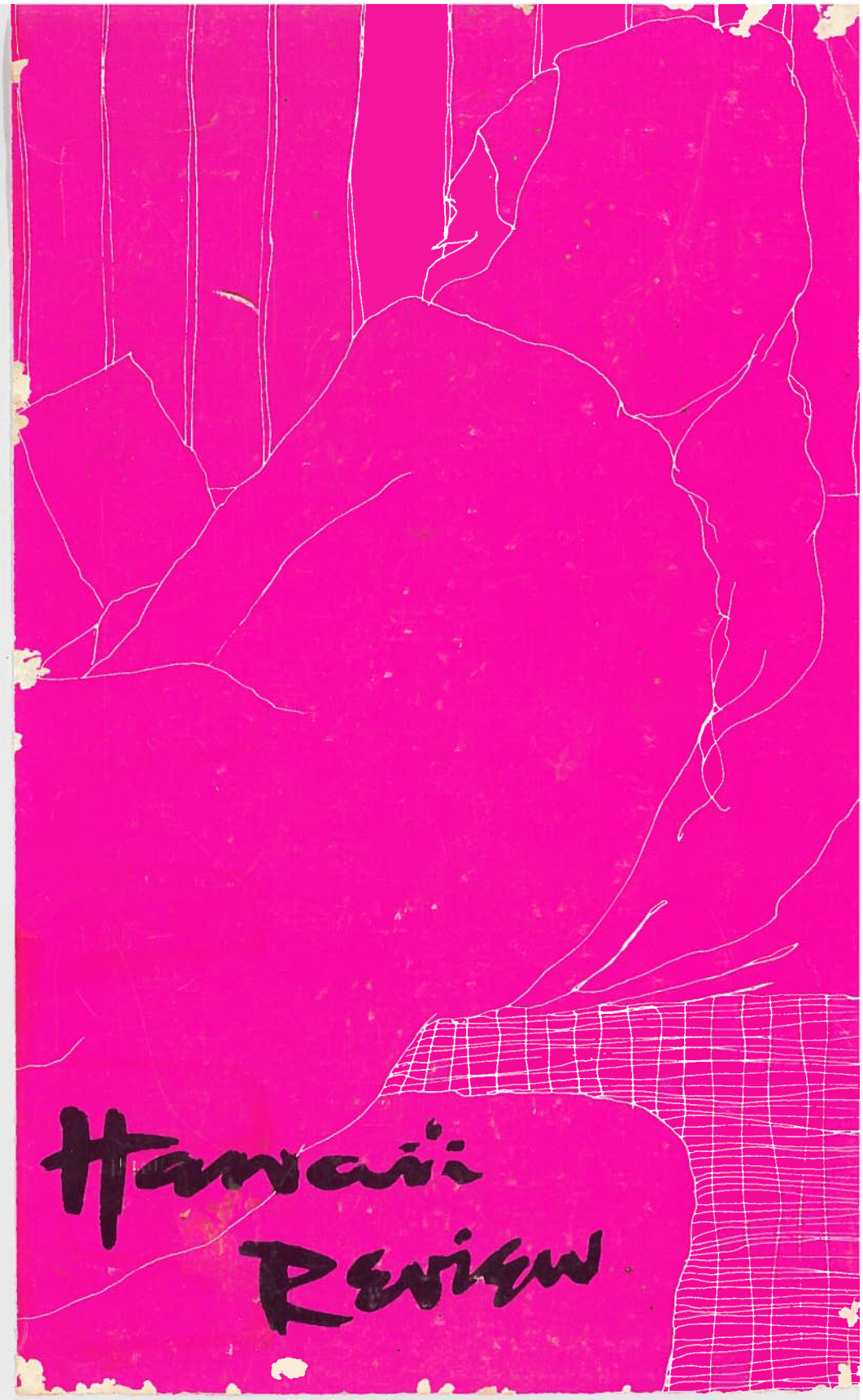

Hawaii
Review

Hawai'i Review

Spring 1992 Issue 35 Vol. 16, No. 2

Untitled cover and frontispiece illustrations by Aaronetta Kandarian.

Hawai'i Review logo by Guy Gokan.

Hawai'i Review is a tri-annual publication of the Board of Publications at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. It reflects only the views of its editors and contributors, who are solely responsible for its content. Correspondence and subscriptions should be addressed to *Hawai'i Review*, Department of English, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1733 Donaghho Road, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96822, phone # (808) 956-8548. The editors invite submissions of art, drama, fiction, poetry, interviews, reviews, translations, and literary essays. Manuscripts (up to 500 lines of poetry, 28 pages of fiction or nonfiction) should be double-spaced, crisp, dark copies and must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). Art submissions should be black and white on 8″ x 10″ photos or 8½″ x 11″ white paper and also accompanied by an SASE. Allow three to four months for a response. Send an SASE for detailed guidelines. Subscription rates: one year (three issues), $15.00; two years (six issues), $25.00; single and sample copies, $5.00. An order form is available on the last page. Advertising rates are available upon request.

Hawai'i Review, a member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, is indexed by the *American Humanities Index*, the *Index of American Periodical Verse*, *Writer's Market*, *Poet's Market*, and *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*.

ISSN: 0093-9625.

Staff

Contents

Stuart Ching
Already Gone 1
Lois-Ann Yamanaka
Girlie and Asi Frenz4-Eva 9
Andrew Gettler
kill the messenger, wait for better news 11
Scott C. Holstad
be 13
Jeff Berglund
Untitled 14
Tom Glass
Miss Thailand 16
Darlaine M. M. Dudoit
The Stick Figures at Ban-Pu 26
James Cushing
You Are Too Beautiful 28
Nettie Farris
You Know Me Better 29
Linda Keegan
Reading Into Love 30
Karen K. Ono
Monstera 31
Robert M. Krakow
excerpt from The False Witness 32
Hanae Uechi Mills
Sea 47
Kathleen T. Choi
Lab Notes 48
Carol Denson
Gentle Knuckles 49
The Baby's Eyes 50
Robert G. Woodring
Crayola 51
Darktime Ritual 52

Scott A. Renschler
Acquaintances 53
Nancy Cherry
Swimming 57
Hanae Uechi Mills
The Bald Prima Donna 61
Kelli A. Logan
Proposal 62
Peter Lefcourt
The Rest of My Life 63
Lust Among the Melons 64
Daryl Nielsen
passenger seat 65
Giles Scott
Japanese Rock-Gardens 66
Ernestine Anderson, Born Houston, 1928 67
Ralph T. Williams
Fried Mullet 68
Trish Rucker
The Power to See in the Dark 70
Hanae Uechi Mills
Figure in the Light 72
Mimi Walter Hinman
The Man of Shibui Voice 73
Leona Yamada
Breaking Steps 75
Cynthia de Geus
Ode to the Body Bountiful 77
Steve Miles
Breaking the Skin 78
After 2:00 am 79
Lou Zitnik
Haole Boy 81
Hanae Uechi Mills
Grapefruits at Harstads 89
Francis G. Sherlock
The Digger 90
Knotted to the Drafthorse 91
J.L. Haddaway
Traveling 92
Tom Wright
Beat Time 93
Constance Han Stewart
Martin's Father 94

Toni Martin
Ho'omaluhia 102
Alice Friman
The Last Soirée 103
Tony Quagliano
Making Light 104
Ian Brand
The Maps 106
The Crows 107
Corey Mertes
Issues of a More Lasting Moment 108
Toni Martin
Waiāhole Winter 116
Paul Andrew E. Smith
Steam 117
Karen Sylte
Camp Robbers 118
Charles Fishman
Far into Vermont 119
Listening to Brahms 120
Ellen Slezak
Listen to Your Heart 121
Stepan Chapman
The Last Judgment 131
Suzanne Kosanke
Leaving 138
Bruce M. Gans
The Imago 139
Rosemary Regan-Gavin
Style is Character: The Writing Style of Joan Didion 149
Robert F. Gish
Calculating the Distance: Paul Horgan and Willa Cather 154
Reviews 160
Aaronetta Kandarian
Untitled 165
Contributors' Notes 166

Already Gone

Ranson liked walking along Waikīkī Beach, surfboard tucked under his arm, and winking at the international women, even though they didn't wink back. He planned to major in travel industry and management at the University of Hawai'i. For Ranson Aiona, Waikīkī was high concrete edges and glass panes reflecting the sunlight, the compressed geometry of hotels and condominiums rising over the island. There was the Honolulu Zoo and Kapio'lani Park. And further down, near the crown of world-famous Diamond Head Crater, coco palms and ironwood trees swayed in the trade winds. He could hardly imagine Waikīkī as the swamp his father often described, the wetland that spread across the coastline. Apparently in the old days, before the area had been land-filled and channels of sand sculpted into the ocean, the reefs had flourished with polyps and fish and had extended to the shore, where local fishermen had thrown their nets and had cast their lines daily.

His father said that the open salt water pool called the Natatorium had been the big attraction, but for Ranson, the Natatorium was a stagnant, green body of water that tainted the modern landscape. Waikīkī's past belonged in the photos and paintings framed in hotel lobbies, in places where it was appropriate and beneficial for people to feel nostalgic.

Ranson stood with his surfboard along Kalākaua Avenue and faced the strip of Waikīkī called Kūhiō Beach, marked by the long, algae-covered breakwater and the pier that protected swimmers from the large surf generated by the hurricane that had recently hit Tahiti. The waves crashed beyond the buoys and exploded on the breakwater. Between waves, some locals dove off the Kūhiō pier into the blue holes of the reef, deep man-made wells. Surfacing, they held up handfuls of sand to show proof that they had touched bottom. Nearer to shore, protected by the breakwater, little children and lovers floated on rafts, and on the beach, people lay on towels and sunned themselves. Ranson walked to the beach, stopped in the small shade of a coconut tree, took off his shirt, and waxed his surfboard.

Someone called his name. He looked up. Twenty yards away, beside a picnic table, a large young man stood with a mossy throw-net

and a canvas fishing bag slung over his shoulder. Ranson recognized him—this was Alfred Kamalii.

Alfred stood up straight, shifting the bulk of the net, which was peppered with seaweed and lead-ball weights. His biceps seemed rock-hard even when relaxed—these were the arms that had become legendary in the sixth grade when Ranson and half the school had witnessed Alfred catapult a Chinese boy named Eddy Pang over the chain-link fence into the drainage ditch behind Pālolo Elementary. Three thin stretch marks lay evenly spaced above Alfred's armpit. His chest, partly uncovered by the fish net, was mountainous. Just below Alfred's heart, a small scar the size of a quarter caught Ranson's attention, and he remembered the New Year's Eve, years ago, when he and Alfred, fifth-graders, had set out to get revenge on Curtis Holt.

Crossing the street, Ranson had watched the explosions and smoke fill Pālolo Valley. Long poles had stood in nearly every driveway; at midnight, these poles would be strung with cords of fireworks ten to twenty feet long.

Ranson waited in the driveway of Alfred's house, a one-room extension that the Kamaliis rented from some Chinese family who owned a meat market in downtown Honolulu. Mrs. Kamalii, her huge stomach filling her mu'umu'u, was sitting on a lawn chair in the yard. Her three-year-old daughter Leimomi was holding sparklers in each hand, and Mrs. Kamalii held Leimomi's wrists and guided them through the air, waving the sparklers in circles. Alfred stepped out of the house, walked to Ranson, and unzipped his windbreaker.

"My artillery," he said. "Stole 'em from Taguchi Store." Packs of fireworks bulged inside Alfred's t-shirt. Three punks stuck out from the top of his shorts. He pulled out a silver lighter from his back pocket, flicked it on and off several times, then stuffed it away.

"Where's your father?" said Ranson.

"Sick," said Alfred. "He stay inside because he having hard time breathe with all the smoke. I was setting up one fan to give him fresh air. You know he get asthma." Alfred pushed back his hair, revealing a bald spot and an adhesive tape. "I was bodysurfing at Graveyards, and Curtis ran his skeg across my head. He never even say sorry. He think just cause he in high school he can act tough."

They struck off through the smoky street. Bits of bright-colored paper swirled up from the pavement and tumbled around Ranson's feet. He imagined himself nose-riding a twenty-foot curl at Waimea Bay, slicing fearlessly through clouds of misting ocean, people on shore snapping photos of him, the rapid clicking of Minoltas and Nikons. Then he heard a loud explosion across the valley, perhaps a

homemade pipe-bomb. They passed Mrs. Mahuka's house—she was the old lady with the gray hair and the large hooked nose.

"My father said she was beautiful in her day," said Alfred. "That was before the accident." Alfred pointed to the mountains. "She was hiking up the ridge, and she fell and broke her nose on one rock. The bone grew back funny kind."

They turned down Nomilo Street because it was near the drainage ditch, and there the houses had yards with ferns, red ginger, and mondo grass, the perfect hiding places for toads.

"What the hell is that?" said Alfred.

Ranson clicked on the flashlight.

"The stone moving," said Ranson.

It jumped.

"Toad!" said Alfred.

Ranson and Alfred chased the toad across the road until it jumped into a Japanese garden and clung to a rock, fitting snuggly into a niche. Alfred pulled out his lighter and lit one of the punks. He pressed the ember into the toad's back; the toad's skin blistered and the toad jumped off the rock and leaped three times and then onto the sidewalk. Ranson lit a firecracker. Caboom!

"You hit 'em!" said Alfred.

The toad smacked on the road. It was missing a front leg.

"Hootah!" said Ranson. He sprinted to the toad and pressed his palm into its back, pinning it to the road. Then he stuffed a wad of firecrackers into its mouth. Caboom! The toad somersaulted.

"Damn," said Alfred.

"Blew his head off," said Ranson.

"Looks like a bean bag," said Alfred.

They giggled and walked away until they reached Curtis's house. Ducking behind a Buick parked in the driveway, they saw in the garage young men, muscular surfer types, roasting meat on a hibachi and drinking beer.

"There he is," said Ranson. "Making out." Noelani Vargas, dressed in a spaghetti-strap blouse, was sitting in Curtis's lap. "She not wearing bra."

Alfred lit one, two, three packs of fireworks and tossed them into the garage.

"Run!" said Alfred.

Already gone, thought Ranson. He was a hundred yards down the street when he noticed Alfred was not behind him, and even though he felt that he should go back, he continued home. Safe in his bedroom, he turned uncomfortably in bed. At midnight, his father called him down to help light their twenty-thousand packs of fireworks, but he stayed in his room, listening to the firecrackers ex-

ploding. The next day, Alfred had come to school with two black eyes, a swollen nose, and a quarter-sized hole in his t-shirt where Curtis Holt had burned him with a cigarette. The older kids had teased him "raisin nipple" and "Mrs. Mahuka's adopted son."

Now, as Ranson stood on the beach, Alfred approached him.

"Going surfing?" Alfred said.

"Yes," said Ranson. He tucked his surfboard securely under his arm. "What about you?"

Alfred thumped his bag and something rattled inside.

"Throw net for a little while," Alfred said. "But mostly I was picking pipihi and catching crabs. Give them to my father, his favorite."

Alfred pointed to a tourist family approaching from the roadside. The woman, whom Ranson assumed was the mother, had the scrunched forehead of someone who had been scowling at the sun for many hours. She wore a white bikini top and a flower-printed skirt. Clinging to her skirt was a girl, glazed pink, licking an ice cream cone. The father was a large man, sunburned on his face and neck to the v-line of his aloha shirt.

"Excuse me," the man said.

"What," said Alfred.

"Hanauma Bay," the man said. "Can you tell us what bus to catch?"

"Why you going to Hanauma Bay?" Alfred said. "Going be night time when you get there. Cannot snorkel at night."

"We're not going snorkeling," said the women. "We just wanted to see it before we leave tomorrow."

"The best reef in the world," said Ranson. He looked at the woman's slightly freckled shoulders and the fine, delicate blonde hairs in the center of her chest.

A gusty wind blew offshore. The woman's skirt filled with air, and she held down the skirt with both hands. Two pigeons flew to the grass. One coconut dropped from the sky and clipped the man's nose. He staggered back, one hand on his face, his free arm beating the air. The girl's arm quaked, propelling the ball of ice cream. The woman braced the man by the shoulders. He stood dizzily, turning his eyes inward as he lifted his hand to look.

"Is my nose bleeding?" the man said.

"Not much, honey," the woman said.

"Looks like a cherry," the girl said. There was a pink strip of meat clefting the tip of his nose.

Alfred motioned at the coconut tree bending above. "One time one lady was sunbathing underneath one tree and seventy three coconuts fell on top of her. Her head broke like one egg. The doctors searched all over for her brains to sew them back into her head. They never

care if she turned mental retarded, just as long as she lived but the mynah birds already ate everything." Alfred picked up the coconut. "See, even baby kind fall down."

"I'll be damned," the man said. "Looks like an over-sized acorn."

"We better forget about Hanauma Bay and go back to the hotel," the woman said.

"It's only a scratch," the man said.

Ranson pointed to the bus shelter on Kalākaua Avenue. "Catch the number twenty-seven."

"Thank you," the man said, holding a handkerchief to his nose. Ranson watched the family walk off, hoping that another gust of wind would lift the woman's skirt.

"Why you nice to them?" Alfred said.

"We need them," Ranson said.

"They stink up the place," said Alfred. "The air, the land. All the fishes dying nowadays because their boats pollute the water."

Alfred found three flat stones and stacked them at the base of the coconut tree. Ranson recalled that in elementary school during a hiking excursion to Sacred Falls, he had seen Alfred build this kind of miniature shrine along the trail by stacking three rocks on a ti leaf. Later, in intermediate school, Alfred had brought to Hawaiian studies class a fishhook carved from human bone and a fishy-smelling cowry shell. He said the hook contained plenty of supernatural power, mana, and that it was a family heirloom. The cowry, he had found off Kāhala. He had called the shell his family god, 'aumakua.

Merely superstition, thought Ranson. Yet, he remembered that when he had been a boy, his father and mother had often told him stories of Pele, who dwelled in volcanoes, whose hair swirled out in flames, and who could appear in the form of different women, maybe even your neighbor. For most of his childhood, he had believed that Mrs. Mahuka, the kupuna who lived next door, was Pele, and when his father would send him to give her tasty āholehole or pāpio which they had caught fishing, he had thought that he had been giving offering to some ancient goddess.

Then, when he had entered high school, he had learned in Hawaiian studies class ancient hula that honored Hawaiian deities. Some of these hula he had learned from kupuna, old Hawaiians who lived simple lives in Kalihi or Kāne'ohe; other dances he had learned from younger instructors who had owned modern hālau and had choreographed some of the nightclub productions in Waikīkī. And then, when his hālau had traveled to Hilo for the Merrie Monarch Festival and then had toured the Big Island, he had seen similar miniature shrines constructed with lava rocks at Pohoiki Bay, beside the road to Kalapana, and along the arid roadside between Kawaihae and

Kailua-Kona, and there, especially on the Big Island, he had felt the spiritual electricity emanating from the land.

Alfred set down the fishing bag and rummaged inside. A line of dirt ran along his spine, stretching the length of his back, and the top of his shorts was soiled and damp with perspiration.

Alfred pulled from his fishing bag a Budweiser carton that contained four beers and a half-filled bottle of Crown Royal. He grabbed one of the beer bottles and used his hand to wipe the fish scales and bits of seaweed from the glass. Then he drank. The beer disappeared and foam bubbled from the corner of his mouth. He cleaned another bottle and offered it to Ranson.

"No thanks," Ranson said.

He was watching a blonde woman who was sunning her back with her red swimsuit untied, and he recalled the summer before when he had worked for his father in the Hilton Hotel's sundry store. Every day, the women had entered from the beachfront, their bodies shiny with suntan lotion. Now the woman in the red bikini sat up, holding her red bikini-top to her chest, and tied the straps. She saw Ranson looking and smiled. Then she turned, walked down the sand, and waded knee-deep into the water. She bent over and cupped water in her hands and dabbed her shoulders.

Alfred dropped the empty beer bottles and the carton into the fishing bag and held out the bottle of whiskey. "Your last chance."

Ranson shook his head and waved the bottle away. Alfred finished the whiskey in five swallows, then dropped the bottle into his canvas bag. A frisbee landed at his feet, and he picked it up and threw it at a man jogging on the sand, smacking the man behind the head. The man stopped and turned with his mouth open.

"What you looking at!" Alfred yelled. The man ran on.

"Why did you do that?" said Ranson.

"The rich ass deserves it. The stupid tourist lucky he get money. You remember my father? He stay sick in the hospital long time. No can work. We no more money for pay the doctor bills, so he telling us he like die already. He telling us for pull the plug, for spread his ashes down the beach."

Ranson didn't know much about Mr. Kamalii, except that he had probably worked for the city. Now and then, while driving along the H-1 Freeway or along Kalaniana'ole Highway, Ranson had seen Mr. Kamalii cutting back the weeds and bushes alongside the road.

"You lucky you rich," Alfred said. "How much your surfboard cost?"

"Three hundred."

"You work?"

"Not right now, but last summer my father . . ."

"Your father manages the Hilton," Alfred said.

"Yes," Ranson said.

"Maybe one day I work for your father. What you think? Maybe you can get me one job." He reached down and straightened the three rocks stacked on top of each other.

"Maybe," said Ranson.

"Nah," said Alfred. "I'm dreaming. Your father would never hire me." He looked at Ranson's surfboard. "I like try your board."

"Uh . . . I don't know."

"What?" Alfred said. Ranson recognized the inflection—it wasn't just "what," but the kind of *what* that meant danger. He tried to read Alfred's glazed eyes. Alfred spat a wad of mucus, then used his forearm to wipe the spittle from his lower lip. Ranson looked at the fleshy scars on Alfred's knuckles.

"One ride," Ranson said.

Alfred nodded, draped the mossy fishing net over Ranson's shoulder and set the bag at Ranson's feet. Then he took the surfboard.

He held the surfboard over his head and stumbled down the beach, kicking sand up from his heels. Ranson dragged the net and bag onto the pier, so that he could watch Alfred surf from above. At the edge of the water, Alfred jumped, his legs apart, a pocket of air between his body and the board, and then he splashed into the ocean. He paddled awkwardly, making big, lazy strokes and smashing through the whitewash.

The sun was near the horizon. Ranson cupped his hand over his eyes. A Caucasian boy stood up on a wave and rammed his board into the crest, spraying Alfred with a cloud of water.

"I kick your ass!" Alfred said, but he didn't stop. He paddled seaward, looping his arms over steadily. He passed the buoy and the old-timers who surfed farthest out on longboards. Then he disappeared behind a wave.

Ranson wondered what Alfred was doing. He must have crossed the reef and entered the open water where it was too deep for the waves to break. Maybe he was drunk and couldn't think straight.

Ranson measured the distance between the shoreline and the area where he had last sighted Alfred. The possibility of Alfred drowning flashed through his mind, but then Ranson caught sight of the distant figure of a surfer paddling over a swell. Ranson understood immediately—Alfred was stealing the surfboard. Ranson kicked the canvas bag. Alfred could either turn right toward Ala Moana Harbor and sneak in amid the catamarans and canoes near the Hilton, or he could turn left and circle a mile around the coast to Diamond Head. Ranson knew that in the future, even if he saw Alfred at Ala Moana or Waikīkī, Alfred would have already sold the board at the swap meet,

or stripped and then refinished it beyond recognition, or dented it and waterlogged it and covered it with patches of fiberglass and tape. Ranson searched for a policeman, but nearby there were only a few people, a photographer snapping pictures of the sunset, and a woman wearing a red bikini. He recognized her as the woman whom he had seen earlier wading near the shore. She seemed to be pointing at him.

"Surfer," she said. She walked toward him, but he wasn't certain if she was motioning to him or at something behind him. Ranson turned to the ocean. One hundred yards offshore, the old-timers were scrambling for the channel, and beyond them an enormous wave was building.

A lone surfer, nearly lost in the distance, stood up on the large curl. It was Alfred. At first, he lurched forward and back like some ancient sea monster. Then he steadied himself and raised his arms. He almost shimmered as he rode the rolling water, coming back in.

For a moment, Ranson imagined the scene framed behind the front desk at the Regency, or maybe at the Sheraton. Nearly perfect, he thought. But still, it was missing something. Then he turned, and here, standing in front of him was the woman in the red bathing suit. She moved closer—was he dreaming?—so close that Ranson knew he only had to step forward and he would brush against her. She propped her sun glasses on her head and smiled.

Reluctantly, Ranson turned back to the ocean to locate his surfboard. On the horizon, Alfred glided through the wave's mid-section and out-raced the whitewash as a thin line of spray—a single strand of hair—drifted off the crest, catching the sunlight.

Girlie and Asi Frenz4-Eva

I tell you somethin'. No tell nobody, ok?
You know the pervert by the school
who wear the big rain jacket and jag off
in front the small Filipino girls
when they walk to school? The one—he everytime
by the trash bin by the housing. Anyway,
one time, me and Asi was walkin' up there
an' the guy start yellin' Asi's name.
So I'n tell her, "Eh, the fuckin' haole pervert
stay calling you."

"What? You like again?" she'n yell back at the guy.
The guy start rubbin' his tits and pointin' at Asi.
"Well, hurry up. I ain't got all day," she'n tell.
Den the guy start running to us. I stay pull
Asi's arm but she no move. I stay tell her what you
doing, Asi? The fucka is running to us. Let's go.
Ho, I dunno, next thing I knew, he was right by us. All
stink he was like b.o. an' toe jam an' halitosis
an' oily hair all mix togeda, I no joke you.

"C'mon," he stay tell Asi an' he stay grabbin'
for his dick part already. "Here's the 20."
An' he'n take um out his pocket. Den he'n put um
inbetween his teeth—all ke-ke, his teeth,
all yellow and full of plaque. His hand stay
grab his dick already. I no joke you.
Den you know what that fuckin' Asi wen' do?
I no could believe an' brah, I was standin' right there.

She'n unbutton her shirt, slow kine, an' the guy
stay tell, "C'mon, c'mon," and den she'n take off
her bra, slow kine, an' the guy stay all nuts already,
his eyes stay rollin' back. An' that fuckin' Asi,
she wen' show the haole pervert her tits.
I no joke you, brah. I was right there.

Ho, by that time, the guy was whackin',
like slappin' meat to the max.

An' Asi'n grab the money from the ground
'cause he wen' kind of bend over and groan.
She never even button her clothes,
she stay hold um closed in the front,
tellin' me, "Run, Girlie, run! Hurry up!"
So we wen' run to Circle K and Asi wen' buy tree packs Kools
and one large pack doublemint, two bottle Pepsi,
an' one big party size Funyuns fo me and her.

Den she went home so I told her laytahs.
Me, I went to the school by the big tree.
Get the park benches over there, eh?
An' I wen' look fo the place I wen' carve
Girlie and Asi Frenz4-Eva.
Den I wen' scratch out the 4-Eva part
with my fingernails until no could see no more.

kill the messenger, wait for better news

"My mind's not right."
—Robert Lowell, Skunk Hour

i am mired
in a pathology
of contradictions;

"Perfect paranoia is perfect awareness,"
my son says . . .
& i have no trouble
believing it;

Paz writes,
"I am the shadow my words cast,"
& i would give
& gladly
half my small
(but, by consensus, cute)
ass
to hang a career carved out of words
on a line as finely sculpted as that.

re-reading Jack, i note he
"shambles after . . . the mad ones,"
& further note
(knowing, now, some of them)
less madness, more shambling
in their own steps.

i have no wish to read
Sexton's secret words,
nor to give credence to
some two-bit shrink's
delusion
that he's Pygmalion
to a REAL

poet . . . yet,
i am curious to know what
might make/have made her
different
from me & thee,
yet suspect i fear
the shock
of recognition.

Nemerov's dead
& now we've a Laureate
who can't quite figure out
what his title means, so . . .
does nothing.

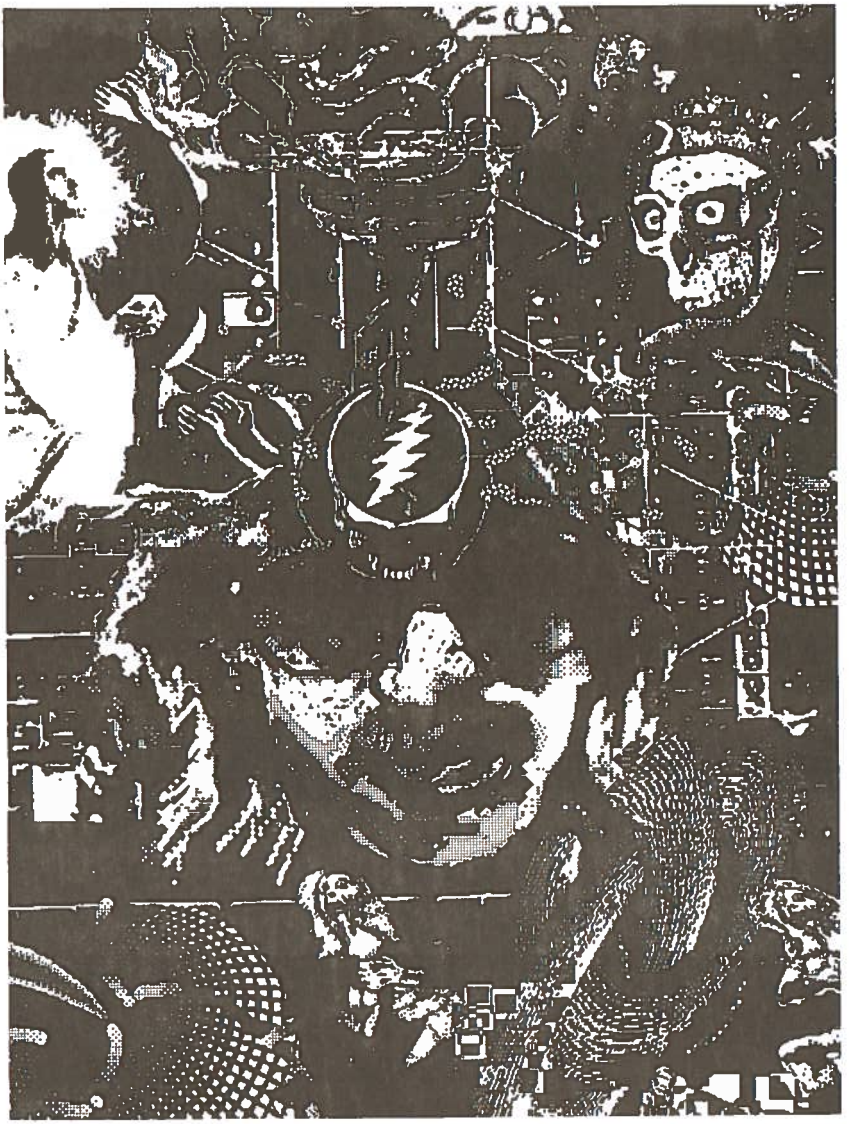
i wonder,
is wisdom more easily quantified
than love,
are
more, most, better, best, -er,-est
not of this lexicon
but really only applicable to
breakfast cereals,
detergents,
highway mileage ratings?

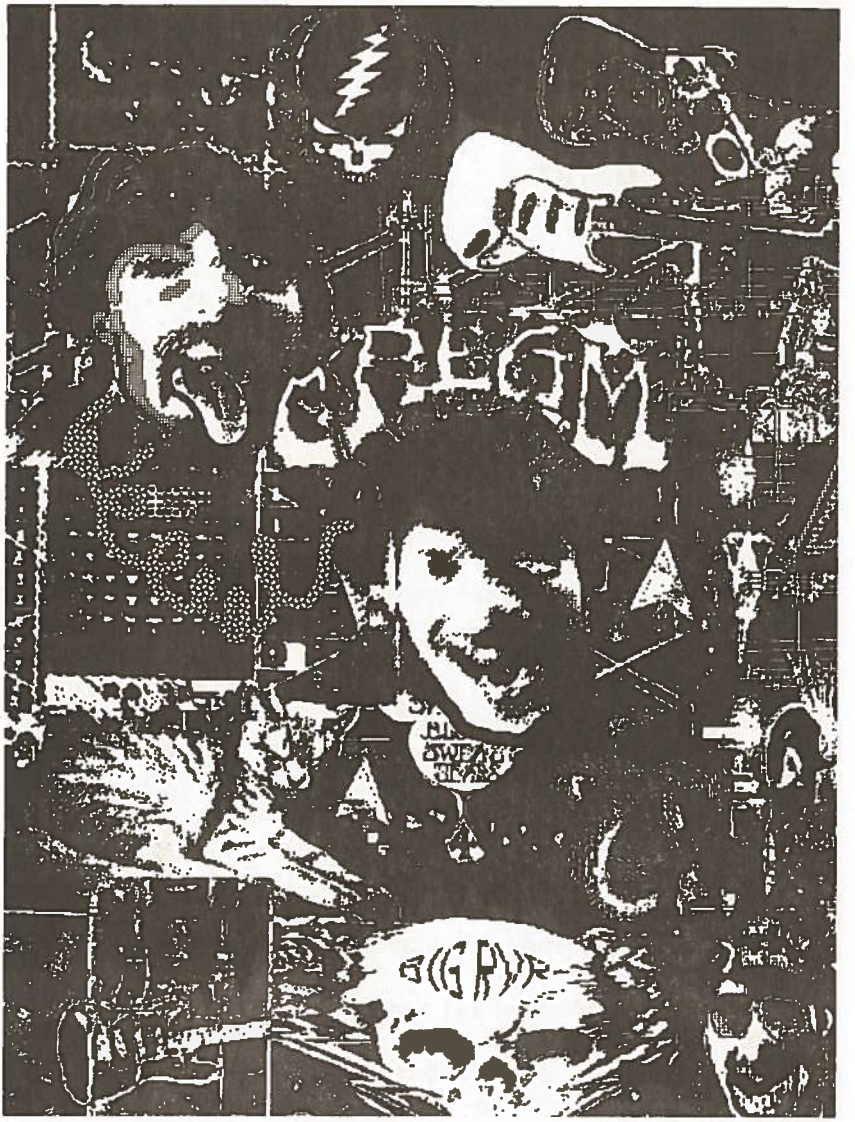
my son is right;
Paz is hard-won peace;
Ginsberg's earned the right
to bore us all with his
catalog of ills;
Anne's daughter is
entitled to revenge
wrought on a corpse & memory;
&, i guess,
Strand at least won't lose his way
when it's time
to go to the bank.

think about all this long enough,
pathology's not a contradiction;
it's a
prerequisite.

be

here with you
and it just doesn't
seem real
sometimes
and wanting to know
you what you look
like when i'm not
with you what you
think when you're in
bed at night what
made you cry the
other day
wanting to bury
myself inside you
physically and
emotionally and
burrow into you
can't get out
never get out
and become you
live you
be you.





Untitled

computer art
by Jeff Berglund

Miss Thailand

It's a long way to my house. And once you get there, you have to keep going. I don't live at my house anymore. My family keeps moving away.

My house was three houses ago. We lived there until it stopped raining. Then our rice didn't grow and our fish pond dried up. We started selling. We had the big argument about which should we sell, the refrigerator or the TV. That was the fight. I said, "Keep the TV." My brother said, "No, keep the fridge." Then we went at it. But our fight had no winner. It never did rain, and we sold them both. Soon we were moving.

We went to stay with my cousins, and when that dried up we came to my uncle's, and after that we all came to stay with even more cousins. Now here we are.

There are twelve of us now, and six of us kids. In the morning I ask my mother, "What is for breakfast?" and she answers, "An egg." She cuts it in six equal pieces, and we eat it with rice. After a while I learned to make the egg last, and take a little bit of egg with each spoonful of rice. Then on some mornings when I ask, "What is for breakfast?" my mother answers, "The same egg as yesterday." On those days she gives me a hug, not cut in pieces, but whole.

I'm real skinny for a girl. I always say that I help my family by not growing much. I can wear the same clothes over and over, and over again.

I'm eleven years old now and this is my last year of school. In the morning I'm always the first one to get there. I live far away and if I don't get there early I'm afraid I'll be late.

The first thing I do in the classroom is open the windows and sweep the floor and then put the chairs down. Now it is ready for study. Next I sweep the teachers' room, too. It makes me proud to help them. The teachers can see I'm proud, so they give me more work. At the end I give them glasses of water. Then I go find my friends.

It was like that every morning. Then along came that day. I got a piece of egg that morning, and my whole hug besides, so I went to school with a smile on my face.

It was when my friends came. They took off their shoes and came across the clean floor to where I sat waiting. I jumped up to meet them.

"Well," they all said at once. "What do you think about Porntip?"

"Who is Porntip?" I asked.

They began laughing. "You're kidding," they said. But I wasn't. "She is Miss Thailand," they said. "And now she is Miss Universe, too. The most beautiful one in the world!"

All day they talked about her, and our teachers did, too. It was the most important thing for our country, they said. Now the world would know the beauty of Thailand, and Porntip would be famous forever.

"We love her," said my friends, and I began to agree.

That night I lay in bed thinking of her. It seemed maybe foolish since my bed was only a mat rolled out on the floor. My cousins lay asleep up against me, and a mosquito net hung over our heads. "What if I were Porntip?" I thought. "What if Porntip were me?"

It was the first time I ever thought about someone like that. It was hard for the girls. The boys always had heroes. They had boxers like Khaosai and Sot. The boys at our school always said, "I am Khaosai!" and "I am Sot!" and when they said it, they were. I thought to myself, "I am Porntip!" Thanks to me, all the Thai girls awake on their mats had something to dream of.

I knew I was foolish. But I could feel the breath of my cousins on each of my cheeks, so I didn't laugh at myself then, not out loud.

I don't have a father. I used to but when we had to start moving he left us. One day he told my uncle, "I am going into town," and he never came back. We don't know if he died or got captured or if he just ran away. We got no letters, no news, no everything.

So now I am happiest when I am helping my mother. I know that except for me and my brother, she is a lonely woman, so we help her the best that we can. My big job comes in the evening. My cousins and I go down to the well for our water. We push a cart full of jugs and it's easy going down because the jugs are all empty. Then we fill them up with well-water, and take baths ourselves, and start pushing back home. I had to teach my cousins not to rest. That just makes you more tired. We push straight through to the house. Now we have water. It will last for one day.

I remember when we got electricity, when we lived at my house. A man came from Bangkok and said, "Now you will want to buy a pump for your water." But we all laughed at that. We told him we wanted TVs. He said, "Why not buy a pump? It will save you a trip to the well everyday, with your carts and your jugs. The water will come

straight to your house, through a pipe." That was the first man from Bangkok I ever knew, and his thinking made no sense to me. What would you do in the evenings if you didn't go for water? What job could I do then to help?

Everyone chose the TVs. That way we could watch TV and we still had our water, besides. And we never saw that man from Bangkok again. He didn't come when we sold our TVs back. I guess if we would have sold back some pumps, he might have come to see us. But we live a long way from Bangkok, and sometimes even we need a reason to decide to come home.

I went to my friend Lin's house to watch the Miss Universe pageant. Everybody I knew went there, too. The TV was up on a table, and we all sat together as a crowd on the floor. I asked my mother if everyone in the country was watching to see Porntip, the winner.

"Yes," said my mother.

You could see right away that Porntip was the most beautiful. We all tried to smile just like her. We tried to walk like her, too, but there was no room for walking, so we kept sitting instead and went back to smiling.

"You know," Lin told me. "Your smile is like hers. You should keep practicing."

I looked back at the TV. "All right," I said. "I will."

To me the best part came at the end, in the interviews. I did not like the swimming suit part because it is not true to life. But the interviews are like talking, and people do that all the time. Even me.

When Porntip answered in her interview, we could not understand her. That was because she spoke perfect English. I studied English at school, but I could just understand "Good morning, teacher," and "This is a small letter A." Porntip spoke many words quickly, and when she finished she smiled that same smile. I watched her and practiced again.

Then a voice on TV translated her answer. It is what made me love Porntip for sure. She said, "If I win, I want to help the poor people of Thailand. Especially the children. I want to spend my life helping the poor children, and help them stay happy, like I am."

I patted Lin's arm. "She is talking about us," I said. Lin held my hand, and she nodded.

But there was something that came over me then. And when they said the winner was "Porntip, Miss Thailand," and put the crown on her head, I knew what it was. I did not think that Porntip was talking about us at all. I thought she was talking about only me. There were grandmothers and parents and all my school friends right there in the

room, and all with the same life that I had, but I was sure that Porntip was smiling at the skinny one, me.

I was still smiling back at her when Lin put her arms around me and hugged. "She's so beautiful!" said Lin, and she kissed me.

I did not take my eyes off the TV. "I think she's even more beautiful than you do," I said. But I was sure that Lin couldn't understand, and I was glad when she stopped hugging me and took her hands back to herself.

I wrote Porntip a letter. It was the first letter I wrote in my life. After a week I was finished.

Writing did not take so long, but I had to find the time alone. So I could not write it at home. I have never been home by myself in my life. I had to wait until one morning at school when nobody came for a while. Then I sat down and wrote it right off.

"Dear Porntip," I wrote. That was not the secret part that I wanted no one to see. But the next part was more private.

"Like everyone else I can see that you are beautiful and perfect." I looked up from my desk. There was no one around.

"But I can see more. At night I become you. I dream that I am you and when I wake up I still am. I know how it feels to say, 'I am Miss Thailand.' I know it and feel it myself, when I'm you. And I think that you know me, too.

"Please tell me, is this my special power? Or does everyone write this to you?

Love,
Cap"

I closed my notebook. That was the letter I had planned in my head while I slept. Then in that quiet I had a new thought. I opened the notebook and wrote, "P.S. When you come to Thailand, please visit me. I'm poor but I love you."

Then I sent it. For another week I did not eat lunch, so I could save up the money for stamps. I wrote, "To Porntip, Miss Thailand, U.S.A." Then I sent it and waited.

It did not seem fair that Porntip went to the U.S.A. when she was Miss Thailand. But she was busy being Miss Universe. She had to go there to be famous and loved.

Meanwhile I waited for her answer. One day at lunch I asked my friends, "What if Porntip comes to visit me. Where should I take her?"

At first, they all laughed. But then I asked the same question again.

"Bring her to school," said one of them. "She can do your homework."

"Take her to market," said another.

"The temple," they said, and they began to be interested.

"When is she coming?" asked Lin.

"After she comes back to Thailand," I said. "Then she will come visit me."

Some of them laughed, but some of them were asking me questions.

"How do you know it?" they said. "Why are you sure?"

I waited for them to be quiet. Then I answered.

"I went to the temple every day," I said. "I made merit every day for a week. Then every night I dreamed about Porntip. I invited her here, and she said, 'Of course, Cap.' And then she kissed me."

Now they were quiet. They were waiting for me to continue. But I had finished already, and just sat there.

Finally Lin spoke up. "Will she come see us, too?" she asked. "Does she want to visit your friends?" I could see they were waiting on my answer.

"Who knows?" I said. I shrugged my shoulders. "I will ask her tonight." Then I got up and walked off somewhere else.

But that night I could not dream about Porntip. My cousin woke up and asked, "Why don't you sleep?" I lay there and thought about my first house, my real one. I was born in that house. It was in the afternoon and when my father came home with his friend, my mother looked from me up to him and said, "It's a girl."

My father shook his head sadly. Then he reached in his pocket and gave some money to the friend.

I don't remember that, but people have told me. I wasn't even alive for an hour, and already I had cost my father one bet. Maybe that started him toward his running away.

The upstairs of my house was open. It had only three walls. That was a good place for sleeping, with the night coming in from outside. But to my father it just showed that he was too poor to finish his building. When we left that house we could look back and see right inside it. "Welcome back," my house seemed to say.

But now I lay in bed with my cousins. One of them is talkative. "Tell me a story," she said.

I told her about the crossroads. It is just where my house drops out of view. "If you turn left," I told her, "you will come to the village of the boy who eats dirt.

"A newspaper printed a story about him. He was so poor. Then people from all over the country sent money to buy food for the boy who eats dirt. That was Thai kindness. But he didn't want it. He was addicted to dirt. Many people in that village were. That's what the newspaper found out when they went in with the money."

"It's a good story," said my cousin. "I used to eat dirt myself." She rubbed up against me. "When will you tell me another?"

"Tomorrow," I said. "I will tell you the story of Porntip."

"Ah," said my cousin. "It will be a good day."

Later on I woke up. My cousin was looking down at me. "Cap," she said. "You were dreaming. You kept saying 'Porntip' over and over."

I crawled outside the mosquito net and went to look out the window. I got next to the night. In this house there are four walls, so if you are not at the window, nobody can look back and see you inside.

"Porntip," I said. "Welcome back."

I said it over and over.

Finally I got an answer.

It came in a blue envelope and my uncle brought it from town. It was the first letter I ever got and I couldn't remember anyone else in that house ever getting one either. Inside was a picture.

Porntip was smiling at me with the same smile that mine will be like if I practice. Underneath it said, "Porntip, Miss Thailand." I was glad it did not say "Miss Universe." "Miss Thailand" is better, I think. Anyone can become Miss Universe, but there is only one Miss Thailand.

Down in the corner was writing by pen. I read it carefully many times. "I miss you. Love Porntip," it said.

I went to my mother. "I think Porntip will come here," I said.

She was chopping some chilis. "Porntip, Miss Thailand?"

"Yes," I said. "Do you believe me?"

My mother could chop very quickly, and close to her hands. I want to learn how myself. "Yes," she said finally. "I do."

I smiled at her. It was almost the same as a hug. "We should buy a chair," I said. "For Porntip to sit in." I looked around at the floor, where we sat. In fact, we sat on it every day.

My cousin was sitting there, too. "And a new glass for drinking," she said.

"Well," said mother. She took two more chilis, and then put one back. "If we are sure she is coming, of course we will make our house perfect for her." My mother put the chilis in a bowl and got out a papaya. It was small and green, our supper.

"But if we make our house perfect now, that will make sure she will come," I said. My cousin was nodding.

I got up and walked around the room with my head held high. Finally I pretended to sit in a chair.

"I am Porntip," I said. "May I have some water?"

My cousin rushed over to me with an imaginary glass in her hand. "I am Cap," she said. "Here you are."

"Thank you," I said. "What a kind little girl!"

My cousin nodded. "Porntip," she said. "Let's go meet my cousin."

Meanwhile my mother just smiled. She chopped at the papaya and said nothing. But I could see her meaning. Our house was already perfect, for us.

I took the picture to school. Everyone crowded around me. I was a hero for almost two minutes.

Then our teacher came in with a newspaper. "Well, here it is," she said. "Porntip is coming to Thailand."

It was true. The next day would be "Porntip Day" and she would ride in a parade all through Bangkok. Schools would be closed and flowers were everywhere already.

"Will she come here?" asked my friends. "Cap says that Porntip will visit."

"That's right," I said. "She told me so in the temple and in my dreams, too."

But our teacher laughed. "We are so far away," she said. "Why would Porntip come here?"

"Because we're the poor children," I said, and my friends started nodding. "She loves us," they said.

Our teacher looked down in a way that was friendly. On that day she wore her brown teacher's uniform. She was married already. We knew that she was a good mother for her children because she often went to take care of them instead of teaching our classes.

But today here she was. She looked down and we could tell she was ready to teach us. "Porntip is very important," she said. "And all the other important people in Bangkok want to meet her. Porntip must be kind to them first. I know she wants to come here, but she is only one person. She cannot go everywhere." She looked down at us friendly, but sad.

"But she said she'll help us," we said.

"But she can still help you," said our teacher. "She doesn't have to come see you to help you. She knows you're here." Then she looked at us again, and we knew that she had just finished teaching.

"And now," she said, "who wants to clean the erasers?" She stood up straight in her uniform. We all volunteered.

After Porntip Day, I waited. All my friends waited, too. "She will come," said Lin. "I dreamed about Porntip in my own dream last night." She said this to make me feel confident, but in fact it made me less sure. If Lin could dream about Porntip, too, somehow it made my own dreams less special.

That night when I was sleeping, I woke up. I went to my mother.

"She is here," I said. "Porntip is at our old house."

"I know," said my mother. "I was just dreaming about Porntip myself."

I ran downstairs and pulled out the board that clamps our door shut, and I wheeled out our bicycle. It was older than I was. We hadn't sold it because then we would have to pay to ride into town on a truck.

I was riding away when my mother came out. "Please don't stop me," I said.

"No," said my mother. "I am coming along."

She sat on the back while I pedaled. She helped pedal, too. We rode into the village and then we turned down the long road to our house.

All along we heard dogs. You always hear dogs bark at night, I guess. I knew that already. Our bike made the sounds that woke the dogs up. It squeaked and it bounced on the hard dirt of the road. We rode along and the barking continued. Each bark, it led to the next.

Finally we came to the crossroads that lead to the town of the boy who eats dirt.

"What will you tell her?" said my mother behind me. "What will you say when you see her?"

"I will take her upstairs," I said as I pedaled. "I will show her the wall that is missing, and we will look at the night."

And the wall was the first thing we saw. It was a dark spot in the night. "No one is home," it seemed to be saying.

I stopped out in front. Now I was breathing. I had never ridden that far before, all the way home.

No dogs were barking. After we left, no one had lived in that house. No one had bought it. No one bought houses at all. If a family moved out, that meant the house was bad luck.

We stood there that night. I had never seen my house look so dark, not even when I lived there and looked at it all the time.

My mother walked up to the house. "Porntip!" she called. "Miss Thailand!" Her hands knocked on the door.

A light came on. The door swung open, and there in the kitchen stood Porntip.

My mother stood there and stared. But I walked right up to the house and went in.

Porntip gave us each water. That was Thai kindness, too. She was wearing a blue evening gown. Her silver high-heels were outside the door. Now in the light we could see them.

"Now," she told us. "Help me take a look at the house."

"Now," she told us. "Help me take a look at the house."

I showed her where we used to keep the TV, and the place for the refrigerator, too. She kept her hand on my shoulder. Then we went up to the room with three walls.

"I used to sleep here," I said.

Porntip looked around at the room. "I like it," she said. "It's a good place for dreaming."

We looked out at the darkness. "There are the crossroads," I told her.

"Yes," said Porntip. "I will go down there next." She pulled me close, and I put my arm around her blue waist.

We stood like that a long time. Outside, nothing was moving. There were no lights to see, either. Finally I looked up at Porntip.

"Porntip," I said. Talking to her was the most natural thing in the world. It must be what having a sister is like. "Why did you come to see me? I mean me of all people. I'm just like every other girl in Thailand."

Porntip pulled back, just a little. But she kept her hand on my shoulder. "Cap," she said. "Don't you know?" She leaned down to me before she went on. "I'll go to your friends' houses, too. I'll go to Lin's. I'm going to see all of your friends."

She was leaning down now and looking me right in the eyes. I remember the way that she sparkled, even in the darkness. It seemed as if every part of her sparkled. Her smile did, her cheeks did, her eyes sparkled, too. Even her eyebrows were sparkling. I had never noticed anyone's eyebrows before.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you knew."

I shook my head. "It's all right," I told her. "Maybe it will make me love you even more." Later, I was glad I had said that.

My mother and I rode with her out to the crossroads. It was odd to see Miss Universe walking along the dirt road in her blue dress like that. There were ruts and buffalo dung to watch out for. But she seemed right at home. Every step seemed sure, even in those silver shoes.

"At night I become you," I thought.

At the crossroads she bowed low to my mother. She kissed me on the cheeks, and before she could stand up, I kissed her eyebrows. Then she walked down that road, into darkness.

I waved good-bye to our house, and then my mother and I pedaled off. After a long time my mother leaned forward. "Cap," she asked me. "Did she give you anything? How can you let your friends know that you saw her?"

Many dogs barked before I gave my answer. "She didn't," I said. "But I think they'll know when they see me."

My mother didn't say anything else. Like most good mothers, she knows that sometimes it's best to just ride along home and help pedal.

I crawled into bed, and now it was just about morning. It's not only a long way to my house. It's a long way back, too.

"Where have you been?" said my cousin. She put her arm up over my shoulder. I stroked her hair.

"I went to see Porntip," I said.

My cousin kissed my cheek. "How is she?"

"She is fine," I said. "She's a little bit lonely out there."

"Why didn't she come here?" said my cousin. "I would have been waiting." She gave a big yawn.

I shook my head, so that it rubbed against hers and rocked it. "She can't go everywhere," I said. "She is only one person."

"That's all right," said my cousin. She yawned again, and spoke slowly. "I'm only one person, too."

I pulled her closer to me. "Me, too," I was ready to say. But by then she was already asleep.

The Stick Figures at Ban-Pu

I

I waited.
But they did not return.
The dusty ground outside the cave
turned dark and heavy with tears.
The green world died.

I appealed to the gods;
I called up their grey faces
in the darkness above the fire,
offered my finest prizes,
sang the songs of my ancestors.
Still the wind returned
empty from the hunt, dragging her belly
over the sharp rocks and
cold embers, gnawing at the naked bones.

I searched the valley, feeling
the spaces between the rocks,
at the foot of trees,
among the tangled branches in the river.
I listened for their voices
in the leaves,
the rushing of wings,
the rain.
Only the jackal wind lurked
on the edge of the circle,
teeth glistening like stars.

II

The big valley is bigger now,
the big spaces, bigger.
Grass fills the footprints
baked into the earth.
The sky is a big Belly, empty.

III

I add the shadows of my sisters
to the army of our ancestors.
I reduce the lines of their bodies
to cold hard rock.
They are captured like the deer,
etched forever in the eye of the sun.

You Are Too Beautiful

My mother at twenty your body a lengthy amazement of fruit
Six weeks you have watered the shoots with your fingers
Not knowing you would see the slow dance in
The trees still and heavy as a church

Wherever the eye lands your hands

In another leaf unforgettable instructions fall
Now as the ending century quietly learns its ending
My mother smiles knowing who is hidden and how

And how and what her death lets light fall through

You Know Me Better

than anyone.
You have seen me dance.

You know how my legs
rise and fall,
the curve of my spine
in arabesque,
that certain tilt
of my head.
You know all the movements
of my body,
read them as poems.

"We begin as an empty stage,"
you said. "In this space,
we create our lives."
We choreographed a ballet.
Arms entwined,
my waist silent—
turning
in your hands.

Ballet is an utterance
without sound. Listen:
since you left me,
I can't seem to move
in all this white space.

Giselle goes mad
before Act II.

Reading Into Love

I come back to books with a longing
I've had for no other, tearing
at their pages with the crazed
intensity I once directed at men.

Both have taken me through conflict
and climax like surfer to crest,
riding with me through routine,
entering the wave of spontaneity,
the heart of passion,
lying with me between cool sheets,
all bindings broken,
pulps swollen,
their bodies warmed by the eager
hands that hold them.

Monstera

illustration
by Karen K. Ono

excerpt from
The False Witness

The following is excerpted from a play entitled *The False Witness*. The setting is the Gate of Heaven. Adolf Hitler is now being brought before the Celestial Criminal Court of the High Tribunal to answer for his earthly crimes. If convicted, he will be sentenced to the Final Circle of Hell. Hitler is being prosecuted by Virgil, the great Roman Poet. Hitler will answer the charges in his own words as recorded from the earthly transcripts of that period.

We pick up the action as the Chief Lord Justice enters the Courtroom. He wears the traditional robe, wig, and is adorned with three pairs of wings which denote the highest rank of a seraphic jurist.

Ch LJ: The High Tribunal is now called into session.

We have convened today to hear a Bill of Indictment brought by the Spirit of Man against one Adolf Hitler, Reich Chancellor and Fuehrer of the German nation from 1933 until 1945.

For only the third time in the history of man has this tribunal been convened to hear so monumental a case.

In the year 42 BC, this Court heard the case against Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longus, rendering a verdict of guilty for their part in the conspiracy murder of Julius Caesar, First Prelate of Rome. They were convicted of crimes against humanity and their souls were sentenced to dwell forever in the Last Circle of the Inferno.[1]

In the year One, the Tribunal heard the case against Judas Iscariot, rendering a verdict of guilty for his part in the betrayal of Jesus of Nazareth. He was convicted of crimes against G__d and his soul was sentenced to dwell in perpetuity in the Last Circle of the Inferno.[2]

The Celestial Criminal Court of the High Tribunal is now prepared to hear the case brought by the Spirit of Man against Adolf Hitler and to determine if those charges set forth in the

indictment be true and certain and furthermore to render a proper verdict in the eyes of Almighty G__d.

Will the Bailiffs bring the accused before the Tribunal.

(The bailiffs bring Hitler before the Chief Lord Justice. Hitler is dressed in the full military regalia of Der Fuehrer. The uniform carries the Iron Cross and the Swastika arm band)

Ch LJ: Let the Clerk of the Court present the indictment.

(The Clerk now reads the indictment against Hitler)

Crimes against humanity:

To wit: For the murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhuman acts against the civilian population before and during the war. For persecution for political, racial and religious reasons.[3] For the wanton murder of 11 million civilians including the premeditated and willful extermination of six million Jews and for the implementation of a policy of racial genocide against his fellow members of the human race.

Crimes against his countrymen:

To wit: For the creation of a German despotism which pressed for war by enslaving justice and freedom through terror, corruption, faithlessness, lies, and disregard for the most sacred human rights; which initiated war against its neighbors, violating international agreements, and waged with numberless and unparalleled cruelties, and by this criminal madness delivered the German people into inexpressible misery and its noble culture into horrible devastation.[4]

Crimes against G__d:

To wit: For the idolatrous worship of war, violence and brutality toward his fellow man: For bearing false witness against the chosen people: For invoking the holy name in vain to further his covetous and barbaric ambitions; For the willful breach of the divine commandments delivered at Sinai. What is your plea?

Hitler: (*defiantly*) Unschuldig!

Ch LJ: The Tribunal so records the accused's plea of innocent. Does the accused wish to make a statement?

Hitler: As Reichfuehrer of the Greater German Reich I accept political responsibility for all my own acts carried out on my orders. These acts were exclusively carried out for the welfare of the German people and because of my oath to the Deutschland. I am responsible for these acts only to the German people. I must strongly reject the accusations that my acts, for which I accept full responsibility, should be described as criminal.[5]

(*ardently*) Love and loyalty to my people alone have guided me in all my thoughts, actions and life. They gave me the power to make the most difficult decisions which have ever confronted mortal man.[6]

It is untrue that I or anybody else in Germany wanted war. It was wanted and provoked exclusively by those international statesmen who either were of Jewish origin or worked for Jewish interests. Centuries will go by, but from the ruins of our towns and monuments the hatred of those ultimately responsible will always grow anew. They are the people whom we have to thank for all this: international Jewry and its helpers.[7]

Ch LJ: Let the record show that the accused has entered a motion pro se and will act as counsel on his own behalf.

Will the accused please enter the dock.

(Hitler is escorted to Defendant's Dock by the bailiffs)

Mr. Virgil, you may commence with your opening statement.

(Virgil, dressed in Roman senatorial raiment, rises majestically)

Virgil: Thank you, My Lord Justice.

PER ME SI VA NE LA CITTA DOLENTE,
PER ME SI VA NE L'ETTERNO DOLORE,
PER ME SI VA TRA LA PERDUTA GENTE.[8]
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE SUFFERING CITY,
THROUGH ME THE WAY TO THE ETERNAL PAIN,
THROUGH ME THE WAY THAT RUNS AMONG THE LOST.

Yes, my Lord, you remember well the inscription on the gates of hell. The gates through which the accused will enter if you find him guilty of the crimes so stated in the Bill of Indictment. We ask you to let Charon ferry his soul across the river of the damned to be condemned to suffer forever in the Last Circle of Hell.

For I propose to prove to the Tribunal that the vast criminality orchestrated by the accused springs from a crime against the Spirit of Man. A doctrine which, denying all spiritual, rational and moral values, sought to plunge humanity back into barbarism. This sin against the Spirit of Man is the original sin of the accused and his regime of death. We are brought back through the millennia to the most primitive ideas of the savage tribe. All the values of civilization accumulated in the course of centuries are rejected, all traditional ideas of morality, justice, the law give way to the primacy of race, its instincts, its needs, its sadistic compulsions. In the

20th century, Germany goes back beyond Christianity, beyond Hamurabi, beyond the Pharaohs to the primitive barbarity of Neanderthal justice.

Without your judgment, history might incur the risk of repeating itself, crime would become epic and the Nazi criminal enterprise a last Wagnerian tragedy.[9] We pray that after your judgment, the accused will be inscribed permanently as the quintessential criminal and his soul forever condemned to the final circle of hell, La Citta Dolente.

Ch LJ: The Prosecution may now proceed with the examination of the accused.

Virgil: Herr Hitler, on what ground do you now justify your treatment of the Jews?

Hitler: If, with the help of his Marxist creed, the Jew is victorious over the other peoples of the world, his crown will be the funeral wreath of humanity and the planet will, as it did thousands of years ago, move through the ether devoid of men.[10]

Virgil: And your mission was to save the world from the Jews?

Hitler: I believe that I was acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator.[11]

Virgil: So, it is in the name of G__d that you justify these monstrous crimes.

Hitler: Objection!

Ch LJ: Sustained. The accused's culpability has not been established.

Hitler: Yes, I was doing the work of the Lord in dealing with these Christ-killers. The Jew's life was only of this world, and his spirit was inwardly as alien to true Christianity as his nature two thousand years previous was to the great founder of the doctrine.[12]

Virgil: (*forcefully*) Objection! The Jews are not on trial here!

Ch LJ: Sustained.

Hitler: (*adamantly*) Yes, the Jews are on trial. I have committed no crimes because the world was happy to finally resolve the Jewish question once and for all. The great Luther wanted to get rid of them. Even the Vatican agreed with me. Within six months of taking power, the papal secretary of state signed a concordant with me, knowing full well my policies toward the Jews. Pius the XII never objected to my methods. So why am I branded a criminal?

Virgil: (*beseeching the Lord Justice*) Objection!

Hitler: We tried to get them to emigrate. Nobody wanted them. You saw what happened at Evian. Only the bleeding hearts in Holland and Denmark wanted any Jews.

Virgil: My Lord, I vigorously protest . . .

Ch LJ: Order!

Hitler: (*pounding his fist, he continues furiously*) Not only was I doing the work of the Almighty, I was rendering a great service to my country and to mankind. I was doing what the civilized world wanted me to do. They made their judgment and I carried it out.

(The Chief Justice calls a brief recess in order to restore order to the proceedings.)

(As the trial resumes, Virgil enters into the record evidence that the Nazis intentionally burned the Reichstag building on February 26, 1933 in order to blame the Communists and thus dupe then President Paul von Hindenburg into signing the "Emergency decree for the people and the state." This law suspended the Constitution and laid the ground work for the future police state run by the Gestapo and SS. Hitler denies responsibility for the fire blaming the arson on van der Lubbe, a Dutchman, found at the scene of the fire. Hitler further maintains that the Emergency decree was necessary to deter the communist threat, which he claims was even invading the world of art and literature. The trial resumes.)

Virgil: So Bolshevism even reached out to contaminate art?

Hitler: It was the spiritual preparation of political Bolshevism.[13]

Virgil: And you decided to do something about it?

Hitler: Is it not the business of the state, of its leaders, to prevent a people from being driven into the arms of spiritual madness?[14]

Virgil: So it was permissible for the state to control the artistic and literary creations of its people?

Hitler: (*sardonically*) Was it permissible to dish up the hallucinations of lunatics or criminals to the healthy world?[15] What did they manufacture? Misformed cripples and cretins, women who inspire only disgust, men who are more like wild beasts, children who, were they alive, must be regarded as under G__d's curse.[16]

For if the age of Pericles seems embodied in the Parthenon, the Bolshevistic present was embodied in a cubist monstrosity.[17]

But after all, Herr Prosecutor, what were Schiller, Goethe, or Shakespeare compared to the heroes of the newer German poetic art?[18]

Virgil: And Herr Chancellor, do you think Schiller and Goethe would have joined in on the events of May 10, 1933? You do remember? At the Franz Josef Platz near the University of Berlin.

(Virgil points to the cauldron and the flames appear)

The Deutsche Studentenschaft with their torches.

(Virgil approaches the cauldron)

(*with bitter irony*) Yes, Herr Chancellor. You wanted "to transform the German spirit itself" den Geist an sich. Burn books. Into the pyre, 20,000 books. Surely, you could purge the national spirit of un-German thought. Surely Goethe and Schiller would have applauded as the books burned and your benedictions illumined the night.

(Virgil recreates the Nazi book burning by throwing the works of Zola, Freud, Mann and Gide into the flaming cauldron.)

Hitler: (*shouting angrily*) Degenerates, Jews.

(A brief recess is called. When the trial resumes, Virgil now enters into evidence the racial law of 1935 which was known as the "Protection of German blood and honour." This law among other things:

1) Prohibited marriages between Jews and Germans.
2) Forbid sexual relations between Jews and Germans.

Virgil questions Hitler about this law.)

Virgil: Does the accused recollect the document?

Hitler: Yes.

Virgil: Can you tell the Tribunal the purpose of this law?

Hitler: With all due respect to the Tribunal, bear in mind, my Lord, the devastations which Jewish bastardization was visiting on our nation each day, and consider that this blood poisoning could be removed from our national body only after centuries, if at all; consider further how racial disintegration dragged down and often destroyed the last Aryan values of our German people, so that our strength as a culture-bearing nation was visibly more and more involved in a regression.[19]

Virgil: And it was this culture-bearing man known as the Aryan that you sought to protect? This anthropological myth upon which you now attempt to justify the persecution of millions of people?

Hitler: Objection!

Ch LJ: Sustained.

Hitler: (*arrogantly*) All the human culture, all the results of art, science and technology that we saw before us then, were almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan. This very fact admits of the not-unfounded inference that he alone was the founder of all higher humanity . . .[20]

Virgil: I object, my Lord. What relevance does this meandering have to the issue at hand?

Ch LJ: Herr Hitler, what is the point of this soliloquy?

Hitler: Just as the Jew, himself, systematically ruined women and girls, he did not shrink from pulling down the blood barriers for others, even on a large scale. It was Jews who brought the Negroes into the Rhineland, always with the same secret thought and clear aim of ruining the hated white race by the necessarily-resulting bastardization, throwing it down from its cultural and political height, and himself rising to be its master.[21]

Virgil: So the Jews sought world domination by destroying the racial purity of the Aryan people?

Hitler: Yes!

Virgil: And the "Law for the protection of German blood and German honour," heretofore introduced into evidence, was to protect the Aryan people from this threat?

Hitler: Yes!

Virgil: Will the accused deign to reveal to the Tribunal, how he arrived at this Darwinistic sophism!

Hitler: Every animal mates only with a member of the same species. The titmouse seeks the titmouse, the finch the finch, the stork the stork, the field mouse the field mouse, the dormouse the dormouse, the wolf the she-wolf.[22]

Virgil: (*with a sense of disbelief*) Titmice, storks, finches! It is this mutation of Mendel, this perversion of Darwin, upon which you now justify the persecution of millions of innocent people.

Hitler: Objection!

Virgil: The wanton murder of 11 million civilians . . .

Hitler: Objection!

Ch LJ: Sustained!

Virgil: (*indignant rage*) Murder, extermination, enslavement, racial genocide based on a counterfeit biology and spewed forth by this dilettante, this simplificateur terrible.

Hitler: (*shouting*) Silence!

Ch LJ: Order in the Tribunal!

Virgil: (*assailing Hitler*) And you, Herr Hitler, the consecrated Aryan, the Prometheus of the German Reich "from whose bright forehead the divine spark of genius has sprung at all times."[23]

Could you be the very same? The high school dropout, the vagrant, the hypochondriac . . .

(The Chief Justice calls a brief recess and summons both Virgil and Hitler into his chambers where he admonishes them about maintaining order and propriety during the trial.

When the proceedings resume, Virgil introduces evidence on the Nazi's plan to destroy Christianity as it currently existed. It was known as the "The program and tenets of the religion of National Socialism." It was the blueprint for the annihilation of Christianity and included among other things:

1) Cessation of the printing and dissemination of the Bible.
2) Removal of the cross from all churches, cathedrals and chapels.
3) The replacement of the cross with the swastika.
4) The replacement of the Bible with "Mein Kampf."

Hitler answers the accusations.)

Hitler: National Socialist and Christian concepts were irreconcilable. The Christian churches had built upon man's ignorance, and were endeavoring to keep the greatest possible number of people in a state of ignorance.

Our National Socialist concept of the world was on a far higher plane than were the ideas of Christianity, whose essential points had been taken over from the Jews. For that reason, too, we had no need of Christianity.[24]

Virgil: (*disbelieving*) "Mein Kampf" replaces the Bible; the swastika and the sword supplant the cross?

(Virgil pulls a flaming cross from the cauldron and holds it near the eyes of Hitler as if to examine a strange being)

(*whispering*) Are you the would-be Messiah?

(*voice rises*) No, you are the Medusa "whom no man shall behold and draw again the breath of life."

(*in a commanding voice*) Look closely ye angels at this baleful stare and remember well the eyes of evil.

(After a brief recess, the Trial resumes with Virgil introducing evidence on the Holocaust.)

Virgil: My Lord, Prosecution proposes to prove that the accused carried out a premeditated and willful scheme to exterminate all European Jewry, that he acted with malitia praecogitata,

malice prepense and with the "dictate of a wicked, depraved and malignant heart."

(Virgil introduces evidence on activities of Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing-units attached to the Wehrmacht that rounded up and murdered Jews in the Russian theatre of war.)

Hitler: (*annoyed*) What is the point of this jabbering! What was coming true for them was my prophecy which I voiced in my Reichstag speech of January 30, 1939. It was that if international financial Jewry succeeded in plunging the nations into another world war, the result would not be the Bolshevization of the world and thus victory of Jewry, but the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe.[25]

Virgil: Is that your answer to the murder of . . .

Hitler: (*vehemently*) What murder! The Jews were our destruction. They provoked and brought about this war. What they meant to achieve by it was to destroy the German state. This plan had to be frustrated.[26]

Virgil: Six million innocent lives.

Hitler: Innocent! Every German soldier's death in this war was the Jew's responsibility. They had it on their conscience, hence, they had to pay.[27]

(Virgil enters into evidence the minutes of the Wannsee Conference held in Berlin, January 20, 1942, which indicate the number of Jews then under German occupation and the method and purpose for deportation to the east for the implementation of the "Final solution" to the European Jewish "Question.")

Virgil: My Lord, here we have history's most notorious blueprint. Designed by the master architect of evil. In these minutes are included the premeditated scheme to willfully and systematically murder an entire race of people.

Hitler: (*angrily*) The Jews were to blame for this war. The treatment we gave does no wrong. They have more than deserved it.[28]

Virgil: For the record, Herr Hitler, was there any Jew whom you would have spared? Might you have saved Albert Einstein, Nobel Prize, Physics, 1920?

Hitler: (*contemptuously*) Einstein, the alien mountebank. The theory of relativity signaled the approach of Jewish world rule which was to force down German manhood irrevocably and eternally to the level of lifeless slave.[29]

Virgil: (*matter of factly*) The Jew, Niels Bohr, Nobel Prize, Physics, 1922, whose work revolutionized conceptions of the structure of the atom . . .

Hitler: Modern physics was an instrument of world Jewry for the destruction of Nordic science . . . True physics was a creation of the German spirit.[30]

Virgil: The Jews, James Franck and Gustav Hertz, Nobel Prize, Physics, 1925, whose research led to the discovery of the laws governing the impact of an electron on an atom . . .

Hitler: (*infuriated*) Objection! What relevance is there in naming a bunch of Jews? This ferment of decomposition.[31]

Ch LJ: What is your point, Mr. Virgil?

Virgil: My Lord, the accused has subjected us to a continuous stream of invectives against the Jews. I want the record to show that those named here along with countless other Jews through the millennia sought the advancement of humanity, not its destruction.

Ch LJ: Proceed.

Virgil: Would the "Final solution" have included the Jew, Otto Stern, Nobel Prize, Physics, 1943, whose research advanced the development of detecting the magnetic moment of protons?

Hitler: (*adamantly*) Yes!

Virgil: The Jew, Otto Loewi, Nobel Prize, Medicine, 1936, whose work led to discoveries relating to the chemical transmissions of nerve impulses?

Hitler: (*violently pounding his fist*) Yes! and forever yes!

Virgil: (*calmly*) Would the "Final solution" have included Jesus of Nazareth, founder of Christianity?

Hitler: (*surprised*) What?

Virgil: Jesus of Nazareth, son of Yosef and Miriam, descended from the House of David.

Do you not remember, Herr Chancellor, your First Supplementary Decree of the Reich Citizenship Law? A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews.

Hitler: Objection!

Virgil: (*demanding*) Answer the question! Would the "Final solution" have included Jesus of Nazareth?

Hitler: (*evasively*) Objection! The question is a hypothetical occurrence.

Ch LJ: Herr Hitler, the transcendent spirits of holy men are not limited by time and space. The question goes to the issue of your intent. Prosecution may proceed.

Virgil: And if Jesus were selected to go to the ovens of Auschwitz and he appealed to Obersturmbanfuehrer Eichmann: "But Herr Eichmann, surely it cannot be a crime to be born a Jew!"

Would Eichmann have said selektion![32]

Hitler: Silence!

Virgil: (*unrelenting*) And if he beseeched SS-Reichfuehrer Himmler: "But Herr Himmler, I appeal to you for mercy. Surely to be a Jew in the service of the Almighty doesn't deserve the oven and the pit."

Would Himmler have said selektion!

And if Jesus appeared before you, Herr Chancellor, the Fuehrer of Das Gross Deutsche Reich des Deutsches Volkes, and asked: "But surely, Reichfuehrer Hitler, son of a Catholic, you are my last recourse for mercy. Surely, you would not include me, the founder of Christianity, in the Final solution. To be born a Jew, do I deserve so cruel a fate?"

And Herr Fuehrer, would your answer have been selektion?

Hitler: (*frightened, yet defiant*) Silence! Seien sie ruhig!

(Virgil angrily approaches the Defendant's Dock)

Virgil: (*enraged*) So you, Adolf Hitler, Reich Chancellor, Supreme Ruler of the Aryan race, Der Fuehrer Das Deutsches Geist, you are the Christ Killer!

(Chief Lord Justice calls a brief recess before requesting summation argument.)

Ch LJ: Herr Hitler, you may proceed with your final argument.

(Hitler fixes his stare upon the Chief Lord Justice)

Hitler: (*defiantly*) It is not you, gentlemen, to pass judgment on me. That judgment is spoken by the eternal court of history. That court will judge us as Germans who wanted only the good of their own people and fatherland, Germans who wanted to fight and die. You may pronounce me guilty a thousand times over, but the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to tatters the brief of the prosecutor and the sentence of this court. For she acquits us.[33]

Ch LJ: Prosecution may now proceed with his statement.

Virgil: My Lord, the task before the Tribunal is a solemn one. To weigh the evidence and determine whether or not the accused is guilty of the crimes so cited in the indictment, crimes so malevolent and grotesque but that we know the facts to be so, we would otherwise think that the acts of the accused would

be part of some fictional tale invented by a deranged novelist. But the tale wasn't fiction, my Lord, and its author wasn't creating fantasy, but a story whose epilogue can be found in ovens of Auschwitz.

For our purposes the story begins on February 27, 1933, with the Reichstag fire. Here we established ab initio the true character of the accused and his regime. Fearful that the parliamentary process would not accommodate their lust for power, the accused and his henchmen ordered the Reichstag building set on fire with the secret desire to blame the Communists. We have shown that under this fraudulent pretense the accused prevailed upon Hindenburg to sign the "Emergency decree for the people and the state," thus giving life to a form of despotism unparalleled in the history of mankind. For this infamous decree suspended the Constitution and began the police state behind which lay the deathheads of the Gestapo and the SS.

But the lustful ambitions of the accused did not cease with dominion over people and territory. He wanted control over thought. Even science fiction, my Lord, couldn't have imagined a more repressive intellectual order than sought by the accused. We established before the Tribunal that on May 10, 1933, under the auspices of Josef Goebbels, intellectual repression took on a new depth when the Deutsche Studentenschaft set their torches to the works of man's greatest thinkers. Under the iron fist of the Nazi regime, thought could be criminal. Woe to him who meditated upon Freud, or Gide,or Zola.

But these crimes were only part of this villainous scheme. For the accused perpetrated crimes that touched the very core of humanity. We documented for the record, the Nazi program for the annihilation of Christianity and in its place the so-called National Reich Church, a church without pastors, without the Bible, without the cross. My Lord, I am struck dumb to describe this arrogant effrontery to G__d and man. For the accused would have had mankind return to the barbarian paganism of centuries past, thereby ruthlessly snuffing out man's quest for spiritual illumination. And finally, my Lord, we submitted documentary proof on humanity's most terrifying nightmare, the conscious, willful, and premeditated attempt to exterminate an entire people and the beliefs for which they stood.

A people for whom the Lord spoke: "And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."[34]

Let us return now through the millennia, as we reckon the earthly chronicle, to the slave pits of Egypt, where we hear the Hebrews groaning under the hard labor of Ramses II. "And the Lord heard their voices, and saw their affliction, and toil and oppression."[35] And with a mighty hand he brought them out of the land of Egypt, to the wilderness where he set them before Mount Sinai to receive the Lord's commandments, a set of laws which would guide man's ethical and moral conduct for centuries to come: (*in a voice like a Old Testament Prophet*) "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Alas Herr Hitler, do you not hear them as they profess their everlasting faith even as they enter the ovens and as they go down into the pit? "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"[36]

(*passionately*) And did the accused succeed in his evil scheme? Did he snuff out their hopes and dreams for a promised land?

(Virgil pulls a Menorah from the flaming cauldron as a vision of the perished souls passes before him.

Virgil points the flaming Menorah towards the Heavenly host and defiantly declares)

Am Yisrael Chai! The people of Israel live!

(Virgil approaches the bench with his final plea)

And now, my Lord Justice, it is time. It is time to ask that justice be done. The prosecution for only the third time in history seeks the maximum penalty: that the accused, Adolf Hitler, be sentenced to the Final Circle of Hell to remain in perpetuity in the jaws of Lucifer.

(Virgil's voice rises with emotion)

We seek justice, my Lord, and we now summon the Tribunal accordingly: that "the Judges shall inquire diligently: and behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified against his brother; then shall ye do unto him, as he had proposed to do unto his brother; so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee. And those that remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil in the midst of thee. And thine eye shall not pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."[37]

(The Chief Lord Justice adjourns to his chambers to consider his decision)

(Virgil nervously stares at the Celestial Clock while awaiting the verdict. Hitler fixes his baleful stare upon the door through which the Chief Lord Justice will return to the courtroom.)

(The Chief Lord Justice re-enters the courtroom.)

Ch LJ: "Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni"[38]
The banners of the king of hell draw closer.
Will the accused approach the Tribunal.

(Hitler stands directly before the Chief Lord Justice)

Whereas, you, Adolf Hitler, have been indicted of crimes so specified which said indictment hath been certified before us in our present parliament; and you thereupon have been arraigned, and upon such arraignment hath pleaded not guilty;
Let it now be known, upon the pleadings and evidence heretofore submitted, we find you guilty as charged.

(Hitler's eyes drop to the floor and his hands hang limply at his sides)

We sentence you to suffer "eternal exile" from G__d in the Final Circle of Hell as the ultimate criminal and to be imprisoned in ice with your spirit to be mangled in the teeth of Lucifer, to remain there "fixed forever in the evil you have chosen by your perverted acts."

And whereas judgment hath been given in our said parliament, that the said Adolf Hitler, not having the fear of God before his eyes, shall be delivered unto the hand of Charon and ferried across the river of the damned to be lead through the inferno to the City of Dis to be forever devoured in the mouth of Lucifer. And furthermore that the Final Circle of Hell, now known as Judecca, from this time forth and forevermore shall be known as Germania.

Let the record of these proceedings be permanently emblazoned in the memory of mankind to serve as a warning to those who would commit such crimes against G__d and man.

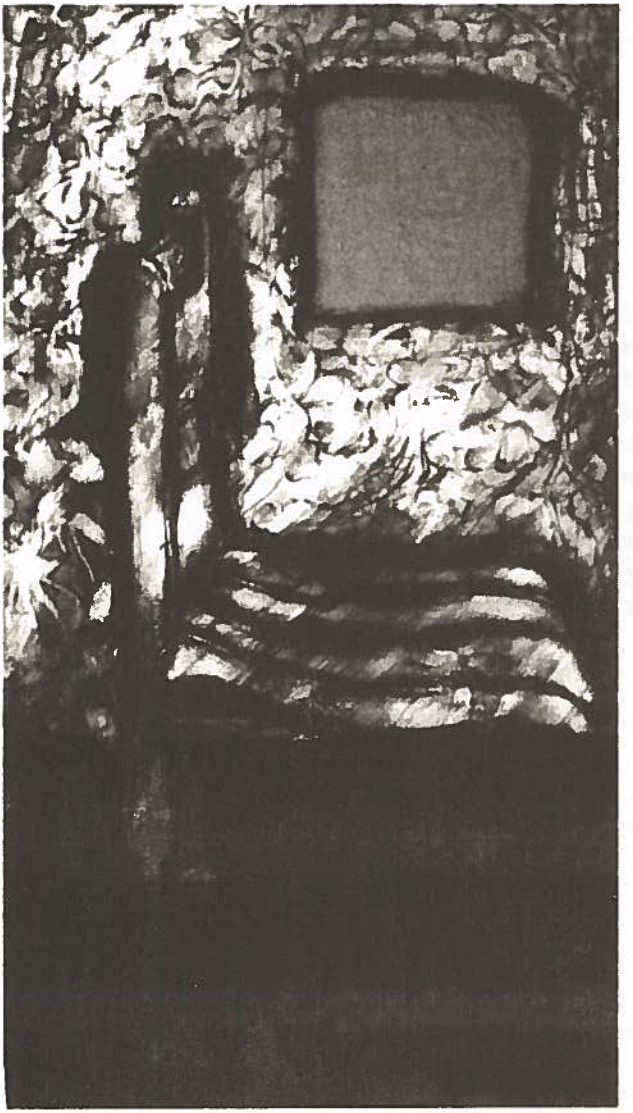
Hearken 'o mankind to the words of the Tribunal. There is a final accounting of your acts and justice will be dispensed.

This Judgment is now marked under the hand and seal of this Celestial Criminal Court of the High Tribunal.

CURTAIN

Works Cited

1. Dante, A. "Canto XXXIV." *Inferno*, Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam Books, 1980.
2. Dante, "Canto XXXIV."
3. Benton, W. and G. Grimm. *Nuremberg: German View Of The War Trials.* Southern Methodist University Press, 1955. 84.
4. Benton and Grimm, 203.
5. Tusa, A. and J. *The Nuremberg Trial.* Atheneum, 1984. 150. (Goering's opening statement at the Nuremberg Trials.)
6. Shirer, W. *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.* New York, 1960. 1124. (Hitler's Last Will and Testament).
7. Shirer, 1124. (Hitler's Last Will and Testament.)
8. Dante, "Canto III."
9. Conot, R. *Justice at Nuremberg.* Harper & Row, 1983. (Opening statement from French Prosecutor Francois de Menthon at Nuremberg Trials.)
10. Hitler, A. *Mein Kampf.* Trans. Ralph Manheim. Boston. Lines 2386-2389.
11. Hitler, lines 2392-2393.
12. Hitler, lines 11332-11335.
13. Hitler, lines 9631-9632
14. Hitler, lines 9511-9513
15. Hitler, lines 9653-9654
16. Noakes, J. and G. Pridham. *Nazism.* Vol. 1. New York: Shocken Books, 1983. 399. (Hitler's speech at the opening of the House of German Art in Munich, July 19, 1937.)
17. Hitler, lines 9632-9633
18. Hitler, lines 9548-9549
19. Hitler, lines 20821-20827
20. Shirer, 86.
21. Hitler, lines 12039-12049
22. Hitler, lines 10466-10469.
23. Shirer, 86.
24. Remak, J. *The Nazi Years.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969. (Martin Bormann's instruction to party district leaders.)
25. Remak, 155. (Joseph Goebbels editorial in *Das Reich*, November 16, 1941.)
26. Remak, 155.
27. Remak, 155.
28. Remak, 155. (Goebbels editorial in *Das Reich.*)
29. Shirer, 251. (German physics Professors Mueller and Bieberback comment on Einstein.)
30. Shirer, 250. (German physics Professor Rudolphe Tomaschek comments.)
31. Hitler, line 16582.
32. German word for selection, e.g., to be selected for gassing.
33. Shirer, 78. (Hitler's trial for treason, February, 1924.)
34. Genesis XXVIII, 14.
35. Deuteronomy XXVI, 7.
36. Psalm 27.
37. Deuteronomy XIX, 18.
38. Dante, "Canto XXXIV", line 1.



Sea

mixed media painting
by Hanae Uechi Mills

Lab Notes

Test your words:
which ones paralyze,
which merely stun.
Study how pressure, heat
ignite a phrase.
Drill thin lines
deep below the skin
until sparks strike,
and the image detonates,
leaving shrapnel
in their souls.

Gentle Knuckles

On Tuesday she told me she wanted to toughen
the skin around her ring. Roughing
brings a beauty— like cheeks against buckles,
bare feet on pavement, the picks in pressed
cloth, though clean and closely tended.

On Wednesday she wanted to weave and rend.
Lost time, before, long loathings
ago, somewhere, I see her suckle
our children, mouth and breast meshed
warm together, an open oven

I stood before, all but broken
even then, slipping, my touch a thing
unfelt, unwanted, a perverted uncle.
I tried and failed, whatever the test
was or is or wasn't. When

the boys were babies we had to bend
our lives to theirs, I thought, toughing
it through those years, but now I tuck her
in. Afternoons, our bed's a nest
she sinks into. Our lives descend.

Too much has broken to time and children.
Our flesh is soup, supposing nothing.
Soft and gnarled, she sucks a knuckle,
gathering faults— her fingers, my flesh.
Between the bones, joints are blind again.

Gentle knuckles numb my love.

The Baby's Eyes

The cast of dying blooms and branches caught
the green and twisting spiralled baby's eyes—
ocean-colored, lulling tidepools, haunted
fierce copies of ancient sweat and queries.

The green and twisting spiralled baby's eyes
mirror mine, but calmer and yet more
fierce copies of ancient sweat and queries.
The sweet pile grows, she watches, mouthing for

mirrors mine, but calmly, even more
heavy-lidded, the cast and pull of waves.
The sweet pile grows. She watches, mouthing for
the fish, the water-snakes in linking caves,

heavy-lidded, the cast and pull of waves.
The surgeon's mouth waters as she cuts.
The fish, the water-snakes in linking caves
slithering her brain's cortextual mud.

The surgeon's mouth waters as she cuts
the shirking nerves, like spiralled shells at fault,
slithering her brain's cortextual mud.
Her anesthesia's weak, her muscles taut

with shirking nerves, like spiralled shells at fault
for weight and salt and quivering beauty.
Her anesthesia's weak, her muscles taut
bow strings in forgotten battles' duties

of weight and salt and quivering beauty,
fierce copies of ancient sweat and queries.
Like bow strings in forgotten battles' duties,
the green and twisting spiralled baby's eyes.

Crayola

For Bill Stafford

A dried broken Crayola with
torn skin is labeled "white."
It was in my crayon box,
a wood cigar box
Mom found in the attic.

This color became a lot of hues:
cold sledding snow, divinity candy,
meringue pie, milk shakes, whipped cream,
angel cake, drifting dunes,
my bedtime pillow, hospital rooms,
death sheets, cocaine, deadly clouds,
maggots, and blinding lights against
desert sand from fingers that pushed buttons,
while chameleons clutched a quaking earth.

They painted us all, those fingers,
into bloodying, fragile forms
like that speckled-stained color
I once played with—
now brittle hard.

All those dried broken Crayolas
with torn skins are of the same flesh now
as they lie in this rubble
fingers made.

Darktime Ritual

Venus of the shadows slips out her door into
the cool moonlight, looks, and drops her robe
around feet that propel her to my world.
Naked she patters around the curve
and through maple night shades,
reappears in patches of moon
until swallowed by more dark.

Walking to street-lit curbs the sylph pauses briefly,
then flies across bare streets. Chaste flesh
glides gracefully onto far walkway.
Brown tresses lift in breeze she makes.
Why she wanders in night each moon,
alone and into my place, I don't ask.

She doesn't see; I dare not speak. Not often I stalk her trek.
The roads she roams on nights are sacred, like the robe
I now clutch and breathe. The felt ache it causes
is no less than when I follow. So not to alarm,
the garment is dropped where found, but never in my world.
In cool heat crickets scratch relentless,
at ritual echoed each moon.

Acquaintances

"Maybe we . . ." The face had looked up at me for a moment, but the mouth stopped itself in mid-sentence and the head shook uncertainly.

"Maybe we what?" I said.

"Never mind," she said.

"What is it?" I said.

"Nothing," she said.

"Oh, please," I said. "You know how I hate it when you do that."

The chestnut eyes examined my floor tiles and the fingers played together. The right knee bounced a little. I placed a hand on it.

"Sorry," she said, still looking down. "You know, your oriental is getting dirty."

"You look beautiful in that dress," I said. "How is it that you look so beautiful all the time?"

"You're sweet," she said.

"No, you are," I said. "You look and taste and feel very sweet to me."

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What for?" I said.

"I just am," she said. "Sorry your oriental is getting so dirty."

"Damn that carpet," I said. "I got it at K-Mart."

"Sorry," she said. "Sorry I said that."

"It's all right," I said. "Don't apologize. Don't apologize for the things you say."

"Okay," she said. "I won't." The fingers were dancing on the black and white cotton of the dress. The right knee was keeping the beat. "Do you think we need some time apart?"

"Time apart?" I said.

"Yes," she said.

"How much time?" I said.

"Some time," she said, "apart." The eyes scanned the oriental. "Is your carpet navy or black?"

"What do you think?" I said.

"I can never tell," she said.

"Does it matter?" I said.

"Only to me," she said. "I like colors, you know."

"Yes, I know," I said. "You look great in colors. Beautiful. Me, I'll stick to monochromes."

"Monochromes?" she said.

"Never mind," I said.

"All right," she said.

"Time apart?" I said.

"Well, what do you think?" she said.

"How much time?" I said.

"Just some time," she said.

"Would it make you happy?" I said.

"Maybe," she said. "I don't know."

"Do whatever you need to do to make yourself happy," I said.

"What about you?" she said.

"I do what I need to do most of the time," I said. "Sometimes I even do things I don't need to do."

"I know," she said. "You're strange that way. I don't think you know what you need. Are you happy?"

"How can I know whether I'm happy if I don't even know what I need?" I said. "It's a silly question."

"Sorry," she said.

"Think nothing of it," I said. "What will you do?"

"*Je penserai*," she said.

"And you need to be away for that?" I said.

"It's hard sometimes," she said, "around you."

"Do whatever you need to do to make yourself happy," I said.

"All right," she said. "You'll be okay?"

"I am so far," I said.

"Please don't cry," she said. "I hate it when you cry."

"Who's crying?" I said. "I just have an ugly expression on my face. I'll try to get rid of it."

"Please don't cry," she said.

"I'm not," I said. "It's my allergy to dust. There's a lot of dust in this room."

"It must be the oriental," she said. "You really should get that cleaned."

"It's cheaper to buy a new one," I said. "Should I get navy or black?"

"I don't know. It only mattered to me, anyway," she said.

"Now we're talking in the *passé composé*," I said.

"I'll miss you," she said.

"I would hope so," I said.

"Please don't cry," she said.

"Something's in my eye," I said.

"I'll miss you," she said.

"Yes," I said. "I heard you."

"Goodbye," she said. "Please don't cry."

"Yes," I said.

The door shut. I lay on my bed a while before I got up and pulled out the leather book from the top drawer of my desk. Everyone needs to have a record of who their friends are. It comes in handy sometimes. I picked up the phone and dialed.

"Lenore, I'm going to spend some time apart and I wondered if you'd like to join me?" I said.

She was fixing a hole in the wall right now, but offered her condolences.

"Jennifer, I was wondering what you might tell me about spending time apart?" I said.

She was going to dinner right now, but said it can be very healthy and we all need solitude sometimes.

"What does it mean, Dianne, time apart?" I said.

"I don't know," Dianne said. "Do you want to come over? You can watch me clean my room."

"I'd rather help you," I said.

"That's fine too," Dianne said.

Dianne's room was messy. I helped her fold clothes and we talked about the odd people blowing horns down the street. We talked about life and how strange it was and after we'd admitted that we really didn't know anything about it at all, we became quiet. I played with one of Dianne's teddy-bears while she put her clothes away.

"I'm sorry I'm not very good company," Dianne said.

"I don't need very good company," I said, "just company. I don't need to be apart from everybody, do I?"

"Of course not. But why aren't you crying?" Dianne said.

"I don't cry. I have a dust allergy," I said.

"Bullshit," Dianne said. "Cry, damn it."

"Waste of water," I said. "Dehydrating."

"Would you rather cry alone in your bed tonight?" Dianne said.

"No," I said. "I don't need to be apart from everybody. But when I cry I get an ugly expression on my face."

"A side of you I haven't seen," Dianne said, "but I think we all do."

While I cried, Dianne's boyfriend, Jim, called. I tried to be quiet.

"I'm going over to Jim's," Dianne said.

"Do whatever you need to do to keep yourself happy," I said.

"What?" Dianne said.

"Never mind," I said. "We can walk out together."

It was raining a bit, just enough so that I wished it would rain some more. We walked by the fountain with two naked cherubs, water running from their mouths. It made me thirsty.

"They say she represents my mother," I said. "Can you believe that?"

"I'm going this way," Dianne said, "to Jim's."

"All right," I said.

"Are you okay?" Dianne said.

"I'm always okay," I said. "Is that shirt you're wearing navy or black? It's hard to see in this light."

"I don't know," Dianne said. "Does it matter?"

"Only to certain people," I said. "Goodnight, Dianne. Thank you."

I walked back to my car and put in one of my tapes. It was late and I drove the highway until the tape had played three or four times and the sky was changing color again. When I got home I went to bed. The phone woke me up sometime in the afternoon.

"I called to see if you were okay," Dianne said.

"I'm always okay," I said, "but thank you. What can you tell me about time apart?"

"Nothing," Dianne said.

"At least you're honest," I said. "Do you want to come over?"

"I'm supposed to meet Jim for lunch," Dianne said.

"I guess I'll have to decide the color of the carpet on my own then," I said.

"I guess so," Dianne said.

I sat in the big chair for a long time and stared at the oriental but all I saw were bits of string and food and paper. No pattern emerged. I looked through the leather book again.

Swimming

The sun comes down out of August nonstop, falling on grass, cement, and the wide expanse of water. I sit with my legs crossed over the lip of the pool, my feet sending out rings of water to lap at the edges. I have finished cleaning the house, a house of bachelors—all at work now, not expected for two more hours. Slowly I raise one leg as if wading through sand, clear, perfect sand. And the muscles of my thigh rise also, hard beneath the stretch of skin. I watch my leg rise another inch, suddenly pleased with its taut movement. The muscle flexes upward like a sleek animal, hidden, strong, something to be counted on. I run my fingers over my thigh, down the hollow created between quad and hamstring. I splash at the water, watch droplets run whole across the oiled skin as if I were waterproof, resistant to change.

I listen to the small transistor radio propped against an inflatable swan. More swans float out on the water, one upright, the other folded over, its head dragging on the surface as if exhausted. I stay on the warm cement, sometimes rolling over on one side, stretching out with my stomach pressed against the rough white stone.

I have been cleaning house every Monday all summer long for the three bachelors next door. The first week, I scrubbed out the showers and the tubs; I cleaned the stovetop, the kitchen floor; I dusted everything. When they came home, they were quite surprised. They knew they got a good deal for five dollars; they knew things here would never be the same. And so they let me use their pool while they work; they lend me this haven from home. Not that home is so bad and it's only across the fence. If it had been farther, perhaps my mother would say "No way, no seventeen-year-old of mine will be trotting off to clean bachelor houses outside of shouting distance." But here she lets me go, to my first job, and even if I am only next door, I am out of sight.

Over the summer, I learn a lot about the three bachelors: I find their parking tickets, their glasses of bourbon forgotten beside the bed. I know their aftershave, deodorant, their foot spray. I know what brand soap each uses, I know what kind of beer they drink, and I know exactly what they were doing on Sunday night.

But no one is home now. I reach for the big blow-up raft and slap it down on the water, my hands flat on its red plastic surface, hot from hours in the sun. I am brown all over except where my bikini hides my true whiteness. I love the line between brown and white, the distinct difference of summer and winter, a line created by my dedication to the sun and a single bathing suit. I scoot my butt closer to the water, dropping my legs straight into the deep end, the cold water running up my thighs, slapping against my crotch. The bottom of my bikini catches on the cement, pulling little threads out like cat scratches.

On the Fourth of July, the bachelors threw a party. They invited the entire neighborhood, including me and my parents. David, the youngest of the roommates at 22, invited the girls' softball team he coaches. He works as a banker downtown and on weekends he takes over the girls' team at the junior high. This is something my mother approves of—volunteering your spare time. So I think she must approve of David. He is five years older than me, but she says he is immature for his age and I think this is good—she sees him as another boy, even though I know this isn't true. I have seen him step out of the pool, water running down his chest and he looks different: his body is thicker, harder and the hair matted down on his chest is not like any boy I know. He goes to bars. He drives to San Francisco and goes dancing in the clubs. He can stay out all night. And he does.

On the night of the party, I wore my white shorts, the yellow polo shirt and my bikini underneath. As I dressed for the party, I stood looking back at my naked reflection in the hand mirror. I had let my hair grow all year, and on the Fourth of July, it reached the center of my back. Cut blunt, it fell as thick and yellow as the kitchen broom. I waved my hair across my bare shoulders, imagining it longer still, touching the small of my back, brushing the fine hairs just above my butt, and I smiled in anticipation.

At the party, people ran in and out of the two back doors, dripping from the pool, carrying towels pressed to their sides and drinks in their hands. My parents settled into club chairs near the bar set up in the family room. The walls there are papered in red velvet, revealing the taste of the owners who are stationed now in New Jersey. The bachelors rent this house until the family can return. On Mondays, when I dust this room, I sometimes sneak small sips of the liquor kept behind glass doors—Galiano, Kahlua, and the bitter Kentucky Bourbon, a favorite of the house.

Outside, the sun set and the pool glowed green with the underwater lights. The girls from the softball team splashed each other, squealing and calling for David to join them. Paper lanterns hung from some of the trees, and stereo music drowned out conversation

around the bowls of chips at poolside. I could feel the air hum with all the excitement of hot weather and beer. After dark, the moon came into the yard, full and white as snow.

I didn't feel like swimming on the Fourth of July, but spent most of the evening sitting near the pool, holding a grape Shasta filled with red wine. I didn't run into David until it was nearly time to go home. I was looking for my towel in the laundry room near the back door when he stepped inside and asked "What's up?" I told him and he helped me look, though we didn't turn on the light and all the towels looked grey in the falling moonlight. Still, we found my towel and as I stood up he leaned over and kissed me, not urgently, not planned out, but as soft as sleep. And I fell into this kiss, swamped with a feeling of paralysis through my arms and legs. I didn't move away at all, but then we were apart and I said "David." A statement. My voice came out husky, not mine at all, but separate from the child I felt beating in my chest. My armpits were damp, though the air had cooled since sunset. He touched my cheek with one finger and didn't say anything. He looked puzzled and I didn't understand. I think he looked afraid. Then he smiled and said how pretty I looked, he hopes I don't mind him and he'd better get back now. Then he was gone. I met my parents in the hallway and hoped they wouldn't notice anything because I was sure I must smell different.

That night was the first time I slept in the nude.

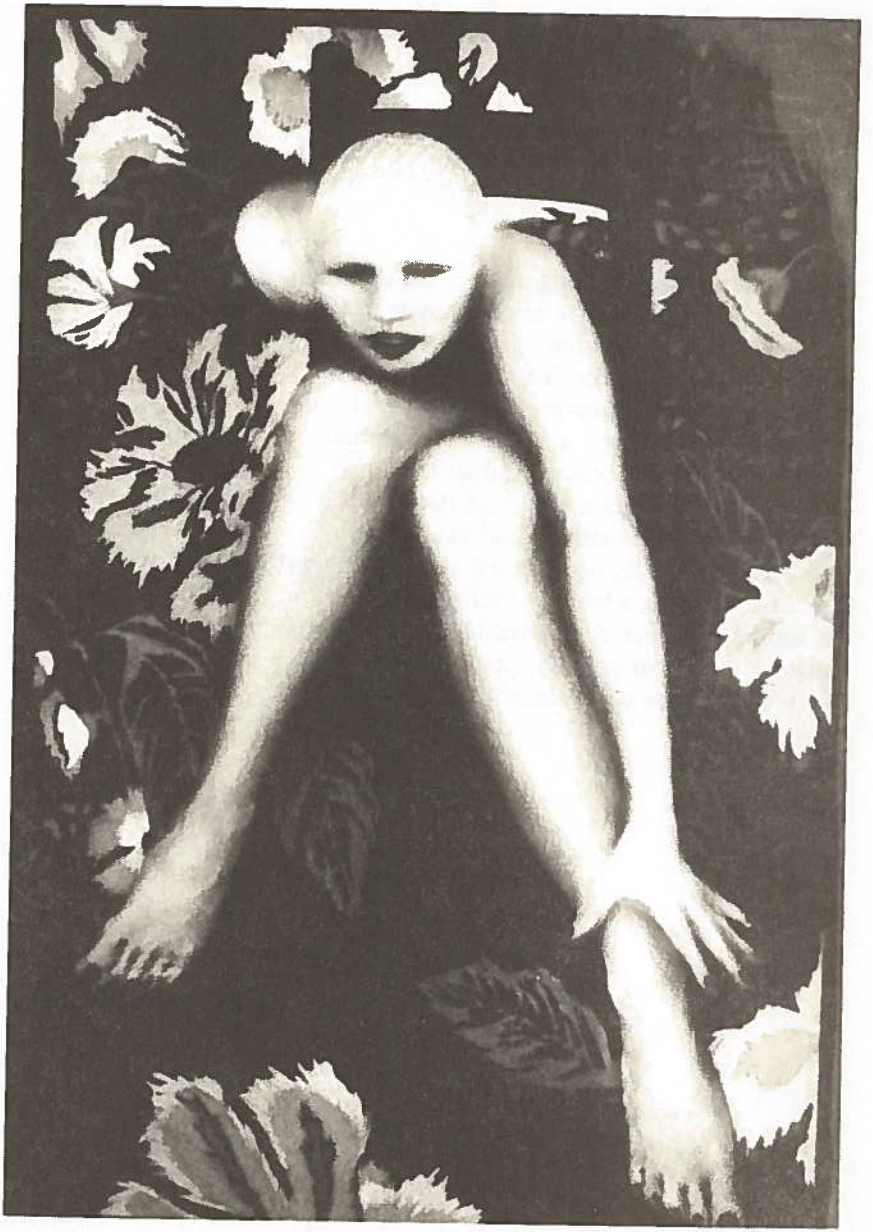
Later in the week I heard the party had gotten wild; there was skinny dipping and drinking until dawn, a scandal in the neighborhood. Rumors, of course, I told my mother, who debated about letting me get on with my job. "But don't worry, Mom," I said. "You can trust David." And she relented. As it turns out, we remain friends, not talking about the Fourth of July. I go on cleaning the house every Monday, swimming in their pool, and growing closer to eighteen.

Today, as I edge slowly into the water, one step at a time, I wonder what is it like, swimming naked. Is it free, is it like swimming in scandal? My stomach shrinks away from the creeping cold as I slip down the stairs, deeper into the pool. The raft rocks against the pool edge and I slide one hand inside my bathing suit, over the cheek and pull the pants down until my bottom is exposed on the step.

I look over my shoulder toward the fence, then back at the empty windows of the bachelors' house. With resolution, I grab at the knotted strings across my back, releasing the tension across my chest. For a brief moment, I feel a light breeze across the white skin before I drop, shuddering into the cold water. My stomach muscles contract; my nipples stand out in the water. I rub my palms across them both, catching the nipples between my fingers, sliding my hands over my stomach and then down the inside of my thighs. Underwater, I pull

off the bottoms, and hold my bikini with one hand as I push away from the steps toward the raft. The water rushes between my legs—not like a bath, I think, so cold and I feel heat escaping from all the white skin, as if my bathing suit had held it in all this time. And I swim away from the pool edges unattached: no raft, no support, no suit. I dive down to the pool bottom, running my hands over the rough surface, turning my body over and over, my hair flying everywhere. I look up through the depths and see the raft floating above, the sun shining through the red plastic, outlining my bikini riding on top. My heart rushes inside me: I'm gonna get caught, I'm gonna get caught. But I wait one more second before I burst out among the swans, gasping, reaching for the raft. One more minute, I think, as I part my legs, kicking through the water, trying out the splits. And then fear grabs me. Hands shaking, I pull on the bikini bottoms, wet and familiar, dragging against the current. I twist about, tying the strings across my back, covering the triangles of my breasts. I am safe. I am covered. And I am a little sad, but I smile at that sadness.

I lift myself out of the water, still smiling, my arms still strong and tan, and I breathe easy again. Now I feel the sun and water come together here at the pool. They meld into something new, crystallizing like a diamond. The water becomes bluer. I see blue shadows on the pool bottom, waving like leaves. I am here, I think, at this pool and I have made it mine.



The Bald Prima Donna

pastel painting
by Hanae Uechi Mills

Proposal

For you, there was nothing short of an entire life
of baths, you oiling and kneading my breasts like dough
and dabbing buds of lotion, pink as icing,
up and down my calves. You wanted me
to marry you, eat lemon curd on Saturdays
in a kitchen full of light and yellow placemats,
sip coffee dark as chocolate and let it
wallow on our tongues. You said there'd be
no drizzly days that sizzled and spat
with rush-hour cars; no morning papers stripped in haste,
like dirty linen on a breakfast table,
the nation's leaders dotted with burnt toast crumbs.
For you, there was no jelly, plain, in simple jars
that we could use again some day to drink from
if we needed to.

The Rest of My Life

unfolds
as we sit on the runway in the rain,
burning off excess fuel,
and I watch Louanne do
things with an oxygen mask
that take my breath away.

I fall in love with her shortly before take off.
I wrap myself in the soft contours
of her sectional couch
in Topeka
on a street with dogwood and screened-in porches;
I see it all clearly,
a preview of coming attractions:
Olivia Newton John on the FM,
mai-tai's, crackers and dip,
steaks medium rare on the grill,
holding hands during Jeopardy,
her warmth burrowed into my cardigan,
her breath sweet licorice on my neck
until bedtime . . .
when she tosses her head fetchingly,
turns on the dishwasher,
puts out the cat, compacts the trash,
slips upstairs to await me
in her shortie nightgown with the puppy dogs on them
in our large firm bed with the baby-blue ironed sheets,
and we go up and down together
with the rinse cycle,
getting very clean.

Lust Among the Melons

When the police arrive
they find me pawing the melons,
sounding them for ripeness,
splitting them with a firm whack of my machete,
mining the inner recesses,
nails dug in the skin,
juices flowing down my arms,
licking the surface clean of seeds
and grinning like a dodo
in the fluorescent chill of the supermarket.

"Drop the cantaloupe," they order,
weapons drawn, feet spread in the reglementary position,
their blue eyes taut with menace,
their badges iridescent,
their boots gleaming
in the raucous light of the Alpha Beta.
"You have the right to remain silent,"
they whisper seductively as they move in,
circling the rutabagas and the scallions,
crouched behind the cauliflower, beneath the Anjou pears;
"You have the right to an attorney . . ."

I bite my tongue to keep from screaming,
think of Camus before the car went off the road:
there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.
Easy for him to say.
What about the melons?
Honeydew, casaba, Persian and musk,
strewn in our path, carved on our ceilings,
singing to us from the produce bins,
making breathy propositions:
pick us up, play with us,
run your fingers across our flesh,
circumnavigate our firmness,
pry us open,
make us flow like the Euphrates.

passenger seat

lovely brown eyes
in rearview mirror —
close to home

passenger seat,
breasts strain blouse buttons —
missed our exit

Japanese Rock-Gardens

1.
Jutting up from the sea of gravel,
the rocks are smooth
as a seal's coat;
atop one stands a gardener,
his brisk loops

raking the pebbles
into women wearing bamboo hats,
or cormorants fishing
among off-shore reeds.

He concentrates on the rocks,
watching them breathe,
chunks of ice
flaming in the gravel,
pricking finger-paintings
underneath his eyes.

2.
The house is very still without her voice
to split the screens,
or the soil of skin
moving inside a transparent dress.

They had sometimes made love
wearing papier-mâché masks,
a dolphin's carcass
buried beneath the mint
of their bodies.

In the morning they sat
on taffeta mats
and sipped pekoe tea,
the masks washed
by the cool, lantern breezes.

Ernestine Anderson, Born Houston, 1928.

The flat, Houston air
curses by Montrose,
drifting into the bars,
croaking out damp blues—
sweat pushing through collars and thighs,

the drumbeat spearing fish
with its bony wrist,
catching the breeze of the horn
flaring up once more.

Out on the edge of the city
an eight year old girl sits at her window,
piano keys laboriously marked
in black and white pencil
on the ledge,
her head bobbing like a sparrow drinking,
the radio turned up just so
as she sings with the words,
fingers kneading and teasing
that windowsill piano,
sending the music out
against the wet back of the night.

Fried Mullet

"Betty," he called. "I've just finished that poem I was writing."

"What'd you say, Mike? I'm in the kitchen. Can't hear you."

He got up from the lounge chair in the living room and sat down at the table in the dining room. The table was partially set with place mats and plates for dinner, but Mike found space for his writing pad.

"That poem. I've finished it."

"You'll have to talk louder, Mike. I'm frying fish, and it's making a racket."

The odor of fish frying came to him then. He hadn't noticed it before. Writing the poem had focused his senses on the words he was creating.

"This one is really good, Betty, a crystalline gem, genuine, and no big words."

"Heard what?" she asked.

Mike could hear the sputtering of hot grease and the whir of the kitchen ventilator fan now. He hadn't noticed them before, either.

"Words, not 'heard.' No big words. I really think this is one an editor will want." He was almost shouting.

"That's nice, Mike, but you thought that about the ones you sent to *Atlantic, Harper's, The Nation,* and all those other magazines that send them back."

"I know, but this poem has something. It's . . . it's more professional. Listen, I'll read it. I call it 'The Poet.' "

He read in a loud voice.

> A lonely man, alone,
> must soon become a poet.
> In the sound of solitude
> I turn my ear upon myself;
> the sibilance of silence
> keens me to a fine awareness.
> The cough beyond the paper wall
> is piercing as a dagger's thrust,
> the wind about the distant soaring gull
> is heard within the eye, . . .

"Damn," said Betty, "this grease popped up on my hand."

"Can you hear it?" Mike asked.

"Yes, that was nice. Now finish setting the table, will you?"

"That was only part of it. Listen."

He read, louder than before.

the voice of her imagined
recurs and believably recurs again.
And though I write no single word
I am indeed a poet,
because I must interpret
by strangely diverse evidence
the symbols of my loneliness.

Betty came into the dining room carrying a platter of fried mullet, and put it on the table. She patted Mike on the cheek, and said, "That was sweet, real sweet. Will you take out the garbage before we eat? Those fish heads will stink up the house to high heaven."

The Power to See in the Dark

People who can see lies are like people who can see in the dark. I have night blindness, a fear of unlit places. Eventually, of course, I'm able to find my way through the dark, but only with a sleepwalker's jerky movements: arms outstretched and fumbling.

When I lie in bed at night I often find I cannot sleep. I am afraid of the dark.

Once when I was a little girl, I put a nickel in a gum machine and got one of my favorite charms, a small round globe that was a pale, milky green. It glowed faintly in my bedroom at night. I hid it under my pillow and put my flashlight under the bed. My flashlight was silver, with stencils that fit over the end to diffuse light on the ceiling in the shapes of stars, crescent moons, and smiling faces, flickering on the ceiling, looking down at me.

I always wondered about lantern shows. Something about the quality of that light is what I long for.

Late at night I turn on a bedside lamp and read the dictionary. *Belfries, benefice, cheval-de-frise, end point, grandiflora, hematite, illiquid, jug wine, kinase, libeccio, loquacious, loss leader, louis d'or, lovat, love apple, lovebird, lover.* Webster defines *lover*:

> **1 a:** *a person in love; esp: a man in love with a woman* **b** *pl: two persons in love with each other* **2:** *an affectionate or benevolent friend* **3:** *DEVOTEE* **4:** *PARAMOUR.*

I have a lover, but I'm not sure if he's in love with me. I know that he is not my affectionate and benevolent friend, my devotee, my paramour.

At night as I lie in bed, my life weighs heavy on me. It seems to be too much, it traps me, I trap myself. *To trap, traps, trapping, trapped. Trap-door, a lifting or sliding door covering an opening (as in a room, ceiling, or floor).* One who is trapped can, by implication, try to escape.

But how can I escape? What is there to escape from?

I can only turn on a light.

Once when I was little, I went to a science museum downtown, saw baby alligators in glass tanks, bought a long, fat pencil with a plastic cylinder full of tiny rocks, walked into a room that was dark. In that tiny dark room, there was a domed glass display, the cases inside un-

derlit, full of rocks that glowed purple, green, and mica-silver in the dark.

Nothing is glowing here.

I have watched the sky at night, imagined ways of escaping. I could fall from my window or run away. I could go to another city and become someone else.

When I close my eyes and turn toward the overhead light I see a network of pink, wet lace, veined with white, like a watermelon.

I can will myself, though, to see nothing. I can see only the darkness, can will myself to become totally attuned to the smell of the sheets, the rustle of the screen against the window pane, my cat's whiskers brushing my shoulder. I can will all faces to disappear, can will my life to race backward, turn backward towards a time when there was an explanation for everything, when there was someone to explain everything.

I have no answers.

I can only close my eyes and count to a hundred, very slowly, almost not breathing at all.

Figure in the Light

pastel painting
by Hanae Uechi Mills

The Man of *Shibui* Voice

1.

Shibui
Before the word, before the land,
before the man, there was a voice
coiling quietly in drowsy darkness,
curling above the hum of a Greyhound bus
with chords in foreign accent descending
softly, so softly that word became lyric
and small talk a lullaby sung to the soul.
Then the mystery began
with no way to explain the enchantment,
when something like a wound was opening,
when the words of my language were lacking,
then a search for definition began.

2.

Willow wind whispers over white
paper fortunes in a shrine garden;
the swish of plum-colored silk.
Peonies drop petals on sounding stones,
unseen waterfalls splash among cedars,
crows practice symphonies in cemeteries;
a bamboo flute sighs staccato.
Rain drips on paper umbrellas while
the sweet potato seller sings his
mournful tune and a soba man's horn
pipes haunting notes at midnight:
These are the sounds of the land.
Shibui; astringent, austere.

3.

There are firefly wings in the soft
phone voice here in his own night city;
blue-gray smoke, warmth without heat,
steam from a sleeping volcano.
We meet someplace on karma edge, on a
fragile bridge between peril and grace:
When he speaks about sin and suicide,
the words are consumed in music.
A foot on two shores, he is outlaw,
doomed to discord in his own land where
he is much in demand for songs and sex.
Shibui; melancholy longing, understated
elegance, perfection with a flaw.

4.

When the word was found, the man was lost.
Now the voice sings only on tape.
In this land there is sadness in beauty,
where pearls are the tears of oysters,
where duty defeats affection—there are
echoes and shadows on rice paper screens.
The man of *shibui* voice keeps his harmony,
being dead or gay or moved far away—
he could sing me alive if he wished.
Shibui; the power of the absent sounding
in the present, all that is left unsaid;
an exquisite pain, chaste, sober, serene;
the beauty of calm understatement.

Breaking Steps

At Grandma's
nobody fixed the stairs.
Not inside or out.
All us kids knew not to hop,
and not to stand too long
on any one.

Grandma and that old house.
Every look was our last at either one.
She said she'd be
dust like the house in time.
But that day I peeled
her front door, Saturday in boring sun,
her face holding a Camel butt
stuck way out the front window.
"Gandamn you!" She was loud.

Aunties screamed at mother.
Didn't anybody hear
what the damned kid was doing?
Now look at the door
hanging there without men to fix
the shame. All eyes pressed
hard on the bottom step
where I stood.

It was the song of tearing wood,
termite wings and dust filling
front porch cracks, and the sun
on each new layer of veneer,
the blossoming door.

Time for lunch. All the
cousins come to feed on rage.

Through the small doorpane,
I stared at a single tree on the spine of
Dinosaur Hill, a jawline for
a face of clouds on its way
to sea.

Ode to the Body Bountiful

Hidden in the bounty of her strong, sweet love,
no one sane would claim the bowel-cry
of the wicked and unsung.
Perched, when at rest, on her finished sigh,
only the greedy and dead would drop
to seek more in that simple act
which leaves you, as vagabonds leave their nestled site,
in a fury of regret and things better forgotten.

Foot following foot,
I tread the shadow of her fondness.
She is somewhere alive, breathing moments
or miles from where another high noon marks me,
lost and locked in hot summer's beam.

Every blonde becomes her beckoned head.
Every house becomes her naked home
enchanting with a door, an open door.
I'll lodge a marble vault there so she will see
that years of these or ancient, shapeless winds
have disfigured even this.

What more, then, to a suckable child whose flesh
tears and falls and dies to give up milk,
yet is still a full-nippled heart that has its own tongue?

Breaking the Skin

When my brother's fist
smashed the screen-door window
we all knew
something important
had happened.

My mother ran
to the door;
he held up his bloody
uncurled fist.

Nobody get near
that door
she repeated
as she drove him away
to the emergency room.

What was it
made me poke my head through
the shattered hole
leaning way over
till a shard laid
my belly open?

Could I finally reach through
what I couldn't see?
For the first time
someone had really
opened a window.

The sun blew lilac
perfume to my face;
my shirt crawled red.
I wanted a ride too.

Brother, we've always wanted
to break through and see
what's inside,
like we both saw inside
our mother that day,

Scolding us like
lilacs, like the clear
blue flames that leap
from summer grass
and reach inside
without breaking the skin.

After 2:00 am

Jack stumbled out of the jazz-joint be-
boppin' blue smoke that hung on him like
the last tenor lead that sparked
his dance feet, the black soles scraping
a disorderly blue.

On the railroad tracks
he could see the train wailing,
thunder from the darkness,
spotlight from the engine blinding Jack
trying to remember his song.

"Basin street . . ." he crooned
till the engine horn blew him
laughing off the tracks, his bones
like organ-pipes shaking a cathedral.
He wobbled as he stood a few feet away
watching the streetlight
burst between box-cars in
off-beat triplets that shook his body stiff
in the stretch of tonnage.

The crushing sound opened up a space.
He felt like the taut, white balloon
that deaf couple in the bar held fingertips to,
the air in his lungs slammed against his ribs;
he had to follow the pounding jazz or explode,
had to catch a train that rolled beyond this town
so he ran alongside, almost keeping pace
with the iron-drum rhythm of his battering heart
and the inviting motions of the swaying flatbeds
that rocked like flooding river-rafts
on Arkansas mud-waters that would carry him out
into the blue open of the shining opal ocean
where sight smell touch taste would wash into one
fluid rhythm of wave-peaks reaching for white
summer storms blowing dark rain down.

He couldn't keep up and the train slid past,
the ass-end caboose man waved and laughed.
His legs ached, his head fell back,
a raindrop splashed in his eye as Jack
slowed to a walk and began to talk
himself into someday riding the pure, light
music of flight unburdened by black soles
and wish-bone legs, on the box-car back-beat
that shrunk in his eye as his own crying voice
rose into the space where a lightning bolt,
like a strung-out flash of the full moon's face
had ripped the sky in two.

Haole Boy

I haven't seen Willie in thirty-three days, not since he ran away with the fry cook. Then Friday afternoon he calls and says, "Big Jim, I'm in trouble. Can you meet me at Kahului Harbor by four?"

So I take my time driving across the island and find him on the beach next to the loading docks. It's after four. The sky is black and blue with rain clouds and the wind is blowing, but the cold doesn't seem to bother Willie. He's wearing swim trunks and lifting an ama onto his shoulder. When I saw him last he was running out of our apartment, his face pale and pink. Now he's dark as a pygmy lifting an elephant tusk.

"Hey, haole boy," I say, running up behind him, slipping my car keys in my pocket.

He whips around so fast the ama hits me in the elbow. When he sees it's me, he smiles and says, "You never change."

I've only been on Maui three months, but I already know a few Hawaiian words. Ama means outrigger float. Haole means white; it's pronounced "how-lee" but to me it sounds like "nig-ger."

"Did you think I was one of your local friends?" I say, rubbing my elbow. "Someone looking for a fight?"

He pretends not to hear me. He does that when he doesn't want to argue. We never argued when we were going to college in San Francisco, now we argue all the time. "Welcome to paradise," he says.

The sad thing is, he means it.

To me, Kahului Harbor is no paradise. It's on the wet side of the island where the working people live and the storms hit. Two container ships are unloading at the docks: forklifts, clanging safety bells, men shouting. Tugboats shove a barge at the docks. Outside the harbor the ocean is brown and gray and green and ugly. A wave hits the breakwater, explodes in a thousand pieces and sprays over the flat oily water. The air smells of salt, rust and diesel fuel.

"You're late," he says. "I was afraid you'd leave me hanging."

"You know me. Anything for a friend."

He looks at me with that stupid smile of his, like I said something funny. Then he balances the ama on his shoulder and starts walking fast toward a canoe under an ironwood tree about twenty-five yards away. The ama must be heavy. Willie has wide shoulders and big

muscles in his arms and legs, but by the time he reaches the canoe, sweat is dripping down his back and he's breathing hard. Still, he treats the ama like it's made of glass while he slips it off his shoulder, sets it down on an old tire, and pushes the tire under two outrigger arms.

The canoe is weather beaten, about forty feet long, a couple feet wide, dark brown, the same color as the ama and Willie, although Willie is as white as me when he stays out of the sun.

Willie says the canoe is made of koa wood. "It's a special wood," he says. "Koa means brave, fearless."

"You'd have to be brave to paddle in this old tub."

Willie stands up, pretending he didn't hear me. Sweat drips down his cheek. "A week ago Wailea Canoe Club challenged Kalākaua Canoe Club to an iron-man race, to the navigation buoy and back. Seven miles, starting right after work, no matter what the weather. Our club wants to race too. But Moke turned up sick this morning. We called all around and couldn't get anybody. You're our last hope, Big Jim."

"Me?" I say, acting surprised. "You're depending on me?"

Willie turns his back to me, bends over the canoe, like he's looking for something under the seats. "We need your help, Jim. Please."

I wonder if he could say that looking me in the eye.

"You don't belong here," I say. "You belong in San Francisco."

Willie must know he's skating on thin ice because he takes his time deciding what to say next. He grabs a plastic bucket from the canoe and kneels down by the ama, pulls a rubber strip out of the bucket and wraps it around the ama and the outrigger arm, and pulls it tight.

"This is my home, Jim. I want to live here for the rest of my life."

"Bullshit," I say, which is my way of saying it's time for him to come back to his senses. Willie's my friend, we've known each other for a couple of years, and he has this freaky habit of getting carried away, going over the edge. We both know it. So before we left San Francisco, we agreed, no crazy stuff. Fly out to work in the hotels for the summer. Have some fun. Drink. Maybe find some girls. Nothing more. Nothing serious. Then fly back to finish our last year of college. Everything was going according to plan until Willie met Pancho.

I'm just about to tell Willie, as I've told him before, what a loser Pancho is, when who shows up but the man himself. Wearing black trunks, a white T-shirt and tiny black sunglasses that make him look like a blind man, he walks out of the trees by the parking lot. When he lifts his arm to wave, his stomach slips out from under his T-shirt. I've never known a cook who wasn't fighting the battle of the bulge.

"Hello," he says, like it's the most natural thing in the world to see me on the beach in Kahului Harbor. He shakes my hand Mainland

style, not like the locals do when they lock thumbs and make a big deal out of nothing like black guys do. "Glad to see you, Jim."

Pancho is a Filipino, a local guy. He spent a year on the Mainland going to junior college so he knows how to talk to me without any of that pidgin stuff.

"Howdy," I say, squeezing his hand really hard even though he's being gentle with mine. He's a big guy, two inches taller than me and outweighs me by fifty pounds. But I'm not afraid of him. I could take him in a fair fight. I'd circle him and punch him in the gut until his heart gave out. The only thing is once I started fighting him probably a half dozen of his local friends would jump in on his side. Local guys stick together when it comes to fighting haoles. As for Willie, who knows what side he would jump in for now that he has gone native.

Pancho and Willie shake hands and hug like they haven't seen each other in years, which is something I don't go for. Why hug a guy? Why make a big deal out of saying hello?

Anyway, after they're through making love and Willie is back rigging the ama, Pancho pats me on the shoulder and says, "Good, you're going to help us."

Again I'm about to lay it on the line and tell him what I think when who shows up but the rest of his crew, all locals. They walk across the beach from the parking lot, knotted together, shoulder to shoulder, like a gang, three pretty tough looking guys, none of them smiling.

They shake my hand, the Mainland way, while Pancho tells me their names. Kawika. He's about Willie's size, with a flat stomach, wide shoulders and long arms. Him and Willie standing together look like a couple of spark plugs.

Malama, he's skinny, maybe seventeen, and smoking a cigarette. He has sleepy eyes and his fingers feel like nylon rope.

Pekelo is a big guy. When he shakes my hand, he tries to crush it. Him I understand.

The locals and Willie stand in a circle, talking about work, smiling, slapping each other on the back, hugging, while I stand there, an extra thumb, trying to figure a way to tell Willie I'm not going to help his new friends. Sure, I've paddled kayaks before, and I'm pretty good, but that's one man in one canoe. I don't like mob scenes. When I can't take the buddy-buddy stuff any longer, I grab Willie's arm and pull him away from the group, about to give him a piece of mind, when who shows up—the Wailea guys.

They drive up to the beach in two big sparkling clean Ford pickup trucks, one red, one yellow. The red truck is towing a bright yellow canoe with two red stripes on its bow. Eight guys jump out and lift the canoe on their shoulders and carry it to the water, set it down on the sand, look at the ocean. Two of them go back for the ama.

They're fifty yards up the beach but I can see that all of them are in pretty good shape. Big guys, wiry. Most of them have blond hair. One's a redhead.

"How much does a canoe weigh?" I asked Willie.

"That fiberglass thing? Four hundred pounds, maybe."

We watch them rig the ama, carry paddles from the trucks, do push-ups in the sand. A couple minutes later, after the Wailea guys have switched to sit-ups, the Kalākaua guys show up in two black trucks. They step out slow, stretch, all of them tough looking locals. One guy, a little guy, points at the ocean, then they lift their pure white canoe on their shoulders and carry it down to the beach, set it on the sand a few feet from Wailea's canoe.

"So what if they have fiberglass canoes?" Willie says, "Our canoe is forty years old. It's a traditional Hawaiian racing canoe."

"It's ready to fall apart," I say, and pull Willie farther away from his buddies. "You got a problem," I whisper in his ear. "Both those crews are winners."

"That's their weakness. All they care about is winning."

"Some weakness," I say. "You got a bigger weakness." I look over his shoulder to make sure no one is listening. "Pancho," I whisper.

He shoves me so hard I fall on my ass. "Hey, you mother," I say, and stand up, wiping the sand off my butt, checking to make sure my car keys are still in my pocket.

"Our crew is family," he says. "We stick together."

And I say, "I don't need a family!" Which is true because I moved out of my mom's house when I was sixteen and I've been on my own ever since. "I'm getting out of here."

I turn around and I'm walking away but Willie grabs my arm. "Big Jim," he says. "I'm sorry."

"Bugger off."

"We need you, Jimmy."

"Who the hell is we?"

Willie is sweating, the local guys are looking at us. "Paddle with us, you'll see."

"Bullshit," I say, and I'm thinking about the time Willie brought a petition to work; he even asked the local guys behind the bar to sign it, which was kind of funny because the petition was for a moratorium on hotel construction and the local guys got lots of friends working in construction. They know tourism pays the bills. And them signing Willie's petition would have been like bartenders joining a temperance league. The local guys laughed and told Willie that he was trying to be more Hawaiian than the Hawaiians.

That's Willie. Always getting carried away.

"Listen to me, Jim. Do this for me, just this once, and after the race if you want me to go back to San Francisco with you, I will." He holds out his hand. "Please."

I look at the harbor, the brown scum floating on the water, the storm drain by the loading dock, the broken glass in the sand and I'm thinking I should leave Willie there to teach him a lesson but, hell, he did help me pass biology and I'm the only one who can save him now, so I say, "Yeah, sure. That sounds like a plan."

We shake hands on it and he leads me back to the circle where everything seems friendly, in a pre-gangfight kind of way, and after a couple of minutes of listening to Willie and his local friends say "We got to stay together. Together!" I look up at the sky, thinking, *Give me a friggin break!*, and a rain drop hits me square in the forehead and I wait for more, but only the one hits, then the clouds just hang there, black and ugly.

No matter how hard we try, the canoe is too heavy. I'm all for dragging it but Willie says, "It's koa wood." Pancho waves to the Wailea and Kalākaua guys and they run over, help us carry it to the water. They're really careful when they set it down in the water.

"This baby weighs a ton," I say, and everyone looks at me. They're all standing there in bathing suits, except me, I'm wearing shorts. I reach down in my pocket and grab my car keys. The water smells like paint thinner, and my feet sink in the mud.

"Get in on the ama side," Willie says, and he tries to give more instructions but I tell him to frig off; I know all about outrigger canoe paddling. Heck, I paid five bucks for a ride in one when I first came to Maui. I get in the ama side, that's the left side, so the canoe doesn't tip over.

Willie sits up front in seat two, behind Kawika. They're the fast guys who are supposed to set the pace. Pekelo and Pancho, the two big guys, sit in the middle; they're the engine. I'm behind Pancho. My hips are wedged between the gunwales. I'm stuck. A prisoner, listening to Malama suck on his cigarette. He's behind me, in the steersman's seat.

"Give 'em, gangee," he says, and I hear his cigarette hiss in the water.

Quite a coach, that Malama. I lean over to the right to poke the cigarette butt under water and the ama pops out of the water.

"Steady, gangee," Malama says.

So I forget the cigarette. Willie holds his paddle over his head with both hands, twists left and right, looks back at me. "Once we start," he says, "no one except Malama talks."

"Yeah, right," I say. I expect a lot from Malama. He's a really talkative guy.

"Hoe hāpai," Malama says, almost in a whisper. I wonder if Willie can hear him and I'm about to relay the message, whatever it means, when Kawika lifts his paddle over his head. The other guys too. I hold mine up but Malama says, "Like Kawika," so I switch my right hand near the blade, my left at the top of the handle. Willie and Pancho have theirs the other way.

"Huki," Malama says.

We start paddling nice and easy. Me, Pekelo and Kawika paddling on the right. Malama, Pancho and Willie on the left. And we're going pretty good but the Wailea and Kalākaua guys jump ahead of us like we're standing still, so I dig my paddle deep and pull as hard and fast as I can. The canoe jerks, glides, jerks. And Malama whispers, "Stay together, gangee. Stay together."

So I slow down and time my strokes with Kawika. It's easy going, nice and smooth when I'm blending in with the other guys, and we cruise by the container ships, three of us paddling on the right, three on the left, with the sun going down behind the mountains. I start thinking that maybe I know something about Hawai'i and I pretend I'm a native back in the 1930s paddling by a white steamer full of tourists from the Mainland, and I wonder what it would be like to dive for coins in Kahului Harbor.

"Stay together, gangee."

I slip back in rhythm.

"Hut," Willie says.

"You're not supposed to talk," I say and the next thing I know everyone except me has switched sides, so I take one more stroke and switch to the left. Point the blade at the water. Poke it deep. Pull. Lift. Poke. Pull.

Wailea and Kalākaua beat us to the harbor mouth by a boat length and they sit there, calm as fat toads, with their paddles resting across their laps and watch the ocean. While we glide to a stop, Pancho's breathing so loud I think he's going to have a heart attack. Over his shoulder I can see waves breaking all along Waihe'e Reef. The sun is setting behind the mountains. The navigation buoy is hidden behind rolling swells of dark water.

"What do you think?" the steersman from Wailea yells in a deep voice.

We sit gently rocking on swells. I want to yell that the Coast Guard station is on the other side of the island, that we're crazy to go outside the harbor, but just as I'm about to open my mouth, Kawika raises his paddle over his head, and Willie, Pekelo and Pancho do the same.

"Hoe hāpai," says the steersman from Kalākaua, and their paddles go up.

"Ready," says the steersman from Wailea, and they lean forward with their blades pointed at the water.

"Give 'em," Malama whispers.

And off we go, paddling. Me digging like crazy because Wailea and Kalākaua are pulling ahead of us.

Past the breakwater, we hit a huge swell, and the bow jumps in the air. I'm looking up at Willie, his paddle digging in the air, then Willie goes down as I go up, and I'm looking down at Willie, my paddle digging in the air.

"Stay together, gangee," Malama says as the stern slams down. The shock slams up my back. We're paddling in a trough between two swells, water splashing everywhere, and Willie says "Hut!"

I take one more stroke on my right, lift my paddle, the canoe wobbles, I switch to the left, dig the paddle in the water.

Ten times on the left then Willie yells, "Hut!" We change. Ten strokes. "Hut." We change. "Hut." We change.

Malama steers us along the edge of a reef. The swells pass under us, come from the right, move fast like they're alive, and smash into the reef. I remember Willie telling me a tidal wave hit this beach in the '40s. I can see a house all by itself on a sand hill. Lights go on in the windows.

My back hurts and I'm sweating even though the air is cold.

"Stay together, gangee."

I try to match Kawika's stroke. Sweat drips in my eyes.

"Stay together."

Wailea and Kalākaua are three boat-lengths ahead of us. A wave breaks across their bows. Their number-five paddlers drop their paddles and start bailing with plastic buckets.

"Stay together."

Wailea's ama pops out of the water. Their number-four paddler leans out, grabs the outrigger arm, pushes it into the water. They smash through a wave in a bright yellow flash. The whitewater pushes them back, turns them sideways, smashes them into Kalākaua's bow. Their steersmen are yelling but I can't hear them. I can only see their mouths moving, their paddles jabbing at the water. They point their canoes at the open ocean, steer toward the darkness on the horizon.

Malama guides our canoe smoothly through the waves.

"Feel the mana," he says.

Mana is this Hawaiian word for power but I don't feel anything. Except scared. The waves are breaking all over the place. The canoe is a wild rocking horse.

"Stay together."

The shore is only a hundred yards away. I could swim a hundred yards with one arm tied behind my back.

"Stay together, feel the mana."

Malama points the canoe away from shore, toward the open ocean, chasing after Wailea and Kalākaua. We break through a wave. Water splashes over Kawika and Willie, makes a river in the bottom of the canoe, covers my feet. The ama slaps at the sea. Kawika, Willie, Pekelo and Pancho bend their backs, strain to pull us into the open ocean where everything is black.

"Turn around!" I yell.

They keep paddling. Pancho's back is soaked with sweat and salt water.

"This is crazy!"

We're heading to sea. We're going to die. I know it.

"Stay together, gangee."

"Screw you, Willie," I yell, and lean toward the ama, hold my breath, and roll into the water.

The ocean is warm, an old friend, and I swim as far as I can underwater. When I surface the canoe is still heading toward the darkness on the horizon. Willie is looking over his shoulder.

"Haole boy," he yells. "Bye, haole boy."

I fight the current, swimming against it with my head down, arms digging until my strength is gone. Then I angle into the surf and hold my breath. A wave lifts me up and throws me onto the reef.

I keep going. Scrape my feet on the coral, push off, keep swimming —kick, pull. The water is waist deep. I try to run. Fall. Crawl across rocks. A wave hits me, pushing me onto the sand. More rocks. I crawl over rocks on all fours to the beach.

My hands and knees are bleeding. Cold wind wraps around me. Willie's crew is hidden in darkness. I must be crazy because I hear Malama whispering "Stay together!" Their paddles digging in the water. Willie yelling "Haole boy!"

I'm all alone on the beach and I feel like I've lost something. I don't know what. Then I reach in my pocket. My car keys are missing.

Hell, at least I'm safe.

Grapefruits at Harstads

mixed media painting
by Hanae Uechi Mills

The Digger

Loosened dirt envelops the shovel
that swings with mechanical timing
from below feet to above shoulders.
Knee caps are invisible from
sea level. Elbows burn and
a lower back screams for mercy.

Quite a crowd has gathered.
There's much debate about this
sweaty man's intentions.
Are these the first few feet
of his shallow grave,
or is there some genesis—
a tunnel of escape?
Their interest is only fleeting,
and children are being called
inside for lunch.

The tool slipped from his calloused hands.
His frame inched down the
basement walls of earth he had created.
Bewildered and muttering
crazy from the sun,
"Now I realize why they only walk
the surface.
Their greatest fear, the torment
of the underground."

Knotted to the Drafthorse

Tied by feet
to the back of a
horse that is running
and not ever coming back.

The trail left by a broken body
isn't artwork but a masterpiece.
What once pumped inside of me
now is sprinkled on the countryside.
Dust inside my wounds
brings me the joy
that tells me I'm alive.

Never sever these ropes that bind me.
I am holding on,
waiting on a moment when
the Connemara slows her hooves to drink.

Traveling

for M.

I only tour you when I am too drunk not to.
Eight p.m. Friday nights with a choice
of MTV or Tennyson
curled lazy with dozing dogs
inside I am liquor-warm and
heading out the door.

Travel brochures tell me there is so much
I haven't seen, but
you are as deceitful as an out of date map
and the chances of finding
the easy routes are slim.

I could say you are a vacation,
but I have brought everything with me,
including wool gloves and a bathing suit;
I cannot be sure of the weather.

Many people have been here before me,
like overseas to the Blarney Stone
leaning to place lips on you for luck.
I have no compass on this trip, no set itinerary.
I am still no closer to the scenic view
the signs have been proclaiming all along.

And if just around the next bend
I find a dim bar with a local band and Dos Equis on tap,
I might see us slow dancing together.
But even from toe to toe
I could still send you a post card—
"Having a great time/Wish you were here."

Beat Time

the gentle beat of waves
rocking
came to us before
we were with need
came to us before
we were with desire
what cycle s do we take to
what rhythm s pound upon our flesh
like empty tin drums
rolling rolling
towards a resting place?
what acres wait
aching to open their breasts to us
that
we too may enjoy so great a quiet rest?
what then
is it we do between the
pounding
and the vacuum of our subterranean
silence
that sends time into a t a i l s p i n
that keeps time from
checking
on its children
dreaming of its march?

Martin's Father

He was the neighborhood drunk. Paunchy and unshaven, his clothes rumpled but generally clean, he could be seen at any hour of the day or night, in varying stages of drunkenness or sobriety, trudging, staggering, or crawling his way along the side streets he had come to know so well.

His favorite spot was a bar not far from his home, where his chances were best for running into the drinking companions he could almost always count on to buy him a drink. His own money, which never amounted to more than a few dollars at a time, Manny Mendoza kept in his pocket for as long as Providence deemed he might.

It was here, too, that once and only once, in an unguarded moment on a quiet afternoon, he had unburdened himself of the one thing that for years had lain embedded, like the point of a knife, deep in his heart. The bartender, a hapa-haole ex-wrestler and trusted member of that vast brotherhood of unordained father confessors, had listened silently and patiently. Chin in hand, his hairy arms resting on the gleaming surface of the confessional, he had listened to a story not entirely new to him, of love and trust betrayed, his eyes narrowing with heightened interest at something implicitly revealing of a relationship that seemed to have exceeded the bounds of all that ordinarily passes in friendship between two men. "We was so close—so close. We—I—We was—We was going in business together, see? I tol' him, take care the money, and he said okay. So everyt'ing was going good—fo' a long time. But aftah awhile—" He paused then, and when he spoke again, breathing heavily, his words came out in whining gasps. "Aftah awhile, he meet this—this damn wahine—She was this—this—Christ, he jes' went crazy fo' her!—damn fuckin' wahine!" Glaring fiercely, his eyes flooding, he continued his story. "He took off wit' her, an' he took all the money. But the hell wit' the money! Who care about the *money*? Jesus Christ, I woulda *give* him all the money if he'da ast. I only wanted—I only wanted fo' him to stay—him and me—like the way we was befo' he meet her. And even aftah—even aftah—Oh, Jesus," he moaned, "I only wanted fo' him to come back. I woulda lef' my wife an' my kid, if only he'da come back. But—but—" his pudgy hands flopped uselessly. "It was all pau—finish. Long time ago. All that happen long time ago—moah than ten yeahs, now. I nevah seen

him since." And then he had wept, softly, like a child with an insupportable sorrow.

But the Manny Mendoza best known to friends and drinking companions was the one gifted in camaraderie, with the instincts of a born entertainer. From time to time, when the tavern was full and spirits especially high, a voice would call out, joined quickly by others, "Le's have a song, Manny! Yah! Sing, Manny! Dance! C'mon, Manny!"

He never refused. He would heave himself to his feet, flashing a boozy grin. His smile was a banner that proclaimed the awakening of something dormant yet ever ready to emerge from somewhere inside him. He would shuffle unsteadily to the center of the space that had been hastily cleared for him, and within seconds, undergo a transformation that never failed to amaze and transport his audience. His body would slowly come erect, as though the attention being thus lavished on him were a palpable force with magical, rejuvenating powers. With eyes closed, and fingers snapping an exotic, evocative rhythm, he would raise his arms slowly from his sides, his thick body rotating and undulating, sensuously. There would be a listening hush as a thin, reedy hum, hardly noticeable at first, would begin to buzz and whine in his audience's ears, rise gradually in a crescendo,and abruptly explode into song. His feet would then come alive, performing a rapid, intricate step, while hands and arms mesmerized the onlooker with sinuous grace. Few in his audience would understand the words he sang, but all would know that the music and the dance were partly improvised from those the performer had originally learned as a youth in his native Portugal, and later brought with him to the Islands.

His wife, a devout Catholic, went about the business of supporting and caring for him, herself, and their thirteen-year-old son with an air of grim purpose that kept the neighbors at a discreet distance. She appeared to them to have no other interest in life than that of keeping her family clean, fed and sheltered. The bulk of her waking hours was spent either at her job at a pineapple cannery, or at home endlessly cleaning or cooking. Raw-boned and fair-skinned, with her long dark hair swept smoothly back in a chignon, she was always neatly dressed, in sharp contrast to the slovenly appearance of her husband. A pair of gold earrings, perfectly matched to the plain gold band on her finger, glinted from her pierced ear lobes.

"I wonder if she thinks she's too good for us," a neighbor had once commented not long after the family of three had moved and settled into the neighborhood. "She's so unfriendly."

"What's she got to be so proud about?" asked another neighbor, not so much with ill will as genuine curiosity.

"Well, I dunno, but my niece told me she reco'nized her. She says she's a forelady at the cannery where she works. Maybe that's the reason, but I don't see why *that* should make her so proud."

"No, no—I don't think she's like that," the third member of the group had said, thoughtfully. "I saw her last week taking a couple of fresh pineapples to Mrs. Chang—you know, the widow with all those kids. I thought that was so nice. And whenever I see her, she says hello to me, so polite. No, I think she's jes'—jes'—Well, some people take life more serious than other people. They not like us. They don't like to sit around, talk story. And look to me like she's jes' the type, real—you know, serious. She's the kind that like to mind her own business."

"Come to think of it," conceded the first speaker, "I gotta give her credit for doing like she is—working and taking care of her kid and her good-for-nothing husband. You can see he's so much older than her, but I can tell you who's the boss in *that* family."

The speaker had then proceeded to tell her companions of the quarrel she and her husband had overheard, which had erupted one night in the usually quiet Mendoza household when the old man, apparently desperate for a drink, had been so unwise as to ask his wife for some money.

"You want *money*?" the woman was heard to shout, her voice ringing free on the clear night air. "Then go to work! I work! I work because we gotta eat, we gotta pay the rent for this house, for our clothes—*everything*!"

"Whatchyou mean, 'Go to work'?" the old man had blustered in reply. "I work! Don' I work?"

"You work?" she had shouted even louder, her voice shrill with scorn. "Oh, yes! You fix some poor old lady's toilet, you cut somebody's grass, you fix somebody's fence, and then what? As soon as you get eight, ten dollars, you stop working! You spend all your money for drinks! And now, as if that's not bad enough, you ask me for money to buy drinks!"

"Stop yelling!" he had shouted. "For Chris' sake, stop yelling! Martin! You come out heah, an' you tell yaw mama to—to—to stop saying bad things to yaw papa!"

There had been a brief silence before the woman's voice was heard again, no longer shrill, but still loud enough to be heard, and with a hard edge to it. "Don't never ask me for money. You got everything you need. When you get hungry, you always find food in the kitchen. You need to change your clothes? I always make sure you got clean clothes to wear. You wanna sleep? There's your bed. This house—You got a house. You can come home any time you want. You got all you

need." Another brief silence. Then, "Don't never ask me for money again."

The boy, Martin, the neighbors saw as well-mannered though shy and withdrawn, and, as the son of a worthless drunkard, deserving of their pity. Mainly they were touched by the sight of his gawky figure buckling under the weight of the old man, who would be leaning on the boy's shoulders after an especially heavy bout of drinking, father and son stumbling homeward.

Yet, for all their condemnation of Manny Mendoza for his moral deficiencies and his failures as a father and husband, the neighbors seemed to have developed an attitude over the years toward the unregenerate drunk that went beyond mere tolerance, or even acceptance. Newcomers to the area were sometimes mystified by the air of patient indulgence with which the man was treated by the residents. "How come these people don't mind this drunken old man walking around the place, so drunk he can hardly walk sometimes—singing so loud—and talking to himself? Two, three times already, I seen him pass out on the sidewalk, and that poor kid of his pick him up off the street and take him home."

But, if the newcomer stayed long enough, he would sense that the benign attitude of the neighbors toward the old man sprang from something as totally unexpected, as whimsical and improbable as the relationship the aging drunk had come to share with the children of the neighborhood.

It had all begun late one summer afternoon, as the old man was returning from one of his lonely wanderings up on the mountain. By then, the neighbors had discovered his practice of going off from time to time on solitary pilgrimages up the mountain, as if to do worship to what gods no one knew, only to reappear some hours later looking sober and refreshed. On this particular day, several of the children had caught sight of the old man coming over the rise of the hill, bearing in his arms and elsewhere on his person all the good things he had gathered along the mountain trails—sprigs of wild orchid, ginger, and bird of paradise, his pockets bulging with wild fruit. With the open curiosity of the very young, they had watched the man they knew best as "Martin's father" trudging his way toward them, right down the middle of the road. As he approached the group, the old man had slowed to a stop, smiling a broad and cheerful smile.

"Hullo, li'l chirren," he had greeted them.

Too shy to return his greeting, the children could only smile and giggle behind their hands.

"Heah," he had invited them, "take thees pretty flowers. And heah's some mangoes—and—and—" gradually emptying his pockets,

"and some guavas—and heah's some moah—and—and—some mountain apples!"

Looking much like a grubby, derelict Santa Claus, he had pressed upon the children all he had, urging them to share with others what they themselves could not use. From this beginning, the relationship had followed a desultory course, gradually forming a pattern in which the children soon learned to tell the difference between those times when they could, and those when they could not, approach the old man and successfully coax him into entertaining them in all the ways he had shown them he could. Most of the time, when they looked out from within a fenced-in yard, or played outside on the sidewalk in the company of playmates, the children would find the old man in a state they recognized as "too-oo drunk" to enable him to do more than smile foolishly and wave a dead hand as he staggered past. But at other times, his broad smile and the familiar greeting, "Hullo, li'l chirren," would be an open invitation to an hour or two of fun and entertainment for any child in the vicinity who wished to join the group. His repertoire consisted mainly of story-telling and clowning, with most of the stories beginning with the words, "When I was a li'l boy in Portugal—" and ending with a moral of some sort—"So you see, li'l chirren mus' nevah lie—" which would be accompanied by grave looks, and cautionary thrusts of a forefinger.

Never at a loss for material, he would sometimes entertain them by making faces, ugly ones and funny ones, challenging them to see who could make the ugliest or the funniest. Then there were other times when he would sing and dance for them folk songs he remembered from his childhood.

But the times the children loved best were those immediately following the old man's return from his solitary hikes up the mountain, when he would be at his playful best. A game they liked to play would begin with a discussion by the old man about the dire consequences of eating the seeds of the guava.

"Now, remembah what I tol' you about eating guavas," he would admonish the children, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "You mus' nevah eat the seeds, because if you eat the seeds, you gonna get all plug up, an' if you get all plug up, you cannot make—" Here he would pause dramatically, drawing himself up with all the poise and aplomb of a conductor facing a full-dress orchestra. A sudden downward thrust of the imaginary baton would bring forth the children's response in a chorus of shouts and laughter.

"Kākā! Doo-doo! Dong! Kūkae!"

"Again!" the maestro would call out. Another downward thrust of the baton, and the response would come again, even louder than before. "Doo-doo! Kūkae! Kākā! Dong!"

The game, with its earthy humor, would seem to touch off a mood of impishness in the children, and, giggling all the way through it, they would then engage in a bout of name-calling, taking turns shouting good-humored insults at the old man.

"You got a fat stomach!" the first of them might begin by calling out.

"An' you got skinny legs!" the old man would shoot back, cackling with delight.

"And you got crooked teeth!"

"An' you got *no front teeth*! Hah, hah, hah!"

"And you eat stink cod fish!"

"An' you eat *harm-ha*, an' you eat *kim-chee*, an' you eat *daikon*! Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah!"

"And you have a big, fat nose!"

"An' you got slanty eyes! Hah, hah, hah!"

At such times, passerby would stop to take in the spectacle of a paunchy, grizzled old man gleefully trading insults with a band of unruly children. Some of the onlookers, their faces askew with suppressed laughter, would merely shake their heads in mock disbelief and pass on; others would double up, laughing uncontrollably, before they too continued on their way. And in the homes nearby, where the shouts and laughter of the children could be heard, someone might pause to look up and say, chuckling, "Ah, that's gotta be Martin's father, playing with the kids."

These raucously playful encounters would usually end when the children, tiring at last, would scamper away, calling out their goodbyes, their faces smeared with the juices of the wild fruits they had just eaten, still holding in their hands the fragrant, rapidly wilting blossoms.

"Bye-bye, Mr. Mendoza!"

"So long, Martin's father!"

"We going come see you again bum-byee!"

But there were still other times when, in the midst of their play, the old man would seem suddenly to weary of it. Quick to sense the change in his mood, the children would grow quiet and wait, wondering. The old man would then shoo them gently away, waving them off with all ten fingers. "Go home now, li'l chirren, go home to your mommas. Tha's a good li'l chirren. Go home, now. Go home. Go—go —" He would then carefully lower himself down to the curb, to sit there and fall asleep, perhaps, or stare into space, leaning against the base of the utility pole.

The night Martin's father died, the air was heavy with the steamy, residual heat of a record-hot day in August. It would seem afterwards

to have been a mournful prelude to what was soon to happen. A forewarning that a man was soon to die a pointless, ignoble and violent death.

Earlier that evening, Martin and his mother had left the house together to attend a wedding. Upon leaving, they had done the three things that were routinely done, especially at night, by the last person to leave the house: they had locked the door, placed the key in its usual place under the doormat, and turned on the porch light. At about ten o'clock, the old man had come home, so drunk he could barely climb the three or four steps to the porch. He had tried the door, and finding it locked, had begun to hammer at it with his fists, cursing his wife and his son for locking him out and refusing to let him in. The neighbors reported later that they had become alarmed when the shouting and pounding had persisted, growing in violence, until the house itself seemed about to fall apart. They had just begun to emerge from their houses, when they were stopped in their tracks by a roar of rage, hardly distinguishable from the thunderous crash that boomed into the night. In the split seconds that followed, the only sound to be heard was the delicate, musical tinkle of tiny pieces of glass falling. Abandoning his assault on the door, the old man had hurled himself in a frenzy of rage upon the window beside it. Less than a block away, his wife and his son were coming home just in time to hear the dreadful cries that would echo in memory for as long as they lived.

"Haa-aalp! Haa-aalp! Haa-aalp!"

It was the last thing the old man was ever to say. Rapidly losing consciousness, he lay on the floor of the porch, fatally wounded, the blood spouting and oozing from the terrible gashes he had inflicted on himself, the most lethal of them appearing on his head, throat and arms. What was left of the window bristled with splintered wood and shards of window pane that gleamed like scimitars in the pale, yellowish glow of the light bulb hanging from above.

For days afterward, much of the talk in the neighborhood concerned itself with Manny Mendoza and the way he had died. The widow and her son received the condolences of friends and neighbors with the same unrelenting reserve that had always been so much a part of their demeanor, a reserve that was breached only once during the funeral by a man she recognized as one of Manny's closest friends. She had listened intently, her eyes bright with something resembling fear or apprehension, listened while the friend spoke of the events of the day the old man died, of someone who had come in search of Manny at his favorite drinking place to bring him news of the death of an old friend. Upon hearing the news, Manny's behavior had so changed as to render him all but unrecognizable to his friends. Tearful one mo-

ment, then violently quarrelsome the next, he had spent the rest of the day drinking heavily, as though trying desperately to knock himself senseless. And as the widow listened, the fearful brightness in her eyes had slowly faded to a look alternating between acceptance and despair.

In the end, it was the children who would think of the old man and remember him as perhaps he himself would have liked best to be thought of and remembered. In the course of a few days, they learned in their separate ways of the loss of their old friend. For some of them, the little ones in particular, it was the first time they had ever heard of the thing called Death, the first time they had ever known there could *be* such a thing as Death. They pondered briefly, as they would again and again, the meaning of it, its mystery and its reality, trying to imagine what it would be like never again to see Martin's father coming over the rise of the hill, singing the songs of his boyhood in Portugal, his arms laden with gifts from the mountain.

Ho'omaluhia

pastel painting
by Toni Martin

The Last Soirée

I wake to snow.
The magician has dropped the handkerchief.
Time for the next act.

By late afternoon the ladies gather,
straight-backed or slant in final jewels.
Some carry tumors, the birch its myopic eyes,
none of which is mentioned
in their rustle of elegance. Even a fallen vine
drapes itself over the shoulder of a scrub
like sable. As I pass, maples
in tight tuxedos seem to move among them
offering platters of reds, a yellow envelope,
a chartreuse glove.

I like to think they gather
to say goodbye, that walking among them
in their dowager days of gold or russet taffeta
earned a lesson other than efficiency—
its closing off and dropping of the old.

The sky slopes and darkens.
A chill wind, like a jewel thief
casing for pickings, slinks in,
stops to lift and finger my graying hair,
to touch a cold blade to my neck. Around me
the trees watch—holding their breath.
I hesitate, then as if reading from a book, walk
a firmer step, aware suddenly of the aristocracy
beneath clothes—nudity's 17-jeweled grace—
and the radiant argument, on a tipped and forgetful earth,
of precarious things.

Making Light

On three works in The Honolulu Paper

"Tragedy is easier than comedy
because in tragedy all you have to do
is say the baby died"

a man walks into a psychiatrist's office
and says doctor
it's my uncle, he thinks he's a chicken
your uncle thinks he's a chicken?
all day long, he acts like a chicken
he walks around like a chicken
he makes noises like a chicken
he thinks he's a chicken
have him see me, I think I can cure him
cure him? we don't want you to cure him, doctor
we need the eggs
Kira is the story of the bird-girl of summer camp
written with high seriousness, but the author
needs her eggs

but I wanna tell you
the baby died
extinguished in a small hotel room in Waikīkī
how small was it?
the room was so small
I had to go outside to change my mind
the room was so small
all the flies were walking
and also the room was cold
you say the room was cold?
the room was so cold, that one morning
I fell out of bed and broke my pajamas
you're talking cold
but seriously, the baby died

the culture in place obliterated
by the culture on tour
take genocide, please
for nobility and virtue which side
of genocide?

stars of soaps are blessed
with tumors
the operation is a risk
or a lasting vice
to give longevity
for a poet on Puget Sound
brain dissolving to a puddle
the inextinguishable galaxies
are running lights in a small harbor
he clutches his wife
in high window of their home
and somewhere near
the teary fraudulence of last-poems-left-behind
and the terrible inutility of wit
Blessing's poem
swells with light

The Maps

Each time you left
you vowed to quit the road.
The hotels were all the same:
linens and ice machines
that failed to cool your anger.

Now at home, you weed
the garden: dandelion,
ragweed. Their heads collapse,
enter the wind.

Once unleashed, life
gives over to disorder
like a constellation of seeds
falling to the ground. Dice
of the cosmos.

Instead you put them in neat rows,
the shoots holding the moonlight
like lights on the edge of a runway.

It was not the hotels.
The maps made you
quit the road, the way
you look at your life,
how you try to get above it,
the furrows, the maps
you frantically mark on:
how, to whom,
and where to turn.

The Crows

Their eyes are dead galaxies
we cannot discern, the look

of a single eye staring
from a bucket of bait, disembodied

or returning now whole, fleshed by
the imagination. And as I watch them

fill the tree—in their previous lives,
snakes and men—everything is moving

in the wrong direction. My feet carry me
not home, but to my bed, and they fall,

these dark reactionaries, back
to the branches, as if part

of some silent movie, run against
our will, in reverse.

Issues of a More Lasting Moment

In the past Adriana kept her straw-colored hair pinned tight behind her in a short ponytail. I remember at the Florentine restaurant she worked in five years ago, she would frequently wear a tie as part of her uniform and her own silver cross-clip on it. She wasn't religious: the clip was a gift, and she liked the way the soft neon lights there reflected from it in every direction. Today there is no cross, no tie either; just a rag-like sweatshirt she sleeps in with an Edward Gorey design on the front. Her hair is free, the way I like it; she seldom brushes it anymore.

"Jack," she says, "what do you think those signs mean by Do Not Drive Into Smoke?"

We're in Oklahoma now, and I don't know the answer. Shrugging, I put in a Tom Waits tape because it's good road music. Adriana hums lightly, staring at what we wish were rolling hills. "Like the song?" I ask.

"Yes."

She wants to listen to the final lyrics, so I shut up. I think she's been losing touch with American culture living in Japan for the past year. Her mother was worried when she decided to go to Tokyo to teach English at Berlitz. Her mother said, "Don't be silly, your father and I will give you money to get started, you can find a job here in New Jersey."

Parents, even when they realize, like Adriana's parents do, that they have stayed together longer than they should have for fear of the unknown or of making life-altering decisions, gradually forget the important role autonomy plays in a healthy self-image. Adriana and I agreed on that point. Parents have forgotten the most in this respect right about the time they reach fifty, we thought.

I'd been driving for five hours and my back hurt, so I do what I always do under those circumstances, I unfastened my seat belt and arched my spine forward. Adriana didn't offer to drive because it's a stick-shift. She laughed instead. She laughed because it's an old Nova and tiny, and I have to tilt my head to one side to fit in that position. Also, my left hand was twitching again, as it has periodically for as long as I can remember.

"Do you love me?" Adriana asked unexpectedly between smiles.

No thought was required. "Yes," I said. Then a momentary pause.

"I love you too," she said, no longer smiling.

I redid my safety belt and put in a new tape: a compilation of songs from the fifties. Adriana and I had traded I-love-yous only once, two years before, the last time we'd lived in the same city, Memphis—and country, for that matter—and slept in the same bed. This day we carried grins with us into Texas, the border reminding her of another sign, the one she'd read when we crossed the previous state line. It read: "Welcome to Oklahoma: Discover the Water, West and Wonder," and had bothered her for miles.

"Why did that sign say that?" she asked now. "There isn't much water in Oklahoma, is there?"

I knew why because I'd traveled this road before on my way to New Orleans with the documentary film crew. I'd asked the same question of the elfin man in the tollbooth on the Turner Turnpike. "There are thousands of man-made lakes in Oklahoma," I repeated confidently, "built since the dustbowl days of the Great Depression."

"Oh," she said. "That makes sense."

Adriana was always curious about things like signs. My father once told me that as a young man, about my age, during his semi-pro baseball days, he had learned that there were three general types of people: *thing* people, who were in the majority, *idea* people, and *people* people. I don't know which one Adriana is, but I do know she wonders a lot about things like signs.

A long silence ensued. On our left, a full-sized U-Haul passed in a dangerous hurry. Two cashew-shaped clouds, moon-white ones, marred an otherwise pure, twilit sky. I checked the windshield wipers to see if they still worked, just in case. Adriana and I were going to Los Angeles to look for an apartment together. I wasn't lying when I'd said I loved her, but was still inexplicably apprehensive and noncommittal. In the past, we'd been friends, then lovers, then for years much more than friends—by phone or letter or short, spotted visits—and were now something simultaneously both and neither. Neither of us cared much for Los Angeles, but I'd lived in Santa Monica for two years and, of course, there was the *industry*.

"Did I ever tell you about the hotel sign across the street from my apartment in Shinjuku? Or at least I thought it was a hotel, until the secretary at my school told me what it really was . . ."

Adriana began telling one of her Japan stories, but I wasn't paying attention. On the way from New Orleans we'd stopped in Memphis to see an old college roommate of mine before coming west, and I was thinking about a television show Bennett and I watched there: The Mother/Daughter International Beauty Contest.

"Shatrice is a kindergarten teacher who likes to cultivate orchids," the M.C. had said. "Her mother is a housewife, but is thinking of going back to school to study pathology." Then they did a dance. Bennett and I laughed, then bet on the outcome. We were like that, still—a product of not having worked long hours for enough years, I suppose: we didn't mind wasting time if even something insubstantial were at stake.

"I don't think you're listening," Adriana noticed.

"I'm sorry. I was thinking about L.A.," I said, tuning in Tulsa radio.

"Mm . . . Los Angeles."

Adriana was apprehensive too; she didn't have a plan. I was returning to Hollywood with camera experience, but she still lacked direction. She'd taught English to Japanese businessmen, but many people in Los Angeles already spoke English, I remembered.

"Los Angeles," she muttered again, to herself and Texas.

Bennett didn't think much of that city either. He guessed that L.A. must stand for either Lousy Air or Latent Animosity. I had wanted to make an old joke about Memphis, but realized almost immediately that there aren't any.

Two searchlights in the far distance, methodical and hypnotic, made moving white swaths across the night, occasionally criss-crossing. As they fell, the blackening sky obscured the west's horizon, our permanent aim, like colored light-bulbs steal one's discrimination of a room's objects. The radio released periodic music as we passed in and out of small towns, matching audibly the silent beat of the Nova's dancing odometer. All conversation had ceased. Green exit signs with white numbers were scarcely worth questioning.

"Flat. Absolutely flat," Adriana finally murmured.

"What?" I said.

"Nothing. I'm a little tired."

We stopped ahead at a Red Roof Inn in Amarillo, and the woman at the desk had a mole on her forehead that made me think of India. In the partly paneled room, Adriana washed her face while I undressed. I was wearing the maroon-striped boxer shorts my grandmother sent for Christmas. I'd told all my relatives I wanted to begin wearing boxers because of an inexplicable nostalgia I fostered for earlier days, before I was born, when every man had baggy shorts and a hat. When my grandfather was alive, he'd pull from a shoebox on family occasions old sepia photographs of outdoor boxing matches with Jess Willard or Jack Johnson in which all the spectators wore Panamas. I'd assumed they wore boxers too, because my grandfather wore them. Now I owned fifteen pairs myself, but no hat to compliment them.

The fedora I'd been wearing periodically over the past year was in the hands of some dart-playing Chartres Street bartender named Eddy.

"Are you coming to bed?" I called.

"I think I lost my umbrella."

I ambled to the window to push it up, pinching my stomach pertly, attempting to determine whether elliptical was my intended form. "Your umbrella?" I said. "We're going to sunny California, remember?"

The air was cool and encouraged closeness. I'd already bundled up and was returning to desultory thoughts when "It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark" rebutted from the bathroom.

Actually that hat wasn't a fedora in the truest sense. The New Orleans haberdasher told me it was a hybrid and unclassifiable. It fell midway between a pork pie and a fedora, he'd said. Unclassifiable. The Cajun merchant informed me further about hats because I lied and said I was writing a screenplay that took place in 1947. It was supposed to be a love story, I'd explained—but of a vaguely different sort when he pressed for details.

Adriana got under the covers finally; gingerly, because by now the bed was cold. I touched her leg and put it in an awkward position around my own. "Did you know," she said, "that the Chinese government charges next of kin thirteen cents for each bullet used in an execution? I read it in Esquire or something."

Adriana had an innate talent for filling one's head with passing trifles, until you could no longer tell whether it was vertigo or communication that just occurred. The lion's share of her attention, I'd noticed, fell recently on the minutest details of life's landscape: the spawning time of a geranium, the obsolescence of pawn shops, the history of buttons; as if—and I too am guilty—to defer larger, more topical questions about sacrifice or commitment, virtue . . . even faith —issues of a more lasting moment—like a divinity student mastering Aramaic before examining the soul.

I touched her hair's bottom-most strands now. A sleepless squirrel rustled through the uneven brambles that lined the service road. Perched on a neighboring bough, a solitary starling croaked in rapid succession expecting no responding call from the dark, like a high-pitched auctioneer pricing mattresses on a monastery lawn. Adriana nestled closer and answered with a sound too; a delicate, almost inaudible, sigh that so warmly mirrored our mutual comfort as to cause me momentary pity for both starling and squirrel, the hanging bough and the cold night. All other sounds ceased for a time as we spoke as mimes do of our uncertain union; and just before our minds' first lapse into sleep the light-blue of daybreak was advancing, and the wind began making speeches again to a brighter Amarillo.

The next day we were stopped on the road early. Every car was being forced to pull over by a line of orange Day-Glo cones, and a burly, uniformed man took his time approaching each one. He wore reflective sunglasses like "the man with no eyes" in *Cool Hand Luke,* and when I rolled down my window he asked directly, staring past us, "You Americans?"

"Yes," I said, "we are."

"Then be on your way."

Through the rear-view mirror I watched two Asian-Americans exit a gold Honda and be questioned in detail. Adriana and I laughed as people seldom do, for exactly the same reason: the sight of a human being reduced to a caricature or an automaton had evolved into a quietly snobbish delight for us both. In some false way we felt deprived of the sheriff's continued attention, as though by letting us go he were making an indirect testimony to our plainness.

We didn't listen to any music at all that day along route 40. Through New Mexico and Arizona we covered every news item in the Amarillo Dispatch. We talked too about movies and agreed that Spike Lee lacked control, but was good for whatever cause he was championing for reasons that might not sit well with him.

"Watch your speed," Adriana cautioned during a rare silence. "'Patrolled by Aircraft,' it says."

"You know, I've been having a lot of conversations about movies lately," I said, slowing down. "I mean *a lot.*"

"It's your field isn't it."

"I guess that's it. People must figure I'm comfortable with the subject since I'm trying to get started in the business." The wind outside was picking up.

"Everyone discusses movies, you know. Even when you're not around." Adriana rolled up her window. "Once their education is complete," she continued, "most people have only two things to talk about, their jobs and movies."

"How cynical."

"People in the movie industry have only one thing," she said, playfully prodding me.

I'd heard that before and thought it made some sense. "Men also talk about sports," I said finally, but she saw that I was being flippant.

On the Interstate 40, the first town you pass through in California is Needles. I spent a good many hours traveling, and every time I passed through Needles in the past I was reminded of a joke Jackie Vernon once told about Lenny Bruce. The set-up for the joke had Jackie driving cross-country and breaking down near a deserted gas station in Needles where he found Lenny, standing naked, with his

hands bound to his ankles. It was a dirty joke, and Adriana didn't care for it. That wasn't why though. She didn't care for it because my Lenny Bruce records never made her laugh and because whenever I told a joke I did a lot of this: ". . . is that how it goes, yeah, that's right, so Lenny says, no, Jackie says to Lenny, right . . . no yeah Jackie says . . ." Jokes always lose something in the retelling anyway.

Ironically, not long after passing through Needles, we stopped for gas and, once reloaded, the Nova sputtered, then repeated a piercing staccato sound before dying, like tacks dropped individually on sheet metal. It was late and almost deserted there, and Adriana and I argued over our next course of action. My experience with engines went as far as a tenth-grade class in miniature motors after which an unsympathetic Mr. Gardner failed me because my lawn mower wouldn't start by the twelfth week. Adriana was tired and wanted to go to a motel, but I insisted we call someone. She lit a cigarette while we waited. She said she hadn't been able to give up the habit in Japan as she'd planned, because everyone there smoked. I sympathized. I lit a cigarette too, and after Adriana went inside to keep warm I talked with the old attendant. He was a born-again Christian and wore a knit cap above his ears.

"Do you believe in God?" he said, after a time.

"You'll have to clarify what you mean by God," I said.

It was a smart-ass response, appropriately elusive, that I'd adopted in college during a course called "Kant, Hegel and the Phenomenology of Existence," or something to that effect. The attendant's name was Kirov, and I listened to him tell the story of Kirov and God:

"I used to do it all, see. I'm fifty now. When I was your age, twenty-four, twenty-five, I would call up five, six girls at a time, have 'em all meet me at some place, a bar or somethin', then I'd pick out the prettiest one and tell the rest of 'em to get lost, to hell with them. Right to their face."

"No!" I urged.

"Yeah," he said, "you wouldn't believe the girls I had."

"So I guess you gave that all up?"

"Yeah, I gave it up. Ruined my life. That's why I'm tellin' you. I was married, see, later. Now I'm not married anymore, but I've been seeing my ex- lately, we're gonna get back together. About four years ago, my wife leaves me, I cracked up. Spent nine months in a mental hospital. Too much gambling and foolin' around, she said, so she left. And you know what, she was right, but I couldn't stop. So I cracked up, real bad too, went right into the hospital. And you know they don't give you no help in those places, just a lot of pills and talk. But I was bad. They say I didn't even know my own name, kept walkin' around in circles in my room."

"So what happened?" I said.

"I'm telling you. About the third day I'm walking in circles, what happens? The nurses say I reached my hands to the sky and yell 'save me,' and then I pass out. I'm unconscious for three days."

"What was it?" I asked.

"What was it?" he said. "God spoke to me. I found Jesus, that's what happened, and he's pointed me the right direction ever since. You know what? I haven't had a drink or fooled around since that day, except for my ex-. I still shoot a little pool, but I never gamble anymore. Found the error of my ways, and now I'm close to getting my wife back, all because I discovered the Lord. Don't you see, the Lord loves me and I love my wife." Then Kirov put his head down unconsciously and murmured to himself, "I love my ex-wife."

A moment passed before Kirov snapped out of it, then pulled a pocket New Testament from his overcoat and read some passages that came underlined in his edition. I expressed some mild incredulity, so he removed his shoe and sock for further evidence.

"See this scar," he said. "Doctors said I would never walk again. I was two years old when it happened. They took me to the best doctors. Same doctors who worked on Evil Knievel when he got banged up. They said I would never walk. But here I am walking. You know why?"

"Why?" I said.

"God."

"But I thought you found God four years ago."

"Right," he said, "but He was watching me even then. He knew I was going to be saved—even then. And I am."

I wasn't convinced that Kirov had really had contact with the Lord, but it seemed a useful notion to him. He had lost what mattered most to him before he knew that it mattered at all, and that required an explanation. Cautious observers of human nature recognize that this happens all the time, but they often fail, like Kirov—who was once conscious solely of the immediacy of the here and now—to arrange priorities along lines consistent with their own stumbled-upon philosophies.

I didn't tell him so, but I thought that Kirov was overcompensating after the fact. People do that and it's always the saddest of shames. My own father, a hell of a ballplayer in his day, failed to turn pro and now rationalizes his life similarly. He loved the game but failed to carry out his dream, not for want of talent, but out of some buried fear. For fear of success or of committing himself and then failing, I'm not sure, but his eyes betray the same sad loss and lack of completion as Kirov's did. And when my father, a sportswriter now, tries to impress upon a person the beauty of chronicling data and other people's

dreams, he does it like Kirov, too fervently, too tunnel-visioned, as though no one needed more convincing than himself. My father deprecatingly refers to himself as a *thing* person, but he's really a *people* person who finally caved in under the weight of his fears. At least, for what it's worth, that's how I interpret him.

By now the mechanic had come and was finishing with the car. It was the catalytic converter, he decided, but "nothing fatal." On the road, I told Kirov's story to Adriana, and she related a similar one about a man she'd met by the boardwalk in Atlantic City. She finished her last cigarette. I was quiet the rest of the way, thinking about Kirov and my father. At three in the morning we arrived in Los Angeles at the loft apartment of the friend we'd be staying with until we found a place of our own. The friend's name was Kara. Six months later, under blue skies and worn awnings, she would play maid-of-honor at our tiny, inconspicuous wedding.

Waiāhole Winter

pastel painting
by Toni Martin

Steam

for Annie

One day the ex-wife gives my Rolex to this homeless guy;
then she says I never took the time to enjoy it anyway.

Me. I'd crossed her face from every picture I owned, old
letters got torn in with sentimental clothes all placed in
a bag for Purple Heart—then it made sense how, on those
warm, rainy days, you can watch sewer steam roll from the blue-
print of a city, up across the neon beer signs in Greek Town,
and know that the secret to making pastry is the layers.
Patience and butter. Patience and butter. Patience and butter.

I turned to this woman standing in the street next to me—
the cars zipping around us didn't seem to bother her—so I
turned to her and confided: "I used to do all the cooking,
but the phyllo god hates me." She nodded. "I like kissing in
the street," she said, "but the cars drive between us." So
we rolled ourselves in baklava, tripped over asphalt to touch
the steam, put alleys and spraypaint back into our lives.

Now each second is a space between the rains, the click in a
neon sign, kiss of wet brick. No Rolex. Patience and butter.

Camp Robbers

or jays she explained when I asked
about the bold birds eyeing my bread and salmon.
I turned my back on the crowded party
to attend the robbers. I talked
and they hopped and swooped to swallow
what dinner I dropped for them.
In a room full of eminent poets and scholars
I can only mumble to Andrew of the golden trees.

He quotes Frost: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep . . ."

I wonder if I should just stay home
like Emily Dickinson, be thought the odd recluse,
leave two-thousand poems when I die—
full of capricious punctuation.
Books say Emily was deeply in love,
renounced the lover, took to brooding
about God and death. Emily loved
her room, I think, more than parties,
more than men, or woods.

It would have been fine if young Frost
could have taught old Emily to swing on the birches.
I see Robert in these woods,
boosting Emily up a sapling.
She climbs, clings, then her skirts
billow as the supple tree sets her buttoned shoes down again,
in the thick, gold layer of leaves.

I have forgotten the party.
Emily and Robert are laughing in the trees.
A jay is snatching bread crusts from the plate
I balance on the deck's railing.

Far into Vermont

For Leonard and Shirley Rose

1
In the cup of mountains
silence is black china
tea the spirit drinks.
Coyote screams welcome
moonlight risen above
the gap in the black
porcelain hills. This is
what stillness is for:
to bring peace to dust,
to teach bones quiet.

Shadows exist without people
and darkness is surf come too near.
A hand is no match for the sugary flesh
of blueberries.

Here it is darker than the inside
of your mouth. Hummingbird sips
from each star.

2
Lichen on tree (old storm-
blasted maple), moss on granite
boulder, gradations of green
on the Green Mountains: green
dark as hemlock in a black December,
rust red greenness of first frost
rolling Vermont meadow cleared field
birchwood and twisted crabapple coolness
in the smart breeze that knows solitude,
salutes it: every shadow here is the imprint
of something living, even the moss-and-lichen-
covered rock that roots down to the core
of the begotten planet.

Listening to Brahms

a forest is laid waste. Birds sing
to each other, shaming the violins.
Rain drifts down in shadow
torn from the farthest sky. Listening
to Brahms, the oceans prepare to die
and black tsunamis hurry toward the land.
Cities darken, the membrane over the earth's core
parts. We are listening to Brahms: the nineteenth
century taunts us. In the Sahel, the dead pile up.
Sand gushes like oil from the mouths of the Sahara.
On Sinai, Silence speaks in shrouds. Rain falls
with the ghost-arms of the forgotten. The orchestra
of birds plays on. Listening to Brahms, the percussionist
awaits his moment. It is Brahms who shatters the bow,
who makes the severed strings of the closing millennium
vibrate.

Listen to Your Heart

The steady beat of my heart was something I had always considered a given, a constant—nothing I had to think about. I'm not sure when my heart slipped into its new beat, really less a beat and more a flutter like a baseball card clothespinned to the spokes of a moving bicycle wheel.

I first noticed the change at work one Thursday night when the phones were lit with their electronic trill and my supervisor, Ms. Bates, was tapped into my headset, eavesdropping on the step-by-step instructions I was giving to a woman who had lost her cash station card and her personal identification number that went with it. As I tried to explain to the customer why she must never again write her PIN number on a yellow post-it and attach it to her card, I felt lightheaded. It was at that moment that I first acknowledged my twittering heart, which, I realized, had been trying to get my attention for days. During my next call I began to cry. Ms. Bates was listening in on another employee at the time, so there was no immediate danger of incurring her wrath, but I was frantic—you see, I couldn't stop those tears. The customer, unable to get cash and preoccupied with his own spoiled dinner plans, didn't even ask me if I had a cold.

Later that night, when I had finished my shift and was traveling home on the subway, I felt my heart racing as if in competition with the garbage-filled, people-emptied train that was making its midnight run. I squelched the urge to ask the vacant-faced conductor to slow things down and concentrated instead on the dim outlines of unlighted windows that flashed by.

I work the afternoon shift, from three to eleven, at Citibank in the cash station customer service department. Most of the customers who call are in the middle of a transaction gone awry. After I'd been on the job for a few months, I realized it would be good simulated-pressure training for a suicide prevention counselor or a member of a hostage negotiating team. I have to be careful, patient, persuasive, and loving with customers, talking them down from the disappointment of not receiving instant cash. They're not desperate in a life-threatening way, but all the same, they need help. I realize, of course, that with this observation, I'm probably just trying to justify the mind-numbing aspects

of my job. I've been working at Citibank for eighteen months. I never thought I'd stay that long, but I can't think of anything better to do.

During my mornings off, I usually watch TV, old reruns of sitcoms on Nickelodeon—"Bewitched" and "Mr. Ed" and the "Brady Bunch." These shows soothe me, like salve on a wound, and convince me during their thirty-minute slots that everything will work out for the best. While I watch them, I'm able to forget that I'm twenty-five years old, haven't shaved in three days, and probably should be past the point of living my life by default.

I paid close attention to my heart after I first noticed its increased rhythm. I took my pulse once an hour and, for the first few times at least, I felt secretly pleased that it was consistently twice the normal seventy beats per minute. I didn't worry too much when I felt dizzy or lightheaded. Though it was behaving oddly, I trusted my heart. I was crying a lot though and, as I mentioned, my tears worried me, mostly because I was afraid of what Ms. Bates would say if they started while she monitored one of my calls. When I was alone, I liked the sensation of crying. My tears, unattached as they were to emotion, were more salty than sad.

The Thursday after I had first noticed my new heartbeat was a tough day. Work had been particularly hectic that afternoon and evening—somebody had stolen an entire cash station machine from the City County building and Ms. Bates, disgusted at what she called the "demoralization of America," wrote me up for flirting with a woman caller whose voice was full of fun and whose bank account was healthy. I knew it was wrong to hit on the woman, but she laughed so easily—her voice sounded like Marcia Brady's all grown up—that I hadn't been able to help myself. As I talked to the woman, I had been unable to stop laughing and grinning and my heart had beat even faster until it felt as if it were going to break out of my chest. Two calls later, I was in tears as an older man asked me to check his balance. Yin and yang I guess.

Marcia Brady appeared in my dream that night. In the dream, I drank coffee with her and told her about her life. I predicted that she was going to get hit in the nose with a football and that Greg was going to get the room of his own in the attic. Marcia looked across the table at me in awe, though I only bore bad news, and then she asked me to go with her to her junior high prom. At the prom, I felt my heartbeat slow while Marcia and I danced to "Knights in White Satin." I put my lips close to her ear and whispered my thanks to her—I thought she was responsible for calming me down. But when the dance ended, my heart continued to beat even more slowly until it was just a suggestion of movement and then I fell to the floor, my

light blue tuxedo collecting the scuff of everybody's new shoes. Marcia administered CPR, leaning over me and pressing hard on my chest. In my dream, though almost unconscious, I was acutely aware of every detail around me and I was worried because my cummerbund was askew. Marcia's wrist corsage, already wilting, brushed against my chin as she alternately pounded my chest, breathed into my mouth, and stroked my cheek. I woke up on edge, my heart fluttering so hard, I worried it would bruise itself on my ribs.

I slept restlessly after my dream and when I arrived at work that afternoon, I collapsed into my chair as if I were just completing rather than beginning my shift. I put my hand to my chest and felt my heart quivering and when I stood up to get a cup of coffee, I had to hold the edge of the desk in front of me to steady myself. I wished I had a girlfriend or a family member close by who would urge me to see a doctor. I was beginning to worry that something was really wrong.

Floyd Egner first called Citibank at about six o'clock, when I was far enough along in my shift to be totally bored, but not far enough to feel the pleasure of anticipating its end. I answered the line and looked up to see if Ms. Bates was tapped in. I was glad to see her engrossed in training a new employee.

"Citibank twenty-four hour line. This is George Montgomery. How may I help you?"

"Gimme some money."

The man slurred the request so I suspected he was drunk. I sat back and adjusted my headset, dreading the potential confrontation.

"Okay sir, please tell me your name and account number."

"Name's Floyd and this machine won't give me money."

"Last name sir?"

"What's your name again?"

"George Montgomery, sir. Now if you tell me your name, I'll see what I can do to help you."

"Listen, Mr. Joy Monkey . . ."

"That's George, sir . . ." I heard Floyd drop something and then swear a string of curses as the metal phone cord jerked him short when he leaned down to pick it up. I began to wish Ms. Bates *was* listening so she could get a taste of the challenges this job sometimes presented. "Your name sir? Please tell me your last name."

"Name's Floyd Egner and this damn machine ate my card."

I pulled the name up on the computer and wasn't completely surprised to see that the account, with only $4.63 in it, had been inactive for the past two years. "Sir, if you tell me your personal identification number or your mother's maiden mane, I can help you with this transaction."

"Machine ate my card."

"Sir, I need one more piece of information to verify your identity before I can talk to you about this account. Can you tell me your mother's maiden name?"

"Mother is dead."

I glanced up at the clock and saw it was break time. Floyd Egner had already tied me up long enough to make Ms. Bates suspicious—whenever a call went over two minutes, she assumed the employee was talking to a friend. As I saw Ms. Bates approach her console and heard the hint of a click that let me know she had just tapped into my line, I made one more try with Floyd Egner, "Mr. Egner, if you just . . ." and then I realized the line was dead.

By ten o'clock Floyd Egner had called me four more times. He was traveling around the city, feeding the contents of his wallet into ATM machines. He asked for me (Joy Monkey he slurred my name, even though he was starting to sound sober) no matter who answered the phone. After the third call, I gave up the pretense of trying to verify Floyd's identity.

"Mr. Egner . . .

"Call me Floyd."

"Floyd, you have to stop feeding other cards into our machines—you need a Citibank cash station card to get into your account."

"Lemme talk to Joy Monkey."

"This is George, Floyd. Now listen, hang up the phone and go home. Call me here tomorrow when you feel better."

"Feel fine. I need money. This machine ate my card."

I looked up at the clock. In an hour I'd punch out and be rid of Floyd. My heart skittered and I put my hand to my chest in an effort to hold it still. Floyd was still talking to me and I could see Ms. Bates signaling that I should get him off the line. "Floyd, I have to hang up now—go home and get some sleep."

"I need my money. I'm gonna kill you Joy Monkey."

I felt sad as I hung up the phone and waited for it to ring again. When it did and I reached out to confirm the connection, I felt Ms. Bates' hand holding me back. "I'll get this one George."

It was Floyd, of course. I could hear him screaming through the headset. "I'm gonna kill you Joy . . ." Ms. Bates held the headset in her left hand and listened while she called the police with her right.

The cops called fifteen minutes later and Ms. Bates motioned me to join her on the line.

"So what's the problem with this guy? Did he steal somebody's card?"

I jumped in before Ms. Bates could answer, "No. No. There's really no problem. I think he's just kind of buzzed."

"Yeah, I'll say, he's buzzed. He's singing the 'Star Spangled Banner' and saluting the cash machine."

"Officer, why don't you just encourage him to go home. It's not like he's dangerous or anything."

"The report says he threatened to kill you. Do you want to follow through with charges?"

"No. It's really nothing serious." I cut off the connection before Ms. Bates could disagree.

An hour later, as I was gathering my coat and gloves together, preparing to leave, I heard Ms. Bates speaking loudly and firmly to a man who was trying to get past her and into the room of the night operators. The man's skin was dark and rough as if he spent a lot of time outdoors. Deep lines were etched on either side of his mouth, and when he talked his jaw dropped up and down definitively as if it were controlled by strings. He wore a black trench coat with ripped pockets and missing buttons. He held it together tightly as if he had no clothes on underneath.

Ms. Bates stood before him, blocking his way, "Sir, I'm afraid you can't come in here," and then, looking behind her as she tried to hold the man off, "Cynthia, call security."

I stood up, feeling as if I was going to faint, and lurched toward Ms. Bates. When I heard the intruder speak, I knew it was Floyd. I automatically raised my arm in greeting and said hello.

When Floyd heard my voice, he pushed Ms. Bates aside and rushed toward me. I noticed that his teeth, bright white, were thin and didn't touch each other—they looked as if they belonged in a skeleton's mouth instead of in a flesh-covered man's. Floyd smiled as he hit me in the jaw. I fell backwards and thought what a waste the disruption was, coming as it did at the end of my shift.

I refused to call the police, though Ms. Bates wanted me to. My mouth was bleeding, and I finally agreed to go to the hospital emergency room to quiet her. Floyd stayed in the background while she and I were talking, then he slipped away without anybody noticing, just seconds before security finally arrived.

When I walked out of the elevator and into the lobby, Floyd was waiting for me looking, I thought, sheepish and hungover. I held my jaw and walked by him determined not to say a word, though I can't say I was angry with him. It was more a desire to escape what I already was feeling was inevitable. I was too involved with Floyd. If I got any deeper, I might never get away. I kept walking even as Floyd spoke.

"Hey listen, I'm sorry about that," he pointed at my jaw, "I was just pissed off that you called the cops on me. Are you really going to the hospital?"

I stopped and turned to forgive Floyd, "No, I just wanted to get away from my boss. This is nothing, don't . . ." I never completed his absolution, falling faint into his arms instead.

When I came to, I was in a cab, with Floyd beside me. He was humming the "Star Spangled Banner." I reached up to feel my chin, but my hand lingered at my chest and I ended up clutching the left side of it instead. "Where are we going?" Floyd, his hum reaching high to the rockets red glare, didn't answer until the cab pulled up at the Emergency Room.

The nurse in ER was visibly fatigued, his limbs loose, spine slumped, his face void of any interest in me as he examined my jaw, but he snapped straight when he took my pulse. Floyd, sitting on a stool to the side, noticed and asked what was wrong. The nurse smiled and chirped, "Oh nothing. Nothing to worry about," and then hurried off, his haste as he called for a doctor, belying his words.

When the doctor arrived in the curtained cubicle, she asked Floyd to leave, but he wouldn't budge. "Sir, I'm sorry, but only an immediate family member is allowed in here."

"Well," Floyd drawled, sober now, "don't you think my son favors me?" Floyd stood and loomed over me, his eyes daring me to contradict him—I let it lie, not sure if I wanted his company or was just afraid to banish him. I was lying flat and staring at the fluorescent light above, my heart vibrating like a circular saw, but I felt calm, ready to deliver myself to whatever they were going to do to me.

It was two in the morning before I was sent up to a room on the eighth floor. The ER staff had talked about abnormal electrical connections in the upper chambers of my heart causing arrhythmia which in turn had caused dizziness, shortness of breath, and a palpable, speedy, damn near visible heartbeat. The nurse who attached the heart monitor to my chest and the nitroglycerin patch to my shoulder, told me not to worry and added how lucky I was that my father was with me. Floyd, leaning on the window sill, lit a cigarette and offered me a drag.

When I woke up the next morning, Floyd was sleeping in the burnt orange vinyl chair in the corner. When he woke up twenty minutes later, I was eating breakfast—eggs scrambled to putty-like consistency —and watching "Oprah."

Floyd was immediately awake. He didn't have a rumpled slept-in-his-clothes look about him. His skin wasn't pasty, nor was his hair sticking out. When he said good morning, his voice had none of the

throaty hoarseness that most people wake with. It was as if he had never slept. I looked him over closely, trying to decide what to do.

"What are you staring at?"

"You don't have to stay here, you know. I'm not even sure I want you here at all. And why'd you go telling them you're my father?"

"Well," Floyd was looking out the window, widening the opening of the Levoleer blinds with his thumb and his forefinger, his back to me, so that I had to strain to hear him, "You're alone, aren't you? And I don't have anywhere I have to be."

"Well, why'd you hit me in the first place?"

"You called the cops on me."

"I did not—that was Bates."

"Well how was I to know that? Besides, I didn't like your voice."

"So why are you here now?"

"I changed my mind."

Floyd stayed with me for the next few days while the doctors ran tests that were inconclusive. They labeled my abnormal beat idiopathic atrial fibrillation and said they'd send me home as soon as it slowed to an acceptable level. If that didn't happen within a few days, they added, looking at Floyd as they spoke, they might have to zap me with electricity—electrical cardioversion they called it. One young intern told me not to worry about anything, and then related the story of the woman in the room next to mine whose heart was destroying itself with its pace—literally beating itself to death. "Hers is four times as bad as yours." He seemed puzzled when I didn't look relieved.

After the third day in the hospital with Floyd, I had to admit I was glad for his company. I felt fine, I was able to eat and drink anything I wanted, and I could ramble around the halls without restriction. I suspected the doctors would have discharged me if I hadn't had insurance. I was bored, but Floyd kept me company. The doctors and nurses commented on how lucky I was to have such a devoted father, but I could tell they were skeptical of the relationship. Floyd never left. He never even changed his clothes. They couldn't do anything though. I had insurance *and* a private room—I could have a goddamn pajama party if I wanted to.

Floyd and I fell into patterns, as if we'd been living together for years. Every afternoon, after I shared my lunch with him—surreptitiously, so the nurses wouldn't snit—we played Yahtzee. (Floyd had stolen the game from the patient lounge on the sixth floor where the kids with chronic diseases were taken for daily doses of fun.) Between rolls of the dice, I asked Floyd questions about his life, but I didn't learn much more than I could have guessed from his bank account. He was unemployed and temporarily homeless and he wouldn't

answer a direct question even when I reminded him he was there as my guest. Once when I felt I was close to breaking Floyd down and getting some real information about his former life and wife, he rolled a Yahtzee and danced around the room celebrating his fifty points, as if it meant anything at all.

In the evenings, Floyd interrogated me, and he did a better job. He filled me up with questions and then, seemingly unconcerned if he ever received answers, he listened while I dribbled out every little thing—from my bad luck with women, to getting kicked out of college, to my problems with my Hungarian landlady, to all the lousy jobs I'd held. I told Floyd about my Marcia Brady dream, and by the time I got around to talking about my achingly monotonous job at Citibank, I felt the glumness of my life was a weight and a color I could never lighten. And why bother trying, I argued to Floyd? If I wasn't careful, I'd get worn out and burned up by all the energy I'd have to put into being frightened by the sameness of my life. For the past year I had consoled myself with the thought that, after all, I did provide people with a basic need—cash. But my automatic tears seemed to be begging the point. Floyd never recommended anything. He seemed not even to be listening at all, which may have been why he was so easy to talk to.

After a few days, the doctors admitted that their treatment wasn't working. The drug they had been feeding me intravenously wasn't helping to slow my heartbeat and the nitroglycerin had only succeeded in lowering my blood pressure to a dangerous degree. The doctors, impatient, had decided to go ahead with the electrical cardioversion. I hadn't taken the thought of that treatment seriously when they had first mentioned it, and now I was visited by the image of my body jerking and then going limp and flopping about like the scarecrow in the *Wizard of Oz* as he's stuffed with clean hay. When I voiced my fears, the doctors laughed and told me I watched too much TV. "Nothing to worry about," they assured me without looking at me, "we'll schedule you for tomorrow morning."

That afternoon over Yahtzee, Floyd was quiet as he watched me going for the safe rolls, taking my three ones even when I had a chance at a full house, and losing the game to him as usual. After the game, Floyd stood looking out the window while I watched "General Hospital" and then he turned to me, without waiting for a commercial break and said, "You know George, I think you don't worry enough." I was engrossed in somebody else's romantic interlude so I didn't respond.

"George," Floyd grabbed the remote control and turned off the TV, "listen to me. I've figured out this heart thing."

I laughed and tried to grab back the remote. "C'mon Floyd. I'm missing the good part."

"George, you take things too lightly. You don't care enough about life."

"A good thing too. With my heart, I'd probably have had a major coronary by now if I *was* a type A."

"No George, you've got it backward. Listen to your heart. It's not warning you to slow down, it's begging you to speed up. You've got to quit watching so much TV and dreaming about TV rerun girls. You've got to quit that job at the bank."

"Bullshit Floyd. I have an idiopathic arrythmia—I need an electroshock, not a shrink."

"George, I'm serious. I've been thinking about this since you were admitted. The cardiologist says there's no medical explanation, but your body *is* telling you something. You've got to find external stimulation so that it doesn't have to provide an internal one. When you do that and your heart believes you, it will settle itself."

I laughed, "So Gandhi, what do you expect me to do? Break out of this place?" Floyd said yes.

The ice rink was deserted when we reached it after midnight. The wood shack at one end was secured shut, but Floyd picked the flimsy padlock in seconds. Inside, it was almost as cold as out, but the walls broke the back of the wind, which was blowing off the nearby lake. Floyd started a fire in the woodburning stove in the middle of the room and I was grateful that the shed warmed up quickly. The room was dim, but Floyd left the stove door open, so I could see that there wasn't much to look at anyway. Splintered wood, with a stack of newspapers next to it, stood in one corner. A pile of old mittens, scarves, and skates—forgotten items that weren't worth coming back for—was heaped in another.

I rubbed my forearm where Floyd had yanked out the IV needle. I had thought I'd faint when he did it, but it had been an unexpected relief to be rid of the plastic tether. Still I moved carefully, vaguely afraid I might die. Floyd was across the room digging through the pile of discarded skates. "Hey George, what size shoe do you wear?"

"No. No. Floyd. I can't skate—it's too cold, and anyway, my heart . . ." I held my chest and shook my head. Floyd tossed me a mismatched pair of size tens. "Put these on."

I wobbled when I first walked out on the ice, but within minutes, my legs felt steady. The surface was, for the most part, smooth, and after I found them by falling a few times, I was able to avoid the pocked areas. The rink wasn't lighted, but Floyd had left the door to the warming shack open and the glow of the fire lit the west end of the

ice so that as I glided I was partner to my shadow. I cut right foot over left and imagined myself an Ice Capades star, passing in and out of the spotlight, thrilling the crowd with my bounds and leaps, my tight pants emphasizing my strong legs, my puffy-sleeved blouse fluttering gracefully in the breeze I created with my speed.

Floyd sat inside the shack, feeding the fire, and when, after fifteen minutes or so, ankles aching from the unexpected workout, I tried to join him, he shook his head and sent me back out again. I pleaded, but he stood resolute, blocking the door with a two by four in his hands. When I came back out on the ice, I was amazed at the strength in my legs, and I swept from end to end of the rink.

My skate blades were dull, but I dug them determinedly into the ice. I skated on automatic at first, my mind nowhere I would ever be able to recount. I tried to go into the shack and rest two more times, but Floyd always barred the way. Soon I was skating out of desperation, the warmth from my exertion something on which I was forced to rely.

After a while I started thinking about Floyd and the hospital. I didn't know why I was listening to him and staying out on the ice. I didn't know why I'd been listening to him for the past week. I felt a kinship with him, but I couldn't find a reason why I'd let him into my life in the first place. I guess mostly there was just no reason not to—I mean I had plenty of room. Accepting him seemed natural—part of my pattern of swallowing my lot, no questions asked, which I guessed was what Floyd had been getting at when he yanked me out of the hospital.

I must have been skating for almost an hour when I stopped at the far end of the rink and realized something was different. I shook out my legs, thinking I might have a cramp and then I put my hand to my chest and felt a slow beat, like the thump of car tires over a flattened hubcap on a lightly traveled road. I felt a rush of relief, as if a friend in danger had made it safely home. I stood for a while enjoying the sensation of beating within the acceptable limit, and then I skated to the end of the rink near the parking lot. When I climbed over the barrier and my skates hit the cement, I almost turned back, but then I moved ahead, glad to be on firm non-skid ground, heading home. I felt steady and solid even as I wobbled and scraped on the tips of my dull blades, lurching toward possibility, knowing Floyd would understand.

Stepan Chapman

The Last Judgment

The element of incurability has been eliminated.
—Joseph Lister

As the dream began, I was no one, just a pair of eyes looking down at the ocean from the sky. The air was a greasy sepia, flecked with suspended carbon. It eddied sluggishly over the crust of the dead ocean.

The surface of the Pacific was a wrinkled plain of sludge that gleamed feebly in the weak, gray light. Mounds of suds spilled from the cracks that snaked like rivers across it. It had rained for forty days and nights. But no more. It would never rain again.

If I looked closely at the crust, I could make out the hump of the survival arcology. The zoo ship. The last hope of vertebrate biology. Rusting away in a tangle of giant molds, like a silver blimp that had crashed at sea. A proud vessel, shaped like a milkweed pod. Once she'd been a part of a proud fleet. Now she was a sole survivor.

I was only a pair of eyes. But I knew that I *did* have a body on board the arcology. Where else *would* it have been? Outside, it would've dissolved.

Inside the stranded metal shell, there was a stall. And in the stall, breathing sour musty air, an elephant hung in a hammock of nylon rope. That was me. A flatulent old elephant with my skin hanging off of me and half of my teeth missing. Domesticated. Underfed. Equipped from birth with a mechanical larynx. Asleep and snoring and drooling on my whiskers.

The keepers of the zoo and most of the animals had starved or been hunted down by predators. Just before we killed them, keepers left me in charge, as a joke perhaps, because my name was Noah. But I took my responsibilities seriously. I was in charge now. In charge of a shipwreck. And who was better qualified than I—a shivering bundle of bones, huddled in a ball amid the smells of mildewed hay and urine. My ribcage moving slowly in and out. A drain on the available oxygen. Grinding a length of rope between my teeth. Afflicted with dysentery and trying not to wake. The last elephant on earth.

I chewed on my rope. I didn't want to think about how hungry I was. Hunger can be bottomless. Earlier in the voyage, I'd had a mate, but the jackals ate her. It was a merciful death. Hunger is the same for jackals as for elephants.

My mind ran on like a mill wheel—hungry for wheat to grind, grinding only itself. I'm always a monster in my dreams, one way or another.

I opened one eye. There was a sty on the lower lid. There was a wintry light, and a smell of things that needed burying. I lowered my feet to the deck and stood there, swaying groggily. I trudged to my hay trough and rested my head on it.

Flies were everywhere, ceaselessly buzzing. What did they find to eat? Shit, of course. They ate shit. The algae in the ponic tanks were supposed to eat it, but the algae had all died.

I lifted my trunk and wiped the crusts from my eyes. I began to hear the noises of the ship—bird chatter, hoarse barking, sudden shrieks . . . water dripping onto sheet metal. I wrapped my trunk around the lamp cord and tugged. The light hurt my eyes. I went to my pail and sucked up some cold, stale water. The water hurt my teeth. There was nothing to eat.

I shuffled to the corner of the stall where my crucifix hung. I knelt on the straw and made the sign of the cross with my trunk. I prayed to Jesus for deliverance and for the forgiveness of my sins. And I cursed the name of Man.

I plodded through the gate of the stall onto a causeway of steel bars that hung in the chilly half-light of the access shaft. The spiral ramp groaned as it took my weight. Somewhere, a pig was grunting. I started down the ramp, passing decks and platforms . . . coops, pens, and tanks . . . torn mattresses, rolls of chicken wire, and gnawed bones. Everything broken open. Everything trashed. When you swept the trash from one level, it fell to the next level down.

A sparrow fluttered up the shaft and perched on a railing ahead of me. A pigeon landed beside her, and she hopped to the opposite rail. The pigeon fluffed up his pin feathers and cooed. We both knew what was on *his* mind. He wanted to *reproduce*. Some guys never give up. If it moves, fuck it. That's *their* philosophy.

I got off the ramp at the level of the slave kennel. (It had been the infirmary in the days before we killed the humans. Then we'd kept the carnivores locked up there. Until they got out.) Lately I kept my slave girl there. Her name was Ivy. I kept the little wretch alive because she was useful to me. Some of the lab equipment required hands.

The girl had built a hovel out of plastic, rope, and squares of corrugated iron. I could smell her already. Like a grubby rodent, all

knuckles and snot. Smoke was seeping from the roof of the hut. I'd told her a million times not to light fires in there. Humans are totally unmanageable.

I called to her. She crept, squinting, from her hovel. Her chain trailed from her ankle, dragging in the dust, connected only to herself. Her rags were septic, and she stared down at the deck between her feet.

"Come with me," I told her, and impatiently turned myself around. She followed behind me, until we came to the steel hatch of the bio lab.

"Open it," I told her. She spun the latch wheel. "Go through," I told her.

The rest of the ark had gone through hell, but the lab was my personal shrine to order. There were work benches with tops of black slate, white porcelain sinks, and propane taps for the bunsen burners, and shelves against the bulkheads, heavy with jugs of chemicals. There were ranks of cages and terraria, and electronic boxes linked with colored wires, and glass-fronted cabinets filled with petri dishes, microscope slides, and rolls of film. There were jars of formaldehyde which held scraps of flesh tied to plastic cards. Stuck to the jars were labels written crookedly in purple ink. The last tadpole. The last carp. Cardboard boxes of beetles on pins. Peacock plumes and the skull of an ocelot. Paleontology. Soup bones.

Ivy took the log book from its drawer and opened it on top of a bench. I looked at the wall clock for the date and the time. I told her what to write.

"Turn on the lock light," I said. She went to the fuse box and flipped a switch. I moved to the hatch of the air lock and put an eye to the fiberoptic periscope built into the door. Brown fumes, speckled with black ash, churned in the dingy chamber.

I looked for a guinea pig or a rat, but all the cages were empty. I looked for a dove, but the dove cotes were empty too. One of the cage doors was hanging from a single hinge.

"*Look* at that door!" I growled. "I *told* you to *fix* that! Can't you do *anything*, you little scumbag?"

I prowled the rows of terraria, searching for a specimen. Every day, the test had to be run. The results were always the same, but that was no excuse for slacking off. If I had to use a fly, I'd use a fly. There wasn't any shortage of flies.

Something moved inside one of the benches.

"Look under that sink," I said. "There's something alive in there." Ivy opened the cupboard doors.

"It's a toad," she said. I told her to catch it. She dragged the toad out and dropped it into an empty jar. It bashed its snout twice against

the glass, then sat still. I told Ivy to put on her rubber gloves and apron, which she did, in her typical slipshod fashion.

"*Wash* the specimen," I told her. "Do I *always* have to *remind* you?" She put the jar in the sink and turned on the water faucet. The toad tried to swim. Ivy put her hand over the mouth of the jar and poured the water down the drain. The little clod couldn't even wash a toad properly.

Beside the air lock were a couple of buttons—one red, one green. I poked the green button with my trunk, and the motor kicked in, flushing the bad air out of the lock. Vent valves opened, sucking air from the lab. Ivy brought the jar to the hatch and hauled out the toad. It kicked once, then hung limp in her hand. It was probably sick. Most of us were.

Just below the periscope, there was a tube that penetrated the hatch, with a lid at either end. The tube was used for putting things into the lock. I held my breath while Ivy opened the lid on our side of the door. She thrust the toad through six overlapping rubber flaps, then pulled out her hand and slammed the lid.

I put my eye to the periscope again. It was angled at the floor of the lock, and I could see the toad down there, flat on its belly. I swung my trunk to the side and pressed the red button. I saw the dark air returning to the lock. I saw the toad spreading like freshly poured pancake. It turned into a puddle of batter. White foam lathered up from it, turned yellow, and began to smoke. It boiled away and left behind a puddle-shaped stain of greasy carbon.

I told Ivy what to write in the log. *Same result.* The achievements of the humans were always staggering. But to poison an entire planet was surely their crowning achievement. They'd cured the earth of themselves. The operation was a success, but the planet died.

Ivy crept up beside me, wiping her nose on her wrist. She asked me a question, but I couldn't understand her. Perhaps I was going deaf.

"What did you say?"

"Do you want me to wipe your eyes?"

"Why would I want *that*?"

"The *sties*, Noah. I can get a rag and wipe off the pus."

"All right then. Shut up and *do* it, you moron."

She got a rag and a chair and stood on the chair to dab at my eyelids. She hummed while she worked, and with her free hand, stroked my bristly old head.

Any number of tasks might have occupied me next. I could have inspected the insectorium. I could've visited the mollusk beds or the tree nursery. I could have returned to my stall and played my Bartok tapes. But I knew exactly how I would spend the rest of my day. I

would go to the hydroponics bay and drink myself senseless with cleaning fluid. It was a habit I'd acquired.

"Get away from me!" I bellowed. Ivy jumped off her chair. "Get out of my sight!"

My legs took me methodically toward the ponics bay. They seemed to have a mind of their own. There was a man in the Bible called Noah, and he was a drunkard too. But *he* didn't get shitfaced until he ran aground at Ararat. Whereas *I* wasn't going to land anywhere.

At the ponics bay, I yanked open a closet and dragged out a square aluminum can. Pulled the cap off and wormed in my trunk. Sucked up a snort and let it run down my throat. Burning. Spreading numbness. Deadening the pain.

A drunken elephant is a ludicrous yet terrible sight. The dripping eyes. The tuneless hissing through the teeth. The clumsy waltzing. The brain disconnected. The heart uninvolved.

My cello case was leaning in the corner where I'd left it. Seeing it made me want to play. I lowered the cello to the foamcrete deck and took the bow in my trunk. I laid the bow to the strings and thought of the beautiful music I could make, if only I could finger the strings, or tune them. I drew the bow back and forth and made a sound like a rusty saw on wet wood.

I threw the bow against a plexiglass tank, put my foot on the cello, and crushed it.

I shouted for the girl, and she came running. She followed me around—the obsequious little parasite. Hiding from me. Never letting me be.

"You were spying on me!"

"No!"

"Don't lie to me! Do you want me to thrash you?"

"No, Sir!" She was shaking.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes, Sir."

"What are you crying for?"

"I don't know."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I won't tell you!"

"Tell me, or I'll whip you!"

"I'm afraid that you'll kill me!"

"Is *that* all?"

Ivy began to wail.

"Shut up!" I told her. "Get down on your knees." She didn't hear me. I slapped her with my trunk.

"Get on your knees and roll over!" I told her. She got down and rolled.

"Sit up," I said. "Speak."

She barked, the way I'd taught her.

"Go to sleep," I said. "Go to sleep."

She pressed her head to the deck and covered her eyes.

I raised one foot and held it over her head. It gently brushed her matted black hair. Her head was small and fragile as a melon. I felt myself drifting apart into a swarm of furious scarlet impulses.

A creaking noise startled me, and the deck went crooked beneath me. I staggered sideways into a partition. The deck jerked out from under me and dropped a yard or two. Birds and beasts of every description were screeching and howling. I rushed into the access shaft. Water was thundering down below. Mist was filling the shaft, obscuring the ramp, and rainbows were dancing in the mist.

The arc was sinking! The ocean would swallow us! I stumbled down the deck of the ponics bay, to tell Ivy the news. We were finally going to die. *Hallelujah!*

For a moment, I thought she was hiding from me. Then I saw her. She hadn't moved. I had stepped on her head. She was going to miss all the excitement.

While pandemonium broke loose around me, I stood and gazed down at the bloody pulp that had once been Ivy.

Is this what dreams are for? I asked myself. *For wallowing in misery? For killing what we love? Is this really the best I can do?*

I pressed my head to a bulkhead, and tears trickled to the corners of my mouth. A lot of nonsense was running through my head. *Tomorrow is another day. It's always darkest before the dawn. Someday we'll remember this and laugh.*

The front of my trunk felt hot, and I smelled something burning. I pulled away from the metal and saw the spot where I'd pressed my head beginning to glow. White sparks sprang from the bulkhead and fell, sizzling, to the damp foamcrete.

Ivy rolled over and sat up. Her flattened head hung behind her back like the hood of a parka. She pointed at the sparks, bouncing excitedly and bubbling from her neck.

The source of the sparks moved sideways, leaving an empty slot behind it in the bulkhead. Someone was cutting through with an acetylene torch. From outside the arcology.

Amid the cries of drowning creatures, I watched the slot form an L, then a C, and finally an O. Someone kicked out the center of the O, and it fell with a clang to the deck.

A blond young man in a white naval uniform ducked through the hole with a cutting torch strapped to his back. Behind the bulkhead was absolute blackness. He smiled at me as though we were old friends. I liked his face.

"Naomi," he said. "It's great to meet you! I've *known* about you for *years*, but we couldn't get *through* till now."

Ivy ran up to the man and bounced around him like a puppy, tugging at his coat.

"Lie down," he said to her. "You're dead." And he gave her a push in the chest.

She fell onto her back and lay at his feet, perfectly still.

"Who *are* you?" I asked him.

"My name is Wing. I'm an angel. I've come to take you out."

He squirmed out of his torch harness and extended his hand to me, so I shook it. Then I looked at *my* hand. I hadn't known I *had* one.

"You thought you were an elephant, didn't you?" He took a hand mirror from his coat pocket and held it out for me. "I never go anywhere without a mirror," he said.

I looked at my face in the mirror. I was a young woman with green eyes and yellow hair.

"Let's blow this dump," said Wing. "Before it sinks." He turned to the hole he'd cut and started through it.

"It's *dark* in there," I told him. He straightened up.

"No," he said. "It's dark in *here*. I'll show you."

He propped one of his shoes against the bulkhead and pushed. It leaned, then fell flat on its back. It was painted canvas on a frame of plywood. A stage flat. And beyond it, utter darkness.

Wing circled the room, edging between the ponics tanks to push down the walls. He left us standing on a rectangular island of foamcrete that floated in a jet black void. The ceiling hung suspended over our heads. Wing walked out from under it and stood in the void.

"I think this dream is just about played out," he said. "Don't you?" He turned and walked away.

"Wait!" I called. Then I was holding tightly to his arm, and we were walking together, through empty space.

Leaving

paper cutting
by Suzanne Kosanke

The Imago

But then I should be giving the Danish Academy the loophole of saying that the exalted teachings of that [i.e. Hegel's] wisdom were not accessible to inferior intellects like mine . . . which cannot grasp its unfathomable profundity of wisdom.
—Arthur Schopenhauer whose criticism of Hegel in an essay submitted to a Danish Academy contest caused his paper to be rejected despite its being the only entry.

If most people were asked which author is considered the greatest novelist who ever lived, the most common answer would probably be James Joyce. If, though, most people were asked who their favorite novelist was, they would probably mention someone else. It is a distinction unique in literature; I mean the distinction between the insignificant place Joyce's novels have in people's inmost hearts and the monumental reputation Joyce has for them. Many people know a few lines of Shakespeare. They delight in his plays and employ Shakespearean phrases in daily life without realizing it because so many have passed into our language. Nothing on this order is true of Joyce's novels.

Yet today Joyce's preeminence seems as axiomatic as Shakespeare's. Indeed, Joyce has become a figure of 20th century mythology, the Writer Incarnate, the Novelist God. Publisher Bill Henderson expressed this general perception to aspiring writers in the *Publish It Yourself Handbook:*

> About your chances: if you expect to be recognized as the next James Joyce, realize that the chances are a trillion to one against. But never forget that one chance.

Why Henderson invokes Joyce instead of, say, Flaubert or Tolstoy stems from another unique aspect of Joyce's reputation; each of Joyce's novels is exponentially more unorthodox and linguistically complex than its predecessor. *Hamlet* by contrast is a greater play than *Measure for Measure,* but next to the differences between Joyce's novels, the language and the structure of Shakespeare's two plays

fundamentally resemble all his dramas. This is also so for every other great writer except James Joyce.

Joyce's most complex and unorthodox book is *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce considered it his greatest work. It was his final novel. He spent 17 years writing it, dedicating far more thought and time to it than his other books. Hence *Finnegans Wake* must be felt by many to be the ultimate masterpiece of the greatest novelist who ever lived.

The problem with *Finnegans Wake*, however, is that fifty years after its publication, decades after works from *Remembrance of Things Past* to the *Rites of Spring* have been enjoyed by the whole world, *Finnegans Wake* is today enjoyed only by a few academic Joyce specialists and a smattering of *Finnegans Wake* societies who "read it" by holding a meeting where two paragraphs are collectively speculated on. This is because Joyce took to his grave the meanings of many words he invented for *Finnegans Wake*. Hence no O.E.D. for this novel can ever exist to elucidate the entire text.

This has created a unique situation. *Finnegans Wake* is today the only *unread* novel that is also considered the greatest novel ever written, or one of them. The reality resembles a myth of punishment devised by the Greek gods; millions of people now and to come are fated to diligently open the novel, soon give up, and place *Finnegans Wake* perpetually on millions of shelves unread, the book having communicated little beyond a false shame at being too stupid to understand great literature, while the novel receives forever the homage of masterpiece by this same "readership."

Devotees of *Finnegans Wake* explain this fantastic contradiction-in-terms by holding responsible the limitations of readers and by writing books of explication and translation. However, as critic Wayne Booth points out:

> In all the skeleton keys and classroom guides there is an open assumption that his later works, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* cannot be read; they can only be studied . . . [Joyce] saw nothing wrong with the fact that [his books] could not . . . stand on their own two feet." . . . [furthermore] . . . About the more fundamental matters the skeleton keys and guides are of little help because unfortunately they do not agree, they do not agree at all.

So, while exegetes like Anthony Burgess exhort readers by calling the novel, "one of the most entertaining books ever written," Edmund Wilson, who admired *Finnegans Wake*, wrote that without Joyce's original skeleton key it is doubtful that the novel would ever have been grasped. In brief, the novel is not and cannot be entertaining in any commonly understood meaning of the word. As a consequence of Joyce's methods in *Ulysses*, few have ever read it cover to cover. Ac-

cording to Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann, W.B. Yeats publicly praised *Ulysses* without being able to read it completely. Hence, as Wayne Booth observes:

> "I would not want to be asked for proof but I suspect that many besides Yeats have praised *Ulysses* as a work of genius without being sufficiently interested even to finish it."

In brief, Joyce is the only writer whose reputation as the greatest novelist in history is basically founded on one novel practically no one can read and upon another novel practically no one completes. Now, is this not a paradox? And does it not raise wonderful questions about our literary values, foibles and needs? If, for instance, as a read novel, *Finnegans Wake* has no existence, perhaps it is a myth that we cannot live without it. Perhaps, in fact, it is precisely the shortcomings of *Finnegans Wake* which are the sources of the novel's standing. If this is so, is Joyce's reputation perhaps the most interesting, peculiar and oppressive of our age?

Finnegans Wake repudiates the esthetics of every other great novelist whose highest values were infinite clarity and a prose subordinated to a novel's contents. In fact, *Finnegans Wake* challenges the legitimacy of masterpieces from *The Iliad* to *To The Lighthouse*, for it implies they are all obsolete and inferior because they are composed in "mere" plain language. The novel has inspired a body of fiction which also cannot be widely enjoyed or finished, only studied. Malcolm Cowley's tenets dovetail with a proclamation published in "Transition" where *Finnegans Wake* appeared;

> *[An author] has the right to use words of his own fashioning and to disregard existing grammatical and syntactical laws.
> *The Writer expresses. He does not communicate.
> *The plain reader be dammed.

However, they sound also like every Maximum Leader's credo, analogous to:

> *The Maximum Leader has the right to make laws and taxes and penal codes of his own fashioning and to disregard existing safeguards and laws.
> *The Maximum Leader rules and orders. He does not communicate.
> *The plain citizen be damned.

In sum, to be supremely great, must the novel reject "limits" and consist of a unique set of multi-lingual words peculiar to each author? Or should a great novel be capable of being read completely with es-

thetic delight? If this last is so, what is the real value of *Finnegans Wake*, of the other novels it inspired or of Joyce as a novelist?

The first obstacle to an honest assessment of Joyce's work is that it is taboo to say his novels are flawed. How routinely overlooked it is that Joyce wrote drama and poetry but is thought neither a major poet or playwright. Joyce's reputation resembles the Chekhov character who possessed, "one of the few fortunate names which it is considered in bad taste to take in vain, to abuse in public or in print." Vladimir Nabokov, for example, was a man so fearless in his public literary judgments that when he was chastised for this he responded in an open letter of rebuke to Edmund Wilson, "I refuse to be guided and controlled by a communion of established views and academic traditions . . . ." Yet in an interview, even Nabokov, after calling *Finnegans Wake* a "formless and dull mass . . . a persistent snore," added defensively, "I know I shall be excommunicated for this pronouncement." Perhaps, however, Booth expresses best the unhealthy orthodoxy people harbor about *Finnegans Wake*:

> I could no doubt leave some readers convinced that I have read *Finnegans Wake*. But I must confess that I have not. I do read in it from time to time with great delight until boredom sets in . . . Will someone who has read this unreadable book tell me [here follows a question about the spelling of a word in the novel.] You don't know? Or care? We are in trouble you and I.

The real question, however, is why is it "you and I" who are "in trouble?" There are several irrational sources. Joyce was a supremely erudite polymath and polyglot. Among scholars he is felt to be the ultimate intimidating genius. Also, readers easily comprehended *Dubliners* and found it a work of genius. They also occasionally deciphered instants of radiance in *Ulysses* in sections such as the conclusion of Molly Bloom's soliloquy. It seems logical, therefore, to assume the impenetrability of *Finnegans Wake* must be one's own failing. Moreover, Joyce enjoys unsurpassed renown for sacrificing his life to art and living in poverty for as long as necessary in his obsession to make perfect uncompromising books.

Joyce spent twenty-four years on *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses*. As a figure of myth, Joyce's devotion to artistic ideals reminds many of religious saints. Then too, Joyce's extreme formalistic originality has elevated him to a symbol of the human spirit which triumphed over conformity and established a tradition of experimentation.

However, these are all fallacious or insufficient reasons why *Finnegans Wake* should enjoy the esteem it does. For it is irrelevant to a novel's artistic value, after all, whether its author was a genius who made inhuman self-sacrifices to compose it. Were this sufficient we

would automatically classify every novel by every self-denying writer in MENSA as a masterpiece. Nor is a primary criteria for greatness how long it took a work of art to be created. Some of Mozart's—and hence art's—greatest masterpieces were composed in a few days or weeks or months. Had Joyce used the Jack Kerouac's puerile automatic writing techniques and produced *Finnegans Wake* in three sleepless nights, the novel's merits would be identical. Great erudition and originality in form and language do not make a book a masterpiece by definition; a book can be original and a failure because it fails on other more important esthetic criteria.

Actually, *Finnegans Wake*'s "discrediting" of the values of clarity and lucidity got several boosts from history. Earlier in the century Communist regimes crippled the once self-evident precept that a book must above all communicate to its audience. They invoked this principle to force writers to produce propaganda in novel and poem form. The "socialist-realist school" denounced or destroyed any artist who did not "communicate to the masses." Hence to object to *Finnegans Wake* today is to invite denunciations as a flatfoot from the Thought Police who wants to impose restrictions that will produce a literary infinity of boring dead plots and prose.

The truth is, however, that both *Finnegans Wake* and "socialist-realist" novels violate equally the cardinal principle of lucid communication of beauty and truth. For the death of communication, and hence art, comes equally from Joycean avant-garde incomprehensibility as it does from slabs of propaganda.

A second boost came from 20th century visual art. The notion of a common criteria of esthetic values by which to measure avant-garde work came to seem anti-art, the bluenosed mark of the Philistine. Consequently, an assumption grew that avant-garde work was by its nature superior, and today archetypical avant-garde novel *Finnegans Wake* silences anyone who fears being lumped with people who long ago were horrified by Cubism.

One other factor at work is our emotionally indispensable belief in perpetual progress and our misconception that human progress is like technological progress. Western civilization has evolved a higher standard of living, the ability to put a man on the moon and so on, by refusing to remain a static society directed by religious dogma and tradition. Innovation therefore is considered superior. Hence we assume the avant garde novel must epitomize literary progress and improvement. But this is a misleading analogy. Technological innovation concerns the physical world, which has qualities very different from human nature, which is literature's concern. Technology takes innumerable forms because it creates *material* improvements. The gap be-

tween what man is and his goal of being able to control his environment like a god is infinite.

Avant-garde literary innovations like *Finnegans Wake*, however, should be likened to institutions which reflect human nature, such as political or economic systems. Human nature is essentially constant and has devised few durable economic and political systems. The best economic system was invented in Athens 2,000 years ago. The most beneficial economic system, capitalism, has existed in some form throughout history. In contrast, the disasters of Naziism and Communism are modern innovations. Political and economic systems show that natural limits exist. Does this not suggest there are also limitations to the forms literature can successfully take and that one criteria of a great novel is that it be readable to most people interested in literature?

When Ezra Pound said, "Make it new," he frightfully confused novelty with, "Make it better: improve upon it." There is nothing necessarily synonymous about novelty and improvement. Even Pound, Joyce's champion, objected to *Finnegans Wake* on the grounds that art had to make contact with others.

Although *Finnegans Wake* fails this criteria it retains its standing because it performs a far more important function; it sustains illusions about life too vital to renounce. It encourages the denial of established limits to literature, and thereby reflects the illusions we cannot give up about the limitations of life. It is intolerable, for example, either to renounce our belief in the ultimate establishment of universal brotherhood and happiness which Christianity and Marxism articulate, or to accept life instead as what Hobbes and America's founders described. Innovation is also synonymous to many with hope, a concept indispensable to the will to live. Dante made the loss of hope the motto of Hell. *Finnegans Wake*, embodying innovation, incarnates such illusions that help us, to the degree a literary symbol is able, to escape such renunciations.

Ironically the general response to *Finnegans Wake*'s greatest shortcoming, its impenetrable language, has been to presume that this incomprehensibility actually embodies ultimate truth, the supreme literary illusion. Indeed, mankind's general belief in and yearning for ultimate truth is the core myth that *Finnegans Wake* sustains. Do we not all instinctively feel that the ultimate origins and meaning of existence are an unknowable mystery whose solution must be too complex to be comprehended? *Finnegans Wake*, with its cosmic shroud of language and learning makes it seem to possess inscrutable omniscience which resembles our idea of the forces behind the universe.

Thus are the needs for religious faith erroneously sublimated into literature. For to assume these things about *Finnegans Wake* presup-

poses that Joyce possessed, outside human experience, unique access to ultimate truth, and only in the form *Finnegans Wake* assumed could he pass on ontological revelations. But as Joyce admits through Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*:

> I wouldn't give a snap of my two fingers for all their learning . . . who was the first person in the universe before there was anybody that made it all who ah that they don't know and neither do I so there you are . . .

If *Finnegans Wake* could be widely read it would be obvious that it is no deity's revealed word, no matter how much Vico it contains. The persistence of *Finnegans Wake*'s reputation shows just how precious is the wish for ultimate truth which one day will be unriddled and resolve all. Given these difficulties, the natural question becomes whether *Finnegans Wake* takes the only form possible for that. Joyce felt its language had to consist of invented words with multiple meanings to most truthfully present the consciousness of a dreaming mind who is simultaneously H.C. Earwicker and Everyman. By structuring the novel as a dream so its action could have the widest possible scope, Joyce felt he was getting at truths impossible to convey by traditional means, truths which immensely enriched literature and mankind.

Unfortunately, however, Joyce's all-too-human foibles appear to have seriously contaminated the purity of his absolutist methods. Given that people dream in images and not words, ultimate verisimilitude dictated that Joyce produce a surrealistic movie and not a novel. Given Joyce's enormous initial "compromise," why did he not make the lesser one of making the novel generally intelligible? Especially since novels don't reproduce life—they are collections of printed symbols that only "live" through the animation of the reader's imagination and intellect.

Some evidence, unfortunately, suggests that Joyce exploited the esthetically-worthless general tendency to confuse obscurity and profundity. When, for instance, a French translator of *Ulysses*, Benoit-Mechin, asked Joyce for his scheme for the Penelope chapter, Joyce responded:

> If I gave it up immediately I'd lose my immortality. I've put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant and that's the only way of insuring one's immortality.

When Max Eastman insisted Joyce provide a key to *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce replied, "The demand I make of my reader is that he should devote his whole life to reading my works." Initially one might dismiss these as facetious remarks. However, Ellmann makes clear that Joyce

aspired to be history's preeminent novelist. In *Ulysses* Joyce attempted to write the definitive book about waking life, likening himself to Homer, history's primogenitive writer. In *Finnegans Wake*, as Ellman puts it, "beyond language" Joyce declared he was greater than English itself, the only novelist who invented his own language, one beyond man's grasp, thus raising his accomplishment forever beyond Shakespeare or any future "competitor." His insistence that readers spend a lifetime to figure out *Finnegans Wake*, however, was an esthetic catastrophe and one need only examine Joyce's claims in the light of books that millions of people for millennia have devoted their lives to studying—the Bible, for instance. The Bible, of course, exemplifies a criteria for literary greatness *Finnegans Wake* lacks; the complexity of what it says is much greater than the methods it uses to express it. Those who study the Bible for a lifetime do not do so to decipher each individual word, but to learn how to apply the book's contents to spiritual problems. A lifetime study of *Finnegans Wake* is an altogether different project, one roughly analogous to cracking Linear B, except that the ancient author *was* trying to be as clear as possible, his language just went extinct on him. Worse, a good portion of the complexity of *Finnegans Wake* was described by Cowley thusly:

> [Here was] the disheartening spectacle of Joyce spending three days elaborating a single sentence containing words of Finnish derivation and ending with the word "finish" as a key to future scholars who might or might not be interested in unraveling its meaning—the author of *Ulysses* wasting himself in erudite puns and crossword puzzles.

Is this a legitimate basis for immortality for *Finnegans Wake* or for readers to spend a lifetime of decipherment? As the professor-editors of an edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* observe in connection to the novel:

> full annotation of even a few pages would require a large book . . . many readers [however] feel that the law of diminishing returns has now begun to operate, and that the effort of both author and reader is disproportionate.

In short, a work's obscurity is justifiable only if the profundity of its contents equals or exceeds it. And so, when Ellmann says Joyce "disregarded the constraints English placed on him," the biographer presumes this was *an improvement* on "merely" communicating in a mother tongue. Yet is it not self-contradictory to claim language is a barrier to communication? For an experiment like Joyce's to succeed ought it to at least communicate more effectively than Shakespeare's language? Did not Joyce mainly demonstrate that once a writer ceases

to communicate he produces something less than language, mere self expression intelligible to himself alone?

Thus Joyce shaped a working definition of the experimental novel. Vonnegut once observed there are two kinds of experimental novels. The first sort succeed; people read them with vast enjoyment and comprehension. *One Hundred Years Of Solitude* and *Mr. Bridge* would be examples. As a result, though, such novels cease to be considered truly experimental.

The second kind of experimental novels are the failed experiments which do not communicate brilliantly and which produce prose and structures that appear affected, gratuitously chaotic, replete with incoherent metaphors—books the great preponderance of serious readers find an unrewarding chore they do not finish and furtively despise. Due largely to *Finnegans Wake*, however, and the erroneous belief in shrouded ultimate truth, such novels today are often hailed as the only truly experimental masterpieces.

For art to be of the first rank, however, must not the esthetic pleasures it renders always rank higher than its originality of form? Would not a literary universe of *Finnegans Wakes* have been the death of the novel, shriveling literature to a desiccated specialty of a few hundred souls scattered throughout the world?

Still, after all is said, are not all these objections inimical to one of history's most daring flights of the mind? Perhaps *Finnegans Wake* is apprehendable by only a few elect and this is sufficient. But is a work great if it is intelligible to only one person? To two? What does it signify that any serious reader with a small effort receives incomparable esthetic rewards from *Remembrance Of Things Past* while *Finnegans Wake* will always be the archetypical tree that fell in the forest that no one heard?

The crowning irony about the whole question of *Finnegans Wake* is that *Dubliners*, Joyce's first book, is the archetype for the values argued for here. While contemporary novelists have generally ignored *Finnegans Wake*, the opposite is so of *Dubliners*, Joyce's revolutionary and most influential contribution. In it, Joyce liberated fiction from sentimentality, contrived plot, and mere verbiage, and enabled it to express far profounder depths of common humanity. The prose of *Dubliners* had the supreme clarity, suppleness, precision and evocativeness reminiscent of Shakespeare. In *Dubliners* Joyce combined a phenomenal grasp of human nature and uncontrived language that simultaneously conveyed naturalistic and symbolic meaning of tremendous importance and emotional power. However, as though to exemplify Vonnegut's maxim, *Dubliners*, Joyce's greatest work, is considered inferior to his last novels. In truth, however, despite Joyce being one of the most erudite, daring, and dedicated writers in his-

tory, when viewed through the more important esthetic values and criteria suggested here, Joyce is neither the greatest of all novelists nor is *Finnegans Wake* a true supreme masterpiece. Joyce's reputation in fact ought to be based on the reverse chronological order of the fiction he wrote.

And herein lies history's greatest literary tragedy. Nabokov called *Finnegans Wake* "a tragic failure." This is so in the sense that Joyce was an artist of supreme ability and had he written his other books in the mode of *Dubliners* he probably would have created a body of work to rival Shakespeare. Instead, Joyce became a "disheartening spectacle," spending the most important 17 years of his creative life composing an unread book of ultimate obscurity, whose legacy has been a curse to literature. Indeed, Joyce's Daedalus quest of the ultimate and his abandonment of the esthetic of *Dubliners* amounted to a tragic literary suicide, a loss to literature equivalent to Mozart's premature death. For conceive of Mozart being granted 17 more years to compose music and when his time was up presenting the world at age 52 not just hundreds of works that soar inconceivably beyond the sphere of beauty of the music we know, but a tome of compositions that might have been written by John Cage.

None of this, however, will affect *Finnegans Wake*'s reputation. For most people cannot either bear to consider, or publicly admit to secretly having considered, even momentarily, the idea of limits in literature or the possibility that there could be a positive value to them. For to do so is synonymous in most minds with intolerance, with stifling creativity and free speech. Most cannot make the necessary distinction. Of course, to estimate *Finnegans Wake* appropriately we would also have to accept the impossibility of ultimate truth, break the superstitious connection in our minds between obscurity and infinite profundity, and accept instead Shakespearean lucidity as a superior esthetic value.

Rosemary Regan-Gavin

Style is Character: The Writing Style of Joan Didion

> My daughter was making, that day in Chicago, an entirely unconscious but quite basic assumption about people and the work they do. She was assuming that the glory she saw in the work reflected a glory in its maker, that the painting was the painter as the poem is the poet, that every choice one made alone—every word chosen or rejected, every brush stroke laid or not laid down—betrayed one's character. *Style* is *character*. It seemed to me that afternoon that I had rarely seen so instinctive an application of this familiar principle, and I recall being pleased not only that my daughter responded to style as character but that it was Georgia O'Keeffe's particular style to which she responded.
> —from "Georgia O'Keeffe"

Joan Didion makes no mystery of her attitude as a writer and as a woman about the relationship between style and character. *Style is character.* It is not surprising that Didion should think this, nor that she should state it so frankly in an essay whose public purpose was surely that of a review of O'Keeffe's book, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, but whose private purpose was the personal, self-revelatory, "recording how it felt to me" writing that we have come to know as hallmark Didion. What then, on examination, do five of her essays tell us about the style and character of Joan Didion?

Didion creates in "John Wayne: A Love Song," a portrait of John Wayne the American movie star, the all-American male hero, a bona fide "real" man, a portrait that is sensitive and reflective, almost reverential, a portrait of a character who changed her life and perhaps yours and mine. She writes, "When John Wayne rode through my childhood, and perhaps through yours, he determined forever the shape of certain of our dreams."

In this piece we are aware of Didion the author from the start, a characteristic not uncommon in many of her other essays. She starts the piece by remembering a time when she was a child idolizing Wayne, steps back a bit to move into a report which takes place on location with one of his movies, and finally ends with an intimate

glimpse of Wayne as she joins him and his wife and guests for dinner one night. Throughout, the writing is infused with precise details: locations, what people were and were not eating, exact numbers, colors, what people were wearing, and sensory details—the temperature, the way something sounded, the way things felt. Didion, the very careful observer. Her points are demonstrated by scenes that are described and by chunks of dialogue overheard or reported. She seems to miss nothing that could ever mean anything, yet she does not lecture. Her long, languorous sentences merely flow across the pages, around the bend in the river she evokes repetitively, along the river "where the cottonwoods grow," sentences that seem to fit the wide open expanse of the Western frontier and the American dreams depicted in most of Wayne's 165 films. Indeed, reading this essay is almost like viewing a film with Didion as our camera operator and director; and yet, she is not invisible as they are—every now and then she reminds us that this is an essay by striking a self-conscious "I am telling you this" attitude. This authorial presence occurs again and again in Didion's essays; "On the Road," "In Bed," and "In the Islands" come to mind.

In "Georgia O'Keeffe," Didion's presence is less obvious, though not submerged entirely. Again she relates an incident from personal experience, this time a visit to an art museum with her young daughter. But what strikes the reader is the extent to which Didion relies on the words of Georgia O'Keeffe. Didion's aim appears to be to look closely at this woman who seems "to have been equipped early with an immutable sense of who she was," the persona of O'Keeffe described as the original independent woman of the West (another American dream), a woman whose public image has reached mythic proportions. Didion lets her subject's words speak for themselves. The key then, is what words of O'Keeffe she chooses to share with us and how she makes them work toward her purpose.

To this end, we see another characteristic of much of Didion's prose. She uses another's sentence and turns it slightly to move the piece further into her own experience, yet never abandons her named subject. From O'Keeffe she quotes, "It is what I have done with where I have been that should be of interest." And in the next sentence, Didion takes those same words and repeats, "I recall an August afternoon in Chicago in 1973 when I took my daughter, then seven, to see what Georgia O'Keeffe had done with where she had been." These two sentences illustrate a number of common characteristics of Didion's prose style: the repetition of key phrases (anaphora); attention to times, dates, and places; and the turning from objective to the subjective, "I was there, this is how it felt to me" approach. From Didion's sentence we can also observe that the diction is usually plain

American, accessible, undecorated; one of her few lapses into use of metaphor occurs when she refers to her subject as "this angelic rattlesnake."

Didion's essays on O'Keeffe and Wayne are not her only efforts at portraiture; she wrote several in her book *The White Album*. And not all of her portraits are of people: some are of places.

"On the Mall" is a portrait of sorts (if portraiture of nonliving subjects is possible) of another American dream, the urban shopping center. This is the only essay of the five discussed here in which humor plays a role, albeit a very subtle one. What is amusing is that there could be so much to know about shopping centers, and that Joan Didion would like them. What a paradox that a writer for *Vogue* magazine, seemingly such a glamorous occupation, would want to escape her job and build shopping centers, and that she would take a correspondence course in shopping-center theory to that end!

Like "John Wayne: A Love Song," this essay includes both the personal experiences of Didion and objective, almost reportorial information about the science of shopping centers. Of the five essays examined, this is the first in which we see another of Didion's trademarks, the list. At least a third of her opening paragraph consists of names of shopping centers, nothing more, but she brings a sort of poetry to the names. Throughout the piece she repeats—almost chants—the names of famous developers of malls, especially James B. Douglas and David D. Bohannon. At one point she writes "many of their opinions are engraved upon my memory." One cannot resist the temptation to think "and so are their names," for she repeats them again and again, as well as other key phrases.

"On the Mall" is more casual in tone than the other two portraits, as is evident by her frequent use of asides, another indication of her characteristic self-consciousness. Her point of view in the piece is almost that of a sociologist: she describes an ordinary aspect of our modern lifestyle, a place in which it is possible to surrender our egos by walking through the door. Didion sees the role of shopping malls in our society as "the sedation of anxiety." After surrendering oneself to the experience of the mall, "one moves for a while in an aqueous suspension not only of light but of judgement, not only of judgement but of 'personality' "—the shopping mall as anesthetic!

She convincingly demonstrates what can happen in such a place by describing at the end of the piece a visit to a specific mall where she goes to buy a newspaper. Because the newspaper is not available, she eats caramel corn (which she does not like), buys two hats and four bottles of nail enamel (which she does not use), and a toaster. Later she regrets only the toaster. Notice her attention to specific details

such as numbers, the way her personal experiences illustrate the point of her essay, and the movement from the general to the specific.

"On the Road" is a chaotic description of a chaotic situation, that of being on a cross-country tour, promoting a book. Predominant in the work are her lists (fragments of her itinerary, what she packed for the trip, reminiscent of her essay "The White Album"), her propensity to invoke the buzzwords and names of the day and age, in this case the mid-70s, and her frequent use of sentences connected by "and," where everything has the "leg bone connected to the thigh bone" kind of quality to it. Everything means something to the ever-observant Didion. Throughout the piece we have the sense that the author is aware that she is viewed (for the purpose of the talk-show circuit on which she finds herself) as a commentator on our society, but who is unable to kid herself; in fact, who realizes that she is as confused and psychologically fragmented as the next person. She ferrets out the absurdities of being on the road and makes them emblematic of the time she is describing, a time in which convenience means everything, a time in which people and opinions are too often in the air. She suggests that just as we surrender our egos when entering a shopping mall, she surrenders her ego to the frenzy of being on the road. She ends on a personal note, asking the oft-repeated questions her interviewers have been asking of her, "Where are we heading? What does it mean?" Again she has taken us from the general, societal overview to a more personal, introspective point of view.

"On Keeping a Notebook" combines elements of Didion's style that are by now familiar to us: the conversational, though not folksy, tone, the recording and recounting of overheard conversations to call forth a specific time and place, and using those conversations to create a narrative of sorts; the use of lists and series; the presence of a self-deprecatory, exacting, self-conscious observer/author; the invoking of names of people who were well-known during the time described; and the revealing of a world where everything, even the quirkiest details, means something more far-reaching and more significant than one would have guessed. In this case, the keeping of a notebook and the reasons for doing so occupy Didion's attention.

"On Keeping a Notebook" is more personal than the other beautifully-crafted essays. She describes the keepers of notebooks as "a different breed altogether, lonely and resistant rearrangers of things, anxious malcontents, children afflicted apparently at birth with some presentiment of loss." And "I imagine . . . that the notebook is about other people. But of course it is not." And finally, "*Remember what it was to be me:* that is always the point." This frank tone is not trying to persuade us to become notebook-keepers, too; this piece was written for herself; she has merely deigned to share it with us. E.B. White

wrote "Every writer, by the way he uses the language, reveals something of his spirit, his habits, his capacities, his bias. Creative writing is communication through revelation—it is the Self escaping into the open. No writer long remains incognito." If what E.B. White wrote is true, then Didion's "On Keeping a Notebook" must be her escape into the open, the literary expression of the idea *style is character* that her daughter instinctively recognized that day in Chicago.

Works Cited

Didion, Joan. "Georgia O'Keeffe." *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

———. "In Bed." *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

———. "In the Islands." *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

———. "John Wayne: A Love Song." *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1965.

———. "On Keeping a Notebook."*Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1965.

———. "On the Mall." *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

———. "On the Road." *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

———. *The White Album*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1979.

O'Keeffe, Georgia. *Georgia O'Keeffe*. New York: A Studio Book—Viking Press, 1976.

Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 3d ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979. 66-7.

Calculating the Distance: Paul Horgan and Willa Cather

There is much of Willa Cather in the writings of Paul Horgan. There is, most obviously, their shared interest in Jean Baptiste Lamy and his life—an interest that for Cather provided motive for fiction and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927); an interest that for Horgan culminated in his Pulitzer Prize-winning history/biography, *Lamy of Santa Fe* (1975).

The distance between Cather's *Archbishop* and Horgan's *Lamy* is much closer than the fifty-two year span between these two books' publication dates might suggest. Calculating the distance between Cather's and Horgan's sensibilities as artists reveals considerable closeness, a kinship which goes beyond biography and aesthetic sensibility to include subject, setting, theme, and technique. Their respective styles, however, are distinctly their own.

Cather's style remains inimitable. Horgan's style, and his reputation as a writer's writer, is unique and bears his own individual imprint. He has been for over three-quarters of a century a person in love with books and words and writing—as a librarian and author. He is, moreover, an amateur musician and painter of considerable talent. So any tracing of influences on him would be a monumental if not an impossible effort and would reveal, finally, an eclectic range of literary and artistic progenitors. Beyond that are Horgan's talent and genius. Even so, there is in Horgan a considerable closeness with Cather—a closeness worth attempting to calculate. Their kinship revolves around their mutual devotion to the efficacy of the right word in the right place, at the right time; a mutual devotion to style.

Cather's influence on Horgan can be seen most obviously in Horgan's short fiction collected in *The Peach Stone: Stories From Four Decades* (1967). But notice must be taken of Horgan's more explicit prose commentaries on Cather. His essay on Cather, "Willa Cather's Incalculable Distance" ("WCID"), found in his collection *A Certain Climate: Essays in History, Arts, and Letters* (*CC*), provides a beginning. Horgan wrote the essay in draft form for a speech. A revised form of the original speech was published in 1988—a decade's distance.

Horgan expresses his respect for Cather in his "Preface to an Unwritten Book," which appeared in the *Yale Review* in 1976, as well as in another speech/essay, "The Pleasures and Perils of Regionalism," published in *Western American Literature* in 1974. Yet another essay, which appeared in *The Catholic Historical Review* in 1961, "In Search of the Archbishop" ("ISOA"), pays homage to Cather.

The aesthetic and historical processes outlined in all of Horgan's "Willa Cather writings" reveal not just his continuing and sustained regard for her as an artist, but also reflect his own attempts to cross personal and professional "distances." They reveal, in sum, his expression of gratitude for Cather's presence and art.

Horgan's lectures on Cather in the 1960s and 70s that culminated in "Willa Cather and the Incalculable Distance" stress her personal "search for her own inner as well as outer distance in her early life, until she finally found it in the writing of her novels and stories," a search, Horgan observes, wherein Cather ". . . again and again . . . made that same search the deep concern of her fictional people," ("WCID," *CC*, 86-87). Horgan shares this concern for his own characters. Both in his early lecture on Cather and in his revised essay, Horgan stresses that Cather's incalculable distance is not merely the physical distance between two "points" (the original lecture manuscript says two "places"), but a "moral distance—the span [says Horgan] between ignorance and awareness; between hope and bitter denial; between the civilization within a soul and whatever corroding condition would work to destroy it in hatred, or worse, indifference," ("WCID," *CC*, 85-86).

This "moral distance" in Cather, according to Horgan, is a closure, an identity, a persona that seemed to identify for Cather whether or not we like a particular writer—the kind of concern which Walker Gibson and Wayne Booth refer to as reader identification of an "implied" writer, or the implied or "mock" reader. In his accounting of Cather's own "moral distance," Horgan quotes what she said about a reader's relationship with a writer: "We like a writer . . . much as we like individuals, for what he is, simply, underneath his accomplishments. Oftener than not, it is for some moral quality, some ideal which he himself cherishes, though it may be little discernible in his behavior in the world. It is the light behind his books, and it is the living quality of his sentences" ("WCID," *CC*, 86).

In Horgan's tallying, Cather's fictive counterpart, Lucy Gayheart, like Cather herself, traveled from small-town Nebraska to Chicago to hear a great singer's recital—an "incalculable distance . . . from the wintry country and homely neighbors, to the city where the air trembled like a tuning fork with unimaginable possibilities," ("WCID," *CC*, 85). It is a distance which Horgan labels "aspiration," "humility

before the greatest of human works," "delight so keen in the established justice of a truly achieved work of art that no pang is too much to suffer if only it can be felt" ("WCID," *CC*, 85). It is an ambition and a delight which Horgan sees prevailing, as well, in Cather's short story, "A Wagner Matinee." It is a journey and a distance covered "between ignorance and awareness; between hope and bitter denial," and away from hatred and indifference toward a humanistic love which Horgan charts in his own life and in his works of biography, history and fiction.

It is worth noting that Horgan's own development as an artist roughly parallels Cather's peregrinations. In all of Horgan's migrations, each of which marks a phase in his career as author, he matched Cather's East-West moves from Virginia to Nebraska, and from Nebraska back east to Pittsburgh and New York, with sojourns in the Southwest. Like Cather, Horgan searched for culture and literacy, aspiration and hope, while he was estranged from the "garden" in a Southwest still awaiting discovery and "cultivation"—albeit in vaster, more sublime environs than Cather's first West, the middlewest of Nebraska. It's no wonder that Lamy's gardening of the West appealed to both Cather and Horgan.

Cather remains much more the Southwestern tourist than Horgan, though he too was essentially eastern in his sensibilities. Although he lived in New Mexico a number of years, and visited yearly for many subsequent years, he needed the amenities of high culture, and settled in Connecticut.

In his story of encounters with Lamy in Santa Fe, Horgan writes that as a boy, soon after moving to New Mexico about 1915, he spent summers in Santa Fe. Although he noted the architectural revival styles of "pueblo" and "Santa Fe," "it was a French nineteenth-century air, [which] seemed to [him] the most *characterizing* element in Santa Fe," ("ISOA," 411).

The distance to Lamy and his French culture, represented by buildings like Lamy's Cathedral of St. Francis, the Mansard roof of St. Michael's College, the Gothic chapel of the Loretto Convent and the porches of St. Vincent's Hospital, was much closer, and more impressive to Horgan than the indigenous adobe buildings. In stories told by friends who had known Lamy, and in the atmosphere of Santa Fe itself, Horgan identified with Lamy and the ways in which the Archbishop had closed the distance between France and New Mexico with his buildings and his gardens. Horgan explains Lamy's inspiring influence on his artistic and literary aspirations: " . . . when I went to the cathedral at Santa Fe, or walked along the long wall of the Bishop's Garden, or heard the Angelus clapping its rings of sound over the city, he was somewhere behind my thought, my eye, my ear;

and one day he would move me to vest him, however poorly, in my word" ("ISOA," 412).

If Lamy and his influence characterized Santa Fe for Horgan and Cather, so too did Horgan identify Cather with Lamy and the City of Faith. Horgan's account of how, one summer morning in 1926 in the La Fonda Hotel, Lamy and Cather and Santa Fe all converged for him, has something of the air of legend about it. It was surely a Wordsworthian "spot of time" of fateful proportions, an encounter that both directly and indirectly influenced Horgan as person and as author.

Horgan infuses the convergence with drama and novelistic flourish and imagination, describing how Cather was busily working on a porch of the LaFonda Hotel, and how his interruption bothered her. In his devotion, he quickly left without saying a word.

Horgan's first published short story, "The Head of the House of Wattleman," appeared in the *Yale Review* three years later, after that chance encounter. Other short stories and narratives followed. His first published novel, *The Fault of Angels*, which won the Harper Prize Novel Contest, appeared seven years later—in 1933. It was the first of a long line of successful novels. Clearly Horgan's brush with Cather—as esteemed author—did much to motivate his own identification not just with Lamy but with authors and the author's life. Horgan wants to believe, and infers, that Cather too was preoccupied with the Archbishop:

> She was working only a hundred yards from his [Lamy's] cathedral, whose humble beauties she was the first to recognize. I remember the eagerness and excitement with which I awaited my first edition copy of her Lamy novel in the following year, 1927. ("ISOA," 413)

Horgan's retracing of his convergence with Lamy and Cather in Santa Fe is, moreover, something of a repeat, doubling performance of Cather's own account (in *On Writing*, New York, 1949) of how she came to write *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and so the distance between Cather and Horgan diminishes on yet another level. It is not too far-fetched to surmise that other aspects of Cather's art, beyond sensibility into technique, also imprinted Horgan. He clearly presents himself as a student before her work.

In "Preface to an Unwritten Book," he wrote that he began reading Cather in high school when, as a student at Albuquerque High, Cather's sister, Elsie, who taught freshman English, introduced him to her sister's books ("PTUB," 324). This early tutelage under Cather's sister is no small consideration in calculating the distance between Cather as mentor and novelist and Horgan as student and novelist. All of his biographies and histories use strong narrative and fictional techniques—from recreating a scene through imagination beyond absolute-

ly verifiable fact, to dialogue and imagistic and descriptive enhancement of setting, character, and plot.

There is little doubt that the magnet and the prism of the East affected both their tallies. In his commentary on three of Cather's stories, "The Sculptor's Funeral," "A Death in the Desert," and "A Wagner Matinee," Horgan hits hard on the theme of western artistic and physical isolation and exile, a theme common in his own stories as well. It is a persona, a stance which Horgan himself assumed, whether visiting in the artist colony of Santa Fe or working devotedly on his first writings in the remote New Mexico town of Roswell.

Horgan observes that if Cather's treatments of exiles seem to lack full sympathy "for helpless states of uninformed life," they do work as portraits. Time and again Horgan's characters choose, like Cather's, to aspire to resist "deracination," to replace philistinism with sophistication, to close the distance not just between high culture and low, but between East and West. Horgan has little tolerance for "regionalism" in any delimiting sense and regards himself as a transcontinental author. His essay on "The Pleasures and Perils of Regionalism" reads, as do all of his "Cather writings," like an indictment of self-conscious, stylized, commercialized "placeness." He warns writers not to exploit regional differences and styles for mercenary means. Cather succeeds as a Western regional artist, for Horgan, because in her fiction she responded more or less incidentally to locale. "It is her lively artistry which holds us for its own sake—how things are said, rather more than what they are about" ("PPR," 170).

Here resides one of the key considerations in calculating the closeness of Cather and Horgan—the issue of style. Horgan appears to hold that style is more identifiable with the language itself than with just its content. And so it would seem with Cather in her allegiance to the "unfurnished" novel, in her recognition of what could be felt on the page without being named. And that is, paradoxically, the basis of the "incalculable distance" in both Horgan and Cather and between them —the striving of style to transcend place and plot, setting, character and theme. However difficult to define, and however nebulous, style is the means by which the distance between all great writers is finally calculated.

Style explains how Horgan, while influenced by Cather and a kindred spirit to her, is much more than her imitator. Horgan would have been a writer even if he had never seen Cather or read her works. But chances are that he would not have been so great a writer as he has remained all these years, if he had not interrupted her at her work on the porch of the La Fonda, in the very royal and rich city of Santa Fe.

Works Cited

Horgan, Paul. "In Search of the Archbishop." *The Catholic Historical Review* 66.4 (January 1961): 409-27.

———. "The Pleasures and Perils of Regionalism." *Western American Literature* 8.4 (Winter 1974): 167-71.

———. "Preface to an Unwritten Book." *Yale Review* 65.3 (March 1976): 321-35.

———. "Willa Cather's Incalculable Distance." *A Certain Climate: Essays in History, Arts, and Letters*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1988. 79-91.

"Paul Horgan Gets Vibes Visiting His Native Buffalo." *Buffalo Courier Express*. Oct. 4, 1977.

Reviews

Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land. By Herman Melville, edited by Harrison Hayford, Alma A. MacDougall, Hershel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle. Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1991. 893 + xv pp. $22.95 paper, $82.95 hard cover.

All of Herman Melville's fiction (ten big books), except "Billy Budd," was published within a relatively brief 12-year period: between 1846 (*Typee*) and 1857 (*The Confidence Man*). "Billy Budd" was written much later and was not published in Melville's lifetime.

Between 1857 and his death in 1891 Melville almost disappeared from public view. By 1866, when Melville published *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, his first volume of short poems, he was already working as a customs inspector in New York City, a job he would keep for almost twenty years. In spite of his involuntary retirement from the literary scene, the restless imagination that had produced *Mardi*, *Moby Dick*, and especially *Pierre*, "Bartleby" and "Benito Cereno" was working on a major project: a long, philosophical and meditative poem based on a trip to the Holy Land that Melville had taken in 1856 and 1857—a trip that seems to have been a kind of farewell to his life as a public writer. *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land* would eventually be published privately in 1876, financed by his uncle, Peter Gansevoort. Melville himself would later describe it as "a metrical affair, a pilgrimage or what not, of several thousand lines, eminently adapted for unpopularity"[1] and the poem would be ignored by all but graduate students in American literature ever since.

Frankly, we have not learned how to read *Clarel*. Some critics have asserted that a "classic" Melville story is trapped inside inept poetry. I disagree. Melville was not a bad poet. Rather, I would argue that Melville consciously chose a poetic language that was already archaic in his own time. *Clarel* was published, after all, 21 years after the first

1. Letter to James Billson, 10 October 1884 p. in *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 275.

edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* had changed the American poetic idiom forever. It might be more fruitful to ask why Melville chose this idiom and what its relation to the content of the poem is. If the reader accepts Melville's idiom, the poem is far from inept, but serious problems still remain. Scholars have been able to demonstrate that Melville, working in the wilderness of a non-literary New York—recall Hawthorne's comments in "The Custom House" on Melville's own experience—and expecting no readers other than himself, incorporated all of his reading into one poem. The "Discussions" section of the Northwestern-Newberry Edition shows clearly the range of Melville's borrowings and illustrates some of the difficulties the poem has for the contemporary reader.

If *Clarel* had a plot like *Moby Dick*, that plot might attract us to the poem and eventually encourage us to read the footnotes and perhaps even the texts that Melville had read. But *Clarel* has only a minimal plot: while waiting for a young woman to complete a religious ritual, one of Melville's sensitive young men goes on a pilgrimage through the Holy Land along with a group of intellectually stimulating and varied men of the world; at the end, the young man discovers that his premonitions have been true and the young woman has died while he was away. The focus of the poem is not on the love plot or on the travelogue but on talk, especially on the problem of faith and belief. If we take some of the individual passages seriously as Melville's meaning, then we must find the "philosophy" adolescent and the poem trivial; if we try to see the individual passages in a kind of counterpoint with one another, then we must find the poem very difficult indeed.

If *Clarel* is this obscure or if the effort of reading it is not worth the candle, then why issue a new edition? The answer is simple: to complete the Northwestern-Newberry Edition of Melville's work, especially now that it has superseded the Hendricks House edition, which, in 1960, had produced the first scholarly edition of *Clarel*. The Northwestern-Newberry Edition as a whole has been controversial since its inception, when several of the Hendricks House editions were still relatively new. More recently, in volume 9, *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces*, and Volume 15, *Journals*, the publication of new material or the re-publication of material that was difficult to come by, has made a real contribution to Melville studies and has rescued the general edition from many of its critics.

One of the early charges against the new Edition was that too much was being made of too little, that the re-editing was not producing a text different enough from earlier ones to justify the exercise. The same charge could be made against the Northwestern-Newberry *Clarel*. The editorial changes in the text are of interest, perhaps, only to

professional editors. But we should not be too harsh on Hayford, MacDougall, Parker, and Tanselle. Their edition incorporates the earlier Hendricks House edition at the same time that it supersedes it. Rather than writing a new "Historical and Critical Note," the long postscript that follows every text in the Edition, the editors have used Walter Bezanson's 100-page introduction to the Hendricks House *Clarel* and have added a "Historical Supplement" by Hershel Parker to bring Bezanson up to date. And Bezanson's notes form the basis of the Northwestern-Newberry's "Discussions." They have also added some previously unavailable source material.

The point of the editorial exercise, I suppose, is to keep Melville's last white elephant in print so another generation of readers with another generation's concerns and methodologies can test itself against it. A number of areas need to be covered by this new generation. None of the major critics have looked at the apparent spiritual despair of *Clarel* either in the philosophical context of late-19th century existentialism or in the socio-economic context of America's capitalistic "Gilded Age." The psychological approaches to the poem have been naively Freudian, worrying about Clarel's sexual identity. Surely some poststructuralist with a Lacanian twist or one of the feminists in the anti-Melville camp can do better than this. Most promising of all, perhaps, would be an examination of *Clarel* as an orientalist text, placing Melville's last major work in the same colonial context as his first two novels, *Typee* and *Omoo*.

Arnold Edelstein

Jamaica Kincaid's Journey

Lucy. By Jamaica Kincaid. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux Publishers, 1990. 164 pp. $8.95.

> "An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back."
> from *Lucy* by Jamaica Kincaid

It took only a moment for me to recognize author Jamaica Kincaid in the crowd at a public library in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she recently read from her book, *Lucy*. She was perhaps the tallest and

most simply-dressed woman in the packed room, yet she was exotic. She might have been somewhat intimidated by video lights and the clickety-clack of cameras. But her eyes hurled back a light of their own.

I know something about those expressions fixed upon her nut-brown face outlined by a cascade of braided hair. Like my mother of West Indian ancestry, Kincaid's face is firm. Yet it is rounded and soft. It conveys unerring determination. But it is pained by resignation to ugly worldly truths.

A year before this encounter, I had reviewed Kincaid's book, *A Small Place*, for a national magazine. This explosive essay recounted much of the social and political corruption on the tiny West Indian island of Antigua, surrounded by the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

Here is where I first recognized this literary heroine who came to the United States as an au pair in 1966 at the age of 17. *A Small Place* is based on her observations after returning to Antigua at the age of 36.

My mother's parents were born on an island possibly smaller than the ten-by-twelve-mile stretch called Antigua. Without ever having stepped foot on either of these secluded lands, I can still grasp what any human being on their 'terra firma' must mean when they assert, as does Kincaid, that no race of people should ever impose their culture on another place already abundant with its own 'native' customs.

A past visit to Haiti, one of the poorest black republics in the Western Hemisphere, cleared my head of what all the tourist-oriented brochures could say about a place that on closer examination was really not quaint.

Kincaid's book *Lucy*, is spun-woven with paradoxes. It could be about any emerging artist (in this case a writer) who claws and fights her way out of subservience in search of where her God-given gift might take her.

Like the author, the book's protagonist, Lucy, leaves her isolated home to become part of a family very different from the one she left; an Anglo-American family with four small girls she is to care for. The maid would clean the house. Lucy would attend classes at night.

This culture is understandably foreign to a young girl from a tropical island and to whom things such as tiled bathrooms are unknown. "The sun was shining but the air was cold. . . . But I did not know that the sun could shine and the air remain cold; no one had ever told me . . ." writes Kincaid in Lucy's voice when she arrives in the United States.

It is just this strangeness of circumstance, place, and routine that provokes Lucy's inner thoughts about her past and ultimately her future.

In an interview with the *Boston Globe*, Kincaid talked about her returns to Antigua, where she remains a citizen. "Everyone (in Antigua) is a great artist. They spin tales. . .," she stated. ". . . But, to be writers they would have had to leave".

The short-sighted might see the book as simply another spiritual journey story, but on closer examination, it defies definition. The quest to find that inner voice is complex and the only definitive discovery here is that to make this journey at all, one must put distance between self and past.

Lucy's past is almost entirely dominated by her mother who remains in Antigua. It is her mother's grip she is trying to escape. Kincaid has publicly referred to this grip as the "magic" that all parents have over their children. "The magic is they carry so much you don't know about. They know you in a way you don't know yourself."

In the book, Lucy's mother writes long, plaintive letters from home about the dangers of big city living and horror stories about riding on underground trains, as many of our parents have hammered us with the terrors of venturing out on our own. Lucy attempts to ignore these letters, but the unavoidable contrast between her familiar past and unfamiliar present continues to haunt her.

"I had come to feel that my mother's love for me was designed solely to make me an echo of her," reflects Lucy in the novel. ". . . but I felt that I would rather be dead than just an echo of someone."

Because the central character is West Indian, it might be easy to compare her experiences to those of African-Americans. But, as the author herself has asserted, the book is not about race and class; it is about a person trying to figure out how to become an artist.

The pages are full of personal irony because Lucy is so mysterious and exploring. This irony prevails admirably throughout Kincaid's third work of fiction, because it chronicles one of the most illusive things in this universe: the nature of self.

Leigh Donaldson

Untitled

illustration
by Aaronetta Kandarian

Contributor's Notes

Jeff Berglund: I've been living in Hawai'i since 1985 and finished my BFA in Fine Arts and Graphic Design at UH-Mānoa. I am currently building up my computer graphics/computer art abilities at Kapi'olani and Honolulu community colleges.

Ian Brand: I've been reading and writing poetry for about six years. I'm a senior history major at the State U of New York at Purchase.

Stepan Chapman resides in Cottonwood, AZ, where he is working on his second novel. "The Last Judgment" is a section of his first novel, *Angels of the Storm*.

Nancy Cherry: I'm a graduate of San Francisco and Sacramento State Universities and left my job to write full-time, thanks to the encouragement of my husband. My poetry has appeared in *Green Fuse, Dark Horse,* and *Vol. No. Magazine* with upcoming work in *Tsunami* and *Metis*. This is my first published short story.

Stuart Ching has an essay in the anthology *Fourteen Landing Zones* (U of Iowa Press), and his stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Madison Review, Hawai'i Review,* and *Chaminade Literary Review*.

Kathleen T. Choi is a columnist with *Hawai'i Catholic Herald*. She has published in over 30 national periodicals. A summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of UH-Hilo, she recently retired from public school teaching.

James Cushing's book of jazz-standard poems, *You and the Night and the Music* (Cahuenga Press), has been praised by W.S. Merwin. Look for his work in *Antioch Review* and *Negative Capability*. John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman recorded the jazz tune, "You Are Too Beautiful."

Cynthia de Gues: My poems have appeared in *Third Lung Review* (where I won their Oxfam prize), *Bay Windows, Valley Women's Voice,* and *Re Arts and Letters*. Reproductions of some of my paintings will appear in *Kalliope* this year.

Carol Denson: I recently completed an M.A. in English at the U of Houston. I teach creative writing to children.

Leigh Donalson's writing has appeared in publications such as *Crisis, Portsmouth Press, Art Times, Harborview Magazine,* and *Manhattan Poetry Review*. He received The Fund for Investigative Journalism Award and a National Press Foundation award. His narrative book on the antebellum Black American press will be published by McFarland & Co. Publishers in 1992.

Darlaine Māhealani Muilan Dudoit was born and raised in Hawai'i, although an inherited wanderlust has taken her around the globe. Her fiction has appeared in *Chaminade Literary Review* and *Kaimana,* and her poetry in *Sister Stew* (Bamboo Ridge Press). In 1989 she won the Academy of American Poets University and College Poetry competition as well as the Ernest Hemingway Memorial Award for Poetry at UH-Mānoa. About the poem: "The caves of Ban-Pu sat in an ancient river valley near the Mekong in northeast Thailand. The rural landscape was silent and lonely, more so because I shared no common language with the people, save the language of gestures and figures drawn in the packed earth at our feet. Those figures eventually directed me to other figures, drawn 5,000 years earlier."

Brooklyn-born Associate Professor **Arnold Edelstein** was educated at Columbia College and the U of California, and has been at the U of Hawai'i since 1969. He first encountered the work of Melville as a teenager and has been both a fan and a student of the author and his works ever since.

Nettie Farris: I teach composition and creative writing at the U of Louisville and am applying to Ph.D. programs in literature. I've recently published in *Louisville Review, Zone 3,* and *Wisconsin Review.*

Charles Fishman is Distinguished Service Professor of English and Humanities at SUNY Farmingdale, where he has directed the Visiting Writers Program since 1979. He has published five books of poetry. *Catlives,* a co-translation of Sarah Kirsch's *Katzenleben,* was released by Texas Tech U Press, which also published *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust.*

Alice Friman won the 1990 Cecil Hemley Memorial Award and the 1988 Consuelo Ford Award from the Poetry Society of America. She has been published in *Poetry, Southern Poetry Review, Beloit Poetry Journal,* and others. She's a New Yorker teaching English and creative writing at the U of Indianapolis.

Bruce M. Gans has published work in *Playboy, Mademoiselle, Kansas Quarterly,* and *American Scholar,* among others. His awards for fiction include a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and a Mademoiselle Fiction Prize. His fiction has been broadcast on National Public Radio WBEZ in Chicago.

Andrew Gettler: I'm a Vietnam vet who began writing poetry about seven years ago. I've been published in journals/litmags in the U.S., Canada, England, Germany, Belgium, and Australia. My most recent books are *Footsteps of a Ghost: Poems from Vietnam* (Iniquity Press, 1991) and *lurid dreams . . . because we all have them* (Experimental Press, 1991).

Robert F. Gish is Director of Ethnic Studies and Professor of English at California Polytechnic State U, San Luis Obispo. His latest book is *Songs of My Hunter Heart: A Western Kinship,* (Iowa State U Press).

Born and raised in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, **Thomas E. Glass** received a B.A. from Pennsylvania State U and an M.A. from the U of Florida. A past Peace Corps volunteer teacher of English at Udorn Thani Teachers College in Thailand, he is presently a professor at Srinkharinwirot U in Mahasarakham, Thailand.

J.L. Haddaway lives in Ohio where she raises and shows collies with her husband. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *Puerto del Sol, The Seattle Review,* and other literary magazines.

Mimi Walter Hinman: I am employed as public relations coordinator for a non-profit student exchange program, Cultural Homestay International; have traveled to Japan five times; had poetry published in *Thema, Pearl, Japanophile;* and won the Cicada Winter Award from *Amelia* for a tanka sequence.

Scott C. Holstad: I have an English degree from the U of Tennessee and wrote two small collections: *Street Poems* (mulberry press, 1991), and *Industrial Madness* (Sivullinen, 1991, Finland). My work has appeared in in three languages, and in *The Wisconsin Review, Mattoid* (from Deakin U in Victoria, Australia), *The Bradford Poetry Quarterly* (Yorkshire, England), and *De Nar* (Belgium). Forthcoming is *Dead Horse Lake* (Ball Cap & Buttermilk Press).

Born in San Francisco, artist **Aaronetta Kandarian** is a 20-year resident of Honolulu, currently a Scientific Illustrator for the U of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and the proprietor of a desktop publishing company.

Linda Keegan's poetry has appeared in numerous journals including *The Pittsburgh Quarterly, Amaranth,* and *Riverrun*. She serves as Associate Director of the Pittsburgh Poetry Exchange and Vice-President of the (PA) Ligonier Writers Group.

Suzanne Kosanke has been a lecturer in English at UH-Mānoa and Windward Community College since 1988 when she received her M.A. Her cut paper art has appeared locally in *Voices, Rainbird,* and *Pleiades*.

Robert Krakow began his career as a trial attorney and served on the adjunct faculty of several universities and colleges where he taught courses on the law. He is an avid student of the Old Testament and modern European history.

Peter Lefcourt has published poems in *Exquisite Corpse, The Galley Sail Review,* and *California State Poetry Quarterly*. His second novel, *The Dreyfus Affair: A Love Story,* is published by Random House.

Kelli A. Logan: I'm an editor at the newspaper *Winston-Salem Journal* and at the *Crescent Review,* a literary journal. I have an M.A. in European history. My poetry has been published in *Tap Joe* and *Black Buzzard Review*.

Presently Gallery Director for 'Iolani Gallery at Windward Community College, **Toni Martin** teaches Color Theory and Design at WCC. On the faculty of the U of Hawai'i at Mānoa, she teaches courses in design. "I've lived in Hawai'i for 21 years. My work responds to the landscape on the Windward side of O'ahu. This current series refers to the Ko'olau mountain range."

Corey Mertes: I'm a graduate of the U of Chicago. Currently, I'm making industrial videos for a living. Screenwriting is what I hope to do full-time. This will be my first published short story.

Steve Miles was recently chosen by the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities as a poet "Artist in Residence" in the schools. He is a regular contributor to *New Letters Review of Books*. His essay about Japan, "Zen Mud," will appear in *Sun: A Magazine of Ideas*. His ceramic pots are represented by the Sandy Carson Gallery in Denver.

Hanae Uechi Mills teaches drawing and painting at the U of Hawai'i Lab School. Her work appears in traveling exhibits and invitational competitions. Collections of her award-winning art are at the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, the Saxe-Kobler Gallery in Seattle, the Honolulu Advertiser Collection, and First Hawaiian Bank.

Daryl Nielsen: I'm 43, a Viet Nam era vet, and in love with poetry, Colorado, and Susan McCallum. Some places my poetry has been: *Haiku Headlines, Haight Ashbury Literary Journal, Lilliput Review,* and *Psychopoetica*.

Karen K. Ono graduated from UH-Mānoa with a BFA in Graphic Design. "Inspiration for 'Monstera' comes from my mother, who painstakingly hand-sews traditional Hawaiian quilts while creating her own patterns."

Tony Quagliano was the editor of the Charles Bukowski issue of *Small Press Review,* and the Reuel Denney issue of *Poetry Pilot*, the magazine of The Academy of American Poets. He has an article, "Signs and Symbols," in the *Encyclopedia of Psychology* (Wiley and Sons, NY) and poems in *New Directions 54, Rolling Stone,* and *Rolling Stock*. He is the editor of *Kaimana*.

Rosemary Regan-Gavin earned her M.A. in Expository Writing from the U of Iowa. Her work has appeared in *Health and Social Work, Iowa Woman,* and is forthcoming in *GreenPrints*. She lives with her husband and two beagles in Iowa City, Iowa.

Scott A. Renschler: I am a senior English and writing major at Pomona College in Claremont, California. My short fiction has been accepted by several other publications, including *The Ecphorizer* and *Innisfree*.

Atlanta freelance writer **Trish Rucker** has poems and stories accepted by *Carolina Quarterly, Poet Lore, Sequoia,* and *Tar River Poetry,* among others. She won a grant in 1990 from the Georgia Council for the Arts.

Giles Scott is "currently paying the rent in Chicago, although I originally hail from Manchester, England. Have poetry forthcoming in *Poetry Motel, Impetus,* and *The Berkeley Poetry Review.*"

Francis Sherlock has poems forthcoming in *Axis* and *Mind in Motion.*

Ellen Slezak: I wrote about George Montgomery in another story about a year ago. After a few false starts, I figured out that he belonged to this one too. From that point, the writing went more smoothly.

Paul Andrew E. Smith was born in Chicago and is now a graduate assistant at the U of Illinois. He writes "scholarly art stuff" as well as poetry and fiction. His work has appeared in *Catch, Point of View,* and *Fly Rod & Reel,* and in the poetry chapbook, *Scenes from THE POST MODERN BUTLER.* In May 1992, he was heard on Chicago's Dial-A-Poem.

Born, raised, and educated in Hawai'i, **Constance Han Stewart** is married and has three adult children. She quit school in her junior year of high school and, 28 years later in 1970, received her B.A. in Liberal Arts from the U of Hawai'i. Besides writing, she enjoys reading, acting, and learning French. " 'Martin's Father' will be my first published story. It is part of a collection of short stories."

Karen Sylte is an MFA student at the U of Alaska-Fairbanks, where there are always camp-robbers at Peggy Shumaker's potlucks.

Ralph Williams, retired U.S. Navy commander, retired English teacher (U High School, Hawai'i), and working writer, has been published in *Poetry Hawai'i* (U of Hawai'i Press).

Robert G. Woodring was a printer's devil and sports writer for his hometown paper at Fremond, Michigan, headquarters for Gerber baby food. He taught at Wayne State, U Michigan, Aquinas College, and community colleges. Now disabled by a spinal cord disease which gradually paralyzes, he continues to publish poetry and feature articles and sells his own watercolors.

Born June 22, 1955, **Tom Wright** was educated at Alfred U, New York. He is executive director of Lifeskill Seminars for Inmates. "The best words are those that make a difference in someone's life."

Leona Yamada is a graduate student at the U of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her work has been in *Contact II, Blue Mesa Review, Kentucky Poetry Review, Chaminade Literary Review, Bamboo Ridge,* and *Hawai'i Review.*

Hilo-born **Lois-Ann Yamanaka** lives in Kahalu'u and works at Castle High School. She is the mother of a baby boy. Recent pidgin pieces have been published in *Asian America, Bamboo Ridge, The Michigan Quarterly Review,* and *Quarry West.*

Lou Zitnik is a Maui resident attending the U of Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Hawai'i Review

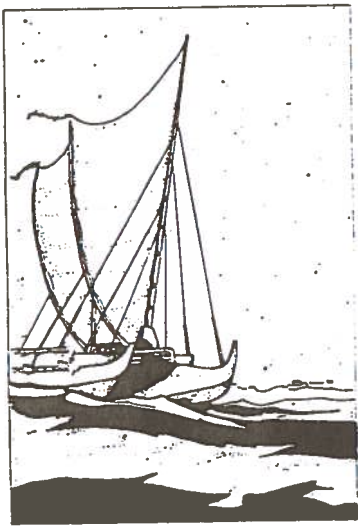


Illustration by Byron Inouye

Poetry • Fiction • Drama

Translations • Reviews

Essays • Interviews

Songs • Chants

Notable writers published in Hawai'i Review include:

Nell Altizer, Joe Balaz, Robert Olen Butler, Eric Chock, Maxine Hong Kingston, Dana Naone Hall, Joan M. Komatsu, W.S. Merwin, Rodney Morales, Susan Nunes, Gary Pak, Cathy Song, Frank Stewart, Joe Tsujimoto, John Unterecker

---

☐ 1 yr. subscription - $15.00 (3 issues)

☐ 2 yr. subscription - 25.00 (6 issues)

☐ Back issue or sample - $5.00

Name_____

Street_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Please mail with payment to: **Hawai'i Review**, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, c/o Department of English, 1733 Donaghho Road, Honolulu, HI 96822.

Work by

Jeff Berglund
Ian Brand
Stepan Chapman
Nancy Cherry
Stuart Ching
Kathleen T. Choi
James Cushing
Cynthia de Gues
Carol Denson
Leigh Donaldson
Darlaine M.M. Dudoit
Arnold Edelstein
Nettie Farris
Charles Fishman
Alice Friman
Bruce M. Gans
Andrew Gettler
Robert F. Gish
Thomas E. Gluss
J.L. Haddaway
Mimi Walter Hinman
Scott C. Holstad
Aaronetta Kandarian
Linda Keegan
Suzanne Kosanke
Robert Krakow
Peter Lefcourt
Kelli A. Logan
Toni Martin
Corey Mertes
Steve Miles
Hanae Uechi Mills
Daryl Nielsen
Karen K. Ono
Tony Quagliano
Rosemary Regan-Gatlin
Scott A. Renschler
Trish Rucker
Giles Scott
Francis G. Sherlock
Ellen Sklzak
Paul Andrew E. Smith
Constance Han Stewart
Karen Sylte
Ralph T. Williams
Robert G. Woodring
Tom Wright
Leona Yamada
Lois-Ann Yamanaka
Lou Zitnik

Cover Art by

Aaronetta Kandarian

$5.00

ISSN: 0093-9625