I had ever heard

of the place. That was on Monday, the first day of my almost-a-week of drinking at Lori's bar.

Then, on Thursday, as the afternoon waned, in the dark confines of the bar, and after a whole succession of people had come and sat on either side of me (a truck driver, born in Stalingrad, who had come to this country at age four-and-a-half, had gone back to Stalingrad for a visit since the war, and who once had taken dramatic lessons in Detroit — he recommended to me the use of a tape recorder, since he himself used one on his long-haul drives across America, recording his thoughts as they came to him and preserving them on countless tapes which he would file in his hotel room upstairs . . . and an oculist from a suburb of Cincinnati, who was writing a novel about people whom he called the radish people, the carrot people, the lettuce people, etcetera, all of whom lived in a modern subdivision — he liked my idea when I asked him if he called the streets these people lived on Radish Street, Carrot Street, Lettuce Street, etcetera). Anyhow, finally a fine-looking little fellow wearing glasses came and sat one bar stool away and started talking to me, without a word of encouragement, in this fashion: 'Go to the Capitol Bar. It's a better bar. There are women there. Beautiful women. They'll swarm all over you.' 'Then why are you here and not there?' I asked. He checked his watch. 'It's still a little early yet. But you'll like it there.' 'Yes,' I said. 'I heard the Capitol Bar mentioned here before.' I saw Lori's red hair swirl as she danced past before me, running to serve another stein of beer to a man in the dark obscurity near the entrance. I felt, by the way she twirled her head in passing, that she did not like to hear about the Capitol Bar. The swish of her red hair was like a red curtain denoting the end of act two or act three, or act four, or some parting gesture. I left. I went to the Capitol Bar. Some men were playing billiards at the back. The bar was one of the longest in Cincinnati, but no one sat at it except one pretty

girl on the last stool. She was talking animatedly to the bartender, a blonde. I walked the length of the bar and, leaving one stool between us, I sat down and ordered beer. Then I said to the girl: 'Do they dance here?' 'They don't really dance here, but sometimes they do.' 'Have a drink.' 'No. I'm going to work. I type for the Williams Directory.' 'How much do they pay you?' 'A dollar seventy-two an hour.' 'That's not too bad.' 'No, it's not.' I could see that she was immaculate. 'I'll play some music.' I went over to the jukebox, dropped some money, and returned to sit next to her, saying: 'Let's dance.' She immediately got up and put herself in my arms. After we'd danced, she said: 'I have to go to work now.' She hurried out of the bar. The blonde bartender told me I would have to play an album now. 'I have to play an album?' 'Yes, play an album.' 'All right. What number?' 'S4.' I went over and played S4 for her, and some kind of country music came on the jukebox. Then I said good-bye to my blonde bartendress and returned to Lori's bar. Lori was doing her cash-register totals. She borrowed my pen to write whatever it was she had to write down, down.

Nothing Friday. Nothing Saturday. I worked on my autobiography (this one), those two days, and wrote a group of four poems called LORI'S BAR (which I sent off to the HORS COMMERCE Press in California for publication as a pamphlet—my first contribution to them—the poems titled Lori's Bar, The Truckdriver from Stalin-grad, The Oculist from Northside, and Charlotte).

I also got a haircut.

A short one. With no sideburns. Just a high sheer cut, and a little hair left on top.

I part mine on the left side.

I see that Larry, who has been cutting my hair, off and on, ever since I was a boy thirty or more years ago, has had a gold tooth installed prominently in the front of his mouth. He

smiles broadly, and it glitters. He has big teeth, and it's a big gold tooth.

His barbershop is a few blocks away from the house where I live—a one-storey, more or less one-room establishment on Eastern Avenue, just beyond the viaduct that flows traffic over our forgotten Linwood into a half-dozen more prominent and prosperous suburbs on hilltops adjacent to our Little Miami River Valley holdings.

And then, on Sunday (it was yesterday, as I write this), I took my mother (who lives with me—my father has been dead since July 1, 1959) to a Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra popular concert in Eden Park: a Rossini overture, the Bizet symphony, selections and medleys from *MY FAIR LADY* and *OKLAHOMA*, Dvorák's Slavonic Dance No. 15, *SLEIGH RIDE*, and a torch song composed by a popular WLW television-program hostess named Ruth Lyons, called *THEY SAY*, and sung by a local crooner named Bill Walters, with the symphony brass section waking up loud and clear in the syncopated arrangement by a local jazz band leader named Cliff Lash.

I've forgotten to tell you that I fall in love as often as seven or eight times a week—from afar, from anear . . . with a girl sitting on the grass far away, listening to yesterday's concert (my mother and I sat on adjacent benches, since the rest of the two respective benches were already occupied) . . . with a girl standing near me on the bus as, packed and jammed and standing in the bus aisle, our concert crowd crept on City Transit wheels back down the narrow, tortuous streets that lead from Eden Park and the Murray Seasongood Pavilion down into the bowl of the city, downtown Cincinnati. I had already noticed her in three-quarter view from the rear, since she had been sitting several dozen yards to the left and front of me, a little while ago at the concert. Coming down the hill on the bus, she stared at me, and I stared at her. My glances were flitting, but they had to return — and there were her pale blue eyes on me each time. Her father was

standing between us. Her mother had found a seat in front of me. I disembarked, with my mother, at Fourth and Walnut Streets; and so did Pale Blue Eyes and her mother and father. Her mother is crippled and carries a cane. Blue Eyes went with them toward the Dixie Terminal Building on Fourth Street where one can catch a bus to the small towns of Bellevue and South Fort Mitchell and Newport and Covington, across the Ohio River in Kentucky. My mother and I continued up Fourth Street. I had quickly, on leaving the bus, made up the idea to go and look at clothing in the window of Burkhardt's store. Half a block or so up the street, I looked around to see whether she was indeed going into the Dixie Terminal Building — and she was looking down the street at me. Such is romance — those unforgettable perfections we see along the way . . . and perhaps, next Sunday when the concert in the park will begin at 4.00 instead of 4.30 and will feature a local twenty-three-year-old pianist playing a Tchaikowsky Concerto, the main theme of which became a jukebox hit some years ago under the title TONIGHT WE LOVE..... How old? Fifteen or sixteen or seventeen? Old enough at any rate to stare down the street at me at the moment I glanced around to see whether she was entering the Dixie Terminal Building. The nub of her perfection was in her coloring. There was a paleness about her, even about her perfect lips, that was not a whiteness, but pale gold. And also in her stature. She was not delicate. Did the fragile gold chain around her neck, which disappeared into her bodice, hide a cross? I have no answer.

EDITORS (AND OTHERS) WRITE

FREE POEMS AMONG FRIENDS

Dear Editors:

Early this year, Miles Payne hand-printed on his 1898 press a book of poems, *THE LOVABLE CABLE CAR* (and other poems). This beautiful little book, like everything Miles writes and prints, is given away, and is subtitled *Free Poems Among Friends*.

Dave Sandberg, a San Francisco poet, picked up the idea, collected poems from a large number of poets in the area, and began a program of mimeographed single sheets (one or two poems) to be given away at street readings, on buses, in stores, hospitals, schools. *FREE POEMS AMONG FRIENDS*. The name and address of the poet accompanies the poem. If the poem has been in a magazine, the name and address of the magazine is given. No kind of sales pitch is given for anything. A reader who likes a poem can, through the poet or a magazine, find more such work. The poets printed differ widely in their ideas about how to make a poem.

The idea and the name are free for use by ANY group of poets. The working principles Dave uses: The poem should be reasonably accessible to an adult of moderate intelligence and literacy — not written ‘down,’ but not terribly obscure or allusive. The poem should not be so involved with contemporary issues that the poetry is lost to the casual reader, in a political, economic, or religious harangue. It shouldn’t be obscene, unless there is something else of great strength going for it; the idea is to ‘turn on,’ not to ‘shock.’

Gene Fowler

ONE LOVELY BUTTERFLY — NOT A SWARM OF MOTHS

Dear Editors: My idea of a poem: put a skeleton in plain sight and hang some flesh on it. The flesh may be part pearl, part thunder, part steel, part scream, part raw feeling, part love (a million varieties), part useful intellect, and — hopefully, — sometimes, part grace. One poem may not have all kinds of flesh. This kind of poem is wide open and vulnerable. Whatever is the matter with it, or me, at the time, is easily seen. Now, I can develop an acceptable conventional style (breaking with all previous tradition, of course, as is customary, or traditional), — and proceed to bury in it my structures, purposes, praises, angers, love, and sparks, in such manner as to make each example printable in spite of defects — but I'm not going to. Out of my cocoon of muses, I want one lovely butterfly, not a swarm of similar moths. In writers' market-lists, where publications' requirements are briefly detailed, I note some poetry accepters ask for ambiguity, some disdain sentiment, some request sophistication and experimentation, even newness of language, apparently regardless of when, where, or whether there is appropriateness or sufficiency of cause — much less, necessity. Some of these proclivities are anti-poetry.

Wm. Blake, Lewis Carroll, T. S. Eliot, D. Thomas, Yeats, Pound, Tagore, many others, present deep, sharp ambiguities — but not when talking about their friendships, their cats, their gardens, their countries, their groceries, their bank balances, their teachers, etc. (at least, not deep, difficult ones). When such men give you ambiguities in such areas (or openings for two or three valid interpretations), they are rather easily untangled. It is for fun, or effect, almost like punning. But Blake, Shakespeare, Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, D. Thomas, Melville, Jung, D. H. Lawrence, Durrell,

etc., treat also the coins of God, the philosophers' stones; they treat inverse-extraverse, reverse-obverse, the image, the phenomenon of the mirror, the two-in-oneness, the word and the anti-word, the essence and the nonbeing — and intersections of these and other oppositions, enigmas, beginnings, and beauties. They are charting deeps, skirting mysticism, and getting their feet wet. Hence, ambiguity.

When the material forces ambiguity or even obscurity into the statement, that is when it belongs there. Otherwise, there is no excuse for it, and it represents only the defensive mumbo-jumbo of a small in-group minority pathetically pretending to a bit of class it hopes to derive from familiarity with esoterics of its own useless devising. When understandable statements of feeling, relationship, or description are compressed into ambiguity and difficulty — out of an odd belief that ambiguity and difficulty are good for their own sakes — I turn to crosswords and cryptograms to find that kind of exercise more straightforwardly presented. Perhaps it is felt ambiguity and difficulty are professional and grown-up; I think the opposite is true.

As for anti-sentiment, this is only the expression of a misanthropic mood. As for objectivity, this is rare, valued, and has its place — within the framework wherein it is recognized that human feeling is a matter of life and death, that livable feeling is more essential to humanity than water or meat. A man trying to be completely objective is a man trying to be dead. Show me one who claims to succeed, and thinks this a virtue — I'll dig a six-foot hole for him and start shoveling clods, his belated angry cries of honest emotion notwithstanding.

As for sophistication, wherever this is requisite, fine — see you later. I am already too old and stingy to give much to sophists in the intellectual sphere, or to sophisticates in the social one.

F. E. Sandelius

Tryford Essay Too Short for His Sword?

Dear Editors:

It saddens me that I had the opportunity to read John Tryford's *THE AVANT GARDE & The Official Culture* (Trace No. 55), while it was still in manuscript . . . and didn't.

It was during a poetry reading that John placed the ms. before me — with its bellyful of rubric corrections — and asked if I'd like to read it. But, between the hot, pungent coffee, the myriad cigarettes creating a simulacrum of the best of all possible smogs, the skin-tight girls with finely tuned occult glances, and the pneuma-filled, mantic-blowing poets — it just wasn't the place to concentrate on a critique of Culture.

However, if I had read it, and John had been before me to stand witness, I might have said . .

There seems to be a contradiction between you, John, and the spirit of this piece. I mean, it opens with a quotation of Carl Linder (a very beautiful stretch of words); but from the beginning, your prose sits like a block of ice trying so desperately to melt. That it covers the same parched ground: the velleity of our official culture, the fact that our government is not French, is not even Bostonian any more, but is, rather, yes, YAHOOOO! — is of little consequence. We could tread that path, like Crusaders in search of Ignorance, countless times. It would not hurt; it keeps the natives happy.

John, you're bright as hell, but your academe is showing. And why shouldn't it? Yet, you write: Poetry 'is not an academic discipline!' Let us dash back to your letter, published in the same issue of *TRACE*, about the death of T. S. Eliot. You wrote: 'Because I imagined myself to be particularly in tune with Eliot's wave length . . .' In the same letter: 'Whereas Eliot tried to stick to academic, conventional English, with arcane references thrown in . . .' (*italics, mine*). To this I add our own conversations on the classics with

reference to Modern Poetry. Pound-wise, how does that go?

I can't disagree with anything you say here. So far as I'm concerned, it holds water. And the last line: 'Poetry is a tool to work the heart (Linder), and will endure as long as there are hearts to work,' is deeply, wonderfully wrought. But, maybe, the essay is too short for your sword. Maybe you hurried along from 'communicating with another person' to 'the University of California' too quickly. Or maybe — well, I was once called an 'intellectual,' and resented it. But, if we accept ourselves, if we let these things work for us, if we use the gifts we are blessed and cursed with to their full potential — then, some day, we may find our roots rejuvenated and new, wild artistic hair growing atop our shiny intellectual orbs.

Joel Weishaus

Question : What Moves Experiment?

Dear Editors:

The trouble with what little stylistic experimentation that is going on these days is that not much of it seems to come from the content of the material. Rather, it seems a conscious attempt to 'create' some vague personalized inscription, more often for the glory of the artist than for the purposes of art.

Dan Georgakas

MURDER & THE GENTEEL WHORE

... IN THE 1830's

by Irwin Ross

One hundred and twenty-seven years ago, come April 12th next, the New York Herald reported the case of Helen Jewett, a beautiful demimondaine alleged to have been slain by her lover, Richard B. Robinson. The romance, the delicacy, the quiet charm, the subtle sense of good taste, and the gracious atmosphere of breeding and culture which surrounded the taking off of Miss Jewett, provided by contrast their own proof how crude and vulgar the murders of our own day have become. The report, which contains much of interest to students of contemporary mores, reads as follows :

‘Yesterday afternoon about four o’clock the sun broke out in a moment of splendor. I started on a visit to the scene (of the Jewett murder) at 41 Thomas Street. On passing through Chapel Street I came to the corner of Thomas Street, which runs west from behind the Hospital yard to Hudson Street.

‘A large crowd of young men stood around the door, No. 41, and several groups along the street in various directions. The excitement among the young men throughout the city was beginning to spread in all directions.’

(The student will not fail to notice how the reporter waited for the sun to appear before venturing out. It was the custom in that time not to report murders until the weather cleared. The more cunning murderers or those with greater experience, knowing this, invariably obtained weather reports in advance, just as aviators do now. They then did their killings at the beginning of a

wet spell, and were often in Central America or Europe before the murder was reported. The number of murderers who went unpunished finally led to the invention of the modern umbrella in 1868. Since then, reporters — and even police — go out in all kinds of weather. Before the umbrella came into common use, however, official weather prognosticators, knowing that a large number of prospective murderers were anxiously awaiting their reports, made their predictions as vague and obscure as possible. For some unknown reason, this practice has persisted to the present day.)

The house is two stories and attic, large and elegant,
painted yellow
and on the left-hand side as you go to Hudson Street. It
is said to be
one of the most splendid establishments devoted to
infamous intercourse that the city can show. I
knocked at the door; a police officer
opened it stealthily. I told him who I was. “Mr. B., you
can enter,”
said he with great politeness. The crowd rushed from
behind, seeking
also an entrance, but the way was barred to them.

“No more can come in,” said the police officer.

“Why do you let that man in?” asked one of the angry crowd.

“He is an editor—he is on public duty.”

(Here, the deterioration of the police of today is all too apparent. Outside of the grammatical lapse in the officer’s saying, ‘You can enter’ instead of ‘You may enter,’ it will be noted that he addressed Mr. B. with great politeness. Not only did he not say: ‘Naw; beat it,’—he actually explained to one of the inquiring members of the crowd why he permitted Mr. B. to enter and kept the rest of the alphabet out. Cynics may contend that he saw a low number on Mr. B’s car and figured he was a bigshot. But this could not possibly be so, as the automobile did not come into licensed use until the end of the century. Another significant sentence is that

which reads: 'It is said to be one of the most splendid establishments,' etc. This is convincing proof that then, as now, newspapers protected themselves from libel suits. The Herald was not risking actions by establishments which might have been more splendid.)

I entered. I pressed forward to the sitting room or parlor. There I found another officer in charge of that apartment. The old lady of the house, Mrs. Townsend, was sitting on a sofa talking to several young men in a state of great excitement. The room was elegantly furnished with mirrors, splendid paintings, sofas, ottomans and every variety of costly furniture. The police officer, when he saw me, said, "Mr. B., would you like to see the place?" "I would," replied I. He immediately rose—I followed him. We mounted an elegant staircase.'

(The use of the word 'another' here disposes of any contention that the first police officer was a freak or throwback of some kind. Nor can it be said that the politeness was accidental; because, after Mr. B. indicated a desire to see the place, the officer immediately rose. He didn't say: 'Take yer time; you ain't goin' to no fire.' It is reasonable to assume by the law of averages, even though there is no direct evidence on the point, that if two polite cops are found in one house at the same time—even an unusually large house—there must have been others scattered throughout the city. Then, the sentence about the great excitement of the young men—the third such reference in the story—tells much about the simple pleasures of that day . . . and this should shame the young men of our own time. Those of a century ago had to wait for days or even weeks and months during which there was not a single killing. Now, with thousands of murders to choose among, our own youth must needs require movies, cars, cocktails, petting parties, and panty raids to whip up their blasé spirits. Truly, as one eminent divine well says: 'Our young men do not deserve to have

murders. If they were compelled to live abroad where murders are few and far between, they would soon realize how well off they are here.' Acting upon his suggestion, a certain Representative has introduced a bill to deport all these unappreciative ones.)

'What a sight burst upon me! There stood an elegant double mahogany bed, all covered with burnt pieces of linen, blankets, pillows, black as cinders. I looked around for the object of my curiosity. On the carpet I saw a piece of linen sheet covering something, as if carelessly flung over it. "Here," said the police officer, "here is the poor creature." He half-uncovered the ghastly corpse. It was the most remarkable sight I had ever beheld. "My God," exclaimed I, "how like a statue! I can scarcely conceive that form to be a corpse." The body looked as white, as full, as polished as the purest Parian marble. The perfect figure, the exquisite limbs, the fine face, the full arms, the beautiful bust, all, all surpassed in every respect the Venus de Melos, according to the cast generally given of her. "See," said the police officer, "she has assumed that appearance within the hour."

(Here is still further proof of the Quixotic quality of the cops of that era. Certainly, no intelligent person will contend that a cop so sympathetic, so observant, and so appreciative of female beauty would be lacking in ordinary politeness! The use of the phrase: ' . . . assumed that appearance within the hour'—lends color to this conclusion, as does also the officer's modesty in leaving half of the body covered. Even in the course of duty, violating the privacy of another was repellent to him. One may of course draw his own conclusions as to whether or not Mr. B., as a sacrifice to newspaper enterprise, exaggerated the lure of the seductive Miss Jewett. As for us, we believe him. What other conclusion is possible when one considers the scorched condition of the bedding?)

It was the first process of dust returning to dust. The countenance was calm and passionless — not the slightest appearance of emotion was there. An arm lay over her bosom; the other was inverted and hanging over her head. For a few moments I was lost in admiration of the extraordinary sight — a beautiful female corpse that surpassed the finest statue of antiquity.’

(Plainly, the reporters of that day were well equipped culturally to take their place alongside the cops. They had to be. One never knew when he would be called upon to compare the flames which gutted the premises with the reds of Rubens or the vivid hues of Veronese.)

I then looked around the room. It was elegant, but wild and extravagant in its ornaments. On the drawers was a small library, composed of light novels, poetry and monthly periodicals. There hung on the wall a beautiful print of Lord Byron as the presiding genius of the place. The books were Byron, Scott, Bulwer’s works and the Knickerbocker.’

(If there may still be remaining doubts about the culture of reporters of that day, this should effectually dispose of them. Had one of our contemporary reporters seen Byron’s portrait, he undoubtedly would have written: ‘On the wall hung the picture of a distinguished-looking man, alleged to be one of the dead girl’s lovers. The janitor stated that he had seen him come and go frequently, sometimes remaining until very late at night.’)

‘This extraordinary murder has caused a sensation in this city never before felt or known. I understand that a large number of fashionable young men, clerks and others, were caught in the various apartments by the police. It was Saturday night.’

(As to this, one can only say that until Saturday nights are abolished and some other night substituted, this sort of thing will go on.)

'The murdered girl was a perfect Millwood. She has seduced by her beauty and blandishments more young men than any woman in the police records. Last summer she was famous for parading Wall Street in an elegant green dress, and generally with a letter in her hand. She used to look at the brokers with great boldness of demeanour. During her residence here she carried on an extensive country correspondence with every part of the Union. We learn from the post office that during last summer she received from three to eight letters a day. Her postage bill exceeded that of several brokers in Wall Street. Her private correspondence is of a remarkable character, resembling that of Abelard and Eloise.'

(The student of contemporary American life can learn much from this short paragraph. First, he will observe a distinct change in the habits of Wall Street brokers. Continual contact with the forces of civilization have made them much less shy, so that it is no longer necessary for a beautiful woman to stare at them with such boldness. At that time, their shyness and timidity, however, were so great that none of them would allow himself to be approached by a woman unless she was properly introduced. This accounts for the letter which Miss Jewett always carried on her saunters through the 'Street.' Undoubtedly, it was one of introduction... One puzzling item remains. The records of the post office indicate that Miss Jewett carried on an extensive mail order business. None of the experts on behaviorism who was consulted has been able to throw any light on how this was accomplished.)

SISTER MARY JONATHAN

A TRAIN, THE RIVER, THE RAIN

We among the river trees
rain rain the upright grove
seated keel sadly with the train.
Left, the earthy hills are struck.
Right, the river cuts the train.
Stiff, in lances, millions deep,
rain stalks the river trees,
shocks the river rounding right.
We within the window skin
silver threading poles of rain
go on riding toward the stroke
sadly seated, lurching.

ISSUE P. 234 · SCAN P. 40

JOAN WHITE

A BREACH OF DIALOGUE

There is something to be said in the right environments after
breakfast or before after dinner or before or then after all
these things, at early morning, evening then before these
things.

We feed and sleep and run into and away again.
Talking is an exercise at rest and languishing
before the nude wind transparent and electrical:
a thought more slim than speech moves so masterly that
tongue is still.

SIMON PERCHIK

EACH TRAVELER

Each traveler who knows the way
will trouble the hill where workmen
proudly spaded Ludd to rest
then still by hand, half hid a stone
to shape his grave, reminding him
the bit of rock above his ground
will burn from every twist of air
until he be finally alone
with the enduring part of stone
buried close to give his name support
give markings to each traveler, 'Here lies
Ned Ludd, feeble minded man.'
except the road has been repaired
the curve erased, high speeds
have sprung to hear dead Ludd complain
of steel and rubber melting to replace
his hill, allow his wind to lose its job
: Ned Ludd wailing at each change of air
screaming pleas into each traveler, stop!
dig out my remaining stone by hand.

BOOKER T. JACKSON

AN INVISIBLE FOR SALE

an invisible for sale sign hangs on her face lolita(
seen only by those who have use of her commodity
she cannot use commercials coo) coo
some countries still practice middle age customs
but news get around by word of mouth mister babbitt
clean clear not careless clap conscience sure
still shallow streams surround her face
how does she breathe leap walk in the rain
nobody knows fire herself rivers
you soul now take five marijuana
shall overcome shall overcome over come.

EDWARD FIELD

IS BOY

Is boy, is bold, and squirming in my arms;
licking my shoulder, wandlike rules my weather;
ducks my kiss and will not come to terms;
loves like a son where I cannot be father.
Scrambling over my knees is wanton but coy;
boywise unserious plays my grownup game
and climbs me like a tree where I lissome lie:
Remembers in me the womb and his flesh is calm.
Finding no pebble, no shell in his sifting sands
still dry where my kisses prophesy him tears,
I push him roughly away, knowing my hands
are far too small to hold his falling years.

NEAL ELLIS

I CLANG ON SOFTLY

It's tough; you hear machines
groan with precision
through a batch of hills
and a botched vision.
Then it's a function of throb;
my mother loved her waist
and kept it long and narrow
and father loved her hair.
It's a way you can smoulder
with your joints odd
to accomodate a flexible
notion of a roving God.
I clang on softly
with a mendicant glare
thinking of father's function
and mother's long hair.

DAVID ROGERS

ADAM'S LONELINESS

Was there not one of all those hairy heads
And beetling brows that he could feed with?
And of the muscled rumps and twitching tails
Was there not one with body he could fondle?
Tufted fetlock folded under guts.
He did not sleep that way. Clattering hooves
And spiraled horn on head. He walked upright.
What of nesting time when sun fell slant
And over the old world somber calm came down?
Around him jutting jaws and lightless eyes
Compounded savagery in rough embrace.
His blood burned and he walked the earth alone.
Where in all that catalogue of night
Was he to find a face with eyes that saw
Not simply shapes, but sun and crimson cloud?
Bellowing out of bone and blood and brain
And over the twilight earth settling to sleep
A cry that clambered out of space and time
And pitched its troubled tone to Father's ear.
Of all that herd he only knew himself.

STANLEY COOPERMAN

JENIFER AT 8 O'CLOCK

Suddenly as oranges
a breath took shape
becoming word,
ripening between us
on dark branches,
a world of faces
turned irrelevant
leaves
surrounded by fruit.
It sometimes happens
that way: a flavor
somewhere underneath

the skin, as though mouths
were drenched with rain,
a reversal of all
sensible gravity,
moisture
leaping into space.
Frightening too,
of course,
since we know our lines,
the demarcation of personal
pronouns
and rules of grammar
by which we spell our names:
unexpected, a rind
of surfaces
cast away to lovely
pulp, the glisten
of this.

STANLEY COOPERMAN

EPITAPH FOR AN ASIAN REBEL

No good will come of it: the corpse
born dancing on a green pole
again, and yet again, as though Jerusalem
were spread like jelly on the world,
the old myths of suffering and dream
thinned to spilled viscera
of soldiers, virgins, Gods, and whores
drowned in dialectic scum.
Robes of orange or thick wool
burn in the same fire,
shout for the same perfumed mouth
that somewhere out of empty time
spits out the bones of stars.
With this grimace, rotten with devotion,
we have eaten a whole world of men,

the spawn of headlines and maggots
for the unpurged freedom of the worm.
Bald heads and buttoned tunics,
bearded demi-Jews owling London smoke
and polished jowls of the beefsteak Church . . .
even now they squeeze their books,
sound every text and circle of despair
to build a tower of frozen blood,
breeding gargoyles out of sacred
sewers, and feeding on the noble excrement
of Law.

GIL ORLOVITZ

TO MATISSE

like the man painting with the nude strapped to his
wrist
on an arctic blue line the problem of joy
as the sunlight descending by eyelids
the woman balanced the mediterranean on her skull
becalmed circuses crouched at his feet
he and the monkeys had walked long trapezes together
a miracle that a man could keep fruit in trust
nudes as ferns
his suns had gazed into mirrors of moons
a most gracious caliper serving brandy in the keenest
dusk
the brilliant plumage crouched to ambush the sunburnt
snows
and the prism sometimes would pale at the approach of
wild game
the arabs listened to the floral beat of hooves on the
wall
the ghosts of crustaceans on crutches spoke sparingly
the sand dunes swept over his ear
the boy dehydrated the gothic cathedrals
the prisms swung as fruit
the piano lesson held in a slate glass enclosure atop the
pyramid
metronomes eyelashes
the nudes of the chinese crustaceans stern coloratura

GIL ORLOVITZ

THUS COME I TO TOUCH

I touch oxen of exile; all hands
convicted of body; the satellite oxen
mulling round the earth — from the
prosecutors who must have a conviction
that side of touch; I touch all men
who must wear their circles on their sleeves;

the body convicted of hands
putting to test, not to touch; touching
the beheaded boys, the plate
is passed around the planets,
heavy denominations of anti-matter
piling up in colossal currency,
the pioneers in cloudy catacombs;
racing behind the roaring fire-engine
genitals that sleek toward oxen orbit,
the children fail to touch a man,
for the woman hath her gauges,
her luminous dials,
hath her relative instruments
and her piquelibrums;
thus come I to touch the ancient infants,
those little boy-and-girl winds of babydust,
who, scratching at the hides of the oxen
of exile, slowly slow them down,
slow them down for my own blind touch.

GIL ORLOVITZ

MEDIAN 34

the snow comes in a lung tin
the airholes wasps
the card-sharp arclight
black players fade down blind alleys where windwasps
 wait round
and around
black automated totems listen with
color ears inside whitely dumb
snow wasps saw through the lung tin
players have flocks of frozen greased geese
 waspscreeching against
the walls
the arc-dealer skins the moonhide down to earth
the lung tins breath is crystal
glittering wasps of color ice shatter in black mammoth
 holes
automated up to the white closemouth waspbubble
with a geese high thin ear card sharp

ART OF THE SONNET: 208

The old married man and woman sitting side
by side under the white nightshade, sautéed by
encephalograph —
do not feed the fish when they are upright in the waves
and spreading apart their eyes to prevent the strain of
mucilage.
The mother and father are infants to their children;
diapers are given
to the old married man and woman for napkins when
they eat — they use a cradle to their ear as
a listening-aid; the ocean is kind to the
encephalographic
fish when, stripped of their scales, they stare in flaky
sauté, mildly gummed in the swaying aspic of listless
shock — there is our sex floating filmily
ashore like a bowel in the shape of a life raft.
We do not mean to offend. We cannot help being
together. We do not talk. Forgive us, then, our teething.

MASTERINDEX : 21

suppose tripping and falling into the holes
in my dead fathers face I should
scrape my shin why what would
I do then to prevent infection the skin
being broken my fathers natural
lockjaw confronting me the usual
bone of my bone germladen
well you didnt have to go tromping
around in my box to see whether
there was still some sort of resemblance
son you could point to with filial
pride certainly the widening flesh
holes are narcissistic more than
anything else explaining why you
lost your footing so that while
infection might be due to me on
the surface apparently you have to
bleed a little to find out you carry
your own deadly personalities
within you in some sort of two-way
kit of course you will look like
me again in time but leave
instructions to your own son if
curiosity whines in him to make
himself a midget before he pokes
about in your face so he
wont get hurt by the man in
the coffin swiftly becoming a giant
of holes in which the living
tripping and falling in their own
size take the chance of lacerating
through to their own gory enormities

that being the supposition I immediately
made myself very tiny before
probing the holes in my dead fathers face

GIL ORLOVITZ

ART OF THE SONNET: 222

In my father's hand the only hand was mine,
each finger a pitchpipe — I blew on my knuckles in
the cobalt cold, each ancestor a blue rebuff
answerable only to the carom carousel's snuff —
his jaw moved like a shoe.

Memory — slowly wiping its glasses . . .

I learned to get the hang of him from stairway
to supper to cellar to sleep — the shoe
slack at the end of the skull, the air swaying
from side to side as if a pendulum were
a bottom, little dried balls of fruit
the degrees of the arc . . .

Stiff with hanging, I withdrew. I could see nothing
on my fingers except the white spaces where his blood
had hung.

FELIX POLLAK

OF LOVE

Hurts like hell and doesn't
turn into poetry either.
Dumb as a sophomore
I stare into my you-shaped void
and try to comprehend the phrase
' thinking of you ' .
How does one think of pain? It's all
there is.
Love: ' a private
world event ' . Thousands of years
men, women staring into
their you-shaped voids, the hurt never
diluted or dispersed.
Forever this forever
different sameness.
O the unbridgeable
one-way distances . . . !

ISSUE P. 249 · SCAN P. 55

FELIX POLLAK

KANDINSKY

Felix Pollak

Improvisation

Twist when & nowhere into a spiral
reiterating who
throw the pebble of never
into the fishpool of why
till how overtakes it
letting what & wherefore escape.

Black Spot

The heart of a bluebird exploding
into the cobalt sun / spirochete
swimming in the blood of the moon.
Magenta sea shells
rocketing circles round a
lapislazuli ocean that copulates with
the tip of a rainbow.
The guts & bones of the world / fins and
vertebrae / mauve jade aquamarine.
And the big black blot in the sun-stung eye
floating softly into cerise shadows.

Composition

Larvae flowering
in the soil of chiaroscuro. Eels
tending thickets of starlight.
The moon at every turn.
Paths ghost-persuaded opening into
thistle gardens.
Toppling the ladders to silence.

S. A. YORKS

BESIDE THE BAY

A rebuffed ocean drools spittle along
The land's flanks while it hisses its loss
Of a salt domain. It spends its passion
In time's troughs and gurgles its outrage
Where jetties proclaim it now a bay. Here,
Life glowers on rocks stinking with renewed decay.
Love crested where we lay in a pool of night,
Where sheets like shingle were salt with parting
Or, as sands between the tide's assaults.
And tears recede like pools below the granite slopes.
A continent is rimmed with salt in these our
Celebrations and still an ocean of space
Leans against these crusty beaches remote
From a chill and drying sun.

S. A. YORKS

PACIFIC MARGINS

Stompers of a continent, they stand, feet
Pricking a strand stippled with laconic cans
Before the ocean that broke their wave,
Mocking their tobacco voices and taproom eyes.
Could Whitman lie? America wasn't God
Though its mountains were high, the prairies broad,
And the rivers wide. Now, cement plains
And lakes of tar nudge those edgy feet.
Should faces be blank that peeled a land,
Sickled forests like wheat and mowed the tribes?
Do they hear their sons sobbing through brass
In the neon thickets or regard them
Where they hover by the wells of the mind
Or where they cower rimmed by ranges of flesh?

WILLIAM J. MARGOLIS

FOR THE WINTER SOLSTICE

All thru autumn
as leaves & petals & fruit
fell in the limetree patio
we watched the sun's noonshadow
pass along the sunken tiled floor
square by square
& then climb crumbling plaster adobe wall,
ancient ruins of our house, mysterious,
magical, becoming our own
everywhere we touched it . .
& the year's shortest day
marks the turn of sun's curved course,
back down the wall, across the field of tile,
toward summer . .

WILLIAM J. MARGOLIS

but it is a long night, & cold
here, where we're unprepared
— by habitual warmth —
the sun's fastest trip quickly lost on us
as we bury ourselves deep in nightwarmth
within the clock of jazz & kindred making,
close love spiriting us in praise
& celebration of our Muses
& their moon, just given birth
to new premonition of new leaves, new blossoms,
new fruits of our ancient sapience, love of being
warm at any season in the robes of creation . . .
& faith in constancy of sunshadow change.

HELEN SORRELLS

OR LIGHT OF NONE

Often her lamps are never lit at all.
By the frail light of stars, or fall of moon,
Or the wide shine of winter whiteness spread
By snow on prairies eyeless as at noon —
Or light of none of these —
She bids the shadowed world come forth and breathe
Its living secrets on unreasoning dread.
Some times she probes the furred cocoon of sleep:
The swallow headless in the brooding eaves,
The child upstairs — is death but blacker sleep? —
Commands the mole drive deep; holed fox to howl;
The scorpion darkly breathe her atmosphere;
Firefly to flaunt the dusk; the twilit owl
Query the rabbit, warm and newly dead;
Deploys these quick against the reaching roots
And devious water waiting underfoot.

HELEN SORRELLS

THE COLD WOMAN

All Fall the suns had been hot.
The horse shows were exceptional.
She kept the plumes,
The brass crescendos
In her mind long into snow time.
They reenforced her mood,
At home in the tightened
Cycle of the sun.
Parades beat smartly on noons
Too cold for reckoning.
She thought of horses,
Braided, brushed and buffed,
The while she drank her coffee,
Taken at four,
And pondered the heat
Of animals and men.

Chrysanthemums, bronze and winter gold,
Vivid as port she drank at dinner,
Burned in copper pots,
Fending off heave and rise,
The break and thaw,
Of horses in melting pastures,
Mouths softened by men
In the inevitable Spring.

ISSUE P. 256 · SCAN P. 62

MYRON LEVOY

DEATH AS A MOVIE

Coming from the hot street
Where jackhammers tear
The inviolable flesh,
Into the dim, cool-
Sucking a hard candy
Waiting for the blue-green
Lights to darken;
Sweet, sickly waiting.
Then the curtains parting
With a slight whir,
And the film, in reverse,
Showing ourselves,
Almost lunatic,
Backing round corners,
Diving out of pools,
Retreating from embraces,
Ourselves diminishing
Toward the child we had devoured.
Film showing fragments:
Schoolyards and mornings;
Children running backwards
Uncannily skilled,
Pale children flickering . . .
Bedrooms and wakings;
Old photos of parents,
Faces of strangers
Withdrawing above us.
The film speeding up.
Infants receding-
Water-lights-cries-
Strong hands pulling back-
Birth sucking inward-

Then flashes-scrambled numbers-
A bright steady white
And the projector reel spinning
Flicketa, flicketa, flicketa, flicketa . . .

MYRON LEVOY

REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES

Remove all obstacles, encumbrances:
Remove the leather belt, the silver buckle,
The shirt of intricate interlacing patterns,
The shoes, the socks, the lint rubbed from the socks,
Remove the underclothes, remove the watch,
Remove the ring, the red mark of the ring,
Remove the surface hair, remove the skin,
The underfat, the epithelial tissue,
Dislodge the joints, uproot the cornerstone.
Cut deep, untie the knots, let loose the hasps,
Undo the woven work,
Unlatch the little boxes all inlaid
With oriental wood,
Sweep the shelves clear of useless bric-a-brac;
Remove the lamps, the ghosts around the lamps,
Remove the pictures in their gilded frames,
Cart off the furniture, the finery.
Pull down the gates, pull down the doors and windows.
Let in the slow procession of the sun.

KENNETH L. BEAUDOIN

SCREAMS (SETTE BELLO)

so lost and far the
child mind wanders in the
remembering man that
elders sometimes shudder
and try to open a door to
moments past and gone
so suddenly immediate, they scream.

W A N T I N G (SETTE BELLO)

Who among the children of
Adam left on the planet still can
Name the one among them
That lacks any good or ill?
In no man
Now living is old
Gaunt history wanting.

KENNETH L. BEAUDOIN

ROLLING (SETTE BELLO)

right here before me
on the sunlit counterpane
life is lighted
like some glowing thing
internal and everywhere
not knowing —
glowing — rolling —

TRINKET (SETTE BELLO)

to what end but
rosy dreams, fond filled
in spring's bright weather
now do young swains
kindle robust hopes
equinox engendered
tarrying near with some sweet trinket.

ALEXANDER KUO

**CUPCAKES : IN CELEBRATION OF SPRING FOR
RICHIE**

On the streets, in air,
they are everywhere lacking
no parasols, nor all-imaginative
orbits, nor invisible
directions. They crowd like
this the inner circles
of my mind and move in air
impossible to my touch,
treading, as always,
on the boundary of disappearance,
their forward motion
the limit of my senses.
This half-mooned three quarter
spring is no joke to me
who see no end in sight,
no end to this sweet parade
passing for me to gloss.
If left untouched, some look
almost good enough to eat.
Back home in Iowa
mother never made such goods.

ROBERT L. ALLEN

PUBERTY

When the alabaster cracking
Left chalked the palms the sleight
Of hands disclosed and still not die
Though tears his tears and naked might
When the alabaster cracking
Run carving down the powder eye.
When the alabaster cracking
Kneeling to line alone
And strained the posture and the lie
To cup some dust or bend one bone
When the alabaster cracking
The breath and broken mouth are dry.
When the alabaster cracking
Now done and raked to rest
He quivered raged and swore and I
The fingers ashes ashes pressed
When the alabaster cracking
And wrinkled voice the hoarse reply
Weeps Marble marble cracking
Weeps My marble boy and I?

MICHAEL LEBECK

FOURTH OF JULY

Her raised switch. CHASES DIRT. Unde malum?
 The Dutch Cleanser Girl streaks over the tiles.
 Satan leers at love from her bleached bonnet.
 Empty the dark before I light the light.
 'Spenser Tracy discovered the light bulb.'
 Since they met one whole childhood has gone by.
 'Oh your smile that sears my eyes which scramble
 between your legs for rest.' YOOHOO! it says.
 'You ought to wear a fig leaf or something.'
 I'd settle for your hand. 'All right for you . . .'
 Say I don't bite. 'You do so bite!' Apple
 bit in, ribs, ribs. 'That's cold!' The wall? 'The wall.'
 'Love teethes all his pups on Maw's same slipper.'
 Dogs cry HIM! HIM! with their eyes. Let it ring!
 'Don Ameche invented the telephone.'
 Nature and Nature's God. How beautiful
 you look! Is it because you're so earnest?
 'Did you ever see your father cry?'
 It makes me shiver you were once a child.

MICHAEL LEBECK

ELEGY FOR GOLDIE ANN HIRSCH

Tree
 fuller of dead wood than another,
 no grass rugs the hardened soil which roots it
 but snow does, that sheets it but soiled by birds
 husking bitter
 hackberries with their bills,
 hewing down quiet
 like the sirens do.
 Bird, no, longer, her shadow blacks plaster
 of tenement's side and far
 enough off
 that shadow proves realer than its bird
 or birds

put themselves in the hand of a baby
blue sky till Night
flake soot off east walls.
Once it was evening but now it is night.
In place of stars
Night shakes . . . her head . . . makes snow . . .
That
seed which rooted in the great boulder's
crack pushed
down a wedge to lift his feathers
until it split the rock in two — and died.

STEVEN RICHMOND

Light

AND THERE IT WAS!
STREWn OUT BEFORE ME ENDLESS
IN MAZED CRISSCROSS FORK-
ING EVERYWHICHWAY!
STARING HARD A THOUSAND HOT BEGINNINGS
LEAPED TO OPEN MY EYE! SMOOTH BUTTER SPILL-
WAYS! FAT FRIENDLY ALFALFA
CLEARING MY VISION!
AND I STARTED TO FLY AFTER IT!
FREE IN ALWAYSBEGINNING WHITE SPACE
I KISSED IT ONCE! THEN FELL
like a bird turd.

DANTE AMMAZZATO (A FANTASY IN THREE ACTS)

First performed (in an earlier version) at the Belshazzar Theatre in Greenwich Village, August 18, 1962, by the Walpurgis Players under the direction of Leslie Bergomask. The cast included: Nigel O'Quinn (as Dante, aged 9); Quentin Pizazzo (Dante, at 18 & 29); Sibyl Turch (Beatrice, at 8); Lila Bodkin (Beatrice, at 17); and Betty Waldbaum (Gemma Donati, at 34).

The action of the play takes place in and about the Piazza della Signoria in modern Florence.

Act I, Scene 1 — THE PIAZZA, LATE AFTERNOON. A GROUP OF BOYS AT STAGE LEFT, CLUSTERED ABOUT THE STATUE OF THE ROMAN LION, SHOOTING CRAPS. DANTE, A SLIGHT, UNDERNOURISHED BOY OF NINE, WITH SHORT PANTS AND RIMLESS GLASSES, ENTERS FROM THE RIGHT.

1st Boy: Six — I made it!

2nd Boy: Shaddup! Wuddya mean, you made it? Lousy cheater!

1st Boy: Wudge you say? (GRABBING 2ND BOY BY HIS DIRTY T-SHIRT) Say that again!

2nd Boy: (PUSHING 1ST BOY AWAY) Whatsamatta, you don't hear so good? I said cheater, (SHOUTING) SCROCCONE! TRUFFATORE! Capeesh, you stupid grease-ball!

BRIEF, BUT VIOLENT, FIST-FIGHT. THE SCUFFLE SUBSIDES AND THE GAME CONTINUES. DANTE WANDERS PAST ABSENTMINDEDLY CHEWING ON A PENCIL, A PAD PROTRUDING FROM HIS PANTS POCKET. HE STOPS FOR A MOMENT AND THINKS.

Dante: (NUDGING 3RD BOY) Hey, Gino, what's a word that rimes with bella?

Gino: (TURNED AWAY FROM HIM, WATCHING THE PLAYERS) Uh what-zat, whatzat you sayin'?

Dante: I said, what rimes with bella?

Gino: Oh . . . stella . . . umm . . . look, how would I know?
 . . . Lemme see, nella, della, fella, no, cella, vanella, stella —

PETER HEINEGG

Dante: Wait a minute, wait — that's it, perfect: stella! Why didn't I think of it? Hey, thanks a million, Gino, thanks . . . (HE

STARTS TO WALK AWAY, TALKING TO HIMSELF) yeah, stella, stella-bella, bella-stella . . . Gino: Say, whaddya wanna

know that for? Whatcha doin' anyway? Dante: Who — me? Oh, nothing. Gino: (Nudging 1st Boy) Hey, what's with him?

1st Boy: Dontcha know? Big deal — he's all crazy about that rich kid down the block, you know the one, whatza name,

Beatrice something. Sheee, what a drip! Dante: (WALKING BACK MENACINGLY) HEY YOU! (TAKES OFF HIS GLASSES

AND PUTS THEM IN HIS POCKET) You want to have a mouthful of teeth? 1st Boy: (COWED) No, I — Dante: (RAISING HIS VOICE. THE GAME STOPS AND ALL THE BOYS LOOK UP)

Look, wise guy, one more word out of your stupid mouth and I'll FLATTEN you. Get it? And that goes for you too, Gozzi!

(POINTING AT A BIG LUMBERING BOY WITH A SMIRK ON HIS FACE.) Gozzi: You don't say. Dante: (GOING UP TO HIM) I DO

SAY, FAT BOY! GOZZI FLINCHES. A TREMULOUS SILENCE FOR A FEW MOMENTS. DANTE LOOKS AROUND HIM FOR A MOMENT, THEN STRIDES MAJESTICALLY OFF. CURTAIN. Act I, Scene 2 — A NEARBY PALAZZO, ABOUT AN HOUR LATER.

DANTE IS STANDING ON THE STREET, LOOKING UP AT A SECOND-STORY WINDOW. Dante: Ssst . . . sssst . . . Beatrice.

SILENCE. BEATRICE APPEARS AT THE WINDOW, WEARING A RED PARTY DRESS. SHE HAS CURLY HAIR AND

ARISTOCRATIC MANNERS. IN HER LEFT HAND SHE HOLDS AN ALL-DAY SUCKER. Beatrice: Who's there? Oh. What do

you want? Dante: Uh . . . look, Beatrice, can you come down now? I want to show you something. Beatrice: (CURIOUS BUT

RESERVED) Oh — what is it? Dante: (WITH PROFESSIONAL PRIDE) A poem . . . a couple of poems. Beatrice: Ooh, let me

see them . . . well, I can't come down now, Dad's having visitors. Could you send them up?

PETER HEINEGG

Dante: (RELUCTANTLY) All right, I'll drop them in the mailbox. OK? Can I come tomorrow?

Beatrice: I'm not sure. Daddy doesn't like having strangers walking around in front of the house. You'd better be careful about Becco.

Dante: Who's Becco?

Beatrice: He's Daddy's hunting dog. He's almost as big as a pony; he has big black eyes and he always —

Dante: (FIERCELY) Look, I don't care, I'm not afraid of dogs. If he goes for me, I'll cut his throat with my knife and — (QUICKLY SWALLOWING HIS UNDIPLOMATIC THREATS) Well — anyhow, I'll see you Sunday in the piazza, won't I?

Beatrice: I don't know . . . Maybe. But thanks for the poems.

Voice within: Beatrice!

Beatrice: Oh, there's Mommy. I have to say hello to some people. 'Bye.

EXIT BEATRICE. DANTE SHAKES HIS HEAD, SIGHS AND EXITS.

CURTAIN.

**ACT II, SCENE 1 — MORNING IN THE PIAZZA,
SOME NINE YEARS LATER. ON THE LEFT
ARE PARKED A WHITE JAGUAR AND A
LATE-MODEL FIAT. NEARBY STANDS A
SMALL GATHERING OF THE LOCAL
JEUNESSE DOREE, MOSTLY SOPHISTICATED
COLLEGIATE TYPES, CENTERED ADMIRINGLY
ABOUT BEATRICE, A CHIC YOUNG WOMAN
IN A BLACK SHEATH DRESS.**

Young Man: (TO BEATRICE) Listen, here's the list for Saturday night. Just check and see if anybody's missing.

Beatrice: Let's see. Hm. Hm. Hm. Fine. Oh, I just remembered. I hate to impose upon you like this, but could

you add somebody else — a friend of mine?

Young Man: A friend? By all means — who?

Beatrice: I don't think you've ever met him — he doesn't get around much socially. Dante Alighieri. Have you ever heard of him . . . the poet?

Young Man: N-no, can't say that I ever —

AT THIS POINT, AS IF CONJURED UP, DANTE ENTERS ON THE RIGHT. THE EYES OF THE GROUP QUICKLY APPRAISE HIM — AND FIND HIM WANTING: THE CONVERSATION FALTERS AND DANTE BRISTLES SLIGHTLY, AS HE WALKS PAST HIS MUCH POSHER — THOUGH LESS INTELLIGENT — OPPOSITION.

PETER HEINEGG

Dante: Beatrice . . . I just wanted to tell you, we're having a poetry recital in the park, on Saturday night. (THE FACES OF THE GROUP EXPRESS DISGUST) Perhaps some music too. I'll probably be in it, so I . . . just wanted to let you know in case you wanted to come. Beatrice: Oh, Saturday night . . . You

know, as a matter of fact, we were just talking about Saturday. Do you really have to go to the recital? Dante: Well, no; but I had some canzoni that I wanted to read . . . Brunetto and Cavalcanti and a few others will be there. Beatrice: Why do you always have to be going around with those people? They're such bores. (DANTE STIFFENS) Look, why don't you come with us on Saturday. Simone's driving us down to the shore to see his new yacht. We'll have dinner at Ciacco's and then drive home. You could read your poems at dinner.

(DANTE LOOKS NAUSEATED AT THE SUGGESTION) Young Man: Ahem. Pardon me, but I think we've already arranged for a piano player and some dancing. I don't know if you'd be able to fit the — uh, reading in. Beatrice: Oh, you're right! I completely forgot. (BRIGHTLY) It'd be rather hard to mix the two, wouldn't it. Dante: (EXPLODING) All right, it's all right! As a matter of fact, I couldn't break the engagement with Brunetto anyway. So it's just as well . . . I'll see you later.

EXIT DANTE. THE YOUNG MAN AND HIS COMPANIONS SMILE KNOWINGLY. BEATRICE SEEMS MOMENTARILY UPSET, THEN REJOINS THE CHATTERING GROUP. CURTAIN.

Act II, Scene 2 — EVENING. DANTE AND BEATRICE ALONE.

Dante: What I can't understand is how can you waste your time with people like that. They're just a bunch of brainless, conceited, parasitic bores. You shouldn't debase yourself.

Beatrice: (PROVOKED) What? Those are my friends you're talking about. Dante: I'm sorry. It's just that — I just can't stand — Beatrice: You can't stand? Listen, I'll live my life the way I want to, and if it doesn't come up to your standards, then you can go back to your intellectuals, roll yourself up in all the wet blankets and stay there!

PETER HEINEGG

Dante: I said I was sorry. Here're the poems. You can read them by yourself. I have other copies home.

Beatrice: (MELTING) All for me? Oh, wonderful, wonderful! I'll show them to Simone and Filippo and the others. I mean they're really good and everybody always likes them when I show them —

Dante: (THUNDERSTRUCK) WHAT? You mean you let those IDIOTS see my poems? You actually — No, that's too much. We're through. Addio!

HE STORMS OFF. BEATRICE SHRUGS HER SHOULDERS AND EXITS.

CURTAIN.

ACT II, SCENE 3 — THAT NIGHT, IN FRONT OF THE PORTINARI PALAZZO.

DANTE IS STANDING BENEATH THE WINDOW AS BEFORE. THE PALAZZO IS BRILLIANTLY LIT, AND SOUNDS OF MUSIC AND GAY CONVERSATION, FROM WITHIN. DANTE HAS SEVERAL SHEETS OF PAPER IN HIS HAND AND CAN SCARCELY STAND STILL, IN HIS AGITATION.

Dante: Ssst . . . sssst . . . Beatrice!

CURTAIN.

Act III — TEN YEARS LATER. DANTE IS SITTING AT HIS DESK AT HOME, CORRECTING A MANUSCRIPT WITH A PENCIL AND HUMMING A TUNE TO HIMSELF. THOUGH STILL WEARING MODERN CLOTHES, HE HAS BY NOW ASSUMED THE TRADITIONAL LAUREL WREATH ABOUT HIS BROW. AFTER A WHILE HE LOOKS AROUND FOR SOMETHING AND, NOT FINDING IT, LEAVES THE ROOM. GEMMA, HIS WIFE, ENTERS, LOOKING VERY SUSPICIOUS. SHE SPOTS THE MANUSCRIPT, AND HOLDS IT BEHIND HER BACK, AS DANTE RETURNS ON STAGE. Dante: (PERFUNCTORILY) Oh, hi, Gemma, didn't know you were here. HE SITS IN HIS CHAIR AGAIN, FINDS THE MANUSCRIPT GONE AND SEARCHES FOR IT, GETTING MORE AND MORE PANICKY, TURNING OVER BOOKS, ETC. Dante: Say, er, uh, honey, you

didn't see a manuscript around here by any chance — did you? Gemma: What kind of manuscript? Poems? Dante: N-no, not exactly . . . It had a blue title page, with La Vita Nuova on it.

PETER HEINEGG

Gemma: (CLOUDS ARE GATHERING) Hmm, what was it about?

Dante: About? What? Oh, the manuscript. We-ell, . . . it was just . . .

sort of boyhood recollections . . . you know —

Gemma: (LEAPING FROM AMBUSH) You bet your life I know. You're

lucky I didn't tear it in a million pieces. Just tell me this: who's

Beatrice, and when's the last time you saw her?

Dante: Honey, she's just a girl I used to know when I was a kid —

and after. (PLAYING HIS STRONG POINT) I haven't seen her in years

— she's dead. You know, if you'd read through to the end, you'd

have —

Gemma: (REVEALING THE MANUSCRIPT) I will read through to the end.

And if you're lying, you can say goodbye to it . . . Anyway, why are

you writing a book about her? You never write anything about me.

Dante: Gemma, try to be sensible about this . . . If you hadn't been

snooping and spying into my things, this whole nonsense'd never have

happened in the first place.

Gemma: SPYING! In the first place, how come it never told me

about all this before? And that reminds me — let's put all our cards

on the table — Cavalcanti told me, yesterday, you've been planning

a big long poem with . . . Beatrice having the main part in it. Said

it'll probably take years to finish. What's going on around here? I'm

the last one to find out about everything.

Dante: Dio mio, can't I get any privacy in my own house? Cavalcanti's

a damn loud-mouth. OK, OK, so I am writing a long poem. So what.

What I write about — and whom I write about — is my own business.

Gemma: (SWITCHING TACTICS) Dante . . . I'm a good wife . . . non é

vero? . . . I take care of the kids . . . I work hard . . . I try to make

the place look nice, when you bring your friends . . . (CRYING A BIT)

. . . I try to help you out . . . (THE LIONESS AGAIN) and you go

spending all your time writing about some other woman. Dante, I

have my rights. Are you ashamed of me or something?

Dante: (FIST TO FOREHEAD, ETC.) No, Gemma, no. It's just that when

I'm picking a subject to write on, I have to —

Gemma: Have to what? Who's more important than your wife — who?

Tell me that!

Dante: Nobody, Gemma, nobody . . . Look, what do you say, Gemma,

the Vita Nuova's already done, the Commedia's in the works —

Gemma: The what's in the works?

Dante: The Commedia. That's the name of the new poem.
But after

I finish the Commedia, I'll do something really big, just for you.

PETER HEINEGG

(GEMMA BEAMS) I've always thought I could do something based on the Aeneid. (WARMING TO HIS THEME) You know, Aeneas' wife, Creusa, gets lost in the sack of Troy and Aeneas has to sail away without her; then he has a dream, where Creusa appears to him and says she's dead, and that Aeneas will marry another woman. Well, I could write a long epic, where Aeneas finds out that the dream was only a trick, from Juno or something, that Creusa was still alive, only held prisoner by the Greeks. Then he'd give up everything, sail back to Troy, rescue Creusa, reconquer the city — with her help — and then there'd be a long part about their reign over Troy and —

Gemma: But I don't see how I —

Dante: Don't you see? You're Creusa and I'm Aeneas! I'll change the names and all, but everybody will recognize you right off the bat. In fact, just to make sure, I'll call it the Gemmaid. And I could write a special preface, telling how you'd been my inspiration and how —

Gemma: (DROPPING MANUSCRIPT AND RUNNING TO HIM) O, carissimo!

Dante: Gemma!

Gemma: O dolcezza!

Dante: Gemma!

Gemma: O Amore!

Dante: (ASIDE) Beatrice!

THEY EMBRACE AS THE CURTAIN FALLS.

A REVIVAL OF BLOOD

(FROM AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL)

One Stripe, a dining steward, deserts his ship to follow Mrs. Pritcher. She assigns him her late husband's bedroom.

In the master bedroom, One Stripe prepared the breakfast agenda. He had before him on the heavy teakwood desk several crisp stacks of vellum; beside his chair the edges of his documents were just visible inside their case. He had earlier arranged and rearranged them for instant referral should the need occur. Now he must devote himself to the more immediate factors—the admitting of guests, the order of seating, the presentation of business and, not least, the matter of proper food.

In this the poor woman was most pathetic, hardly aware of her own provisions. Why, she imagined, and he maintained his solemn nod, there would be fruit, or eggs, or toast, or some of them would take cereal—raw, cracked grain, he had rustled the box—empty. She had assented, at his inspection, to everything. Certainly, uniform portions would be most unobtrusive, and most readily distributed; the number of plates would be reduced. The matter of the beverage—coffee they expected, and coffee they would not have, no, by this negation to present himself most forcefully to their attention.

He consulted the top sheet of the central stack: his menu—it satisfied him, that.

His eyes had tired, he permitted himself a yawn, projecting himself at the same time back, the chair, too—the leather case brushing to the floor—from the desk. It was the largest desk he had had for some time, more so when considered in retrospect with the overburdened table in his

cabin. Yet here he allowed himself a schedule no less strict; his curfew hour was affixed to the paper on the left; he checked his watch.

No one had returned; in the morning they would be roused, roused out.

He rose, grimacing, proceeded to the window, dragging slightly on the soft carpet his borrowed robe and slippers. A bit of distaste in that, the borrowing; no shirking it, though the dragging was rich, the materials of excellent cut.

He thrust his head deeply behind the thick outer curtain, then sneezed in surprise when it encountered another, the dusty gauze next the

M. D. ELEVITCH

window. He snagged it behind his ear, righted his bearing, saw through the cold glass beyond the steam of his nose the flat yard, grim trees, an iron fence; a street, even, opalescent, with small blemishes of fallen leaves. Above, through the branches, the nervous twitch of a star.

He withdrew his head — had there been a sound? — firmly packed the curtain to the frame; a high window, a broad bed, a high winged chair still draped, its outline faltering — even a hearth; a good room. Another yawn.

Now then, the yawn had stifled the slur of a foot, yes, no mistaking it this time, a foot, no less, and frankly, very near. He looked at the bed; that was no bulwark.

What — he had omitted, grossly, to completely fasten the door — somehow it must have been his righteous concern, the thought of that woman neglected by others, alone in the house — her need.

He jerked in rapid, careful strides to the desk, switched off the lamp. Unmistakably someone approached.

He would not be caught unprepared — a stripe of light, a single stripe fell now from the hall, and through the opening, and over his foot. He sprang from it, as if lanced. If the stripe should widen — he burrowed like a metal bar into the bed;

he expected to screech like chalk on the sheets, white on white in the grisly dark.

No one had ever entered his cabin — without knocking. Although Gerthe, well, Gerthe! . . . so long ago; she had only felt his navy cloth. It was, admittedly, difficult to thoroughly comprehend the warm, reluctant American lady, so retiring, yet so alarmingly robust. He knew them all, in those years, some like that — dissembling, the menu takers, or unaware of their true wish — the hesitancy he had noted at his mention of beer; yet she had spoken of home, beer had brought her to an offer of bed. He was in it, and now — It was absurd to think it, impossible she would come so soon, so early, so openly; impossible, even if true, to impute the motive. Of course — he would listen for the sound of the bath. No, that was another direction.

Ideally then he should turn to the wall, he must not seem the provocateur; decorum would dictate; it was too soon to force himself more than he had — obviously this precipitous visit was proof of his effectiveness, he had only to accept — but cautiously — to confirm her illusion of his worth.

No, better to welcome her openly, lest she retreat with regret first at her boldness but basically at her lack of consummation, always to be held remorselessly against him, for he would have left her alone with her

M. D. ELEVITCH

weakness, so overpowering she could never again rise to the point to which the suddenness and novelty of his fresh arrival had driven her.

He clamped his teeth in the pillow — why couldn't she come — there was nothing more unendurable than concourse in love. He assumed one composed like she would be quick in her dealings and — satisfactory! The last occurrence — and it touched him sorely — had been a crossing not long before, on the Principia, a Mrs. Jorgensen and her niece, the latter, as in this case, the decoy. Though

she had screamed terribly when he had tickled her elbow, my back Herr Van Moog she had insisted and then curled up so that he could no more than reach her portmanteau. But she was a Danisher, always adventurous they were, and he knew better than to leave her, though she would not let him undress her above — they are all there; I am not american — saying finally while the sea heaved them Now, and in righting himself, to scramble upon her, he had fallen to the floor.

He grasped the bed, swallowing him, not falling this time, he longed for the hard, knowable confines of his bunk. Why had he left — he had never known a time when it wasn't an ordeal — this bed waiting, that is what it was, bed waiting. Mama, for instance, coming in to him and brother Rudy with the eiderdown or to lower the shade, padding so softly, and how she jumped when he leaped roaring from the blankets; his cycle of activity by no means to tease her, scare her, but to win her over again, that was what he enjoyed, the putting to rights, the soothing, and, as on all our voyages, the revival of blood.

SORTIE

I remember looking back at those carefree days before my little bulb of light turned on, how I once made a sortie of sorts into my neighbouring adult evening school to discover what a rascally art teacher might be hiding up his sleeve. I might learn something. You never know.

Well, I got there early and while waiting outside where everyone else was also milling around waiting for everybody else to do something, I struck up a converse with this ravishing paleyoung yellowhaired crimson-billed hummer whose smile made the sky-roof crash in. I said strip and she said what for and I said this is Mr. Tingpo's course I guess, and she of course, and I added of course and she added also she'd studied art in a high chair. Some baby, and yes she was working. Working? Where? A telephone operator. Say, that's great, I said, you know I'm an operator myself too, chuckling, and she was the said and I said oh yes and she said of all the fellows who use that line you're the living and I laughed, and I laughed back, you always busy? . . . I tell you she had me so absolutely baffled that I propositioned her under the nightlit linden tree anyway but she didn't understand (on purpose?) and we dove on into the armory stable where I settled back in my shifty seat and tried the brakes and tuned my antenna in on the little runty up front who turned out to be the instructor.

Putting up a sad-looking bunch of fake frayed flowers he then snarled at us to get dressed. He meant drawing. Then he went around from drawing to drawing snarling at everybody in the way, and when he came to mine he didn't stay long or say anything but went right on past — as I was testing him. I was drawing a nude female cow from udder memory — which is in a way another universal — and I had

this unch that if we were going to get along (i.e., he stay off my back, I'd stay off his) then I'd better start with the proposition that all mean men are created equal.

Anyway this pitititiful leftover from the renaissanamiento started giving us a limp description of what his course was all about, what he intended doing, that he knew he was letting air out of all fifty-five of us signing up because half of us ha had no ha intention of staying on and ha would drop ha out before the ha third week was over because ha we either didn't have the talents nor the interest nor ha ha the brains or else we didn't ha find what we were really looking for (making it all sound sleazy, like shmord gabor) people just didn't have the interest ha in fine art any more and he wondered for crying out ha loud why

RAYMOND BARRIO

people bothered coming in at all to these damned classes of his damned if he knew and why he was so ha popular — which was, all of it, a very interesting by-gosh gambit. I read into it one of the meanest reverse switches I'd ever had the simple dinosaur-ing pleasure to observe at first hook. This kind of marvels would be a natural with cleaners I thought. Gad, he was dirty.

Well.

When I came to I found out afterwards, during the smorgasbord break, that he never . . . Say, the blonde operator had meanwhile connected with some breezy boxer, or maybe it was a bulldog, who'd been hiding out on us in an AT & T course on interplanetary correspondence or space writing . . . that this demented art instructor of ours was in reality a history teacher by day. Which explained everything of course. Or because of his kid's sinus did he latch onto this swell moonlit job for the extra gaff? Making us pay for his remiss? Sheer pull. Now he also needed more dinero in order to pay off his second wife's alimony (his first applecidered), which was in add quite fenetritious way of keeping out of his

salty wife's co. as she couldn't stand him in bed either.

So. He kept on spouting about form this and refund that and the rOtund O of giOttO and line that up and sensitivity of litmus paper and all about the thing itself.

That there was one pyrex phrase he was really hung up on. 'The thing itself —' He must have picked it up somewhere eremose, along with the rest of the litter that made up his torn, shredded life. He sure could run on about it.

'You must learn to take a shower or a flower or a stem or even its butt tock and treat it like the thing itself.' . . . Now, ain't that a crock! Can you translate it? What's it mean?

'This is the way the masterpieces were built, you won't ever learn to do this in these classes of mine if I have my way because you can't. Not without talent. Half of you will frap out before the night's over ha anyway and the sooner you do it the ha less bitter you'll get. I can't stand anyone's wasting their time in here ha. Go somewhere else to do it. Go bowl.'

This flow of efflusage was positively entrancing. The only reason I sat on my hands, not for talent certainly, ha, was that there was a simple honesty in this man's manic approach that hypnotized me. No lion had ever had ideas he had, nor such deliberately crunching threats.

The thing itzself . . .

Would I have to quit after all and go back to painting my own private profanities little by little for some show place or other to win in?

GUY DANIELS

THE CROW AND THE FOX

Guy Daniels

High in a treetop, Miss Marianne Crow
Was perched with a book in her beak.
Reynard Fontaine, from far, far down below —
From Hades, in fact — rose to speak:
‘Hé! bonjour, Madame du Corbeau!
What’s that book in your mouth? Ah! Your new poems
— no?
Well, they’d better be better this time,
Or I’ll speak to my friend Guggenheim;
What you did to my Fables, Miss Crow, was a crime!’
Hearing this, our poor Miss and/or Madam, half-dead
With fright, threw back her head
And cawed — dropping the book (which, however, she’d
read).
Said Reynard (not stooping to read it), ‘I’m so
Sorry, my dear, but that book ends your chances
Of sitting on Sappho’s right hand Down Below:
It’s full of those bad rhymes like branches : fragrances.’
‘But how, without reading it — ?’ ‘How could I tell?
Your new volume, though thin, made a thud when it
fell.’

Author’s Note: Earlier drafts of this poem, as a kind of object lesson for Miss Moore, were fitted closely to the contours of La Fontaine’s French. The decision, however, to use Miss M’s clumsy feminine rhyme, entailed a break in the pattern, through which gap other heresies then infiltrated. Yet a good deal that is doctrinally sound remains, as amateurs of La Fontaine’s fables will recognize.

JAMES SIMMONS

FOR JOHN CLARE

Lucky John, your lady, hard to get,
Lived in the grave. Lucky John walking
Hard miles (in your mad mood, easy)
All hedge and thistle homewards, nowhere.
Imagination decorates flat marshes
You grew (in a way) up in, all with Mary
Till keepers, John, kindly enough, return you,
Keeping your feet on, but above, the ground.
And Pedro too, the Runswick idiot, sketching
Himself with princess can hold us and her,
And walks, as long as visitors will listen,
The streets of Monte Carlo, long familiar
From nightly lingering in a book with pictures;
For he turns pages as people shake hands,
And that is a great talent.
Pedro, John,
Bless the girls that I lie on, for I
Who loved Illona Massey at fourteen
With a great love am now a has-been.

LEE RICHARD HAYMAN

FOR THAT MATTER

Though we may not admit the truth
of it is we're afraid of what
we don't know is coming around
time's almost foreseeable bend —
or worse we do know today's
timetable and may not be able
to mark up the proper number
of naying powers to garage
in our neighbors' eyes.
How can we be sure what the milkman says to the
 Petersons on a
rainless Sunday morning if our
barbecue is smaller than theirs —
or his, for that badder.
We can't
be. All to do is add impractical
copper accessories, or brass, brighter
in sunlight and caught by the
meat's early gleaming. We'll eat!
Though not in peace or comfort, for
that madder.

LEE RICHARD HAYMAN

It's time to put mats
out and say, 'Well, come in.' You might
as hell sit by our fire in our easiest
chair; the truth of it is you're here
no fatter in person than mind's eye
observes you: fear.
You're here.
Will you stay? Long? Forever? Or will
this scientific, psychiatric trend of
progress strip you down to bared
end-trails and let us sleep and
wake without you? Happily? We'll eat!

SHEILA SMITH

CHANGE OF WEATHER

The outcome of temptation
Is the wind of desolation:
A chill wind with cutting edge of pain.
All that remains of a time of exaltation
Is bone-wearying negation
And promises of cold Autumnal rain.
By forty-two degree descent
He left the closer firmament
And went back to his business on the plain,
Where the hated tree of duty
With its form its only beauty —
An ugly, shivering, leafless thing
Identified with suffering —
Reminded him again, again, again —

GIL ORLOVITZ

ART OF THE SONNET : 223

I came all the way from Cairo to spit on her grave,
an old travel agency, with posters of the people
on spinal trampolines, and tenor acrobats
depositing bravuras in the shade. Fat
cocks crowed in all the sacrificial steeples
nobody could climb to, the sphinx chewed gum,
and the excrement of the dead woman's children
burned in my ear to the tune of the orphanages
of Paradise, Heaven's slum.
I had known her as man, woman and Trinity
in trust — what pre-God was I not to give
her my word? Well, the wind had changed
the direction of the cocks, and my spit went wild:
no foul mouth of mine, now, would get her with child.

LILITH LORRAINE

HE GOES ALL AROUND THE QUESTION

To be or not to be.
To be is an aphrodisiac
A fix
A rock that may move
If shouted at
a stone that sings
a pink elephant
a tiger that mates with a lily.
It can be anything
Around any corner.
But not to be
Is reality
It won't go away

SOME REFLECTIONS

8/17/65. The riots, beginning as I finished this. Have added more on 'The social earthquake, for which we have no measuring or sociological SCALE.' i.e.: No living literature, Scaled to life like 'fire in a dry thicket, where the universe is qua universe.' (James) No. 56 hits me as a sort of pajama party, pillowfluffing, and flowery combat role play, as the human disposition wars. A place for No. 46 'a new language.' In Whitman's terminology 'the sign appears in the mouth of the people' in TRACE, the mag of living Lit. Silence, warmth like a Quaker meeting, or UN Quiet room. There is Not silence, summarized in Franklyn's bk. rev., now warm, not mere silence, but Man The Bridge Between 2 worlds of time & the river, on the bridge oriented spanwise in 1955 JBM requoted, to be oriented spanwise for 1962, now 46 & 56 to JBM requoted: ,, ,, ,, ,, , 1965, 46 thus we 'apply the physical laws of matter (& traceline of motion) a 56/46 bridge format of/to) the little mag pubg ind., traceline and optical contour comparator like making 'an arbitrary skeletal form for the industry's operations . . . 'The flow is both ways on the radials.' The radials . the source of interest, getting to be ON TRACK equally in the radials. On WJRZ this week, Author Shirley Smith TRACK formats from ,, ,, 'Mississippi From Within.' Strictly by selection from the newspapers 7/2/64 thru 5/65, reaction to the new federal law, culled from 5,000 papers. Photobacked — no editorial comment at all, 5,000 paper 'ON TRACK' system, showing Shockofrecognition as they meet . . . a mirror of enigmas, a new refutation of time & the river, they mostly, see every variation (the negro taking on position & being) as if only that. Every variation implicitly in each negro going up, is selective in every variation, meaning they are going down. Thus, selective as with

'Leisure, Curse or Blessing,' we have JBM p242, 46, The endlessly contradictory consequences limned in (this) mirror of Enigmas to the Southerners, limned & fluffed by Shirley ON TRACK un-Enigma'd as in JBM quoting Coffield 'Individuals' in the ON TRACK process of time & the river, 'send toward center, where it is selected,' fluffed, puffed . . . & so in No. 56, shows itself directly ON TRACK 95 VanSickle . HEGEL, Goedel, Finnigans, Cubism TRACKclick dada, 93 Thompson . (HEGEL successor) Wittgenstein . . . so much of philo. psychology dependent on Wittgenstein's work. Wittgenstein is entirely directed toward combining the theological and the logical via the concept of ON TRACK . . . sprung and laddered . . . in the ON TRACK 'Gubernatio Rerum' of Aquinas . . . the laddering & bridging & Thru Track laying machine of Hegel's 'GAME' equivalent, his 'Reflex Category.' . . . (Augustine's tale of 2 cities, the old 'Mobile Being') In very TRACK of divinity. TELLtale, 2 issues 46/56.

DEVIL CRONE (ONI/BABA)

as viewed by A. Fredric Franklyn

THE TIME EQUIVALENT IN THE Christian or Western Era is the Fourteenth Century, A.D. To the east of the protean occidental civilisation, in the island nation of Japan, two emperors are contending for the throne of a people. Virtually the entire samurai class has become involved, on one side or the other, in the bloodletting which is raging across Honshu. The warriors in this class, which constituted the lesser gentry in the feudal system of the time, were the military retainers of the daimios, or land barons, who served the emperor.

All the eligible males in the villages and on the farms also have been pressed into service, first by one army and then by another, as the chance engagements bring victory or defeat to their samurai generals. It means nothing, to the men of these lower classes, who wins the senseless struggle or on whose side they fight. They turn coat as quickly as they are captured, fighting today for the Kyoto emperor and tomorrow in the armies of his enemies.

In Kyoto, near which most of the heavy battles are currently in progress, there is starvation and epidemic. The merchant class, almost nonexistent in this age, is powerless to mitigate the incidental horrors of the war. Not for another five centuries will they begin to acquire the eminence they will have later, when the impact of trade with the West will commence to alter a whole way of life and the hour for the passing of the samurai lords will have struck.

The neglected farms are overgrown with weeds and rotting or destroyed crops. The city people are eating anything — dogs, cats, mice, rats — when they are lucky! The women left behind by the farmers who have been pressed into

soldiering, especially the older ones, have been dispossessed of their lands, or at least, in the absence of men, are unable to cultivate them. Most of these perish of starvation or escape to the villages and the city, where the same fate awaits them at a quicker tempo! Some of these women survive. But only the most ruthless of them can support life. They are the ones who will obtain food no matter what they have to do to get it. In the succeeding half-millennium, whole legends have grown up around one of these hardier survival-types: the onibaba, or demonwoman. So effective is the screen-play which Kaneto Shindo has written and directed that Joseph Levine began his negotiations with Japan's Toho Studios, to film an American version later, even before the picture had completed its first-run engagements in the United States. A canny —and powerful (!)—Twentieth-century merchant himself, Levine has chosen wisely. Considering the impact of the results on viewers, the story lends itself to an astonishingly low-budget production. It has, literally, everything, including horror and fantasy. And it has even more sensational elements in its violence and sex. This last aspect already has brought the production's initial release in New York into conflict with the authorities, whose fumbling efforts at censorship have resulted in packed audiences wherever the movie has subsequently opened. Kaneto Shindo has previously directed a number of films: GENBAKU NO KO, THE ISLAND, NINGEN, and the documentary, DAI GO FUKURYU MARU. His camera techniques and his concern for the relationships among his characters, and their separate identities as human beings, inevitably suggest a comparison with his contemporary, Akira Kurosawa, also a director at Japan's Toho Studios. The latter, in his 1950 film, ROSHOMAN, developed the first extensive use of the fast-tracking camera technique which Shindo and his photographer, Kiyomi Kuroda, have employed so extensively in ONIBABA. The sexual aspects of

ONIBABA do not raise any ordinary question of censorship! So integral are they to this particular screen play that, had the New York authorities succeeded in deleting the thirty minutes they sought to have cut from its hour and forty-three minutes running time, the balance of seventy-three minutes would appear insouciant and even meaningless. The considerable areas, also, of violence and death in the story are absolutely organic to the material. It was inevitable that films of such mature emotional stature and artistic magnitude, employing a thoroughly adult approach to the fundamental character of human life and potential, would begin to appear in the world's cinema. Assuming that human life has value and that there is point to preserving the larger race of mankind, then individuals must eat, sleep, labor, create, fornicate, and bear children. These are universals so bedrock to the human condition that they transcend the lesser realities of geographical, political, philosophical, religious, linguistic, or even epochal barriers. It is always within the suitable province of our art forms to look at these eternities. The motion picture is one such form, and ONIBABA provides a singularly forceful instance of such usage. Author-director Shindo establishes a cohesive tension in the opening moments, with his story and his directorial choices and with Kiyomi Kuroda's fast-tracking camera and macrocosmic/microcosmic lens, whose pacing and continuity are never betrayed right up to the cathartic statement of theme at the film's climax. Fugitives from a disastrous local engagement, two samurai warriors, an older and a younger, are racing on foot through man-high bamboos, pursued by riders who are quartering the overgrown fields, butchering the fleeing enemy so that they will not escape to regroup and fight again. If not appetizing in any context — such fighting and killing — this is war, and the destruction at least has the clean aspect of a kind of frightened necessity. With all the ugliness and futility of that

necessity, there is as yet no element of the bizarre attached to the violence. The elder of the two fugitives had been wounded, and his companion has been supporting him since their escape from the battle. Overcome at last with nervous exhaustion, the younger samurai collapses and, with him, his wounded companion. They lie concealed in the reeds, their bodies making a little island of trampled growth which is seen only by the hovering camera. Like the debilitating heat from the afternoon sun overhead, the lens pins the two weakened figures against the earth. The focus cuts briefly to the riders hurtling through the fields in search of them. The camera returns to the two samurai, still prostrated on the ground. The younger one recovers enough to sit up and, a moment later, he helps his companion to an upright position. In the next instant, before they can get to their feet, the blade of a samurai sword, fixed to a long bamboo spear, has pierced each of them from the small of the back all the way out the stomach in front. They barely have time to realize they have been murdered before death claims them. Their last breaths, animal grunts of surprised pain, hangs in the air a moment with the noise of their bodies collapsing back against the trampled growth. Whatever has been sentient in these two human beings has been plucked instantly and violently from them and from the world. There is a brief silence. The reeds then part and a pair of legs gradually become visible. One of the murderers is cautiously peering at these fresh corpses. The legs advance, and the first killer comes into frame. In another second, the other one steps through the bamboo growth. Only now, in this moment, does the film's element of horror become evident: These are women.

The first is an old woman, a 'baba' in Japanese idiom (played by Nobuko Otowa). The other, a girl young enough to be her daughter (Jitsuko Yoshimura), is in fact her daughter-in-law.

The two women push and kick the dead men to ascertain that these are now only bodies. Then, with obviously practiced efficiency, they begin stripping their victims of armour and clothing. There is so little wasted motion and so much earnest bright sunlight around them, that it is impossible to attach any sinister implications to their ghoulish activity. It is like observing a couple of professional upholsterers removing the old stuffing from a pair of worn armchairs.

They strip their victims of everything but their loincloths. Then each woman grabs a pair of feet and begins walking through the reeds trailing a body behind her. They move directly to a pit, dragging the still-malleable corpses right up to the rim. One at a time, they push each body forward until its legs are dangling over the lip, lift the torso upright at the edge, then topple the man into the pit. A long fall which they will not feel.

The camera reference to this deep hole in the earth is employed with a deliberate repetition at other moments later in the film. The pit, of course, is death. But it is more: It is the large death. The sense of this symbolism derives from the finality with which, antithetically to Buddhist doctrine, Kaneto Shindo regards dying.

The women return for their loot, draping everything over the bamboo spears which they carry through the forest of giant reeds until they reach the hutch in which they live. Here, they dump the spoils and immediately attack a kettle filled with cooked millet. Voraciously hungry from their labors, eschewing the bowls they normally use, they dig in with their hands until they have stuffed themselves. Both then stretch out on a single mat in this hovel and fall instantly asleep.

The next day, they load two large baskets with the armour and clothing they've stolen; and each carries one of these baskets across the fields and through the forest of reeds

until they reach the cavelike home of Ushi the Broker (Taiji Tonoyama). They barter the effects of the dead men for two bags of millet, with which they return to their hutch.

This is where they live. This is how they live. The only missing equation is their reason for clinging to life on such elemental terms. But the measure of Shindo's craft is that his audience continues to believe in the uncritical, unreasoning determination to live which is the first imperative for these dehumanized creatures. The need to survive, both as individuals and as a species, is their absolute. The means of survival are whatever comes to hand, whatever the dictates of necessity impose upon them by their circumstances and their era. They are not the victims of history, but its living materials.

The author of these beings says: 'I feel an energy in the onibaba, the energy of a completely miserable people who survive no matter what the conditions of life. These people are not destroyed by any series of wars; they overcome everything. They live out their lives, doing what is necessary, under every circumstance of defeat and catastrophe. People do not forget to eat, or cease to seek an outlet for their sexual energies . . . they continue to live in the framework of their natures.'

Shindo feels that the same motive for the onibaba in the Fourteenth Century has brought this creature again into the world in our own time. But he feels that the philosophy of Buddhism, which sought to answer its terrible need, six hundred years ago, with what occidentals would have called Christian resignation, is a bankrupt alternative today. Scorning the use which the Noh and Kabuki forms of drama still make of Buddha's morality, he declares: 'I feel differently. I have directed this picture as my way of seeking an answer.' He has at least achieved, if not an answer, a vehicle for his search, the honesty and insights of which are compelling.

Deliberately minimizing the story's adequately-complex elements of character and situation, Shindo manages to make a maximum use of his means. Hachi (Kei Sato), a young farmer from this neighborhood who has been dragged off to war with the old woman's son, escapes from captivity after another stupid battle and returns to the area. He tells the onibaba (Otowa) that her son (Yochimura's husband) is dead. His is the nearest hutch to theirs, and Otowa and Yoshimura begin to see him often. He soon becomes interested in Yoshimura. She has realized that her man will never return, and she has already waited a long time for him. She begins to return Hachi's interest. Their growing sexual desire frightens and angers Otowa, who knows it inevitably will mean she will be left alone. She knows she cannot continue this method of killing for her survival without the aid of the younger girl.

Curious about how the two women have survived without a man and without their rice field, Hachi brings them a fish and questions Yoshimura. The old woman catches them together on the bank of the river. At this point two samurai from opposing armies appear on the opposite shore, one chasing the other. They leave their horses, and one attempts to escape by wading into the river. His enemy follows and they continue fighting until they are almost across, when one is finally defeated. The victor, exhausted, yells for help to the two women and Hachi. Hachi cold-bloodedly shoves his bamboo and bladed spear through the man's stomach, shouting to the women to get the one who is floating away.

As they leap into the water, Hachi maneuvers to keep the samurai he has stabbed at the end of his spear. The man, sword in hand, makes an agonizingly impossible attempt to reach his murderer, but — thoroughly skewered — he dies a moment later.

Simultaneously, the girls have caught the other wounded samurai. Discovering that he is still alive, they hold him

under water until he drowns. Even as Hachi is stripping his victim and shoving the body back into the deeper part of the river, the women denude their samurai and roll his corpse back into deep water to catch the current. Hachi does the bargaining this time at Ushi's cave, returning with a jar of saki and three small birds, as well as the bags of millet.

Otowa and Yoshimura do the cooking and, while the three sit over their meal that night, the young man proposes to join forces with them and asks for Yoshimura as his woman. The onibaba quickly refuses. She still fears being abandoned, if Hachi and the girl unite. 'We're us,' she tells him. 'You're you. Everybody alone!'

Like an animal in heat, Hachi follows the girl around during the day. He finally contrives an opportunity to speak to her. He instructs her to come to his place that night.

When she leaves him, he runs through the fields, yelling and gurgling in delighted anticipation of the evening. He rolls on the ground like any healthy beast in rut. Momentarily, his antics carry him near the edge of the pit. All the vitality of his sexual appetite is contrasted against the motionless silence in this hole of death into which he stares. Suddenly, a flight of crows, which come to feed on the convenient corpses, bursts out of the pit against the sky, their shrill protests at his interruption of their meal diminishing as they wheel away into the sun.

The onibaba tries to keep her daughter-in-law from becoming involved with their neighbor; but, inevitably, Yoshimura commences going to Hachi at night when her own sexual need becomes more than she can bear. These scenes of frank sexual rutting are as outspoken and visual as anything that ever has been filmed. They are cinematically the equal, in detail, of the rape scene in Bergman's *THE VIRGIN SPRING*. Yet, such is Shindo's craft, the sequences seem absolutely right — parts of the unified whole he has created from the sum of his story's materials. The old woman

accidentally acquires the means of a unique opportunity to frustrate the girl. She has been talking to her of the Buddhist theology, according to which, as in most Christian doctrine, a person's conduct in this life determines the quality of the heaven or hell in which they will be permitted to participate after death. She speaks of demons, to frighten the girl. Protesting that, in her sexual relationship with Hachi, she is doing nothing more than what everyone else does, the superstitious girl is nonetheless intimidated and already half-convinced.

During the daytime, the old woman even seeks to bribe Hachi by offering her own body. Her interest in him is, of course, twofold: She does not merely hope to induce him to leave her daughter-in-law alone, she has been aroused by watching the couple together when they thought they were alone. She actually wants to be physically taken by the young man. He does not need or want her, and scorns her offer.

It is conspicuously curious, during their talk of sin and virtue and demons and punishment, that it never occurs to either of the women there may be anything to trouble them in their habits of stealing and killing. That is their means of survival, provided by the evil conditions of a perpetual war which they view as beneficial only to the upper classes. Particularly, since they take their victims from the very nobles by whose insane contentions they have been impoverished, the results seem to be only the fairest of arrangements. In this context, no question of right or wrong even exists for them. They behave as they must.

One such noble, a samurai general, appears at night in the entrance to their hutch. The girl, as usual now, has waited until she thought the old woman asleep and has then gone off to Hachi's dwelling to lie with him for an hour or so. The old woman, in the act of leaving to follow the girl, is stopped by the demon aspect of her visitor.

The samurai, who has become lost in these reed fields, is richly dressed and obviously a person of station; but he wears the devil mask of one of the traditional Japanese demons. He demands that she accompany him and lead him out of the reed forest.

On the way, they talk. He speaks willingly enough about his mask, but he will not remove it to show her his face. 'Do I not look stronger with it on?' he asks. He teases her, also, by telling her that she could not bear it if she'd see how handsome his face is. She would faint with pleasure. She answers that she has never looked at anything beautiful in her life, that she would like to see this wonderful face of his. He replies: 'This is not a face for peasants to look upon.'

For him, the mask is one thing: a trapping, perhaps, denoting privilege — at once to hallmark and mask the superior samurai class. For the onibaba, when she acquires it later, the mask will achieve a different connotation.

She is leading him to his death, of course. In the dark, when she comes to the pit, she leaps it easily, but he falls into it. Subsequently, she returns with a rope of knotted steps and a post. Hammering the post into the earth and anchoring the rope to it, she descends into this anti-life darkness. The audience is ready by now to make the descent with her.

Standing over the fresh corpse of her last victim, amid the debris of bones from all the others before him, the onibaba struggles to remove his mask. She has great difficulty; but, persevering in her curiosity, she finally pulls the thing from his face. She learns then, as she will again later (and as Wilde pointed out to Alfred Douglas), that 'Those who want a mask have to wear it.' She sees, in all its exemplary ugliness, the horror and the truth disguised by the ritual mask: The nobleman's face is a mass of pustules, open sores, and fungus-type growths — the reality hidden behind that warlike elegance!

Having stripped his corpse of everything saleable, she begins disposing of the dead man's effects a few pieces at a time, in the ensuing days. She explains to her daughter-in-law that she has discovered this is the way to deal with Ushi, that they will receive more grain by bartering the things slowly. Her real reason lies in her purpose to stop the girl from seeing Hachi at night. To effect this, she retains the mask without her knowledge, and immediately starts using it to prey on the girl's untutored and primitive nature.

Yoshimura, who is afraid of the reed fields at night, races through them to and from her assignments with Hachi. In these sequences, the camera tracks her running figure in the dark with the same tension-supporting visual felicity for motion it has devoted to the earlier sequences in sunlight: Hachi running through these reeds in a pure energy discharge; the samurai fugitives racing through them to escape the doom behind them, only to meet another doom ahead of them. Their terror and Hachi's animal delight presage the girl's feelings of fear and sexual anticipation when she later runs to her lover across this moonlit bamboo forest.

The first night the onibaba comes into possession of the demon mask, she waits in the fields for the girl's return. Her simple plan is successful: She is wearing the mask and suitably anonymous white robes, when Yoshimura almost runs into her in the dark. Rising from the ground before the girl, the onibaba looks like some devil ascending from the core of the earth in search of vagrant souls. She effectively employs the trick each night, blocking the girl from going to Hachi, her lover. The old woman always is in the fields ahead of her, because now she takes a few things to Ushi the Broker every evening.

One rainy night, half out of his mind with his frustrated appetite for the young body of Yoshimura, Hachi has gone into the fields to meet her. In her devil disguise, the crone

tries to stop the girl, who has run out to go to Hachi. But this time the mask fails; meeting in the rain, Hachi and Yoshimura make love openly on the soaked earth. Unseen by them, the devil crone is their silent and raging witness.

When Hachi returns to his own hutch, by sheer chance he enters in time to catch a nameless fugitive stealing food from his millet pot. The man's face, which is covered with kernels of the cooked gruel he has been stuffing into his mouth, is absolutely unfamiliar. It is that of no one Hachi ever has seen. They freeze, staring at each other, in a fleeting tableau.

The stranger's fear moves him to act first. Seizing Hachi's own bamboo spear, with the samurai blade on its end, he has run Hachi through the stomach and escaped into the night before Hachi has had time to realize he is dying. This is the same spear he'd used earlier to murder the samurai who had sought help from him at the river.

But Hachi's death is not Buddha's or any other god's retribution. It is entirely meaningless. Which is exactly the point: Every fortune and misfortune in the lives of these destitute people rests on sheer chance. They kill one another incessantly, merely to stay alive! Ultimately, the struggle is so senseless that the only thing more foolish would be to seek the meaning in it. All the gods and devils are dead, even before they are born. And human beings are born with the death in them, awaiting its hour. A dark and lifeless and inscrutable hole in the earth is what all life returns to. We can look for poetry in that, but not for meaning.

When the girl returns to her hutch, the onibaba is already there. On lighting the lamp, Yoshimura sees the mask still on the old woman. Before she can run, her mother-in-law quickly confesses it is only herself and not any demon. She then admits everything, and the girl is visibly relieved. And the old woman is compelled to betray the reason for her confession: The rain has caused the mask to adhere to her

face. Unable to rid herself of the thing, she begs Yoshimura to remove it for her.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Yoshimura forces Otowa to promise not to interfere in her life any more, not to come between her and her lover. She does not know that the man she has just coupled with, moments before, already has been removed by death from any use the living might have for him. When she again looks upon him, she will see a body, no more—and not greatly different from any of the many she herself has helped into darkness.

The old woman having agreed to all her conditions, she commences to try to help with the mask. It proves too difficult by hand, and she takes a wooden mallet and gleefully starts smashing the front of the onibaba's head. The older woman is screaming in pain as the mask begins to crack. She tries to escape the girl's savage assistance. But Yoshimura persists until the blood is running out from under the mask and down Otowa's neck.

The mask splits completely down the front. Yoshimura rips half of it away and the crone removes the other half. Now, the onibaba is delighted; she babbles gratefully and triumphantly. Suddenly, she perceives the horror in the girl's face. She does not know that, like the samurai from whom she stole the mask, her own face is now a mass of crawling bloody sores and growths.

When the girl runs screaming out of the hutch, the onibaba begins to surmise what has happened. She runs after her daughter-in-law, shouting pathetic assurances that it is only herself and not any kind of devil. The women race through the night, the younger certainly on her way to seek refuge with a dead lover!

When they reach the pit, Yoshimura's young body easily hurtles it. Running after her, pleading with her, the old woman screams: 'I am not a demon. I am not a demon. I'm a human being!'

She, too, leaps at the pit's edge. But the dissolve at the film's close has deliberately left her leap as an open question: Did she reach the other side or did she fall into the pit? The answer depends upon the degree of unforgivingness in the individual nature of each member of the audience; whether his sense of recognition, of identification in fact, requires that his proxy in this woman's person must live or die.

If the mirror is too appalling, if we must have her death, it is not the creature on the screen we will have rejected and condemned, but the demon collaborator within ourselves.

ISSUE P. 303 · SCAN P. 109

EXCEPT FOR POETRY

John Tagliabue

Adam signed the book of Signs.

Put up a few Posters,

Plastered a few Symbolist Professors.

The rest is Commentary.

THE DARKER SIDE OF SEX & OTHER FOREBODINGS

WHY NOT INVERT THE OMINOUS currency to say: In a world of poetry, more people than ever before are making violence and readying more wars? Yet, today's would-be poetry makers — a majority of them — accept a world of violence and speak of poetry itself in ironic terms of anomaly. Meantime, if such a count could be made, several times over as many global inhabitants would be found making love as are fighting and killing. Well, there is much love poetry — ranging from humanitarian abstractions, through sentimental idyls, to bawdy recitals of physical acts of sex. But, particularly in the last category, these works usually carry themes of hate and death — often cruelty and sadism. It may be demurred that essential polarities are provided; but the point is that a large percentage of so-called love poems place dark counters in ascendancy.

Elizabeth Bartlett, alphabetically first here (IT TAKES PRACTICE NOT TO DIE — \$5 & \$2.95 — VAN RIPER & THOMPSON, Inc., but now via ETC.), presents a large and distinguished array of exceeding pessimisms, of 'commitment to failure,' as she puts it, and saying: '... who is invulnerable / is already dead.' Love's existence is barely acknowledged; at one point, we find each love ritual 'a carnage of communion.' But the poetry itself, despite her intellectual approach and preference for classic structures, is verbally fresh and stimulating.

Earle Birney's pessimisms (NEAR FALSE CREEK MOUTH — \$4.50 & \$2.50 — McCLELLAND & STEWART, Ltd.) often somewhat inferentially issue through comparatively-minor themes. One of his virtues is an ability to be realistic without being prosy; and he's considerably more than a 'Canadian poet.' Uses of narrational patterns — and, in five pieces, of a

good deal of colloquial language — are poetically successful. He's better than a verse craftsman; as, in *FOR GEORGE LAMMING*: 'Suddenly on a wall mirror / my face assaulted me / stunned to see itself / like a white snail / in the supple dark flowers.' These broken lines are not 'typical'; he employs a larger variety of forms than do most long-practiced poets.

A smaller book, of unusual vertical paperback format, is Alan Bold's (*SOCIETY INEBRIIOUS* — 5/- — MOWAT HAMILTON), containing more than the bar poems the title prefigures. Again, pessimism predominates: 'The town I live in is a bloody hell / My country is downtrodden — pretty low' (Scotland). With more direct social commentary than the preceding, he speaks of death as 'triumph;' and while he does see 'some signs of life around,' he closes the book with the quotation: "The world's divided into knaves and fools." Structural and verbal innovation is slight; in his best-individuated piece, *BOOR IN A CHINA SHOP*, he relies on rhymed metred statement: 'And ghastly whores with pallid faces / Peer out of doors like our great nation / Where healthy sex is masturbation. / And all that's coming from the arts : / A stream of rather feeble fahrts.'

Sue Abbott Boyd, in a limited mimeo edition (*FORT SMITH and other poems* — \$2.50 — BORDER Press, Inc.), exhibits moods as varied as might be expected in the sex in brief chiefly-personal pieces; but those of love are decidedly in minority. On the other hand, the actual doom theme governs but once. She's as socially concerned as she is intent upon tones of verbal beauty, so the Pollyanna rarely flutters. Some poems are so vastly better than others that they render the entire selection worthwhile and suggest sustained stronger work to come.

A DREAM OF LILIES*Joan Finnigan (\$1.50 — the Fiddlehead)*

sounds happy enough; but her opening poem concerns lovers' clay and their arisal. The fatal hemlock figures in the next, and the 'Disguise where life and death push always / On our unsuspecting days.' However, here and there in sixty-four filled pages, Miss Finnigan does do better than evidenced by these lines. For instance — if in melancholic vein and verse-telling rather than poetrymaking: 'All the hills of his walking / are higher now; / / his stooping down to the wild ginger / is breathless / and when he bends his head back / to the wide circle / of the red-shouldered hawk, / I can hear in his bones / the bird-counts / of vanished summers.'

A contrasting poetry of lively movement and intense feeling is provided by Gene Fowler (FIELD STUDIES — \$1.50 — DUST): 'I watch the thin silver of your step / Across the grasses of the field. / I see my love in your liquid cadences.' And when he does touch death themes — going so far as to balance 'corpses on my head' — he's bright, almost gay about it.

LOVE IS DEATH'S ORACLE*Trevor Goodger-hill (\$3.50 — H. E. Heinemann)*

dedicated 'In memorial, for my aging body,' is supplemented by sixty-three distinctive Marie Koehler line drawings of nudes. The poetry also is presented in French translation, by Germaine Gabélier. The whole is very 'livingly' hand-lettered, though Goodger-Hill declares we must 'engage the flesh / And voice towards eventual dying,' and 'we living take / all young girls / within / our phallic rags / and turn them / into hags.' And yet, withal, he elsewhere chants: 'O world she melted into my arms / and became ripe / like a smile in the sunshine.'

Again, an unusual format, Marguerite Harris' *THE RISK OF THE VINE* — printed and bound in Sino-Japanese style — (Australian edition — \$4.50 — PHOENIX Book Shop) carries tragic sex as its most nearly overall theme. In characteristic stark restrained lines, she says: 'Alone in the staring dark, / unrecruited by love. And all / impaled on barren vines, / whose roots need rain.' Intense personal statement is her vehicle, whether she writes of Hiroshima or of Marianne Moore or of when 'pierced / by his manic / sword my / flood spilt / and my iron / ran / like milk.'

Returning once more to Canada and a larger offering, we find the lover 'seeking the "true unconscious self" / beyond the personal form, a universal gulf / of warm impersonal cells behind the shell.' (Anne Kekes' *THE SUSPENDED LANDSCAPE* — \$1 — *THE FIDDLEHEAD*.) But most lines aren't composed of such generalities; many literally overflow with specific images. Unities of effects frequently are sacrificed with what must have been deliberation (lines always being architectonic), in spite of nonrestraint of phrase; as: 'the kiss to set / the organs afire.' Miss Kekes displays ranges of world concern as broad as those of Bartlett and Boyd; but her involvements are less convincing — perhaps because she always seems writing from neutral ground, neither saying life is good nor death is sweet.

LAND OF ROSEBERRIES, by Walter Lowenfels (*EL CORNO EMPLUMADO* — \$2, paperb., ltd. 1,000 c.), is a major work by a major poet who has long been serving world culture with brilliant commentaries the often-philosophic nature of which has not often detracted from his poems as poems. Displaying more warmth of love than most bardic castigators of society's rulers, he works from line combinations rather than from words and phrases, using what he says as well as structural conjunctions for his effects. Attention to sounds also saves him from dropping into mere descriptive poetical prose, narration, and exhortation. High emotion is another factor.

In this same volume, which contains six drawings by David Alfaro Siqueiros, Margaret and Sergio Mondragón present the poetry in Spanish translation.

With significant themes and authentic individuality of style, Howard McCord (*THE SPANISH DARK* — \$2 — WASHINGTON STATE University Press) — though delineating the grimmer actualities of circumstance in man and nature — is the first so far examined conveying undertones of optimism: the impression is that of one who loves without total despair. Sharp similes and metaphors in tight verbal motion evoke trenchant thoughts. He employs history and archeology through forceful oppositions, in contrast to flat meanderings of many others using such materials: ‘The Apache drug, Cofradía in the water-fist, / the brotherhood of dark, the night cowl. / Narcosis of the desert hangs in the black, / clasp of stones, and in the solid thorns burn issues / and the final demolition of wisdom.’

The first here who almost unreservedly sings a burning ‘yes’ to life

is Jo McDougall (*a lemon yeast and Other mornings* — \$2, paperb.

—SOUTH & WEST, Inc.). Her handlings are distinctly (and distinctively) her own — though her word-ways and typography indeed may be traced to earlier innovators — ‘original’ in the true sense of personal expression. Generally brief and acutely concentrated on single scenes, situations, persons, her poems must be read in series, to gain a notion of her over-all intention of showing humanity in vital process of evolution. But a few lines will denote her style: ‘... her loosened hair / fanning like a fragrance / she reminds me of the stem of a deer / quick pulse the trembling anger seen / : life crushing red and pulling blinds / or chariots threshing the frozen fields / Her eyes are soft and / roundmouthed now / as if she had witnessed / birth.’

With *DEATHS AND DISTANCES*, Richard O'Connell (ATLANTIS Editions — \$1, paperb.), we reenter darker realms. O'Connell refracts, with what often appears to be deliberate artfulness, the mottled, bitter, and angling images of lives awry. This is because — despite that his forms and manners of phrasing are quite modern — at bottom, his approach is classic. First, fifth, and sixth stanzas of *BRASILIA*, 1960 illustrate: 'Brasilia / ultimate bus stop / lit with a freezing fluorescence / light crawling lice / on clumps of old clothes / revealing too little / too much / / Burst a blue man / into fierce glare dripping blue / fluid streaming head to toe / moaning in absolute despair / "What can happen next?" / / Nothing / by no clock / / hung on the bile wall / gigantic the sign ...'

Frank O'Hara's *LUNCH POEMS* (CITY LIGHTS Books — \$1.25, paperb.) are sharply-thoughtful observations. They spring from what he has seen and pondered at luncheon times in many different cities (and countries) over a twelve-year span. In composition and varied verbalization, they are filled with energetic life; but attitudes are nearly always negative. Though not in moodily-tragic veins, these are poems of disgust, rejection, and mordant criticism of the poet's world — not just the world about him, but his body's world. While some truths here may be undeniable, it's also undeniable that there are such things as benevolent intentions, optimistic glow ... even love. One gets the impression Mr. O'Hara suffered hangovers each of these noontimes; and, technically, the most that can be said is that he produces well-tailored, heightened prose — good, but indistinguishable from works of others performing in the recognized modern manner.

Robert L. Tyler, in *THE DEPOSITION OF DON QUIXOTE* (GOLDEN QUILL Press — \$3), is engaged with scarcely any major concerns, the questions forming stuff of tragedy and triumph; he but touches on them occasionally by references from common reminders of dramatic events out in the world

somewhere, in other lives—often, in the past. Closing lines of the title poem set the posture: ‘Just sheep, of course, are mystery enough, / or windmills.’ It’s doubtful that Tyler would reveal deep commitment either toward darkness or toward light, even should he allow himself to understand that Don Quixote really was tilting at more than windmills; his engagement with language itself, while not dull, remains well below levels of intense verbal excitement: ‘. . . having seen perhaps only faintly / And from afar / The smog-barred delectable mountains / Around the rim of awful emptiness.’

‘Mysteriously,’ it may seem to many, Robert Wallace (VIEWS FROM A FERRIS WHEEL — \$3.50 — E. P. DUTTON & Co.) also is restricted to smaller happenings and scenes of daily living, yet his poems magically emit visions fused with thoughts by augmented feelings. Analyzing component words, the percentage of those carrying movement and counterplay is no higher than in Tyler; but internal oppositions are bolder, contrasts sharper, and the conjurements are tensely held within the poems — not weakened by mere references to what lies behind or beyond. Effects of immediate involvement make the commonplace uncommon; not simply telling of mystery, Wallace creates it. He writes ‘about’ poetry in only two pieces. One, while it rises to climax in an uncharacteristic (for this poet of light) polarity of death, provides pungent explication: ‘Poems not written for love of a woman / rot, are dry, are crushed leaves . . . / / Why . . . bother with cold poems, distractions, / ideas . . . ? / Love isn’t abstractions. / / See she knows she will be dead, / so her nipples harden / at your touch only, and her thighs stream / of the hot stars’ milk and sperm. / Let her go down for it in street or garden / as fiercely as in bed.’ (INSTRUCTIONS FOR KEEPING A MUSE.)

James L. Weil exhibits understanding acceptance of existence in THE THING SAID (AMERICAN WEAVE — \$2 & \$1). He has his own clipped elliptic manner of putting this down in

tight short-lined pieces; in vertical forms, he does what the Greeks and some earlier English poets used to do with two long, sometimes padded, lines, imparting a feeling of inevitability from the closing of a circuit. In a few, the titles are not identificatory of content, but part of a poem, as in *FOR & AGAINST*: 'How much there / is to say / / for love goes / without say / / ing when you / get down to / / love coming / up against.' Some are not so generalized. Most critics would declare the poems dealing with specifics the better ones; and yet, other pieces often convey universality so sparsely phrased that there is no distraction toward imagining and empathizing beyond the reader's personal recognition of his own experience, in Weil's poetic statements of the common human condition. Though this type of thing happens not to be in high critical favor, it's very effective when done well — and this poet does do it well.

Spells for enchantments, are most of the poems of John Wieners in *ACE OF PENTACLES* (JAMES F. CARR Books — \$5 & \$1.95); and, though they breathe melancholy and often tragedy and sometimes dwell upon so-called depravities, the charms work. The secret is twofold: they do not speak in terms of rejection, if of loss; they are passionately woven of effective threads of words. In brief, they are convincingly living expression of an identifiable individual who has mastered his medium. Wieners can write of drug addiction, homosexuality, and lechery in ways to make the reader understand — and not to turn the page with disgust. On the negative side, few of his poems are strong, and too frequently — if charmingly — he reuses long-recited words and phrases of poetic vagueness.

Another successful poet — via related, though different, language textures — is Helen Wolfert (*THE MUSIC* — \$4.50 — W. W. NORTON). However, her subject matters are those of more generally accepted beauty, and there is less of contrast, with a pervading lack of major internal oppositions in all but

a few pieces. The indubitable life of her poetry lies in the comparative minutiae of words and phrases: 'Out of the quarrelled stars, / These gales of falcons,— the stars we see, / These old, mad lionesses / Mold their frothings into bells, / Laugh their bells to filigree.' She does bring excitement to old favored subjects; and surprisingly — since she's not really a 'modern,' except in freedom from older forms — her language is more consistently fresh than is that of Wieners. Needless to add, she is as much on the bright side as Sue Abbott Boyd. And sexual love, when touched upon, is decidedly romanticized.

J.B.M.

Endorsing 'Unsafe' Anthologies

ANTHOLOGIES OF CONTEMPORARY POETS usually contain poems by the recently-deceased, or so-called 'safe' writers. For example, Theodore Roethke or Richard Eberhart. From DOUBLEDAY, however, comes A CONTROVERSY OF POETS: An Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry, edited by Paris Leary and Robert Kelly. It contains poems by Gregory Corso, Robert Creeley, James Dickey, Larry Eigner, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones, Denise Levertov, Charles Olson, Robert Sward, and even

305 Diane Wakowski. (ANCHOR Original — \$2.45, paperb.)

As with Walter Lowenfel's POETS OF TODAY anthology, the accent is on the living, the new, the poems of our time. In addition to the poems, the editors have provided biographies and bibliographies of each poet, listing not only the poets' works, but their favorite magazines as well. These range from FUCK YOU: A mentioned much more frequently.

While on the one hand we must applaud a major house such as DOUBLEDAY for taking a risk in publishing contemporary poetry for a mass target, on the other hand we must admit that the book will provoke controversy, particularly in regard to the poets whose work is overlooked. The gusty poems of, say, Charles Bukowski or Gil Orlovitz,

are nowhere to be found. Even in a postscript by Robert Kelly, their names are omitted. Neither does the whimsical poetry, such as that of Carl Larsen, find a place. A poet as well known as Judson Crews is mentioned in the postscript as 'Crewes.' One could compile a larger list of omissions than of authors included.

Still, W. D. Snodgrass' HEART'S NEEDLE may not be familiar to the general public — who knows? It is strange, however, that the largest number of poems presented are those of Paris Leary and Robert Kelly, the editors. And who are they? Kelly founded THE CHELSEA REVIEW, and Leary had a book of poems published by SCRIBNERS. Now here's something for little-mag editors with time on their hands to do: Compile an anthology.

It's to the good if one can give to the public lines such as Robert Sward's:

There is no reason why not to look at death.
A good poem, also, is death-contained.

or the directness of Creeley's THE RHYTHM:

It is all a rhythm,
from the shutting
door, to the window
opening,
the seasons, the sun's
light, the moon,
the oceans, the
growing of things . . .

In short, any book which helps the public realize that poetry is no longer a staid Tennysonian singsong pastime, but a vital means of expressing the timbre of the present, that book should be welcome. Let us hope for more such collections. Poets are in danger of becoming a clique with a jargon peculiar to themselves. Every poet needs an audience, and A CONTROVERSY OF POETS gives it to fifty-nine of them. I hope the book sells well. It deserves to.

Sylvio Insana

5-VIII-65: A COMMENT ON CULTURE

THE OTHER NIGHT, 5-VIII-65, I WITNESSED what demonstrates why San Francisco is not the cultural center of the world, or of any smaller domain. Two hours of very good theatre were presented—to about thirty people. Three plays by a young Negro playwright, Ed Bullins, opened at the Firehouse Repertory Theatre: *THE RALLY*, or *Dialect Determinism*; *How Do You Do*; and *CLARA'S OLE MAN*.

Why the unpacked house? And what has this to do with the place of San Francisco in the civilized activities of the world? It seems only thirty people were free on a Thursday evening to look at something, without need to be drawn by celebrity, or by the good review endorsement of some space-salesman critic, or by some sort of notoriety. And I feel thirty isn't the figure at all; some fair percentage of that thirty undoubtedly knew someone connected with the production and had some inkling of the quality. Where are those hungry theatre searchers who value fine work enough to go out and look for it, who will not rely on someone else's judgment? This deadness, this failure to seek the fine, or even the better, is destroying this city culturally.

Ed Bullins is a better writer than LeRoi Jones. That is obvious; and this can be said without directing any animosity or lack of appreciation at Jones. Jones will draw good crowds in San Francisco because (1) he has a measure of celebrity (*THE REALIST* thought it necessary to define him, twice) and (2) his plays have achieved notoriety (Los Angeles' Chief Parker was moved by the content or the author's color to develop an interest in public morals). He will draw a crowd from among the literary and the avant garde because he edited *YUGEN* and other publications, and thereby entered an elite. But the fact stands that Ed Bullins, whose run in this city overlaps the run of Jones' two plays, is a better

writer—and his opening night played to but thirty people.

I wouldn't compare Bullins and Jones, except that they both happen to be Negro. Our concern for such things today is very great. No reviewer can possibly write about a young Negro writer without comparing him to some more famous Negro; or, as an alternative, appear to be an idiot. But something can be taken from this particular comparison that is of value.

Jones is pretty concerned, right now, with being a black man in America. Bullins is concerned with being a man in the universe, somewhere about 1965—yet, not locked there. These three plays by Bullins will have audience value when only historians or very cultured men remember that once a man with a particular pigmentation had a special name and lived in a particular subculture. Bullins uses the life he has led as a Negro in 1935-65 America as any writer worth anything uses his own life and the lives about him. An interesting thing, today, about these plays is that the casts are all Negro. In only one of the plays (*How Do You Do*) is there a major reference to the 'White World;' and it is a pretty vague 'White World' at that. Besides which, the three plays could as easily be acted by all-white casts—with no reference to the Negro—should a director choose.

In *THE RALLY*, Boss Brother says, at one point or another, that he is (1) Hitler, (2) Stalin, (3) Lincoln Rockwell, (4) Malcolm X. The remarkable thing is that he indeed could be any of the four (or others he named) with equal validity. And if we are going to measure the relative maturity of Jones and Bullins, we may start right here.

Finally, program music has some very strong built-in limitations. Bullins has shown himself no more willing to accept these limitations than any major composer would be. He has accepted the cost of his decision as well. How easy for a young writer not to withstand the ready-made celebrity and notoriety accruing to a picking-up and turning-of the mass

guilt; or to make use of the goading, righteous indignation today available to the Negro with enough sensitivity and talent to handle it—and little enough sensitivity and talent to see it as a valid literary method.

The plots of Bullins' plays do not belong in a review. They are quite definite, strongly drawn, but have little to do with what is really put across. What really comes across is the tale of a man's growth. An unfinished growth. In each play, it is easy to know in which character Bullins is centered as of the moment. And he deals with the character's confusions and gropings to find where he is in this universe, with an honesty which itself is an integral part of the plays. He is not pointing up social or even human errors he has been clever enough to observe. He is attempting to construct an identity, letting the viewer see his difficulties and the elements with which he works.

These plays are uncommonly good, now. They will remain uncommonly good in the year 2500, assuming the English language has not shifted too greatly; for they will, like good poetry, suffer terribly, I should think, in translation.