

# NEW World Writing

An Important Cross Section of Current Literature and Criticism

- Christopher Isherwood      The World in the Evening  
 Alain Locke      The Negro in American Literature  
 Louis Auchincloss      Billy and the Gargoyles  
 Tennessee Williams      I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix  
 Flannery O'Connor      Enoch and the Gorilla  
 Thomas Merton      Sports Without Blood  
 Rolfe Humphries      Translation in Revival  
 Shelby Foote      Day of Battle  
 Themistocles Hoetis      Akin and the Small Boy  
 Alice Dennis      The Death of Miss Emma K. Wood  
 Henry-Russell Hitchcock & Philip C. Johnson      The Buildings We See  
 Gore Vidal      Erlinda and Mr. Coffin  
 Wright Morris      The Rites of Spring  
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*First Mentor Selection*  
*A New American Library Publication*



## About This Publication

THE EDITORS of The New American Library of World Literature, Inc.—America's largest and most selective re-printer of inexpensive editions—owe an explanation to friends in the literary profession and in the book publishing industry, as well as to readers generally, for this unique volume. It is intended to be more than just the sprightly anthology which, at first glance, it may appear to be. It is a Mentor Book. It is also a "little magazine."

As a Mentor Book, it will benefit from widespread distribution, at home and abroad, to thousands of newsstands and bookshops that no existing literary or scholarly publication reaches. As a literary publication, it is designed to bring to readers of Signet and Mentor Books an important cross section of current literature and criticism. It is not a capricious project, but the result of long and earnest urging by American book publishers and book readers ever since *Penguin New Writing*, edited by John Lehmann, ceased publication in England. The New American Library was once closely identified with *Penguin New Writing*, and therefore feels qualified, with the blessing of John Lehmann, to recreate, in an American frame of reference, a counterpart of that international publication. The intention of *New World Writing* is to provide a friendly medium through which new, promising, genuine and vigorous talent may be communicated to a wide and receptive audience, and also to provide an instrument for serious letters and criticism. It has no prejudiced link to any special school, group, cult or movement, academic, literary or political, in the field of criticism. Our publishing experience, and our close association with people who write, edit and publish books, constantly demonstrate that today's new writing becomes tomorrow's "good reading for the millions." Therefore, we want *New World Writing* to attract and interest the significant writers of the future.

This first Mentor selection of *New World Writing*, originating, as it has, out of our own long-cherished desire to reinforce the not fully appreciated role of the world's "little magazines," and of such substantial enterprises as *New Directions* and *Botteghe Oscure*, for example, has been edited as a group project. Established authors, notably Gore Vidal, Christopher Isherwood, Shelby Foote, Thomas Merton, Tennessee Williams and Rolfe Humphries, and creative editors such as Mary Louise Aswell, formerly of *Harper's Bazaar*, have urged us onward with inspiration and suggestions, or, very generously, with contributions of their own writing, to give the

project momentum from the outset. Leading American book publishers—among them Harcourt, Brace, Viking, James Laughlin-New Directions, Alfred A. Knopf, Scribner's, Houghton Mifflin, the Dial Press, Random House and Little Brown, to name but a few—have welcomed and encouraged this publication. Howard Moss and John Lehmann have been of great assistance on poetry.

By publishing new work in these pages we hope to give aspiring authors a respected position in a sort of vicarious literary salon among the eminent, and to dispel the impression that modern writing must be limited to the audience of an entrenched, and sometimes static, *avant garde*. In *New World Writing* new writers have a showcase, a position in an exhibition, a dramatic display in a sort of literary bazaar, where their work may be viewed by critics, agents and publishers, as well as by sensitive readers. Our critical articles, although they avoid malice, do not avoid controversy. We hope that we are not competing with any existing publication, but are, in fact, nourishing every worthwhile effort to promote a distinguished diversity of literary creation in the form of books.

If the response to this publication makes recurring selections of *New World Writing* advisable, subsequent volumes will endeavor to reflect a greater variety of international literature. The world of letters is universal, not provincial. By its very name, The New American Library of World Literature aspires not only to distribute its publications wherever English is read, but to make available, in English translation, the best writing and the most important books from every country in the world, as they are ultimately introduced in America by our more imaginative book publishers. If our publication can expedite the international flow of literature, it will fulfill its most important purpose.

We acknowledge with profound appreciation the cooperation of publishers, critics, translators and agents. Although this volume is a group project, the editorial coordination has been the responsibility of Arabel J. Porter, executive editor, who contributes a concluding note on "Literary Hospitality."

The Publishers

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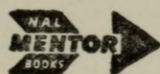
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## Christopher Isherwood

# THE WORLD IN THE EVENING

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wood hills, in a ranch-style home complete with Early American maple, nautical brasswork and muslin curtains; just too cute for words. It looked as if it had been delivered, all ready equipped, from a store; and you could imagine how, if the payments weren't kept up, some men might arrive one day and take the whole place back there on a truck, along with Mrs. Novotny, the three children, the two cars and the cocker spaniel. Most of the houses Jane and I visited were like that.

It was quite late already and several people were drunk; not acting badly, just boastful and loud and thick-voiced. I was about halfway; which was the best way for me to be. As long as I was sober, I sulked. If I went on drinking, I was apt to turn nasty and say something embarrassing, or else fall asleep and snore. Jane was always worried about that, and yet she never could tear herself away until the end. "Why in hell don't you go on back home, if you're so bored," she sometimes whispered to me furiously, "instead of drooping around like a goddamn martyr? What's the matter? Afraid I might do something *you* wouldn't do?" I used to grin at her without answering. That was exactly how I wanted her to feel: unsure

*Christopher Isherwood*, author of *THE BERLIN STORIES*, on which the play, *I AM A CAMERA*, is based, was born in Cheshire, England. He has lived in the United States since 1939, and became a citizen in 1946. In 1949 he was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, an organization which limits its membership to 250 citizens whose works are most likely to achieve a permanent place in American culture. Among his works are *THE MEMORIAL*, *LIONS AND SHADOWS*, *PRATER VIOLET*, and, in collaboration with W. H. Auden, the plays *THE DOG BENEATH THE SKIN* and *THE ASCENT OF F6*. *The World in the Evening* is the first chapter of a novel in progress by the same name, to be published by Random House.

**T**HE PARTY, that evening, was at the Novotnys'. They lived high up on the slopes of the Holly-

of me and uneasy and guiltily aggressive. It was the only way I knew of hitting back at her.

I was alone, now, at the uncrowded end of the living room. A mirror on the opposite wall showed me how I appeared to the outside world: a tall skinny youngish-oldish man with a weakly good-looking, anxious face and dark over-expressive eyes, standing in a corner between a cobbler's table and a fake spinning-wheel, holding a highball glass in my hand. A miniature brass ship with a fern growing out of it was fastened to the wall beside my cheek. I looked as if I were trying to melt into the scenery and become invisible, like a giraffe standing motionless among sunlit leaves.

I was wearing my usual crazy costume, the symbol of my protest against this life I was leading: a white tuxedo jacket, with a crimson bow tie and carnation to match my moiré cummerbund. Elizabeth, if she could have seen me, would have said: "Darling, what on *earth* are you supposed to be? No—don't tell me. Let me guess—" In a way, I think I did dress like this just because it would have amused Elizabeth. Certainly, no one here saw the joke, not even Jane; my masquerade as a musical-comedy Hollywood character passed entirely unnoticed. And why, after all, should any of these people notice it? This was the only way they knew me—as I appeared, night after night, at Jane's side, in the doorways of their homes. (We never stayed home alone together in the evenings, any more; it would have been unthinkable.)

If you had asked who I was, almost every one of them would have answered "Jane Monk's husband," and let it go at that. It had been the same right from the start, when we'd first arrived in California, the previous year. Even the society columnists decided I was no fun and had better be ignored. They never mentioned me directly if they could avoid it, though they bubbled with items like: "Saw Jane (Mrs. Stephen) Monk looking gorgeous (as usual) in white satin with some stunning antique Brussels lace. They're here from New York, via Nassau. Plan to settle for a while. Jane tells me—" etc., etc. Jane loved it. She never seemed to get tired of being talked about, no matter how bitchily. She even told me once—taking it as a huge joke—how a man at Chasen's had been overheard saying: "Well, he may be a Monk—but, brother, she's no nun." That was one of the things about her I still found charmingly innocent and touching.

"Out here on the Coast," someone declared, in the group nearest to me, "you just don't know what the score is. Why, back East, we're practically in the war already." Someone else agreed that F.D.R. would get us in as soon as he could find an excuse. There was talk about the London Blitz, and Rommel and the fighting in Africa (this was April, 1941) but you could tell that none of them cared very much. Their fears and their interests were elsewhere. Sid Novotny was a screen writer, and

this party was just in case the Studio might be hesitating to take up his option. Lana Turner, who was to have been the guest of honor, hadn't shown up. However, several of the front-office executives were present, a couple of second magnitude stars, and a lot of young actresses and actors. Such as Roy Griffin, for instance.

A man disengaged himself from the conversation and came over to me. I'd been watching him preparing to do this for several minutes. We'd been introduced to each other earlier in the evening; I knew he was a producer, though I'd forgotten his name. He had a crew-cut, clean hairy hands, inquisitive eyes and a very sincere manner.

"Say, Mr. Monk, you know I've been wanting to get together with you ever since I heard you were out here? It was quite a thrill, meeting you tonight. It really was. Believe it or not, I'm one of the old original Rydal fans. Yes, I'll bet I was one of the very first in this country."

I made a suitable noise.

"*The World in the Evening*. Jesus—that's a great book! One of the truly great books written in our time." The producer lowered his voice, as though we were just entering a church. "You know something?" He glanced quickly at the group he had left, afraid, apparently, that they might be listening. "Somewhere in that book, there's a great movie. *One hell* of a movie. Most people wouldn't be able to see that. But I can. I can give you my word that it's there. . . . Did anyone ever buy the rights?"

"I don't think so." I was looking over the crowd at the other end of the room. I had just noticed that Jane wasn't there. "I could find out, if you're interested." Roy Griffin wasn't there, either.

"I'm definitely interested. Definitely . . . Say, supposing we manage to work something out, would you possibly consider helping us on the screenplay?"

"I'm not a writer, you know." Jane might be in the bar, of course. Or with Mrs. Novotny, admiring some new clothes. Maybe she wasn't with Roy at all.

"Not a writer, Mr. Monk? Come now—let's not be so darned modest! What about that introduction you did to the *Collected Stories*? I read that over and over. You did a beautiful job. Fine. Sensitive. No one but yourself could have written that way. No one else was in a position to know her as you did."

"Well—I'm glad you liked it, but—"

"And it's not a question of movie experience. Let me put it this way—we'd need you as a sort of a, well, an artistic conscience. Someone to tell us when we're getting off the beam. You're the only man who could tell us that. And we've got to watch our step clear through, from start to finish. Got to watch every darned little nuance, or we're sunk. Every word Eliza-

both Rydal wrote is sacred to me. Sacred. I'm not kidding. I'd want to make this picture just as she'd have wished it—catch that wonderful delicate style and preserve it in celluloid, if you get what I mean—”

I've got to find them, I said to myself. Now, at once. I can't stand any more of this. This time, I've got to be absolutely sure.

The producer's voice faded in again: “. . . Say, how about lunch, some time? Say, why don't I call you around the first of the week?”

“All right.” I tore a leaf from my notebook and scribbled the telephone number, substituting one wrong digit; a favorite trick of mine. If they ferret you out in spite of it, you can always pretend it was a slip.

“And Mrs. Monk too, of course. If she'd care to join us.”

“I'll ask her.” I thrust the paper into his hand and walked away before he could say another word.

At the entrance to the bar I ran into Mrs. Novotny, dainty and haggardly bright, in a dirndl costume with slave bangles.

“Getting yourself a drink? Good!” She smiled brilliantly, squeezing the crows' feet around her eyes. “I like a man who knows how to look out for himself.”

I grinned at her numbly. (“Your dying-Jesus grin,” Jane called it, when she was mad at me.)

“Sid and I were both so glad you could come this evening. Jane's such a lot of fun. She enjoys herself so. She always gets a party going. She's such a *happy* person—”

“Yes,” I said.

“Excuse me—” She gave me another smile, touched my arm lightly and headed eagerly back into the crowd. I'd been getting ready to ask her if she knew where Jane was. It was so hard to hit on exactly the right tone of voice; casual, but not too casual. Now I felt glad that I hadn't tried.

The bar was three steps down from the living room. Here, the dueling pistols and the ships' compasses, the Toby jugs, the clay pipes and the Currier and Ives prints clustered around a gay altar of colored bottles, and the air was thick with smoke and chatter. I stood on the top step, looking down. A couple of men recognized me and nodded, and I nodded back; but I knew very well that none of them really wanted me to join them. A cold, bored, boring highbrow: that was how I seemed to them, no doubt. Or else a snooty, half-Europeanized playboy with a limey accent and a Riviera background, who knew Italian princesses and French counts. An alien, in any case, who didn't belong to their worried movie world, where you lived six months ahead of your salary and had to keep right on spending lest anyone should suspect that your credit wasn't good. I had no part in their ulcers and anxieties, their mortgages and their options. I had never sweated it out at a sneak preview or a projection-room post-mortem. And so, when these

people thought of me, they certainly envied me my unearned money but probably also despised me for my irresponsible, unmanly freedom.

I came near to startling them all, at that moment, with a great bellow of despair, like an animal trapped in a swamp. Somehow or other, I'd wandered into this gibbering jungle of phonies, and now here I was, floundering stupidly in the mud of my jealous misery and sinking deeper with every movement. I hadn't even the consolation of being able to feel sorry for myself. I wasn't in the least tragic or pitiable; no, merely squalid and ridiculous. I knew that, and yet I couldn't help myself. I couldn't get out of the swamp. I tried to think of Elizabeth and what she would have done; but it was no good. Elizabeth wasn't here. I was all alone. I should go on struggling and sinking. I had no control, any more, over what was going to happen.

Jane wasn't in the bar. Neither was Roy Griffin.

Turning from the steps, I walked quickly along a short passage, opened a glass door and stepped out into the garden. It was cut from the steep hillside in two terraces; a dichondra lawn above, and, below, a small kidney-shaped swimming pool. The water of the pool must have been heated for it steamed gently in the beams of submerged lamps; its green-lit fumes rose theatrically against the enormous cheap-gaudy nightscape of Los Angeles, which sparkled away out to the horizon like a million cut-rate engagement rings.

There was nobody in the garden.

I came to a halt at the edge of the pool. It was brilliantly clean; not one leaf floating on its surface, not one speck of dirt on its tiled floor. God curse this antiseptic, heartless, hateful neon-mirage of a city! May its swimming pools be dried up. May all its lights go out forever. I drew a deep dizzying breath in which the perfume of star-jasmine was mixed with chlorine.

So this time was going to be like all the other times. I wasn't going to find her. I wasn't going to know for certain. Later, she'd walk into the living room quite casually, smiling as she said: "We took a ride. I felt like I needed some fresh air." Or else simply smiling and not bothering to explain at all. And Roy would either be casual too, as some of the others had been, or else embarrassed and in need of a stiff drink, avoiding my eyes. And I'd look at Jane and she'd look right back at me; and there would be nothing to say about it because I could prove nothing.

She and Roy had probably driven off into the hills together, the way the high-school kids did. The other day, at another party, a man had told us how he'd had a flat tire on Mulholland Drive, and how he'd gone over to a car parked nearby, after suitable warning coughs, to borrow a jack, and surprised a couple of them—the boy around sixteen, the girl maybe less—stark naked. "Holy smoke," the boy had said, "for a minute

I thought you were a cop!" They hadn't seemed the least ashamed of themselves. . . . Jane's comment on this story had been: "Well, good for *them!*"

I became suddenly aware of my hand, and the glass in it flashing green with the magic light of the water. The glass was empty, asking to be filled. I would have to go back into the house to fill it. I'd fix myself a huge drink and then sit down somewhere and figure out a very clever way to trap her once and for all, and be sure.

Wait, though. What was that?

Not the distant noises from the house. Not the crickets, which were chirping all over the hillside. Not the beating of my own heart.

There it was again. Quite close.

But—of course! I had entirely forgotten about the doll's house.

It was a playhouse, actually; fixed up to look like the Witch's candy cottage in Hansel and Gretel, with curly pillars that were supposed to be sugar-sticks and shingles painted the color of toffee. The three Novotny children were still just small enough to squeeze into it together; Mrs. Novotny thought it was cute to make them demonstrate this to her guests, on Sunday afternoons. All you could see of it now was a black outline, standing back among the shadows of the oleanders around the pool.

I set my glass down very gently on the paving and tiptoed across to it, holding my breath.

Small but unmistakable sounds. Out of the darkness, right at my feet.

And then Jane's voice in a faint gasping whisper: "Roy—"

I stood there, death-still, clenching my fists. But I was grinning.

For now, suddenly—now that there was never again to be any more doubting, dreading, suspecting—here, right in the brute presence of the simple unbelievable fact—I felt what I had never guessed I would feel; a great, almost agonizing upsurge of glee, of gleeful relief.

Caught. Caught her at last.

At my first school in England, on winter evenings, we had played hide-and-seek sometimes, turning out the lights and hiding all over the big house. When you were He, you tiptoed around holding your breath and listening, until your ears grew so keen it seemed you could hear every sound within miles. I had always hated being He, but it was worth bearing the tense, spooky loneliness just for the sake of that one intoxicating, gleeful instant when you knew you'd caught them, those whisperers lurking and mocking you in the darkness.

A funny thought flashed through my head: I've been He for nearly three years. What a long game—

Right at my feet, Jane giggled: "Roy—you sonofabitch—"

And, as if this were the signal they had been waiting for, my



clenched fists jumped from my sides and pounded thundering on the doll's house roof.

Then, light and quick as a murderer, I turned and ran laughing up the steps from the pool, jumped a flower-bed, burst through a line of bushes and was out on the driveway. Luckily, my car was parked some distance from the front door of the house. I fumbled frantically for the key, started the engine, backed out like a rocket, smashed into another car—crumpling the fender, probably—bounced off it, whirled the steering wheel around, and was away.

After that, everything came unstuck. The car bolted headlong with me down the road, squealing and skidding around the curves. My left hand wanted to swing it over the edge and plunge it to a blazing wreck in a gully; but my right hand refused, and was stronger. My voice was yelling dirty insane words about the things it would do to Jane. My mind sat away off somewhere, calm and strangely detached, disclaiming all responsibility for this noisy madman, just watching, listening and waiting for what would happen next.

And then I was up in the bedroom of our house. I had found one of her lipsticks and scribbled the mirror and the walls with the words I had been shouting, in big scarlet letters. Now I was throwing stuff into a suitcase as if the place were on fire. Reaching into the closet for clothes, my hands touched an evening gown, gripped and crumpled it and dragged it out, and it was Jane I was going to kill. "Rip her up. Rip her wide open," I muttered, hunting for a razor blade in my shaving kit. The blade was double-edged, awkward to hold. I cut my thumb deeply as I slashed with obstinate rage at the dress; the silk was amazingly tough. But it was done at last. Sobbing, I flung the poor beautiful harmless thing into a corner, all gashed and bloodied and spoiled. How horrible! I was going to vomit. I stumbled into the bathroom with my bleeding thumb in my mouth and reached the toilet bowl only just in time.

When I had washed myself, I came back into the bedroom for my suitcase, feeling weak and shaken and nearly sober. It was then that I remembered Elizabeth's letters. They were in a file, standing on the desk in the room I called my study but never used; I hadn't looked at them in months. I couldn't leave them, alone with Jane. She might burn them. She might even read them. I should have to take them along with me—wherever it was that I was going.

At the front door I paused and turned for a last look at our little hate-nest. Perhaps I had never seen it properly until this moment; my feelings about Jane had reduced it to a sort of flat, colorless backdrop. Actually, it had considerable comic possibilities. The hall was Hollywood-Spanish, with decorated beams and a staircase of curlicue ironwork and tiled steps gaily painted with birds and flowers. High up the wall, which had a surface like very expensive cream notepaper, there was a

balcony draped with an Indian blanket. "Romeo and Juliet," I said aloud. Then I noticed a bottle of whisky standing unopened in a paper bag on the carved Italian dower-chest. I picked it up and ran down the crazy pavement to the car, leaving the door ajar and all the lights burning.

In the darkened hotel lobby, only the reception desk was illuminated. It was quiet here and calm like a chapel, with the desk clerk keeping his vigil amidst the shadows of big sleepy indoor leaves. I signed the guest card, saying to myself as I often did: After all, I suppose I do actually exist. Anyhow, I seem to have a name, just like anybody else.

"Stopping with us long, Mr. . . . Monk?" the desk clerk asked, with an instant's glance at my signature. His manner was perfect; correct yet discreetly understanding. It was as if he knew just what I was thinking. You can trust us, his reassuring smile seemed to say. We shall accept you for what you tell us you are. We shall assume that you are a real person. All our guests, by definition, are real people.

"I'm not sure about my plans, yet." (But, even as I said this, I knew suddenly what I was going to do.)

The clerk nodded pleasantly and wrote something in a book. He was dressed for this death-watch job as if for a lively party; his suit, shirt, tie and teeth were immaculate, and his handsome sunburned young face showed not the least sign of fatigue. How is it, I wanted to ask him, that you can sit there, hour after hour, so calm and alone? What's your secret? How did you learn to inhabit the Night? I would have liked to stay and talk to the young man, telling him everything exactly as it had happened, without shame or excuse, as you might tell a doctor or a priest. But already the porter stood behind me with my suitcase; and the clerk was saying: "Four Sixty-two, sir. I hope you'll be comfortable."

"Will you put a call through for me, please?" I said. "Long distance to Dolgelly, Pennsylvania. You'll have to get the number from Information. It'll be listed under Pennington; Miss Sarah Pennington. The house is called Tawelfan T-a-w-e-l-f-a-n. It's on Boundary Lane."

"Surely." The clerk was scribbling this down. "Good night, Mr. Monk."

The call came through very quickly; only a few minutes after the porter had left me alone in my room.

"Go ahead, Los Angeles. Your party's on the line."

"Hello—"

"Yes—?" Sarah's voice sounded faint and anxious and old. I could picture her—with her hair in pigtails, probably—startled from sleep in the gray of dawn and fearing news of some disaster.

"Aunt Sarah, it's me, Stephen. . . . I woke you, didn't I? I'm so sorry, but I had to tell you this at once. I—"

"Stephen! It's you! Where are you?"

"Still here. In California. But listen—"

"I'm sorry, Stephen dear. I can't hear you—"

"What I want to know is—could you possibly have me at Tawelfan? I mean, right away?"

"Stephen! You mean, to *stay*? To *live* here?"

"Well—it might be only for a day or two. Or maybe longer. I'm not sure, yet. . . . But are you quite certain it won't be inconvenient?"

"Inconvenient! Listen to the man! He expects *me* to tell *him* that it's inconvenient to have him *here*. . . . Oh, Stephen dear, I'm so excited I can hardly believe it! When do you suppose you'll be coming?"

"I ought to be with you tomorrow. That is, if I can get on a plane sometime later today. I'll send you a telegram when I know for sure."

"Oh, how wonderful . . . Stephen, I'm not dreaming, am I? You really *are* coming?"

"Of course I'm coming, Aunt Sarah. Now you go right back to bed and finish your sleep."

"Oh, I shan't sleep another wink. Besides, it's getting light already. I must be up and doing. Good night, Stephen, my dearest. I suppose it *is* still night, with you? How odd that seems! God bless you."

"Good night, Aunt Sarah."

I hung up with a sigh of pain and relief. Her joy made me feel sad and guilty, as though I had somehow cheated her. But what a relief to know that it was done, now; I had taken the single, necessary, irrevocable step. And now I knew what I hadn't realized or admitted to myself until this moment—that I'd taken it only just in time. The least delay in getting that phone call through, and perhaps—no, it was certain; I'd have gone back to the house. Back to Jane, on her own terms, any terms. That was the simple, miserable truth.

"But it's done now," I repeated aloud. I opened my suitcase and took out the whisky bottle. First I would get into bed, then drink until I slept. Very soon it would be morning. Things would start to happen of themselves, and Life would begin to carry me slowly, slowly away from the wreck.

But the whisky nauseated me. I couldn't touch it. Instead, I lay there staring at the ceiling and was shaken by another trembling-fit of hate. Grinning savagely, I thought of Roy Griffin, that film-fairy, that pansy male-impersonator who fooled nobody but himself, stuck with a very expensive nymphomaniac. Stuck with her, and not knowing how to wriggle out of it, and scared silly because of his career. Maybe he'd even have to marry her. Ha-ha, what a laugh! The poor miserable little pansy bastard, married to a bitch who's been accustomed to spend more on herself in one week than he earns in six months. Or did he think he was going to live on alimony?

Well, if he did, he certainly had another guess coming. Not one cent would that whore get. Not one single cent. Not even if she took the case to the Supreme Court. I'd go to jail, first.

But I got hot, then, thinking of them together; two mating giants filling the dwarf world of the doll's house, and nearly bursting it apart with their heavings and writhings. I played the scene over and over to myself, elaborating every detail, until it left me sick with disgust and exhaustion. And so, toward dawn, I fell asleep.

## Alain Locke

*Alain Locke* is one of America's most distinguished Negro scholars. Born in Philadelphia, he was educated at Harvard, at Oxford University where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and at the University of Berlin. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University.

A professor of philosophy at Howard University, Dr. Locke has also been active for many years as a literary and art critic, and has

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IN AMERICAN CULTURE.

# THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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of the Negro as author, but also the general use in American letters of the Negro as a theme. This double development, especially when panoramically viewed, is fully as dramatic and significant as the social history it parallels. Historically, the Negro presents the unusual phenomenon of the most rejected and seemingly most unimportant segment of the population becoming, because of a fundamental contradiction between slavery and American democratic institutions, a center of such inevitable conflict and readjustment as to involve critically the destiny and fortune of the entire nation. On the cultural

**T**HE CAREER of the Negro in American literature properly includes not merely the story

plane something similar and equally significant has happened. For the position of the Negro in American culture has come to mean far more than merely the artistic activity and cultural progress of the Negro minority. Sometimes nationally, sometimes regionally, it has involved the trends and temper of the whole literature, and so has brought about basic changes in the orientation of American letters and a vital enlargement of the national culture. For, in addition to the crucial issues of cultural democracy, the goal of a fully representative and natively characteristic national literature has been at stake.

Just as slavery may now in perspective be viewed as having first threatened our democratic institutions and then forced them to more consistent maturity, the artistic and cultural impact of the Negro must be credited with producing unforeseen constructive pressures and generating unexpected creative ferment in the literary and artistic culture of America. In cutting the Negro completely loose from his ancestral culture, slavery set up a unique and unprecedented situation between the Anglo-Saxon majority and the Negro minority group. The peculiar conditions of American slavery so scrambled Africans from the diverse regions and cultures of an entire continent that, with the original background culture tribal to begin with, neither a minority language nor an ancestral tradition remains. The American Negro was left no alternative but to share the language and tradition of the majority culture. Thus, instead of the usual minority nativism with its logic of separation, Negro aspiration and effort has aimed, almost without exception, at full cultural assimilation. The occasional exceptions, like Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement and a few similarly quixotic and desperate "separate state" or "colonization" schemes, have been rare and relatively inconsequential. In the long run, this has meant that with the futility of trying to substitute an arbitrary, artificial barrier like a "color line" for a natural or accepted boundary of language, creed or culture, historical circumstances have made it necessary that this particular majority-minority issue be settled or resolved within the context of a common culture.

Full comprehension of this is essential to any adequate understanding of the Negro's special position in American society and culture. It explains why, although forced by majority attitudes of exclusion and rejection to take on a defensive attitude of racialism, the American Negro has rarely set up separate cultural values, much less developed divergent institutional loyalties or separate political objectives. On the whole, Negro racialism has remained what it historically is—an enforced, protective counter-attitude, stemming the worst of proscription and discrimination. Accordingly, although becoming with each generation, and now with each decade, more racially militant and protesting, the American Negro remains steadfastly conformist in basic attitude and assimila-

tionist in over-all policy. The Negro's values, ideals and objectives are integrally and unreservedly American.

And so, with no possibility of a solution by cultural autonomy or secession, and with no temporizing barrier of segregation effective for long, solution by progressive incorporation into the general culture has become for the Negro the only sane and real alternative. This commitment to a common culture is, naturally enough, the bogey and ultimate despair of the Negro's opponents; ironically enough, it is also their Frankenstein. But by the same token, it is the hope and ultimate assurance of the Negro and his well-wishers. It means for the Negro an eventual emergence from the social and cultural ghetto. For the common good it means an unpremeditated but inevitable democratization of the national culture.

After generation-long resistance and delay, progress toward both these goals appears at last to have gained considerable momentum. In no field is this development more clearly observable than in the step-by-step evolution of the Negro, as both theme and participant, in American literature. The crucial factors in group relationships are social attitudes, and literature—recording and reflecting these in preference even to social fact—becomes the most revealing medium. It is to this mirror that I turn for the salient changes of majority attitudes toward the Negro and, equally important, for a view of the Negro's changed attitudes toward himself.

The Negro has been a figure in American letters for little more than a century and a half. In the total perspective a great cumulative transformation can be seen to have taken place—registering on the one hand, extraordinary growth and cultural development on the part of the Negro, and, on the other, a significant democratic maturing of the majority mind and culture. But except in such long-range contemplation, the picture is sorry testimony to the psychological blight of slavery and its aftermath, for its distorting stereotypes, both naive and deliberate, have crippled most literary portrayals of the Negro. The Negro writer has been seriously affected by the public reign and tyranny of these stereotypes, for he, too, has either been forced in one way or other to cater to them in order to get a hearing, or else he has been driven to resort, in unrealistic despair and concern, to the dangerous over-correctives of counter-stereotyping. Indeed, one may say that except here and there in the vision of sheer genius like that of Melville or Whitman or in such studied detachment as that of Chestnutt and Toomer among Negro writers, only in the last decade or so has any deep portrayal or full self-portrayal of the Negro been possible.

The Negro came on the scene as a theme in American literature casually and occasionally in the late colonial period. Oddly enough, the first appearance of a Negro writer, in 1760,

was quite as early. At this time American slavery was still predominantly patriarchal, and the full weight of the plantation regime had not yet settled on the land. Even by then, though rather naively at first, the portrayal of the Negro was inauspiciously out of focus, and the "typical" basic Negro of American tradition—grotesque, comic or sentimentally pathetic—had already been set. Low comedy, burlesque and sentimental melodrama had molded the twin stereotypes of the entirely "comic" and the wholly "tragic" Negro, which were to condition and delimit the way in which the Negro was seen and thought of for generations to come. Slavery saw to that, blinding the majority eye with the crude, condescending distortions of prejudice, and blurring the minority eye with a myopia of fumbling, exhibitionist concern for its own sad plight and predicament. It has taken generations to rise, step by half-step at times, from this level of farce, buffoonery, caricature and condescension to portrayal of the Negro as completely and self-sufficiently human.

Yet this has been a very necessary evolution, not only in the interest of the truth about the Negro, but also for the artistic integrity of the national literature. Not that I am insisting here upon realism as such—romantic and other non-realistic styles have their appropriate approaches. But in the past far too many romantic delineations of the Negro character have been so tritely and superficially drawn as to lack solid, honest quality altogether. Yet to millions, and for generations, the Negro has been these pasteboard "Uncles," "Aunties," Chloes, Sambos and pickaninnies. In fact, the well-intentioned sentimentalists have done almost as much damage as the deliberate detractors.

All these trends have had to be counteracted in order for the Negro subject to progress slowly from stereotype to human being, from carelessly conceived genre and caricature to seriously studied and carefully presented character. An acceptably authentic Negro has had to wait for gradual liquidation of the inequities of double-standard portrayal. That this is at last on the verge of realization, even in the contemporary regional fiction of the South, and that the Negro writer, instead of being regarded as a mere ghetto prodigy or spokesman, is being more frequently received as a fellow artist and welcome collaborator, are symptoms of significant cultural progress, and so a matter for the deepest human and artistic satisfaction.

The first two Negro writers of record were poets: Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, both favored slaves—in Northern surroundings. Long Island and Boston, respectively. Hammon, whose first publication, *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, and Penitential Cries*, was issued in 1760, continued to write intermittently until 1787, when his last work (and first prose one), *An Address to the Negroes in the*

*State of New York*, achieved popularity because of its obsequious position on slavery. At best an imitative rhymester, Hammon displayed, naturally enough, the cautious complacency of the pet protégé, and was mainly notable as a first example. He was aware of his more talented contemporary, Phillis Wheatley, and was race-conscious enough to compose twenty-one dedicatory stanzas in her honor in 1778. She, too, although unquestionably a more powerful personality, took on completely the coloration of her patrons and their Boston environment. In 1773 she traveled alone, but under their auspices, to England, and as guest of the Countess of Huntingdon was a sensation in literary and court circles. Her first book was published in London that same year. Returning to Boston, she shared the Wheatleys' Whig sympathies, and in 1775 addressed laudatory verses to Washington on his assumption of the command of the Continental Armies. But because she had experienced only nominal slavery, her racial patriotism was vaguely rhetorical, with hardly any specific identification with the cause of anti-slavery. Indeed we find her saying: "'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land," and later writing even more explicitly in "Lines to the Students of the University of Cambridge":

*'Twas not long since I left my native shore—  
The land of errors and Egyptian gloom.*

Perhaps no more was to be expected of these minds groomed by favoritism and bound by its silken chains. Their constructive contribution was to give evidence of the intellectual and artistic capacities of the Negro in a time and environment of doubt, and that, with a few other outstanding talents, they gave.

Soon thereafter the earliest indictments of slavery from the articulate free Negro gave signs of a virile group consciousness. These also came surprisingly early, less than a decade after the first Quaker and non-conformist challenges of the institution by such men as John Woolman, Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush. The first protest by a Negro was published in Baltimore, significantly enough in the very year of the nation's official founding—1789. It was, understandably, an anonymous arraignment, entitled, *Negro Slavery by Othello: A Free Negro*. It was so forthright, trenchant and daring that, if its author could be definitely identified, he would be the first great name among American Negro writers. Considerable evidence points to the Negro, Benjamin Banneker, a man of many talents—astronomer, inventor and publisher of the widely circulated annual *Almanacks* of 1791-96. In 1791, in an exchange of personal correspondence he challenged Thomas Jefferson on slavery. Later he was appointed by Jefferson as surveyor-draughtsman on the L'Enfant Com-



mission which laid out the plans for the city of Washington.

Both the language and the logic of "Othello's" protest are masterful:

When the united colonies revolted from Great Britain, they did it upon this principle, "that all men are by nature and of right ought to be free." After a long, successful and glorious struggle for liberty, during which they manifested the firmest attachment to the rights of mankind, can they so soon forget the principles that governed their determinations? Can Americans, after the noble contempt they expressed for tyrants, meanly descend to take up the scourge? Blush, ye revolted colonies, for having apostatized from your own principles! . . . The importation of slaves into America ought to be a subject of the deepest regret to every benevolent and thinking mind. And one of the great defects in the federal system is the liberty it allows on this head. Venerable in everything else, it is injudicious here; and it is much to be deplored that a system of so much political perfection should be stained with anything that does an outrage to human nature. . . . So, far from encouraging the importation of slaves, and countenancing that vile traffic in human flesh, the members of the late Constitutional Convention should have seized the opportunity of prohibiting forever this cruel species of reprobated villainy. That they did not do so will forever diminish the luster of their other proceedings, so highly extolled and so justly distinguished for their intrinsic value.

This historic first protest was followed by a brave succession of others, Lemuel Haynes's in 1810, Peter Williams's in 1808, David Walker's *Appeal* in 1829, and that by the first Convention of the Free Men of Color in Philadelphia in 1831. If slavery molded the emotional and folk life of the Negro, it was the anti-slavery struggle that developed his intellect and spurred him to disciplined, articulate expression. Up to the Civil War, the growing anti-slavery movement was the midwife of Negro political and literary talent.

Under the zealous tutelage of the abolitionists, Negro leaders, some well educated, others self-taught fugitive slaves, learned almost equally well the arts of public speech and of platform debate, and there began that rare collaboration which in a little over four decades divided American public opinion and shook down the firmly founded edifice of chattel slavery. Beginning in 1818 with John Russwurm, editor of the first Negro newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, a vigorous group of Negro writers and orators, including Martin Delaney, Ringgold Ward, Highland Garnett and William Wells Brown, developed, to be climaxed by the admitted giant of them all, the ex-slave journalist and orator, Frederick Douglass. Inspired by their alignment with a great cause, they came to such skill and maturity as to compare favorably with their white col-

leagues—Lovejoy, William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld, Charles Sumner, Henry Ward Beecher and Wendell Phillips. Their activities earned for the Negro the moral credit and satisfaction of having been a valiant, effective collaborator in the struggle for his own freedom. Besides serving as traveling lecturers and abolitionist organizers in the North and Midwest, and on occasion as secret agents of the "Underground Railroad" for the rescue of slave fugitives, many of the more talented were sent abroad on extensive tours of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. William Wells Brown remained in Europe five years on a continuous mission, during which time, in 1853, he published the first novel of Negro authorship, *Clotel*. On several trips Frederick Douglass became the idol of Belfast, Liverpool, Manchester and London audiences. The presence of such men before foreign audiences and at international anti-slavery conventions had a most strategic effect in making abolition an international issue.

One of the most unique and effective contributions of the Negro to the liberation struggle was the "slave narrative," a genre of which there are several hundred examples extant. These were the life stories of fugitive slaves, firsthand exposures of slavery's inhumanities and incongruities. Although propaganda tracts in origin and purpose, they were so crammed with a new brand of heroic and melodramatic adventure that they became popular "thrillers." Soon, with such incandescent sparks added to the abolitionist tinder, the audience at home and abroad was aflame with ardent anti-slavery sentiment. Although often exaggerated, the slave narratives had human authenticity and set forth a type of evidence that no amount of Southern propaganda could offset or contradict. The more capable writers had such power that they turned mere flight from slavery into a dynamic crusade for human freedom. Moreover, as the *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* readily admitted, they were the core materials of the unrivaled bombshell of anti-slavery literature, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Although not published until some years later, the slave narrative of Josiah Henson, told to her orally, was Mrs. Stowe's model for the character of Uncle Tom, while the narrative of Lewis Clark gave her the pattern for George Harris, with Frederick Douglass's famous *Narrative* serving as the general inspiration of the whole book.

All this was marvelously effective propaganda. But *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exemplifies the dilemma of more than two generations of writing about the Negro. As a moral issue and controversy, both pro- and anti-slavery thinking viewed everything in moralistic antithesis, sharply contrasted black and white, with no shadings. In a second novel, *Dred* (1856), Mrs. Stowe herself attempted a more carefully drawn picture, but it was swamped by the popular appeal of the sentimental melodrama in the first one. Both sides were caught in this

atmosphere, and with few exceptions, an incubus of moralism and polemics settled down not only on the pre-Civil War phase of American letters, but unfortunately also on that of a considerable part of the post-war Reconstruction period.

This brought a blight upon both the majority and the minority literature, each element seeking not truth, but self-justification. Negro writers saw themselves and their subject materials in terms either of self-pity or of parade-dress vindication. Northern views were either indifferent or sentimentally indulgent and patronizing, while with the chronic ambivalence of its half-child, half-beast formula, the Old South wavered between condescending amiability and deliberate hostility. As the iron ring of controversy tightened, the whole tone and temper of Southern fiction changed. The easy-going rustic atmosphere of such earlier novels as those of Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms were displaced by tense, fictionalized versions of the official pro-slavery argument in action, character and speech. In *The Negro in American Fiction*, Sterling Brown records that within three years of the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, fourteen pro-slavery novels were published in the South. The significant fact is that not one of them is remembered today: overt propaganda artistically stifled Southern creative writing for over a generation.

But this dead hand of didacticism, though at its worst in the South, affected all sides. The works of the two Negro novelists of the period—William Wells Brown and Frank J. Webb—were dull and overdrawn counter-statements. The anti-slavery poems of Longfellow, Bryant and Whittier, in spite of their best intentions, were all several notches below these authors' artistic average. Only Lowell, Melville, Mark Twain and Whitman, because of their more universal perspective and approach, struck real fire. Melville's convincing Negro sailors in *Moby Dick* and Mark Twain's unforgettable Jim in *Huckleberry Finn* are artistically worth reams of the sentimental moralizing with which the whole iron age of slavery controversy was plagued. So, also, is Lowell's brief but penetrating reference in the "Commemoration Ode":

*Bow down, dear Land, for thou hast found release . . .  
Bow down in prayer and praise!  
No poorest in thy borders but may now  
Lift to the juster skies a man's enfranchised brow . . .*

and Whitman's equally keen, swift strokes in "Ethiopia Saluting the Colours":

*What is it, fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?  
Why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red and  
green?  
Are the things so strange and marvelous you see or have  
seen?*

and in "The Wounded Person" in *Song of Myself*:

*The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the  
fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat,  
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck—  
the murderous buck-shot and the bullets,  
All these I feel or am . . .  
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,  
I myself become the wounded person.*

At the close of the Civil War the moral enthusiasm of the North was deeply spent. With the Negro occupied with the practical emergencies of emancipation and reconstruction, the South had another, more successful literary inning. Shortly after 1875, reconstruction fiction began to appear, taking the form of adroit glorification of the ante-bellum regime. There was little counter-statement by Northern writers, with the notable exception of Albion Tourgee, whose *A Fool's Errand* and *Bricks Without Straw* were desperate attempts to tell the truth about the obstructionist tactics and Klan terrorism rampant in the South from 1880 on. But in its first phases, reconstruction fiction was at least genteel. It is typified by the work of Thomas Nelson Page, which just because of its sentimental blandishments won wide public favor. It persuaded a majority of its readers that the romantic version of the old regime was essentially true. In spite of its insistent injustice to the Negro, its dominating motive was to give balm to the South's injured pride and achieve emotional compensation for the "lost cause." A half-generation later, however, with the open and sinister animus of Thomas Dixon's *Leopard Spots* and *The Clansman*, it became vindictive and overtly anti-Negro, and, as the critic William Braithwaite aptly puts it, "the portraiture descends from caricature to libel."

Not all the Southern romancers were equally partisan. Joel Chandler Harris in his Uncle Remus stories rendered as much poetic justice to the Negro as an orthodox Southerner could, and George W. Cable, an ardent local colorist, told decidedly more of the truth than was popular in his day. His *Madame Delphine*, and especially *The Granddissimes*, with its two half-brothers, the illegitimate mulatto Honoré upholding the family's worthier traits and tradition while the legitimate Honoré exhibited its worst, is courageously outspoken, and told a story for New Orleans and its Creole society that no one until much later would dare tell of the more characteristic South and its more typical undiluted Negroes.

What really was lacking was any presentation of the other side of the picture by either Northern or Negro writers. That, however, came with time. At almost the same cue, toward the turn of the century, new forces broke into the doldrums of the Reconstruction, bringing fresh social and literary impetus. In

1895, Booker Washington appeared with his dynamic program of self-help and practical education, but also with his *Up From Slavery* theme of Southern appeasement, to head what became the inevitably popular "school of conciliation." Shortly after, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois followed as leader of an initially small equal rights movement. His *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) became, as the movement grew, the bible of the militant school of protest. Negro writing divided into two parallel trends, with Dunbar and Chestnutt at their respective heads. Paul Lawrence Dunbar, best known as a dialect poet, but also a versatile lyric poet, story-writer and novelist, became immensely popular as a sort of Negro Eugene Field. Heralded by William Dean Howells, he became the lyric spokesman of the Negro peasant, and, as he later regretted, gave wider and longer currency to the accepted stereotypes. He himself thought more of his legitimate English lyrics and his later realistic social novel, *Sport of the Gods*, the first portrayal of the urban Negro in Harlem. It was very probably in subconscious protest against being tied to the sentimental commonplaces of the peasant tradition that Dunbar had written three other, earlier, but mediocre novels, with white main characters and bourgeois themes. His assured place in American letters, nevertheless, is as the tuneful laureate of "When Malindy Sings" and "When de C'on Pone's Hot." He represents the sunset of one era rather than the sunrise of the next.

It was the less popular Charles W. Chestnutt who stood for the coming age. His was the ambitious and progressive aim to counter the influence of the Thomas Nelson Page school of fiction and reveal a more balanced and accurate truth about Negro life in the South, which as a native North Carolinian he knew intimately. Chestnutt quite successfully modeled his short-story style on Bret Harte, his novel technique on Cable's, but with decidedly less success. He achieved, however, considerable recognition in *The Atlantic Monthly* and a long career of publication by Houghton, Mifflin. With Dunbar, he represents the historic break-through of the Negro author into the mainstream of American letters. Chestnutt spared no one's foibles, Northern or Southern, black or white. Himself almost quadron, he ruthlessly satirized the mulatto color-line within the race, and sought to liquidate all conventional double-standard values. Miscegenation and mob violence were his main themes, as indeed they were for this whole period of fiction about the Negro, but with the important difference of careful, sober documentation and an even balancing of the situation, whether comic, melodramatic or tragic. With greater novelistic skill, Chestnutt would have been our outstanding period novelist.

As long, however, as romantic taste was in vogue, no amount of counter-statement, however sound and documented—Chestnutt's, DuBois's or any other—could stem the tide of

conventional stereotyping. The only antidote was realism. During the early 1920's a discerning critic could at last say: "The folk-lore attitude discovers only the lowly and naive; the sociological attitude finds the problem first and the human being after, if at all. But American art in a reawakened seriousness, and using the technique of the new realism, is gradually penetrating Negro life to its core." Just before that, a pseudo-realism had brought a spate of fresh misinterpretation, and particularly the magazines were crammed with the last serious majority cliché, that of blood atavism and inherent Negro primitivism. Well-intentioned writers for more than a decade deluged readers with such pseudo-scientific interpretations, which still linger on or recur with their false biology of the potent "black drop" of blood, an actual title of a story on the subject by Margaret Deland, and an equally dubious anthropology of the ineradicable "savage."

By and large, the Negro as subject matter achieved artistic freedom and stature only as American literature itself crossed over into the domain of realism. One of the earliest instances was in Stephen Crane's *The Monster* (1897); there were also Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1905) and Dreiser's *Nigger Jeff* (1918). None of these is a pleasant characterization, but they at least present the full-length social and psychological truth about their respective settings—a Negro in a small Midwest town, Negro strike-breakers in the Chicago stockyards, and a Southern lynching. Most significantly for Southern literature, realism invaded the Old Dominion through Ellen Glasgow—tentatively in *The Miller of Old Church* (1911) and then full force in 1925 in her epoch-making *Barren Ground*, which put into the same canvas with the Virginia aristocracy and bourgeoisie carefully observed "poor whites" as well as Negroes. William J. Cash rightly assesses this as "the first real novel as opposed to romances the South has brought forth, certainly the first wholly genuine picture of the people who make up and always had made up the body of the South." With realism triumphantly crossing the Potomac, the legendary South was finally on the defensive.

It was an odd coincidence, perhaps, that this same period was also that of the Negro creative writer's spiritual emancipation. For from 1912 on there was brewing the movement that in 1925 explicitly became the so-called "renaissance of the New Negro." This movement was not so much in itself a triumph of realism, although it had its share of realists, but a deliberate cessation by Negro authors of their attempts primarily to influence majority opinion. By then Negro artists had outgrown the handicap of allowing didactic emphasis and propagandist motives to choke their sense of artistry. Partly in disillusionment, partly in newly acquired group pride and self-respect, they turned inward to the Negro audience in frankly avowed self-expression. Langston Hughes, one of

their number, thus phrased this literary declaration of independence:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on the top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

Once again, there was a common denominator between the advance-guard elements of the majority and the minority. The anti-slavery collaboration had earlier forged a moral alliance; this was an aesthetic one, which spelled out a final release from propaganda and its shackling commitments both for Negro materials in American art and literature and for the Negro writer and artist. And from 1925 to the present, realism and Southern regionalism on the one side, and the promotion of racial self-expression on the other have informally but effectively combined to form a new progressive atmosphere in American letters.

The "New Negro" literature was not without its social causes: its roots were in the changed condition and temper of the Negro people themselves, stirred by heavy mass migration from farms to cities, from the deep South to Northern and Midwestern centers of industry; by improved economic and educational surroundings; and above all by the galvanizing insights and disillusionments of the First World War. All this was reflected in a new sort of race consciousness, divested of the older apology and self-pity, proud, self-reliant and challenging. A whole galaxy of talented poets and writers caught up and focused this new spirit—Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, to mention the leading poets, and Rudolph Fisher, Eric Walrond, Zora Hurston, Arna Bontemps, Waters Turpin and Richard Wright among the writers of prose. James Weldon Johnson, who in 1917 shared the stylistic outlook of Dunbar, by 1927 was publishing *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, which renounced traditional dialect and put into rhapsodic free verse "the truer idioms of the folk imagination." In Countee Cullen's "Shroud of Color," his sense of race is one of loyalty, pride and group confidence, almost the tone of a chosen people:

*Lord, I will live persuaded by mine own,  
I cannot play the recreant to these:  
My spirit has come home, that sailed the doubtful seas.*

Toomer, whose sketches of Georgia in *Cane* (1923) are one

of the artistic triumphs of the new era, in "Song of the Son" sees slavery in this calm, third-generation perspective:

*Now just before an epoch's sun declines  
Thy son, in time I have returned to thee . . .  
In time, although the sun is setting on  
A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set. . . .  
Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet  
To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone . . .  
An everlasting song—a singing tree  
Caroling softly souls of slavery.*

Instead of Phillis Wheatley's myopic apologies for Africa as "the land of errors and Egyptian gloom," Claude McKay sees her in this dignified retrospect in his sonnet, "Africa":

*The sun sought thy dim bed and brought forth light,  
The sciences were sucklings at thy breast;  
When all the world was young in pregnant night  
Thy slaves toiled at their monumental best.  
Thou ancient treasure land, thou modern prize,  
New peoples marvel at thy pyramids!  
The years roll on, thy sphinx of riddle-eyes  
Watches the mad world with immobile lids.*

Nor was the poetry of this talented generation unrealistic enough to neglect the significant new notes of social protest and the unflinching intention to hold democracy to strict and just account. This ranged from the quiet confidence of Cullen, in his challenge "From the Dark Tower":

*We shall not always plant while others reap  
The golden increment of bursting fruit,  
Nor always countenance, abject and mute,  
That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap, . . .  
We were not made eternally to weep.*

to the harsher defiance of McKay in "White Houses":

*Your door is shut against my tightened face,  
And I am sharp as steel with discontent.  
But I possess the courage and the grace  
To bear my anger proudly and unbent.*

In its prose, this group of Negro writers faced the realities of Negro life and experience with laudable detachment and objectivity, which not only added to their artistic success but quickly enlarged their audience, for intelligent majority circles were glad to have a reliable inside view.

For a time, Negro fiction was mired in the problem novel; as with DuBois's *Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) and Walter



White's *The Fire in the Flint*. But in such work as McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), and (1924) Rudolph Fisher's semi-satiric stories and novel of Harlem, *Walls of Jericho*, the new trend turned to full-scale social realism quite in key with Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser and Dos Passos. Gradually the whole range of Negro life was opened up—Northern, Southern and Caribbean; urban and rural; upper, middle and lower class—the last much to the distaste of the older generation and their tacit taboos of "respectability." George Lee's *River George* gave us an excellent close-up of both the white and the black sharecropper; Zora Hurston an excellent inside view, in both folklore and fiction, of contemporary Negro peasant life; Jessie Fauset pioneered in depicting the unfamiliar circles of the upper and middle-class Northern Negro. Arna Bontemps delved into historical fiction with *Black Thunder* and *Drums of Destiny*, and in *God Sends Sunday* into sporting life in St. Louis and New Orleans. Turpin in a series of period novels sketched three contrasted generations, while Langston Hughes in *Not Without Laughter* gave a semi-autobiographic account of the Midwest. Eric Walrond in *Tropic Death* exploited his native Caribbean, as did McKay in *Banana Bottoms* and *Gingertown*. In short, Negro life attained for the first time almost full-scale self-revelation and considerable self-criticism. Finally, in something of a *Studs Lonigan* style, and with a Chicago slum setting, Richard Wright climaxed the development with an international best-seller, *Native Son* (1940), a masterpiece of realism, spiced in the final chapters with a Communistic sauce, at that time vigorously espoused but later repudiated by its author. Wright's accusation of the social environment, however, had point and relevance, and with the work of others of his generation brought Negro writing abreast of contemporary American realism and within hailing distance of cultural maturity. Thus rapidly did the younger Negro writer move out from the brackish backwaters of problem isolation into the main current of contemporary American letters.

While this advance of the Negro writer had its own racial dynamic, it could hardly have been successful without considerable reinforcement from trends in the national culture at large. Indeed important initiative often came from the leading talents in American letters. As early as 1916, Ridgeley Torrence promoted a new dramatic interest in the Negro with his *Three Plays for a Negro Theater*. This led to Eugene O'Neill's sensational success in 1919 with *The Emperor Jones*, and with Charles Gilpin in the title role, to the Negro actor's first undisputed Broadway success. Paul Green's many plays of Negro life climaxed in a 1927 Pulitzer Prize for his *In Abraham's Bosom*. Similarly, three pioneers of Southern regionalism broke open the deep South in courageous frank novels of

Negro life—Clement Wood in *Nigger* and T. S. Stribling in *Birthright* in 1922, and in 1925, Du Bose Heyward in the momentous *Porgy*, later dramatized, and still later in Gershwin's musical setting reworked into America's most successful folk opera. Starting with her sensitive character study, *Green Thursday*, Julia Peterkin banished at least some of the stereotypes of the plantation tradition. In 1928, with *Scarlet Sister Mary*, she too won a Pulitzer Prize. Marc Connelly salvaged the trite materials of Roark Bradford's *Old Man Adam*, and in *The Green Pastures* inaugurated a new era of sympathetic insight and understanding of the Negro folk imagination. In *Dark Laughter*, Sherwood Anderson brought to first articulate recognition those factors of emotional buoyancy so distinctively characteristic of Negro living, already half revealed in the growing vogue of ragtime and jazz. Here, he suggested, was the spiritual ammunition for that generation's crusade against puritanism and its joyless repressions, and the Negro folk spirit and its materials became the standard-bearers for over two decades in a nationwide cult of joy in living.

Then, in spite of considerable resistance from the old romantic but reactionary trends in Southern fiction, realism continued its conquest of the leading creative talents of the South. William Cash's *The Mind of the South*, with its surgical self-criticism, definitely turned the tide. A strong succession of novelists like Hamilton Basso, William March and Robert Rylee picked up the challenge in a third-generation defiance of the South's most sacred taboos, opening one ancestral skeleton closet after the other, especially on the South's sex mores and the subject of the Negro. Some wrote not so much in specific desire for retributive justice for the Negro as out of loyalty to realism's basic aesthetic credo; but others like Lillian Smith and Grace Lumpkin had the explicit resolve of making moral amends. So, the literary revolution that started in the Midwest with Willa Cather, Carl Sandburg and Sinclair Lewis was destined to achieve one of its best triumphs in the literature of the South, bringing that region its first era of outstanding cultural distinction. For this movement climaxed in the contrasted geniuses of Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner. Caldwell, after the shattering disclosures about the "poor whites" in *Tobacco Road*, went relentlessly on to equal candor about the South and the Negro in *Kneel to the Rising Sun* and *Trouble in July*. William Faulkner, with hesitant but brave introspection, has detailed the South's most intimate and apologetic social confessional. From the characterization of Joe Christmas in *Light in August* (1932) to the artistry of *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948, one of his central concerns has been the enigmatic and inconsistent relation between Southern whites and the Negro. The international acclaim that brought to Southern letters its first Nobel Prize, awarded to William Faulkner in 1950 for his unexcelled, intensive por-

trayal of Southern life, includes as one of its most vital justifications, ironically enough, recognition of his unorthodox integrity in the treatment of the Negro. Such honest liberalism is, of course, far from being the present average in the South, but it is becoming established among the South's artistic elite. And in view of the undeniably more liberal attitudes of the younger generation, this is a happy augury of an eventual attainment of both social and cultural democracy. Happily the upsurge of a new Negro has been paralleled by the significant emergence of a new South.

For the moment a strong sense of integration has taken hold of many of the younger Negro writers, and with good reasons. Even though it may temporarily reduce the more overt kind of racial self-expression, it is appropriate that Negro artists, in moving out into the mainstream of American culture, should gain a sense of solidarity with both the national and the general world of art. As a clear instance on the popular level, one can cite the repeated successes of a best-seller romancer like Frank Yerby, who writes general fiction exclusively. More meaningfully, however, and on a higher level, stand the careers of Willard Motley in fiction and Gwendolyn Brooks in poetry. Motley's novels, *Knock On Any Door* and *They Fished All Night*, both blend the Negro materials proportionately into a representative cross section. Most significant, perhaps, is the work of Miss Brooks, the first Negro recipient of a Pulitzer Prize, who chooses a skillful combining of universal themes with racial overtones:

*Grant me that I am human, that I hurt,  
That I can cry.  
Not that I now ask alms, in shame gone hollow,  
Nor cringe outside the loud and sumptuous gate.  
Admit me to our mutual estate.*

*Open my rooms, let in the light and air.  
Reserve my service at the human feast,  
And let the joy continue.*

With improving race relations, a welcome relaxation of emotional tensions is making possible a calmer flow of creative effort and a deeper current of human understanding. In time one may expect a return on the part of Negro writers to native materials, but in a context healthily free from both provincialism and propaganda. For the Negro seems at last on the verge of proper cultural recognition and a fraternal acceptance as a welcome participant and collaborator in the American arts. Should this become the realized goal, the history of the Negro's strange and tortuous career in American literature may become also the story of America's hard-won but easily endured attainment of cultural democracy.

## Louis Auchincloss

*Louis Auchincloss* was born and brought up in New York City and Bar Harbor, Maine, in an environment that is reflected in the settings of his stories and novels. His career as an attorney in New York was interrupted by three years of active sea duty during World War II. After the war he returned to his law practice, from which he retired in January 1952, to devote full time to writing. His stories have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* and *Town & Country*; *THE INJUSTICE COLLECTORS*, a book of short stories, and *SYBIL*, a novel, were published by Houghton Mifflin.

## BILLY AND THE GARGOYLES

**S**HIRLEY SCHOOL in appearance was gloomy enough to look at, but it was only when we returned there in later years that it seemed so to us. As boys, we took its looks for granted. The buildings were grouped in orderly lines around a square campus; they were of gray stone and had tall, Gothic windows. The ceilings inside were high, making large wall spaces which were covered with faded lithographs of renaissance paintings. There was a chapel, a gymnasium, a schoolhouse, several dormitories and, scattered about at a little distance from the campus, the cottages of the married masters. No fence separated the school from the surrounding New England countryside, but none was needed. Shirley was a community unto itself; its very atmosphere prohibited escape or intrusion. The runaway boy would know that he was only running from his own future, and a trespasser would immediately feel that he was intruding on futures never intended for him. For Shirley, even through the shabby stone of its lamentable architecture, exuded the atmosphere of a hundred years of accumulated idealism. You were made as a boy to feel that great things would be expected of you after graduation; you would rise in steady ascent on the escalator of success as inevitably as you rose from one form to another in the school. Life was a pyramid, except that there was more room at the top, and anyone who had been through the dark years of hazing and athletic competitions, who had prayed and washed and conformed at Shirley, should and would get there. It was good to be ambitious because, being educated and God-

fearing, you would raise the general level as you yourself rose to power, to riches, to a bishopric or to the presidency of a large university. At the end there was death, it was true, but with it even greater rewards, and old age, unlike Macbeth's, would be sweetened by a respectful lull broken only by the rattle of applause at testimonial dinners. I find that I can still look at life and feel that it ought to be this way, that I can still vaguely wonder why one year has not put me further ahead than its predecessor. There were no such doubts at Shirley, unless they were felt by Billy Prentiss.

Billy was my cousin and the only other boy at school whom I knew when I went there first at the age of thirteen. The contrast between us, however, was not one to make me presume on the relationship. Billy came of a large and prosperous family, and I was an only child whose mother gave bridge lessons at summer hotels to help with my Shirley tuition. Billy, though thin and far from strong, was tall and fair and had an easy-going, outgiving personality; I was short, dark and of a truculent disposition. But these contrasts were as nothing before the overriding distinction between the "old kid" and the "new kid." Billy and I may have been in the same form, but he had completed a year at the school before my arrival which gave him great social prerogatives. By Shirley's rigid code there should have been only the most formal relations between us.

Billy, however, did not recognize the code. That is what I mean when I say that he had doubts at Shirley. He greeted me from the first in a friendly manner that was entirely improper, as if we had been at home and not at school. He helped me to unpack and showed me my gymnasium locker and supplied me with white stiff collars for Sunday wear. He talked in an easy, chatty manner about how my mother had taught him bridge and what he had seen during the summer with his family in Europe, as if he believed that such things could be balanced against the things that were happening at Shirley, the real things. He was certainly an odd figure for an old kid; I think of him now as he looked during my first months at school, stalking through the corridors of the Lower Forms Building on his way to or from the library, running the long fingers of his left hand through his blond hair and whistling "Mean To Me." He lived in a world of his own, and, with all my gratitude, I was sufficiently conservative to wonder if it wasn't Utopian. It embarrassed me, for example, when he was openly nice to me in the presence of other old kids.

"How are you getting on, Peter?" he asked me one morning after chapel as we walked to the schoolhouse. Nobody else called me by my Christian name. "Have you got everything you need? Can I lend you any books or clothes?"

"No, I'm fine, thank you."

"You're a cousin, you know," he said, looking at me serious-

ly. "Cousins ought to help each other out. Even second cousins."

I didn't really believe that anyone could help me. Homesickness was like cutting teeth or having one's tonsils out. I nodded, but said nothing.

"If you have any trouble with the old kids, let me know," he continued. "I could speak to them. It might help."

"Oh, no, please!" I explained. Nothing could have more impressed me with his other-worldliness than a suggestion so unorthodox. "You mustn't do that! It wouldn't be the thing at all!"

We were interrupted by voices from behind us, loud, sneering voices. It was what I had been afraid of.

"Is that Prentiss I see talking to a new kid? Can he so demean himself?"

"Do you pal around with new kids, Billy?"

"What's come over you, Prentiss?"

The last voice was stern; it was George Neale's.

"Peter Westcott happens to be my cousin," Billy answered with dignity, turning around to face them. "And there's nothing in the world wrong with him. Is there a law that I may not talk to my own cousin?"

He turned again to me, but I hurried ahead to join a group of new kids. I'm afraid I was shocked that he should speak in this fashion to a boy like George Neale. George, after all, was one of the undisputed leaders of the form. He was a small, fat, clumsy boy who commanded by the sheer deadliness of his tongue and the intensity of his animosities. He also enjoyed an immunity from physical retaliation through the reputation of a bad heart, the aftereffect, it was generally said, of a childhood attack of rheumatic fever. He had chosen for his mission in school the persecution of those who failed to meet exactly the rigid standards of social behavior that our formmates, represented by himself, laid down. I sometimes wonder, in trying to recollect how George first appeared to me, if he derived the fierce satisfaction from his activities that I believed at the time. It seems more probable, as I bring back the straight, rather rigid features of his round face and his tone of dry impatience, that he looked at nonconformists as Spanish Inquisitors looked at heretics who were brought before them, as part of the day's work, something that had to be done, boring and arduous though it might be. Why George should have been chosen as the avenging agent of the gods it was not for him to ask; what mattered only was that they required, for dim but cogent reasons of their own, a division of the world into the oppressed and their oppressors. He and his victims were the instruments of these gods, caught in the ruthless pattern of what was and what was not "Shirley," a pattern more fundamental and significant in the lives of all of us than the weak and distant humanitarianism of the faculty, who brooded above

us, benevolent but powerless to help, like the twentieth-century protestant God whom we worshiped in the Gothic chapel.

George was in charge of the program of hazing the new kids, and Billy's ill-considered kindness only resulted in bringing me prematurely to his attention. Custom required that each new kid be singled out for a particular ordeal, and I was soon made aware, from the conversation of old kids who raised their voices as I passed, that mine had been decided on. Apparently I was to have my head shaved. I lived from this point on in such an agony of apprehension that it was almost a relief to discover one Sunday morning, from the atmosphere of huddles and whispers around me, that George had chosen his moment. I retreated instinctively to the library to stay there until chapel, but the first time I looked up from the book I was pretending to read, it was to find George and the others gathered before me.

"Won't you come outside, Westcott?" George asked me in a mild, dry tone. "We'd like to have a little talk with you."

"It won't take a minute, Westcott," another added with a leer.

No violence was allowed in the library; it was sanctuary. I could have waited until the bell for chapel and departed in safety. George knew this, but he knew too, as I knew, and he knew that I knew it, that the fruition of his scheme was like the fall of Hamlet's sparrow: if it was not now, it would be still to come. I got up without a word and walked out of the library, down the corridor and out to the back lawn. There I turned around and faced them.

There was a moment of hesitation, and then someone pushed me. I went sprawling over on the grass, for George, unnoticed, had knelt behind me. They all jumped on me, and I struggled violently, too violently, destroying whatever sympathy might have been latent in them by giving one boy, whose heart was not really in it, a vicious kick in the stomach. In another moment I was overwhelmed and held firmly down while George produced the razor. I closed my eyes and felt giddy with hatred.

Then the miracle occurred. I distinctly heard a window open and a voice cry:

"Cheese it, fellows! Mr. O'Neil!"

And in a second twenty hands had released me, and I heard the thump of retreating feet in the earth under my head. I sat up dazedly and looked around. Nobody was there but Billy; he was standing inside the building looking out at me through an open window. He smiled and climbed over the low sill. He was actually helping me to my feet.

"Where did they go?" I demanded.

"They beat it."

"But why?"

He laughed.

"Didn't you hear me?"

I stared at him in perplexity.

"Then where's Mr. O'Neil?" I asked.

He laughed again.

"How should I know?"

I rubbed my head.

"Why did you do it, Billy?" I asked.

He helped me brush the grass off my blue suit.

"Because you're my cousin," he said cheerfully. "And because they're down on you. Isn't that enough?"

I felt for the first time since I had come to Shirley that I might be going to cry.

"They'll be back," I pointed out, "when they find out."

"Then let's clear out."

"You go," I said. "They're not after you."

Incredibly, he laughed again.

"They will be now."

Again we heard the stamping of feet, this time from within the building. The door burst open, and they surrounded us.

"What's the idea, Prentiss?" George snarled, stepping out of the circle toward him. "Where's Mr. O'Neil?"

Billy shrugged his shoulders and put his hands in his pockets.

"Didn't you see him? He and his wife were coming over by the hedge on their way to chapel."

He flung this off coolly, as if to him it was a matter of the utmost indifference whether or not he was believed. Then he gave his attitude a further emphasis by turning to me, quite casually, and smiling.

"We saw them, didn't we, Peter?" he said.

"Well, *we* didn't!" George cried.

"I can't be bothered with what you see and don't see," Billy retorted. "If you didn't, you didn't."

"Are you siding with Westcott, Prentiss?" George demanded. "Are you on the side of the new kids? Is that where you stand, Prentiss?"

He glanced from side to side at the others as he said this.

"What about it, Billy?"

"Are you with the new kids, Billy?"

"Let's *get* Prentiss!"

But just then the bell for assembly, at long last, jangled sharply from within the building, and the crowd burst apart and rushed up the steps to the door. I can still remember the fierce joy with which, as George Neale leaned down to pick up the comb that had slipped from his pocket, I stamped on it and broke it in two. He didn't even bother to look at me, but turned and hurried after his friends.



him and his victim, and I lived for days in dread of a renewed effort to execute the head shaving plan. I soon found out, however, that I had nothing personally to be afraid of. George, it was rumored, had put the new kids quite out of his mind; he was concentrating his energies on a project against the person whose basic challenge of authority he had so immediately recognized. One Sunday after chapel, when Billy was waylaid by the gang and pelted with the icy snowballs of the season's first snow, his books flung in the mud and the lining ripped from his hat, we knew that George's campaign had begun in earnest.

"I don't know if I'm quite as popular as I supposed," Billy told me, with a sort of desperate gaiety, as he and I engaged in the sorry task of collecting his books and rubbing them off. "I would suggest that I might be a good person to stay away from for a while."

"Cousins should help each other," I said tersely. "You told me that."

Every persecution has a pattern, and George soon revealed the nature of his. It was to establish that Billy was really not a boy at all, not even an effeminate boy, but a girl. This was carried out with the special vindictiveness which old kids reserved for other old kids who had been disloyal. George devised not one but several nicknames for his victim; Billy became known as "Bella," then as "Angela" and finally, with a venomous simplicity, as "Woman." George trained his boys to carry through the identification with a completeness that would have done credit to a secret police. He knew at an early age that the way to break a human being is never to relax, to follow him through the day and into the night until he lets down his guard for just a moment, a private moment, alone in his cubicle, in the lavatory, in his seat at chapel, and then to strike hardest. If George and the others found Billy taking a shower in the morning when they came into the lavatory, they would act like men who have stumbled into a ladies' room. "Eek!" they would shriek. "It's Angela! Excuse me." And they would leave the lavatory and insist on waiting outside even when the prefect on duty came by and ordered them in to take their showers, shouting in voices clearly audible to poor Billy: "But we can't go in! There's a naked woman in there," until the bewildered prefect would go in and find Billy and order them in, but not without a leer to show that he sided with the conspirators, grinning at their joke and looking the other way when, upon entering, they pelted Billy with pieces of soap, crying, "Cover her up! For the sake of decency cover her up!" George was careful to carry the use of the female pronoun into every department of life at school; if commenting on a translation of Billy's in Latin class he would say, even if reprimanded, "She left off the adjective in line ten, sir," or filing into the schoolroom for prayers he would always step aside,

pushing the others with him, on Billy's arrival and cry: "Ladies first!" Even in chapel, the sacred chapel, where the headmaster, lost in illusion, believed that freedom of worship existed, I have seen Billy, intensely religious as one can only be at thirteen, interrupted from his devotions by having a hat jammed on his head by George, crouching in the pew ahead, and hearing him hiss: "Ladies always wear hats in church. Didn't Saint Paul say so?"

Billy's reaction to all of this seemed designed to bring out the worst in George. He simply appeared to ignore the whole thing. He would stare blankly, at times even pityingly at the crowd that baited him and then turn on his heel, carefully smoothing back the hair which they would inevitably have rumbled. He never seemed to lose his temper or strike back except when he was physically overwhelmed and pinned to the ground and then in a sudden galvanization of wheeling arms and legs, with closed eyes, he would try to fight himself free with an ineffective frenzy that only aroused laughter. But such moments were rare. For the most part he was remote and disdainful, like a marquis in a tumbrel looking over the heads of the mob.

The very fact that I think of a marquis and not a marquis shows the effectiveness of George's propaganda. I saw it all, for I stayed close to Billy throughout this period. The fact that he was in trouble on my account overcame, I am glad to say, my instinctive, if rather sullen, deference to the majority. And then, too, I should add, there was a certain masochistic pleasure in sacrificing myself on the altar of Billy's unpopularity. My real difficulty came less in sharing his distress than in sharing his attitude of superiority to it, for I believed, superstitiously, in all the things that he sneered at. I believed, as George believed, in the system, the hazing, in the whole grim division of the school world into those who "belonged" and those who didn't. The fact that I was one of the latter, partly at my own election, was not important; I was still a part of the system. It bothered me that Billy, on our Sunday walks in the country, insisted on discussing faraway, unreal things—home and his mother and her friends and what they did and talked about. He would never talk about George Neale, for example. One afternoon I made a point of this.

"Do you suppose there will always be people like Neale in life?" I asked him as we walked down the wooded path to the river. "Will we always have to be watching out for them?"

"George?" Billy queried, as if not quite sure to whom I had referred. He paused. "Why, people like George simply don't exist in my parents' world." He shrugged his shoulders. "After all, you can't spend your time throwing snowballs at people and expect to be invited out much. You don't make friends by going up to your host at a party and calling him by a woman's name."

"But he might learn to do other things, mightn't he?" I persisted. "Spread lies and things like that?"

"My dear Peter," Billy said with an amiable condescension, "George will be utterly helpless without his gang. And his gang, you see, will have grown up."

But he couldn't quite dispel my idea that some of the ugliness that was George might survive the grim barriers of our school days. Billy's faith in the future was a touching faith in a warm and sunny world where people moved to and fro without striking each other and conversed without insults, a world where the idea was appreciated, the mannerism ignored. I could feel the attraction of this future, so different from the Shirley future of struggle and success; I could even yearn for it, but try as I would, I could never quite bring myself to believe in it. As the sky grew darker and we turned back to the school and saw ahead over the trees the Gothic tower of the chapel, my heart contracted with a sense of guilt that I had been avoiding, even for an afternoon, the sober duty of facing Shirley facts.

"I don't know if the world will be so terribly different from school," I said gloomily. "I bet it's very much the same."

Even Billy's face clouded at this. It was as if I had voiced a doubt that he was desperately repressing, a doubt that if admitted would have made his troubles at school too much to bear. He gazed up at the tower, anticipating perhaps all that we were returning to, the changing of shirts and collars, the evening meal, the long study period amid the sniggering, the note-passing, the sly kick from the desk behind.

"It should have gargoyles, like cathedrals in Europe," he said suddenly. "Grinning little gargoyles like George Neale."

## 3

Even George could not keep a thing going forever, and the persecution of Billy at length became a bore to his gang. We had been through the long New England winter, and in the spring of second form year we were beginning to emerge as individuals from the grey anonymity of childhood. We were even forming friendships based on something besides mutual insecurity and joint hostility to others, friendships more intense than any relationships that we were to know for many years. It was a time in our lives that the headmaster viewed with suspicion, conducive, as he believed it to be, to a state of mind which he darkly described as "sentimental," but it was nonetheless exciting to us to be aware of ourselves for the first time as something other than boys at Shirley. We were beginning to discover, in spite of everything, that there were not only blacks and whites, but reds and yellows in the world around us and that life itself could be something more than a struggle.

It seems clear to me now that George must have resented our maturing and the break-up of the old hard line between the accepted and the unaccepted. He tried to maintain his waning control over his group by reminding boys of their ungainliness and ineptitudes of a few months before, by reviving old issues and screaming the battle cries that used to range the group against the individual. He sought new victims, new scapegoats, but public opinion was increasingly unmanageable. George represented the past, or at most the passing; he was like an angry Indian medicine man who finds his tribe turning away to the attractions of a broader civilization. Though he could beat his drum and dance his dance, though he could even still manage to burn a few victims, essentially his day was over. But if George had been left behind, so, oddly enough, had Billy. Instead of stepping forward to take his place among the boys who would now have received him, he preferred to remain alone and aloof. He seemed tired, now that the ordeal was over, discouraged, just when there was hope. It was as if, in the struggle, he had received a small, deep wound that was only now beginning to fester. George, deprived of other victims, seemed to sense this, for he pressed the attack against Billy all alone, with a desperate vindictiveness, as if to deliver the last and fatal blow of which his declining power was capable. Their conflict had come to be an individual thing, almost a curiosity to the rest of us. They stood apart, fighting their own fight, quaint if rather grim reminders of a standard of values that had passed.

Toward the middle of spring Billy developed the habit of reporting sick to the infirmary. He would go there for two or three days at a time, using the old trick of touching his thermometer to a lamp bulb when the nurse was out of the room. The infirmary had its pleasant side; like the library it was sanctuary, an insulated white box where one could stay in bed and read the thick, rebound volumes of Dickens and Baroness Orczy. It so happened that we were both there, I with a sinus infection and he with the pretense of one, on the day of the game with Pollock School, the great event of the baseball season. I hated to miss the game, for it involved a half-holiday, a trip to Pollock and a celebration afterward if we won. Billy, less regretful, was sharing a room with me on the empty second floor.

Late in the afternoon of the game, as we were working on a picture puzzle, Mrs. Jones, the matron's assistant, hurried in, greatly excited. One of the masters had just telephoned from Pollock to report that we had won the game. I gave a little yell of enthusiasm, partly sincere, partly perfunctory. Billy looked at me bleakly.

"Now we'll have that damn celebration," he said curtly. "Drums and cheers, drums and cheers, all night. God! And for what?"

He lost all interest in what we were doing and refused to

discuss it with me. He lay back in bed and simply stared at the ceiling while I turned back to the unfinished puzzle.

It was late in the afternoon, about six o'clock, when the buses which had taken the school to Pollock began to return. We could hear the crunch of their wheels on the drive on the other side of the building and the excited yells of the disembarking boys. From across the campus came the muffled roll of the drums. Already the celebration was starting. The entire school and all the masters would now assemble before the steps of the headmaster's house. He would come out in a straw hat and a red blazer and be raised to the shoulders of the school prefects on a chair strapped to two poles. Waving his megaphone he would be borne away at the head of a procession to a martial tune of the fife and drum corps on a circuit of all the school buildings. Before each of these the crowd would stop and in response to the headmaster's deep "What have we here?" would shout the name of the building followed by the school cheer. As the slow procession wended its way around the campus it would become noisier and the cheers more numerous; wives of popular masters would be thunderously applauded and would have to appear at the windows of their houses to acknowledge the ovation; statues, gates, memorial fountains would be cheered until the procession wound up by the athletic field where a bonfire would be built and the members of the triumphant team tossed aloft by multitudinous arms and cheered in the flickering light of the flames. And all the while the "outside," the big bell over the gymnasium which sounded the hours for rising, for going to chapel, for attending meals, a knell that brought daily to the countryside the austere routine of Shirley School, would toll and toll, symbolizing in its shocking unrestraint the extraordinary liberty of the day.

The atmosphere pervaded even the infirmary. Mrs. Gardner, the matron, and her assistant watched from the dispensary window. The infirmary cook gave Billy and me an extra helping of ice cream. I moved my bed over to the window and listened to the distant throb of the band. When it stopped we would know that the headmaster was speaking and a moment later would come the roar of the school cheer. Glancing at Billy, after one of these roars, I noticed that he looked pale and tense.

"Listen to that damn bell," he complained, when he saw me looking at him. "It gets on my nerves. It's like St. Bartholomew's Day, with everyone coming after the Huguenots."

I said nothing to this, but there was something contagious about his tensivity. As the shouts grew louder and more distinct, as we finally made out the stamp of feet, I got out of my bed and pushed it away from the window.

"What are you doing?" Billy asked me sharply. "Are you ashamed of being in the infirmary?"

He sat up suddenly and got out of bed. He walked to the

open window and stood before it, his hands on his hips. From behind him, looking into the courtyard below, I could see the first boys arriving, waving school banners and blowing horns.

"Billy, get back," I begged him. "They'll see you! Please, Billy!"

Then I spotted the headmaster's chair coming around the corner of the adjacent building and ducked out of sight. Billy ignored me completely. From below, through the open windows, almost unbelievably close now, came the din of the assembling school. The drums kept beating, and laughter and jokes, often from recognizable voices, came to our ears. It seemed to me, as I shrank against the wall near the window, pressing my spinal cord against its white coldness, as though every shout and drumbeat, every retort, detaching itself from the general roar and suddenly coherent, every laugh and cheer, each sound of feet on gravel, was part of some huge reptilian figure surrounding the infirmary and our very room with the cold, muscular coils of its body. Fear pounded in me, sharp and irrational.

"Billy!" I called again at him. "Billy!"

There was a sudden silence outside, and we heard the rich, assured tones of the headmaster's voice, starting his classic interrogatory to the crowd.

"What is this building that I see before me?"

"The infirmary!" thundered the school.

"And who is the good lady who runs the infirmary?"

"Mrs. Gardner!"

"And does Mrs. Gardner have an assistant?"

"Mrs. Jones," roared the crowd.

This would have been followed immediately, in normal procedure, by the headmaster's request for cheers for the infirmary and for the good women who ran it. Instead there was an unexpected pause, a silence, and then, as my blood froze I heard the headmaster's other voice, his disciplinary voice, directed up and into the very window at which Billy was standing.

"Who is that boy in the window? Go away from that window, boy, and get back to bed." It then added, with a chuckle for the benefit of the crowd: "Good gracious me, anyone might think he wasn't sick." There was a roar of laughter.

Billy, however, continued to stand there as if he hadn't heard, and the momentary hush that followed was broken by the sharp, clear tones of George Neale.

"Go back to bed, Angela! Can't you hear? Take the wax out of your ears!"

Once again there was a startled quiet. The amazement must have been as much at George's impudence as at Billy's immobility; it was unheard of for a boy to second the headmaster's order. The old struggle between George and Billy hung like a lantern in the darkening air before the upturned eyes of three

hundred boys. It may have been the use of his nickname, the bold, casual, unconventional use of it before the boys and the faculty, before Mrs. Gardner and Mrs. Jones watching from the window of the dispensary, before the townspeople from Shirley who had come to watch the celebration, that broke Billy down. It was as if he had been stamped "Angela" unredeemably and for the ages. The future, in spite of all his protest, would be a Shirley future. He suddenly waved his arms in a frenzied, circular fashion at the mob.

"Three cheers for Pollock!" he screamed in a harsh voice that did not sound like him at all. "Three cheers for Pollock School!" he screamed. "I wish they'd licked us! I wish they had!"

What I remember feeling at this unbelievable outburst, as I pressed my back harder against the wall, was its inadequacy to express the outrage with which Billy was throbbing. It was too hopelessly disloyal, too hurt, too puerile to do more than dismay or shock. Yet he had said it. He had actually said it! Then the door opened and Mrs. Gardner came in, followed by Mr. O'Neil. I was moved at once to another room, and Billy at last was left alone.

He was taken out of school for good a few days later. His parents drove up from New York and had a long conference with the headmaster. Immediately afterward his things were packed. I was out of the infirmary by then and went to see his mother at the parents' house. She wept a good deal and talked to me as though I were grown up, which flattered me. She said that Billy had had a little "nervous trouble" and would be going home. She added that he was tired and would not be able to see anyone before he left. Then she kissed me and tucked a five-dollar bill in my pocket. I'm afraid that I rather enjoyed my sadness over the whole catastrophe.

At school, after Billy had gone, I did much better. In the ensuing years I rose to be manager of the school press, head librarian and even achieved the dignified status of rober to the headmaster in chapel. Billy diminished in retrospect to a thin, shrill figure lost in the past darkness of lower school years. But it was only a part of me that felt this way. There was another part that was always uneasy about my disloyalty to the desperate logic of his isolation. It was as though I owed the warmth and friendliness that I later found at Shirley to a compromise that he had not been able to make. Whether or not I was justified in any such reservation can only be determined for himself by each individual who has passed as a boy through that semi-eternity which begins with homesickness and hazing and snowballs and ends, such seeming ages afterwards, with the white flannels and blue coats of commencement in the full glory of a New England spring.

## Tennessee Williams

# I RISE IN FLAME, CRIED THE PHOENIX

A play about  
D. H. Lawrence  
*With a note by*  
Frieda Lawrence

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**A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR** The action of this play, which is imaginary, takes place in the French Riviera where D. H. Lawrence died.

Not long before Lawrence's death an exhibition of his paintings was held in London. Primitive in technique and boldly sensual in matter, this exhibition created a little tempest. The pictures were seized by the police and would have been burned if the authorities had not been restrained by an injunction. At this time Lawrence's great study of sexual passion, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was likewise under the censor's ban, as much of his work had been in the past.

Lawrence felt the mystery and power of sex, as the primal

*Tennessee Williams* is the outstanding name in the American theater today. He has won both artistic and popular recognition with his plays, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Rose Tattoo*. He is known, too, for his novel, *THE ROMAN SPRING OF MRS. STONE*, and for his short plays, published by New Directions. The one-act play, *I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix*, was published recently by New Directions in a signed edition of remarkable beauty, limited to 300 copies, at \$15.00, hand printed by Harry Duncan and Wightman Williams at the Cummington Press, Cummington, Massachusetts. The play is reprinted here by kind permission of Tennessee Williams and James Laughlin.



life urge, and was the lifelong adversary of those who wanted to keep the subject locked away in the cellars of prudery. Much of his work is chaotic and distorted by tangent obsessions, such as his insistence upon the woman's subservience to the male, but all in all his work is probably the greatest modern monument to the dark roots of creation.

—T. W. *New Orleans, September, 1941*

**A NOTE BY FRIEDA LAWRENCE** *This book has a beautiful title. When I read this short play, I forgot that it was supposed to be Lawrence and me; it happens in that other world where creation takes place. The theme of it is the eternal antagonism and attraction between man and woman. This was between Lawrence and me too. But the greater reality was something else. I wish I could say in convincing words what it was—it is difficult. What was it? It was so different from the ordinary everyday being-in-love, that has its limits so very soon. It was life in its freedom, its limitless possibilities, that bound us together. In our poverty the whole world with everything in it was ours. It was living every moment, not only existing day by day. All that happened was a new experience. Because of the background of death, every happening was more vivid. Die we must, and no "Forest Lawn" can wipe death out.*

*Lawrence infused new meaning into the written word, by going deeper than the surface. We have had a lot of surface. We have become bored. Lawrence faced his own dying a death with clear courage, he lived it right through. When finally it was over for him and he lay dead on his bed, I felt a triumph in him. He was dead, but he had died with an unbroken spirit, he had lived in superb honesty and the pride of a man.*

*When I think of him now after all these years, it is as if a kind wind blew on my flame of life to make it burn brighter. He will do the same for others, if they give him a chance.*

—*Frieda Lawrence*

The characters in this play are Lawrence, Frieda, and Bertha.

The scene is at Vence, France, in the Alpes-Maritimes. It is late afternoon.

Lawrence is seated on a sunporch, the right wall of which is a window that faces the sun. A door in this wall opens out on the high seacliff. It is windy: the surf can be heard. Lawrence looks out that way. Behind him, on the left wall, woven in silver and scarlet and gold, is a large banner that bears the design of the Phoenix in a nest of flames—Lawrence's favorite symbol.

He sits quite still. His beard is fiercely red and his face is immobile, the color of baked clay with tints of purple in it. The hands that gripped the terrible stuff of life and made it

plastic are folded on the black and white checked surface of an invalid's blanket. The long fingers of the Welsh coalminers, with their fine blond hairs and their knobby knuckles, made for rending the black heart out of the earth, are knotted together with a tightness that betrays the inner lack of repose. His slightly distended nostrils draw the breath in and out as tenderly as if it were an invisible silk thread that any unusual tension might snap in two. Born for contention, he is contending with something he can't get his hands on. He has to control his fury. And so he is seated motionless in the sunlight—wrapped in a checkered blanket and lavender wool shawl. . . . The Tiger in him is trapped, but not destroyed yet.

Frieda comes in, a large handsome woman of fifty, rather like a Valkyrie. She holds up a fancily wrapped little package.

LAWRENCE

*without even turning his head*

What is it?

FRIEDA

Something left on the doorstep.

LAWRENCE

Give it here.

FRIEDA

The donor is anonymous.

I only caught a glimpse of her through the window.

LAWRENCE

A woman?

FRIEDA

Yes. . . .

LAWRENCE

Yes. . . .

FRIEDA

Some breathless little spinster in a blue pea-jacket.

She stuck it on the porch and scuttled back down the hill before I could answer the doorbell.

LAWRENCE

*his voice rising, querulously shrill*

It's for me, isn't it?

FRIEDA

Ja, es ist für dich.

LAWRENCE

Well, give it here, damn you, you—!

FRIEDA

Tch!

I thought that the sun had put you in a good humor.

LAWRENCE

It's put me in a vile humor.

We've sat here making faces at each other the whole afternoon.

I say to the sun, Make me well, you old bitch, give me strength, take hold of my hands and pull me up out of this chair!

But the sun is a stingy Hausfrau. She goes about sweeping the steps and pretends not to hear me begging.

Ah, well, I don't blame her. I never did care for beggars myself very much.

A man shouldn't beg. A man should seize what he wants and tear it out of the hands of the adversary. And if he can't get it, if he can't tear it away, then he should let it go and give up and be contented with nothing.

Look.

*He has unwrapped the package.*

A little jar of orange marmalade.

*He smiles with childish pleasure.*

This is the month of August put in a bottle.

FRIEDA

Ja! Sehr gut.

You can have it for breakfast.

LAWRENCE

*drawing tenderly on the fine gold thread*

Uh-huh. I can have it for breakfast as long as I live, huh, Frieda?

It's just the right size for that.

FRIEDA

Shut up.

*She starts to take the jar from him.*

*Quick as a cat, he snatches her wrist in a steel grip.*

LAWRENCE

Leave go of it, damn you!

FRIEDA

*laughing*

My God, but you still are strong!

LAWRENCE

You didn't think so?

FRIEDA

I had forgotten. You've been so gentle lately.

LAWRENCE

Thought you'd tamed me?

FRIEDA

Yes, but I should have known better.

I should have suspected what you've been doing inside you, lapping that yellow cream up, you sly old fox, sucking the fierce red sun in your body all day and turning it into venom to spew in my face!

LAWRENCE

No . . . I've been making a trap.

I've been making a shiny steel trap to catch you in, you vixen! Now break away if you can!

FRIEDA

*grinning and wincing*

Oh, God, how you hurt!

LAWRENCE

*slowly releasing her*

. . . Don't lie . . .

You with that great life in you . . .

Why did God give you so much and me so little?

You could take my arm and snap it like a dry stick.

FRIEDA

No . . . You were always the stronger one.

Big as I am, I never could beat you, could I?

LAWRENCE

*with satisfaction*

No. You couldn't.

*His breath rasps hoarsely.*

Put the jar down on the sill.

FRIEDA

*complying*

Ah, there's a card stuck on it.

"From one of your devoted readers."

And on the other side it says:

"I worship you, Mr. Lawrence, because I know that only a god could know so much about Life!"

LAWRENCE

*dryly*

In looking for God so unsuccessfully myself, it seems that I

have accidentally managed to create one for an anonymous spinster in a blue pea-jacket.

Upon the altar of her pagan deity she places a dainty jar of orange marmalade!

What a *cynical* little woman she is!

Only the little ones of the earth, who scuttle downhill like pebbles dislodged by the rain, are really capable of such monumental disbelief.

They find their god and they give him marmalade.

If I find mine . . . ever . . .

If I found mine, I'd tear the heart out of my body and burn it before him.

FRIEDA

Your health is returning.

LAWRENCE

What makes you think so?

FRIEDA

You are getting so sentimental about yourself and so unappreciated and so misunderstood. . . . You can't stand Jesus Christ because he beat you to it. Oh, how you would have loved to suffer the *original* crucifixion!

LAWRENCE

If only I had your throat between my fingers.

FRIEDA

*crouching beside him*

Here is my throat . . . Now choke me.

LAWRENCE

*gently touching her throat with the tips of his fingers*

Frieda . . . do you think I will ever get back to New Mexico?

FRIEDA

You will do what you want to do, Lawrence. There has never been any kind of resistance you couldn't jump over or crawl under or squeeze through.

LAWRENCE

Do you think I will ever get back on a strong white horse and go off like the wind across the glittering desert?

I'm not a literary man, I'm tired of books.

Nobody knows what an ugly joke it is that a life like mine should only come out in books.

FRIEDA

What else should it come out in?

LAWRENCE

In some kind of violent action.

But all that I ever do is go packing around the world with women and manuscripts and a vile disposition.

I pretend to be waging a war with bourgeois conceptions of morality, with prudery, with intellectuality, with all kinds of external forces that aren't external at all. What I'm fighting with really's the little old maid in myself, the breathless little spinster who scuttles back down the hill before God can answer the doorbell.

Now I want to get back on the desert and try all over again to become a savage.

I want to stand up on the Lobos and watch a rainstorm coming ten miles off like a silver-helmeted legion of marching giants.

And that's what I'm going to do, damn you!

FRIEDA

Whoever said that you wouldn't?

LAWRENCE

You! . . . You know that I won't.

You know that the male savage part of me's dead and all that's left is the old pusillanimous squaw.

Women have such a fine intuition of death.

They smell it coming before it's started even.

I think it's women that actually let death in. They whisper and beckon and slip it the dark latchkey from under their aprons . . .

Don't they?

FRIEDA

No . . . It's women that pay the price of admission for life. And all of their lives they make of their arms a crossbar at the door that death wants to come in by.

Men love death . . . Women don't.

Men cut wounds in each other and women stop the bleeding.

LAWRENCE

Yes. By drinking the blood.

Don't touch me so much!

*She releases his fingers*

Your fingers, they make me feel weaker, they drain the strength out of my body.

FRIEDA

Oh, no, no, no, they put it back *in*, mein Liebchen.

LAWRENCE

I want you to promise me something.

If I should die, Frieda . . . the moment I'm dying, please to leave me alone! . . . Don't touch me, don't put your hands on me, and don't let anyone else . . . I have a nightmarish feeling that while I'm dying I'll be surrounded by women. They'll burst in the door and the windows the moment I lose the strength to push them away. They'll moan and they'll flutter like doves around the burnt-out Phoenix. They'll cover my face and my hands with filmy kisses and little trickling tears. Alma the nymphomaniac and the virginal Bertha—all of the under- and over-sexed women I've known, who think me the oracle of their messed-up libidos—they'll all return with their suffocating devotion. I don't want that. I want to die as a lonely old animal does. I want to die fiercely and cleanly with nothing but anger and fear and other hard things like that to deal with at the finish.

You understand, Frieda?

I've still got a bit of the male left in me and that's the part that I'm going to meet death with.

When the last bleeding comes, and it *will* in a little while now, I won't be put into bed and huddled over by women. I won't stay in the house, Frieda. I'll open this door and go outside on the cliff. And I don't wish to be followed. That's the important point, Frieda. I'm going to do it alone. With the rocks and the water. Sunlight . . . starlight on me. No hands, no lips, no women! Nothing but . . . pitiless nature . . .

FRIEDA

I don't believe you. I don't think people want nothing but "pitiless nature" when they're . . .

LAWRENCE

Frieda!

You mean you refuse?

FRIEDA

No. I consent absolutely.

LAWRENCE

You give me your promise?

FRIEDA

Ja doch! Ganz durch die Ewigkeit!

Now think about something else. I'll go fix tea.

*She starts to go out.*

LAWRENCE

*suddenly noticing something*

Ah, my God.

FRIEDA

What's the matter?

LAWRENCE

Put the aquarium on the windowsill.

FRIEDA

Why?

LAWRENCE

So I can keep an eye on it. That detestable cat has attacked the goldfish again.

FRIEDA

How do you know?

LAWRENCE

How do I know? There used to be *four*, now there's *three!*  
*Beau Soleil!*

FRIEDA

She's gone outside.

LAWRENCE

To lick her chops, God damn her!  
Set the goldfish bowl on the windowsill.

FRIEDA

You can't keep them there in the sun. The sun will kill them.

LAWRENCE

*furiously*  
Don't answer me back, put 'em *there!*

FRIEDA

Wie du willst!

*She hastens to place the aquarium on the sill.*

LAWRENCE

You know what I think? I think you *fed* her the fish.  
It's like you to do such a thing.  
You're both so fat, so rapacious, so viciously healthy and hungry!

FRIEDA

Such a fuss over a goldfish!

LAWRENCE

It isn't just a goldfish.



FRIEDA

What is it then?

LAWRENCE

Now that my strength's used up I can't help thinking how much of it's been thrown away in squabbling with you.

FRIEDA

*suddenly covering her face*

Oh, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

What are you doing? Crying?  
Stop it. I can't stand crying. It makes me worse.

FRIEDA

I think you *hate* me, Lawrence.

*After a moment he shyly touches her arm.*

LAWRENCE

Don't believe me . . . I love you.  
Ich liebe dich, Frieda.  
Put some rum in the tea.  
I'm getting much stronger, so why should I feel so weak?

FRIEDA

*touching his forehead*

I wish you would go back to bed.

LAWRENCE

The bed's an old tarbaby. I'd get stuck. How do I know that I'd get loose again?  
Is my forehead hot?

*Frieda places her hand tenderly over his eyes.*

*He recites in a childish treble:*

"Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home,  
thine house is on fire, thy children will burn!"

*He smiles slightly.*

My mother used to sing that whenever she saw one . . .  
Simple . . .

Most people are so damned complicated and yet there is nothing much to them.

FRIEDA

*She starts out, then pauses before the banner.*

Ah, you old Phoenix . . . you brave and angry old bird in your nest of flames! I think you are just a little bit sentimental.

LAWRENCE

*leaning suddenly forward*

Tea for three!

FRIEDA

Who is it?

LAWRENCE

Bertha! . . . Back from London with news of the exhibition.

*He pulls himself out of the chair.*

FRIEDA

What are you doing?

LAWRENCE

I'm going outside to meet her.

FRIEDA

Sit down, you fool! I'll meet her.

And don't you dare to ask her to stay in this house. . . . If you do, I'll leave!

*She goes out.*

LAWRENCE

Cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck! . . . You think I'm anxious to have more hens around me?

*He wriggles fretfully in the chair for a moment, then throws off the blanket and pushes himself to his feet. Stumbling with dizziness and breathing heavily, he moves to the inside rear door of the porch. He reaches it and pauses with a fit of coughing.*

*He looks anxiously back toward the chair.*

No, no, damn you . . . I won't!

*He looks up at the Phoenix, straightens himself heroically and goes out.*

*After a few moments Frieda returns with Bertha, a small, sprightly person, an English gentlewoman with the quick voice and eyes of a child.*

FRIEDA

My God, he's got up!

BERTHA

He shouldn't?

FRIEDA

Another hemorrhage will kill him. The least exertion is likely to bring one on.

Lorenzo, where are you?

LAWRENCE

*from the rear*

Quit clucking, you old wet hen. I'm fetching the tea.

BERTHA

Go back to him, make him stop!

FRIEDA

He wouldn't.

BERTHA

Does he want to die?

FRIEDA

Oh, no, no, no!

He has no lungs and yet he goes on breathing.

The heart's worn out and yet the heart keeps beating.

It's awful to watch, this struggle. I wish he would stop, I wish that he'd give it up and just let go!

BERTHA

Frieda!

FRIEDA

His body's a house that's made out of tissuepaper and caught on fire.

The walls are transparent, they're all lit up with the flame!

When people are dying the spirit ought to go out, it ought to die out slowly before the flesh. You shouldn't be able to see it so terribly brightly consuming the walls that give it a place to inhabit!

BERTHA

I never have believed that Lorenzo could die.

I don't think he will even now.

FRIEDA

But can he do it?

Live without a body, I mean, be just a flame with nothing to feed itself on?

BERTHA

The Phoenix could do it.

FRIEDA

The Phoenix was legendary. Lorenzo's a man.

BERTHA

He's more than a man.

FRIEDA

I know you always thought so. But you're mistaken.

BERTHA

You'd never admit that Lorenzo was a god.

FRIEDA

Having slept with him . . . No, I wouldn't.

BERTHA

There's more to be known of a person than carnal knowledge.

FRIEDA

But carnal knowledge comes first.

BERTHA

I disagree with you.

FRIEDA

And also with Lawrence, then. He always insisted you couldn't know women until you had known their bodies.

BERTHA

Frieda, I think it is you who kept him so much in his body!

FRIEDA

Well, if I did he's got that to thank me for.

BERTHA

I'm not so sure it's something to be thankful for.

FRIEDA

What would you have done with him if ever you got your claws on him?

BERTHA

Claws? . . . Frieda!

FRIEDA

You would have plucked him out of his body.

Where would he be? . . . In the air?

Ah, your deep understanding and my stupidity always!

BERTHA

Frieda!

FRIEDA

You just don't know. The meaning of Lawrence escapes you. In all of his work he celebrates the body.

How he despises the prudery of people that want to hide it!

BERTHA

Oh, Frieda, the same old quarrel!

FRIEDA

Yes, let's stop it.

What's left of Lorenzo, let's not try to divide it!

BERTHA

What's left of Lorenzo, is something that can't be divided!

FRIEDA

Sh! . . . He's coming.

BERTHA

*advancing a few steps to the door.*  
*Lorenzo!*

LAWRENCE

*He is out of sight as he speaks.*  
"Pussycat, pussycat, where have you been?"

BERTHA

*gaily*  
"I've been to London to look at the Queen!"

LAWRENCE

*coming nearer*  
"Pussycat, pussycat, what did you there?"

BERTHA

*her voice catching slightly*  
"I chased a little mouse . . . under a chair!"

*Laughing, Lawrence appears in the doorway, pushing a small tea-cart.*

*Bertha stares aghast.*

LAWRENCE

Yes, I know . . . I know . . .  
I look an amateur's job of embalming, don't I?

BERTHA

*bravely*  
Lorenzo, you look very well.

LAWRENCE

It isn't rouge, it's the fever!  
I'm burning, burning, and still I never burn out.  
The doctors are all astonished. And disappointed.

As for that expectant widow of mine, she's almost given up hope.

*Bertha moves to assist him with the table.*

Don't bother me. I can manage.

FRIEDA

He won't be still, he won't rest!

LAWRENCE

Cluck-cluck-cluck-cluck!

You better watch out for the rooster, you old wet hen!

FRIEDA

A wonderful Chanticleer you make in that lavender shawl!

LAWRENCE

Who put it on me? *You*, you bitch!

*He flings it off.*

Rest was never any good for me, Brett.

BERTHA

Rest for a little while.

Then we go sailing again!

LAWRENCE

We three go sailing again!

"Rub-a-dub-dub!

Three fools in a tub!

The Brett, the Frieda,

the old Fire-eater!"

BERTHA

*tugging at his beard*

The old Fire-eater!

LAWRENCE

Watch out!

Now I'll have to comb it.

*He takes out a little mirror and comb.*

FRIEDA

So vain of his awful red whiskers!

LAWRENCE

*combing*

She envies me my beard.

All women resent men's whiskers. They can't stand anything, Brett, that distinguishes men from women.

FRIEDA

Quite the contrary.  
*She pours the tea.*

LAWRENCE

They take the male in their bodies . . . but only because they secretly hope that he won't be able to get back out again, that he'll be captured for good.

FRIEDA

What kind of talk for a maiden lady to hear!

LAWRENCE

There she goes again, Brett . . . obscene old creature! Gloating over your celibacy!

FRIEDA

Gloating over it? Never!  
I think how lucky she is that she doesn't have to be told a hundred times every day that a man is life and that woman is just a passive hunk of protoplasm.

LAWRENCE

I never said passive. I always said malignant.  
*He puts the comb away and stares in the mirror.*  
Ain't I the devil to look at?

FRIEDA

I tell you, Brett, his ideas of sex are becoming downright cosmic!  
When the sun comes up in the morning . . . you know what he says?  
No, I won't repeat it!  
And when the sun's going down . . .  
Oh, well, you will hear him yourself.

LAWRENCE

*chuckling*  
Yes, I always make the same remark. You'll hear me yourself in just a few more minutes . . .  
*He puts the mirror away.*  
Well, Brett!

BERTHA

Well, Lorenzo?

LAWRENCE

You haven't said anything yet.

BERTHA

Anything? About what?

LAWRENCE

What do you think that I sent you to London for?

BERTHA

To get me out of the way!

LAWRENCE

What else? . . .

Out with it, damn you! The show!

How did they like my pictures?

BERTHA

Well . . .

FRIEDA

Go on, Brett, tell him the truth. The monster will not be satisfied till he hears it!

BERTHA

Well . . .

FRIEDA

The exhibition was a complete fiasco! Just as I said it would be!

LAWRENCE

You mean that they *liked* my pictures?

FRIEDA

*Liked* your pictures?

They called your pictures *disgusting*!

LAWRENCE

Ah! . . . *Success!*

They said that I couldn't paint? That I draw like a child?

They called my figures grotesque? Lumpy, obscene, misshapen, monstrous, deformed?

BERTHA

You must have seen the reviews, you've read them yourself.

LAWRENCE

Why? Am I quoting exactly?

FRIEDA

Yes, you are quoting exactly!



LAWRENCE

And what did the public think? And what of the people?

FRIEDA

The people laughed!

LAWRENCE

They laughed?

FRIEDA

Of course they laughed!

Lorenzo, you're not a painter, you're a writer! Why, you can't even draw a straight line!

LAWRENCE

No! But I can draw a *crooked* line, Frieda.

And that is the reason that I can put *life* in my pictures!  
How was the attendance? How many came to look?

BERTHA

After the disturbance, the entrance had to be roped off to hold back the crowds.

LAWRENCE

Disturbance? What disturbance?

FRIEDA

Just look. The monster's exulting!

LAWRENCE

Go on, tell me what happened!

BERTHA

A group of ladies' club members attempted to slash the picture of Adam and Eve.

*Lawrence shakes with laughter.*

FRIEDA

Lorenzo! Stop that!

BERTHA

That was what called the attention of the police.

LAWRENCE

The police?

*He rises.*

What did they do to my pictures? Burn them? *Destroy them?*

BERTHA

No. We got out an injunction to keep them from burning the pictures.

LAWRENCE

The pictures are safe?

BERTHA

The pictures are safe, Lorenzo.

FRIEDA

Sit down in that chair or I'll have to put you to bed!

*She tries to push him down. He slaps her fiercely.*

BERTHA

Lorenzo!

LAWRENCE

Vaunting her power, gloating over my weakness!  
Put me to bed? Just try it . . . I dare you to touch me!

FRIEDA

Lawrence, sit down in that chair or you'll start the bleeding again.

*He stares at her for a moment and then obeys slowly.*

LAWRENCE

*weakly*

Give me back that shawl.

The sun's getting weaker.

The young blond god is beginning to be seduced by the harlot of darkness . . .

FRIEDA

Now he's going to make his classic remarks on the sunset.

*She puts the shawl about him.*

LAWRENCE

Yes . . . the pictures . . . they weren't very good but they had a fierce life in them.

BERTHA

They had *you* in them. But why did you want to *paint*, Lorenzo?

LAWRENCE

Why did I want to write?

Because I'm an artist . . . What is an artist? . . . A man who loves life too intensely, a man who loves life till he hates her and has to strike out with his fist as I struck out at Frieda . . . To show her he knows her tricks, and he's still the master!

*The smoky yellow light is beginning to dim.*

Oh, Brett, oh, Frieda . . .

I wanted to stretch out the long, sweet arms of my art and embrace the whole world!

But it isn't enough to go out to the world with love.

And so I doubled my fist and I struck and I struck.

Words weren't enough . . . I had to have color, too.

I took to paint and I painted the way that I wrote!

Fiercely, without any shame!

*This is life, I told them, life is like this!*

Wonderful! Dark! Terrific!

They banned my books and they wanted to burn my pictures!

That's how it is . . . When first you look at the sun it strikes you blind.

Life's . . . blinding . . .

*He stirs and leans forward.*

The sun's . . . going down.

He's seduced by the harlot of darkness.

FRIEDA

Now he is going to say it . . . Stop up your ears!

LAWRENCE

Now she has got him, they're copulating together! The sun is exhausted, the harlot has taken his strength and now she will start to destroy him. She's eating him up . . .

Oh, but he won't stay down. He'll climb back out of her belly and there will be light.

In the end there will always be light . . . And I am the prophet of it!

*He rises with difficulty.*

BERTHA

Lorenzo!

FRIEDA

Lawrence, be careful!

LAWRENCE

Shut up! Don't touch me!

*He staggers to the great window.*

In the end there is going to be light . . . light, light!

*His voice rises and he stretches his arms out like a Biblical prophet.*

Great light! . . . Great, blinding, universal light!

And I . . . I'm the prophet of it!

*He staggers and clutches his mouth.*

FRIEDA

Lawrence!

BERTHA  
*terrified*  
 What is it?

FRIEDA  
 The *bleeding!*

BERTHA  
*Lorenzo!*  
*She tries to rush to him but Frieda clutches her arm.*

LAWRENCE  
 Don't touch me, you women.  
 I want to do it alone . . . Don't move till it's finished.  
*Gradually, as though forced down to the earth by invisible arms, he begins to collapse, but still he clings to the wall and shuffles along it, gasping for breath, until he has reached the door. He opens the door.*  
 Don't follow.  
*He goes out.*

BERTHA  
*struggling fiercely with Frieda*  
 Let me go, let me go, I want to go to him.

FRIEDA  
 I promised "no women"!

BERTHA  
 You go!

FRIEDA  
 Nobody, nobody goes to him! Not you, not me, no woman!

BERTHA  
 He can't die alone, I won't let him! No human being would let him!

FRIEDA  
*agonized*  
 I will, I promised, I'll let him!  
*The wind blows open the door to the terrace. There is the sound of waves breaking. The silk banner of the Phoenix billows out from the wall. Bertha almost breaks away, but Frieda violently restrains her again. In the struggle the lamp is upset and goes out. Bertha cries Monster! and collapses sobbing to the floor. For a few moments, stillness: then faintly, as if from a distance, Lawrence's voice:*

LAWRENCE

*Frieda!*

*All in one instant Frieda thrusts the sobbing woman violently away from her and sweeps out upon the terrace like a great winged bird.*

FRIEDA

*wildly, with infinite tenderness*  
Ich komm', Ich komm', mein Liebchen!

## ENOCH AND THE GORILLA

*Copyright, 1952, by Flannery O'Connor. Part of a novel, WISE BLOOD, (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952).*

the entrance of the drug store, trying to open it, that it was at least as old as she was. When he finally got it hoisted, he pushed his dark glasses back on his eyes and re-entered the downpour.

The umbrella was one his landlady had stopped using fifteen years before (which was the only reason she had lent it to him) and as soon as the rain touched the top of it, it came down with a shriek and stabbed him in the back of the neck. He ran a few feet with it over his head and then backed into another store entrance and removed it. Then to get it up again, he had to place the tip of it on the ground and ram it open with his foot. He ran out again, holding his hand up near the spokes to keep them open and this allowed the handle, which was carved to represent the head of a fox terrier, to jab him every few seconds in the stomach. He proceeded for another quarter of a block this way before the back half of the silk stood up off the spokes and allowed the storm to sweep down his collar. Then he ducked under the marquee of a movie house. It was Saturday and there were a lot of children standing more or less in a line in front of the ticket box.

## Flannery O'Connor

*Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia, twenty-six years ago. Enoch and the Gorilla is part of one chapter of her first novel, WISE BLOOD. Chapters from the novel have also appeared in Sewanee Review and Partisan Review.*

**E**NOCH EMERY had borrowed his landlady's umbrella and he discovered as he stood in

Enoch was not very fond of children, but children always seemed to like to look at him. The line turned and twenty or thirty eyes began to observe him with a steady interest. The umbrella had assumed an ugly position, half up and half down, and the half that was up was about to come down and spill more water under his collar. When this happened the children laughed and jumped up and down. Enoch glared at them and turned his back and lowered his dark glasses. He found himself facing a life-size four-color picture of a gorilla. Over the gorilla's head, written in red letters was "GONGA! Giant Jungle Monarch and a Great Star! HERE IN PERSON!!!" At the level of the gorilla's knee, there was more that said, "Gonga will appear in person in front of this theater at 12 A.M. *TODAY!* A free pass to the first ten brave enough to step up and shake his hand!"

Enoch was usually thinking of something else at the moment that Fate began drawing back her leg to kick him. When he was four years old, his father had brought him home a tin box from the penitentiary. It was orange and had a picture of some peanut brittle on the outside of it and green letters that said, "A NUTTY SURPRISE!" When Enoch had opened it, a coiled piece of steel had sprung out at him and broken off the ends of his two front teeth. His life was full of so many happenings like that that it would seem he should have been more sensitive to his times of danger. He stood there and read the poster twice through carefully. To his mind, an opportunity to insult a successful ape came from the hand of Providence.

He turned around and asked the nearest child what time it was. The child said it was twelve-ten and that Gonga was already ten minutes late. Another child said that maybe the rain had delayed him. Another said, no not the rain, his director was taking a plane from Hollywood. Enoch gritted his teeth. The first child said that if he wanted to shake the star's hand, he would have to get in line like the rest of them and wait his turn. Enoch got in line. A child asked him how old he was. Another observed that he had funny-looking teeth. He ignored all this as best he could and began to straighten out the umbrella.

In a few minutes a black truck turned around the corner and came slowly up the street in the heavy rain. Enoch pushed the umbrella under his arm and began to squint through his dark glasses. As the truck approached, a phonograph inside it began to play "Tarara Boom Di Aye," but the music was almost drowned out by the rain. There was a large illustration of a blonde on the outside of the truck, advertising some picture other than the gorilla's.

The children held their line carefully as the truck stopped in front of the movie house. The back door of it was con-

structed like a paddy wagon, with a grate, but the ape was not at it. Two men in raincoats got out of the cab part, cursing, and ran around to the back and opened the door. One of them stuck his head in and said, "Okay, make it snappy, will-ya?" The other jerked his thumb at the children and said, "Get back willya, willya get back?"

A voice on the record inside the truck said, "Here's Gongga, folks, Roaring Gongga and a Great Star! Give Gongga a big hand, folks!" The voice was barely a mumble in the rain.

The man who was waiting by the door of the truck stuck his head in again. "Okay willya get out?" he said.

There was a faint thump somewhere inside the van. After a second a dark furry arm emerged just enough for the rain to touch it and then drew back inside.

"Goddamn," the man who was under the marquee said; he took off his raincoat and threw it to the man by the door, who threw it into the wagon. After two or three minutes more, the gorilla appeared at the door, with the raincoat buttoned up to his chin and the collar turned up. There was an iron chain hanging from around his neck; the man grabbed it and pulled him down and the two of them bounded under the marquee together. A motherly-looking woman was in the glass ticket box, getting the passes ready for the first ten children brave enough to step up and shake hands.

The gorilla ignored the children entirely and followed the man over to the other side of the entrance where there was a small platform raised about a foot off the ground. He stepped up on it and turned facing the children and began to growl. His growls were not so much loud as poisonous; they appeared to issue from a black heart. Enoch was terrified and if he had not been surrounded by the children, he would have run away.

"Who'll step up first?" the man said. "Come on come on, who'll step up first? A free pass to the first kid stepping up."

There was no movement from the group of children. The man glared at them. "What's the matter with you kids?" he barked. "You yellow? He won't hurt you as long as I got him by this chain." He tightened his grip on the chain and jangled it at them to show he was holding it securely.

After a minute a little girl separated herself from the group. She had long wood-shaving curls and a fierce triangular face. She moved up to within four feet of the star.

"Okay okay," the man said, rattling the chain, "make it snappy."

The ape reached out and gave her hand a quick shake. By this time there was another little girl ready and then two boys. The line re-formed and began to move up.

The gorilla kept his hand extended and turned his head away with a bored look at the rain. Enoch had got over his fear and was trying frantically to think of an obscene remark

that would be suitable to insult him with. Usually he didn't have any trouble with this kind of composition but nothing came to him now. His brain, both parts, was completely empty. He couldn't think even of the insulting phrases he used every day.

There were only two children in front of him by now. The first one shook hands and stepped aside. Enoch's heart was beating violently. The child in front of him finished and stepped aside and left him facing the ape, who took his hand with an automatic motion.

It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft.

For a second he only stood there, clasping it. Then he began to stammer. "My name is Enoch Emery," he mumbled. "I attended the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen years old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me come . . ." and his voice cracked.

The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. "You go to hell," a surly voice inside the ape-suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away.

Enoch's humiliation was so sharp and painful that he turned around three times before he realized which direction he wanted to go in. Then he ran off into the rain as fast as he could.

In spite of himself, Enoch couldn't get over the expectation that something was going to happen to him. The virtue of Hope, in Enoch, was made up of two parts suspicion and one part lust. It operated on him all the rest of the day. He had only a vague idea what he wanted, but he was not a boy without ambition: he wanted to become something. He wanted to better his condition. He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand.

All afternoon he fidgeted and fooled in his room, biting his nails and shredding what was left of the silk off the landlady's umbrella. Finally he denuded it entirely and broke off the spokes. What was left was a black stick with a sharp steel point at one end and a dog's head at the other. It might have been an instrument for some specialized kind of torture that had gone out of fashion. Enoch walked up and down his room with it under his arm and realized that it would distinguish him on the sidewalk.

About seven o'clock in the evening he put on his coat and took the stick and headed for a little restaurant two blocks away. He had the sense that he was setting off to get some honor, but he was very nervous, as if he were afraid he might have to snatch it instead of receive it.



He never set out for anything without eating first. The restaurant was called the Paris Diner; it was a tunnel about six feet wide, located between a shoeshine parlor and a dry-cleaning establishment. Enoch slid in and climbed up on the far stool at the counter and said he would have a bowl of split-pea soup and a chocolate malted milkshake.

The waitress was a tall woman with a big yellow dental plate and the same color hair done up in a black hairnet. One hand never left her hip; she filled orders with the other one. Although Enoch came in every night, she had never learned to like him.

Instead of filling his order, she began to fry bacon; there was only one other customer in the place and he had finished his meal and was reading a newspaper; there was no one to eat the bacon but her. Enoch reached over the counter and prodded her hip with the stick. "Listen here," he said, "I got to go. I'm in a hurry."

"Go then," she said. Her jaw began to work and she stared into the skillet with a fixed attention.

"Lemme just have a piece of theter cake yonder," he said, pointing to a half of pink and yellow cake on a round glass stand. "I think I got something to do. I got to be going. Set it up there next to him," he said, indicating the customer reading the newspaper. He slid over the stools and began reading the outside sheet of the man's paper.

The man lowered the paper and looked at him. Enoch smiled. The man raised the paper again. "Could I borrow some part of your paper that you ain't studying?" Enoch asked. The man lowered it again and stared at him; he had muddy unflinching eyes. He leafed deliberately through the paper and shook out the sheet with the comic strips and handed it to Enoch. It was Enoch's favorite part. He read it every evening like an office. While he ate the cake that the waitress had torpedoed down the counter at him, he read and felt himself surge with kindness and courage and strength.

When he finished one side, he turned the sheet over and began to scan the advertisements for movies that filled the other side. His eye went over three columns without stopping; then it came to a box that advertised Gongga, Giant Jungle Monarch, and listed the theaters he would visit on his tour and the hours he would be at each one. In thirty minutes he would arrive at the Victory on 57th Street and that would be his last appearance in the city.

If anyone had watched Enoch read this, he would have seen a certain transformation in his countenance. It still shone with the inspiration he had absorbed from the comic strips, but something else had come over it: a look of awakening.

The waitress happened to turn around to see if he hadn't gone. "What's the matter with you?" she said. "Did you swallow a seed?"

"I know what I want," Enoch murmured.

"I know what I want too," she said with a dark look.

Enoch felt for his stick and laid his change on the counter.

"I got to be going."

"Don't let me keep you," she said.

"You may not see me again," he said, "—the way I am."

"Any way I don't see you will be all right with me," she said.

Enoch left. It was a pleasant damp evening. The puddles on the sidewalk shone and the store windows were steamy and bright with junk. He disappeared down a side street and made his way rapidly along the darker passages of the city, pausing only once or twice at the end of an alley to dart a glance in each direction before he ran on. The Victory was a small theater, suited to the needs of the family, in one of the closer subdivisions; he passed through a succession of lighted areas and then on through more alleys and back streets until he came to the business section that surrounded it. Then he slowed up. He saw it about a block away, glittering in its darker setting. He didn't cross the street to the side it was on but kept on the far side, moving forward with his squint fixed on the glary spot. He stopped when he was directly across from it and hid himself in a narrow stair cavity that divided a building.

The truck that carried Gongga was parked across the street and the star was standing under the marquee, shaking hands with an elderly woman. She moved aside and a gentleman in a polo shirt stepped up and shook hands vigorously, like a sportsman. He was followed by a boy of about three who wore a tall Western hat that nearly covered his face; he had to be pushed ahead by the line. Enoch watched for some time, his face working with envy. The small boy was followed by a lady in shorts, she by an old man who tried to draw extra attention to himself by dancing up instead of walking in a dignified way. Enoch suddenly darted across the street and slipped noiselessly into the open back door of the truck.

The handshaking went on until the feature picture was ready to begin. Then the star got back in the van and the people filed into the theater. The driver and the man who was master of ceremonies climbed in the cab part and the truck rumbled off. It crossed the city rapidly and continued on the highway, going very fast.

There came from the van certain thumping noises, not those of the normal gorilla, but they were drowned out by the drone of the motor and the steady sound of wheels against the road. The night was pale and quiet, with nothing to stir it but an occasional complaint from a hoot owl and the distant muted jarring of a freight train. The truck sped on until it slowed for a crossing, and as the van rattled over the tracks, a figure

slipped from the door and almost fell, and then limped hurriedly off toward the woods.

Once in the darkness of a pine thicket, he laid down a pointed stick he had been clutching and something bulky and loose that he had been carrying under his arm, and began to undress. He folded each garment neatly after he had taken it off and then stacked it on top of the last thing he had removed. When all his clothes were in the pile, he took up the stick and began making a hole in the ground with it.

The darkness of the pine grove was broken by paler moonlit spots that moved over him now and again and showed him to be Enoch. His natural appearance was marred by a gash that ran from the corner of his lip to his collarbone and by a lump under his eye that gave him a dulled insensitive look. Nothing could have been more deceptive for he was burning with the intensest kind of happiness.

He dug rapidly until he had made a trench about a foot long and a foot deep. Then he placed the stack of clothes in it and stood aside to rest a second. Burying his clothes was not a symbol to him of burying his former self; he only knew he wouldn't need them any more. As soon as he got his breath, he pushed the displaced dirt over the hole and stamped it down with his foot. He discovered while he did this that he still had his shoes on, and when he finished, he removed them and threw them from him. Then he picked up the loose bulky object and shook it vigorously.

In the uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the other, one arm and then the other: a black heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark back head over the other and corrected this. It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings and what appeared to be minor adjustments of its hide.

For a time after this, it stood very still and didn't do anything. Then it began to growl and beat its chest; it jumped up and down and flung its arms and thrust its head forward. The growls were thin and uncertain at first but they grew louder after a second. They became low and poisonous, louder again, low and poisonous again; they stopped altogether. The figure extended its hand, clutched nothing, and shook its arm vigorously; it withdrew the arm, extended it again, clutched nothing, and shook. It repeated this four or five times. Then it picked up the pointed stick and placed it at a cocky angle under its arm and left the woods for the highway. No gorilla anywhere, Africa or California or New York, was happier than he.

A man and woman sitting close together on a rock just off the highway were looking across an open stretch of valley at a view of the city in the distance and they didn't see the

shaggy figure approaching. The smokestacks and square tops of buildings made a black uneven wall against the lighter sky and here and there a steeple cut a sharp wedge out of a cloud. The young man turned his neck just in time to see the gorilla standing a few feet away, hideous and black, with its hand extended. He eased his arm from around the woman and disappeared silently into the woods. She, as soon as she turned her eyes, fled screaming down the highway. The gorilla stood as though surprised and presently its arm fell to its side. It sat down on the rock where they had been sitting and stared over the valley at the uneven skyline of the city.

## SPORTS WITHOUT BLOOD

A letter to  
Dylan Thomas

### Thomas Merton

*Thomas Merton* joined the Cistercian Order in 1941, and was ordained a priest in May, 1949. Born in France in 1915, he was educated at Clare College, Cambridge, and at Columbia University. His autobiography, *THE SEVEN STOREY MOUNTAIN*, and his account of life in a Trappist monastery, *THE WATERS OF SILOE*, both published by Harcourt, Brace, have won him a wide audience. Other books by Thomas Merton include *SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION*, and three volumes of poetry, *A MAN IN THE DIVIDED SEA*, *FIGURES FOR AN APOCALYPSE* and *THE TEARS OF THE BLIND LIONS*, published by New Directions.

In old King George's June  
When evening drowned and sang in the peeled water,  
Hate took place in Cambridge, and a cricketer's death  
Under the tents of Chesterton.

It was to be a night without religion.  
The houses rumbled their ancient skins:  
The century still thundered at their doors.

“Now here they come, down the abiding sky  
Lovers of many monies under the sun  
Crosscolored bodies, in which is vanity.  
Hush-hush waters cripple the world that’s upside down,  
And lives are flights on the face of motherofpearl heaven  
Until old crossbones get their skulls in greysize capture.  
The race is over. Life and death are even.”

In this same night of ales  
I was uprooted by my own ghost  
Not without fury and  
Not without cost.  
The rivers mummied, grandfathers  
Grumbled at my door.  
War in the water and war on the grass,  
War in the belly and feet and face,  
(Crosscolored bodies in which is vomiting)  
The war in the river was, perhaps, worse:  
The upside down were last and first.

“Thus did the oarsmen feel the waters of their fen  
(With dog-drunk gasbodies winning under the tank)  
Scattering the shadows of a railway bridge  
And seven willow women mad as trees:  
They smashed the gas river over and under,  
The blue-brown river, bad as drink.”  
Their smiles have shivered all that order  
And boats slide down their oil on an army of wrinkles  
While blades replace the upside down cathedrals  
With a wallop of bells.

In old King George’s attic  
When everything went black in the piled city  
Pain took place in colleges, and bloodless sports  
Under the tents of Chesterton.

## 2

Old Joe and Rosa’s martyr  
Seven principal oarsmen and Jack-John the lad of the lawns  
Planted a relic of our spotting biograph  
Here, in a spell between two bombs.  
And here we bloom, amid the marigolds  
Sad, with the central doll of an old photo,  
The treeless grills, and the pelouse.

Oh, the bald lawns, and the enclosure  
The green we had to smell!  
What subtle matter for an effigy  
Between the door and the wall:

And there the old, whose airless voice  
 Fell from our England's winding sheet  
 Withdrew their leaves, let George and Dragon  
 Drown in the porter's little room.  
 All the bodies dangle in a garden of bowls.

But you proceeded to the burial.  
 Night by night in Camden Town  
 Up and down the furry buildings,  
 In and out the boxing alleys, dark as tea  
 You walked with murder in your music box  
 And played the pieces of blind England all around the  
 down.

Thus the men lay down to sleep in the pavilion  
 With a whisper of flannel and leather;  
 The ladies all arranged themselves upon the ground  
 With a wuthering of old fowls:  
 And now from their ten million pots and pipes  
 Their dreams crept out and fumed at the wet night,  
 While they slept in the cloud without Christ.  
 Then angels ploughed them under the ground  
 With little songs as sharp as needles  
 And words that shone in the dark as bright as pins.

## 3

Blind northern friends, whose hopeless manor  
 Fox and grouse have come to own,  
 Bred hand in glove with pestilence  
 The ivy eats your castle down.

The horns of thunder drown and die  
 When evenings sing their frittered song.  
 The sonnets of my tearless eye  
 Shine on the city's second string,

Cling to the city's second rung  
 While oarsmen feel their frozen fen:  
 And boat by boat their tocsins ring  
 And house by house their walls cave in.

Then the blue pleasures are destroyed  
 Whose seas concern the oarsman's blade.  
 The halls are severed, bridges bleed  
 And the drowned world is animate,

Till the brown boats, devouring all  
 Wipe out the city's second spring

Sail on, while the cathedrals fall  
And feel what rain the bellnotes bring.  
Before the formal racers come  
And puzzles are once more unfurled,  
Come, let us drink our poisoned home  
And swim in the face of a glass world!

All the world's waters whimper and cry  
And evils eat body and soul.  
The times have carried love away.  
And tides have swallowed charity.

Bound, bound, my fens, whose soundless song  
Both verse and prose have come to end.  
It is the everlasting wrong:  
Our cities vanish in the wind.

4

They have given the cricketer a grass heart  
And a dry purse like a leaf, Look!  
Look! The little butterflies come out!  
He was wounded, he was wounded in the wars  
Where the roots our umpires are.  
It is a funny death, when flowers undermine castles.  
O Listen to their calls  
Listen to their wooden calls.

"Chop-chop" says bats (or blocks):  
But we shall drive in another direction,  
Leaving this people to its own calm,  
And turn again to waters brown, whose underlights,  
Whose manners are insane  
With the oars of the young man trained  
To separate a mirror into riddles.

Come, let us die in some other direction  
Sooner than the houses in the river quiver and begin  
their dance  
And fall in the terrible frown.

## TRANSLATION IN REVIVAL

### Rolfe Humphries

*Rolfe Humphries* has written five books of poetry, the most recent being *THE WIND OF TIME*, published by Scribner's. His outstanding work in translation includes Garcia Lorca's *POET IN NEW YORK*, published by Norton, and a translation of Virgil's *AENEID*, published by Scribner's. By profession a teacher of Latin at Woodmere Academy, Long Island, New York, Mr. Humphries has also taught courses in poetry at a number of colleges, universities, and writing seminars. He conducts the Verse Chronicle department of *The Nation*.

**HALFWAY THROUGH** our century, the art of translation seems to be taking on a new lease of life. Quantity, quality, interest, all are at a higher level than they have been for decades. Hardly a week goes by but I receive for review, and must make room on my shelves for, new specimens, not all published by university presses, either; hardly a fortnight, month, or quarter, but I read somebody's remarks on translation. The Third Programme of the B.B.C. has recently featured a new version of *Faust* made by Louis MacNeice, and an *Aeneid* by C. Day Lewis; recent additions to my own library include, for example, Dorothy Sayers' version of Dante's *Inferno*, an *Iliad* done by Richmond Lattimore, the North Sea poems of Heine, by Vernon Watkins, Roger Fry's translations of poems by Mallarmé, the Gypsy ballads of Lorca, rendered by Langston Hughes. Why is this?

One answer that occurs to me is that this is, in a sense, a series of mopping-up operations. Toward the end of the first decade of our century a strong break-through took place; behind an *avant garde* which sometimes outran its lines of communication, a vigorous advance followed; terrain, especially that which lay below the surface, was newly reconnoitred and mapped; the old strongholds of mid-Victorian, middle-class prejudice, smugness, gentility, respectability, were assailed and reduced. Pockets of resistance nevertheless re-



mained: the citadels of Academia were not laying claim to much, but they held fast to what areas they did claim, and one of these was the domain of translation. Who bothered?—let the scholars have their musty past. Long after Bulwer-Lytton and Owen Meredith were dead ducks, long after Richard Watson Gilder and Bliss Carman had come to be regarded as pale but mildly comical caricatures of the real right thing, the names of Lang, Leaf & Myers were still pronounced with wholesome respect and awe. Latin and Greek, in the colleges, might no longer be protected industries, but the Loeb Classical Library, bravely facing the trend and trying to bring culture to the barbarians (translation on facing pages of the original), rated a good deal of kudos. Even then, forty years ago, there was that holy terror, Ezra Pound, translating Propertius as no man ever had before and as many pious scholars prayed no man would again, and compounding the offense further by suggesting that Chinese and Provençal literatures might be worth looking into; there were a few hardy others. But by and large, Cary and Longfellow, or Jebb, if anybody wanted to be really lofty, would more than suffice.

It is also possible that the creative energy which has been expressing itself with great vigor and originality over two or three decades is by now becoming a little tired and spent, a little diffuse, with no heirs to maintain its estate. This often happens: you have your Beethovens, then your Mendelssohns; first Hopkins, then Bridges. We become convinced by our own talk of a waste land, a lost generation: the world shrinks to a smaller size than it used to be; there are no frontiers any more. Yet ardor and imagination, once let loose, are fairly hard to bottle up, let alone kill; we may think the atom bomb is just behind the next cloud, but we all rush out to get vaccinated when a smallpox scare comes along. Having, somewhere along the line, committed ourselves to the side of life, we find it a little hard to let go. So, since our own moment offers us nothing but the creed of doubt, we fall back—I do not think this is by any means a sign of panic—on the company of the less fearful and more composed. Lending some of our energy to, we get back energy from Homer, Virgil, Dante, Cervantes, Goethe.

What warrant save presumption do we have for this interest and the responsibility it involves? For one thing, the shrinking size of the world has had some good effects. It is not literally true that everybody in America has by now seen a Picasso, or listened to Prokofieff, but that's the general idea. The barbarism of Carol Kennecott's Gopher Prairie or Stover's Yale is a good deal less benighted than it was in 1910 or 1920. America is, in many ways, still very provincial; it is also, in some ways (and not only in New York City) not.

If there are no frontiers any more, it is equally true that there are no parlors. We often hear now, and sometimes make,

rude noises. We give the Bronx Cheer, a form of criticism as succinct and devastating as it was when employed by Aristophanes. We may never have met The Common Man, or The Little Man—those dull jerks, those pious nonentities so beloved by the political editors of *The Good Republic*—but we have bumped into fellows in garages, in taxis, at the ball-parks and the race-tracks, who use language as if it meant something. We do not shudder at vulgarity. (True, we invent new and timid forms of it, but that is beside the point here.) The last accusation that could be brought against T. S. Eliot would be that he is a vulgar man; but that vulgarity has a certain interest for him, an attraction, even a delight, no one who has heard him read the chess game passage from *The Waste Land* could possibly deny. This is wholesome; it brings into the language a drive and directness, a freshening of metaphor, a cadence of the voice, the ring of talk, not merely the copy of the page. In short, signs of life.

With this peculiar combination of diffidence and arrogance, when we investigate the writing of men of other tongues and other times, we presently make an exciting discovery: *they were all moderns!* (The obvious fact that they certainly never thought of themselves as anything else escapes our notice for the moment.) They spoke our language, even when they did not speak it. So, however well they have been translated before, into the idiom of a different time, we have to translate them all over again; Golding's Ovid does not suffice, for us. Dryden understood this principle, so did Pope; many Victorian translators did not. Virgil, Robert Bridges noted, wrote in quantitative hexameters, so he should be rendered quantitatively in English, and never mind whether English metrics were not used to working that way; Virgil's Latin was archaic, therefore it should be put into archaic English. So, "Let my sooth a litel thy cruel destiny comfort," Bridges comes up with, than which no more atrocious specimen from the entire archives of translation could be presented. Wait a minute. "Thyself she would Thou camest" is the way the Loeb Classical Library translator brings over a phrase from the lovely *Pervigilium Veneris*.

How wrong can you ever get? Let us take a hypothetical example. Professor B. gives a course in Goethe's *Faust* at a Midwestern university. It is one of the most popular courses in the college; even football players have been known to work hard enough in it to earn a thoroughly honest C+. In order to keep the course alive, for Professor B. is thoroughly trained in up-to-date pedagogical psychology, he has introduced, from time to time, some of his own verse translations, especially those of the more comical passages. These have been well received by the students, and the word has even reached some of his faculty colleagues, who, with remarkable lack of professional envy, have suggested that he carry matters further,

and why not do the entire poem? For this task the poor fellow has no technical equipment whatsoever; modern poetry he finds obscure, difficult, and distressing, though he has derived comfort from Matthew Arnold, and a detached amusement from some of Swinburne. Nevertheless, he believes in something more than dusty scholarship; and he will try. He devotes ten, twenty, thirty, years to his task; he has read all the lives of Goethe, studied all the variorum editions, can explain, in notes and footnotes, in appendices and bibliography, whatever needs explaining; he will make no mistake when accuracy is involved. He will reproduce, faithfully, the original meters; he will make a version that is almost, not quite, 100 per cent line for line; he will even manage to keep quite a few of the original puns (easier than if he were working from Spanish or Italian). In the finished product only two things will be lacking: 1, the impression that Goethe was a giant of a man; and 2, the impression that he knew anything whatever about how to write.

From this pathetic and horrible case we can establish one cardinal principle: for our century, the job of translation must be entrusted only to those who have themselves some creative experience of the art over which they are engaged. Novels must be translated by novelists, poetry by poets, drama by playwrights. Only in this way can the public be given the guarantee that the basic craftsmanship, the framework of the artistry, is substantial and sound. We have to be scrupulous; the task makes too great demands for the scholar, the dilettante, the well-intentioned and thoroughly appreciative *homme de lettres*. Smug as it may sound, offensive as it may strike others, only the artist, our time is just about convinced, can present the artist. When the scholars were quibbling over a disputed reading of Juvenal, for the manuscripts were hopelessly corrupt, and batting their heads together over Codex A vs. Codex B, Housman cut through all the nonsense with conjecture and emendation of his own. He said he knew what Juvenal must have written, a) because he was a poet himself and b) because, being one, he knew how Juvenal's mind worked; and he had the rarely vouchsafed satisfaction of seeing a miraculously late-found manuscript prove him right to the letter.

I hear objections. Isn't your original artist, if he is any good, going to be too busy with his own work to find time to devote himself to another man's? There are several answers. For one thing, as I suggested earlier, circumstances or mood may have forced on your original artist the temporary lack of theme. For another, there is the obvious fact, as indicated in the opening paragraph of this essay, that a great many such people do find the time. Never mind how, they do. Third, it is quite possible that your original artist is not going to find this quite as much a chore, a waste of time, as you may think; he is, at

worst, taking a refresher course, he is going to be learning something. Fourth (and while this is the least obvious, it may be the most significant answer), it does not take as much time as you think, it takes the artist less time than it would anybody else. What does your scholar do when blocked by a phrase in which there is some doubt, let us say, as to whether a word is in the subjective or the objective genitive? Unless he is atypically arrogant, he looks up all the other translators; then he looks up all the commentaries; finally, in an agony of indecision, he makes up his mind, one way or the other, cites all the authorities he possibly can in support of his position, and, in order to be perfectly fair, quotes a substantial body of dissent from the other side. Which, then, nobody pays any attention to except other scholars, but it has taken considerable time. Whereas your unscholastic artist pulls himself up short for a moment, immediately recognizes that his author's mind favored the subjective instead of the objective (a truly scrupulous scholar would probably count and balance the total of subjective and objective in the author's complete works), either plumps outright for that, or gets round the whole difficulty with a brilliant ambiguity of his own which leaves matters exactly where he found them.

"Every good writer," said Gide, "owes it to his country to translate at least one good foreign work." (Possibly not every good American writer—are there so many?—knows another language than his own, but never mind.) Given, or taking, this assignment, you face certain risks. Since you do not come to your original author as a sycophant, but as a self-respecting artist in your own right, there is the danger that you may impose yourself on him as a tyrant, or even as a god, creating him in your own image. You must be careful, and on to yourself; if you have, for instance, certain favorite adjectives, you must beware lest you pin them on his every unadorned noun. You must be fully aware that in some respects you are bound to fail; you can never bring over his master-strokes, where the sound of his language is the essence and soul of his meaning. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*. To compensate for this inadequacy, to even up the balance, you occasionally, very rarely, may, and, once in a blue moon, must, correct his mistakes. He has probably not made many, but you are not doing him justice if you do not detect some lapses; you are not really entering into the spirit of the thing if you cannot sense the passages where he was getting a little tired, a little bored, was doing just a bit of vamping. You have the right to take some liberties; remember, you are translating a writer, not his words, one at a time: you are not Hinds, nor yet Noble. You have the right, which you will exercise sparingly, to take some liberties: you will not transliterate every diminutive, nor patronymic, in a Russian novel; you might say "the way he always did" instead of "according to his custom (or wont)" for *suo more*

in Latin. Your part is that of a host, to perform introductions as unobtrusively as possibly, and thereafter leave guest and company to get along with each other as best they may. But remember that while your guest is a fellow-citizen of the republic of letters, he must not be divested entirely of his native ways. If you are presenting a Bengali poet who is used to going around in nothing but a loin-cloth, it is not courtesy to clap a derby hat on his head. Every good translation will suggest at least an aura, an adumbration, of the foreign element.

Images, of course, pass readily across the barrier of language, but even here one needs to be vigilant. When Pliny wrote that the cloud over Vesuvius in eruption looked more like a pine tree than anything else, he was not thinking of pine tree as a Maine Yankee, or a California High Sierran would see it; you had better say "umbrella-pine," though there is no word in Pliny's Latin which justifies umbrella. With sound effects it is an entirely different matter. "Latin verse," wrote Professor Garrod, "has in it the sound of a great nation"; and Chesterton refers to a passage from the Song of Roland, "which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron." Attention to sound is more important in poetry than in prose; sometimes *all* the poetry is in the sound, and I do not mean merely theatrical onomatopoeic effects. The sound of a great nation, the clang and groan of great iron, ought also to be brought over in prose; the translator who ignores or evades this responsibility is a slob. Many of the sentences in Caesar's Commentaries are long and complex, subordinate clauses within subordinate clauses, explanations within explanations. But the narrative rushes, succinct, almost stenographic; you will not spoil the effect if you chop it up into short declarative sentences, which you would hardly be justified in doing with an equal number of words in the involute longueurs of Marcel Proust. Have I got this to come out so it *sounds* like something? is a question the translator must ask himself over and over. Do I have any suggestion at all of the rise and the fall, the rest and the rush, the lingering, the halt, the explosion, of the original cadence?

Great writers are often refreshingly direct. Reading them in translation, you might not always think so; too many times the translator makes them come out sounding, not like great writers, but only literary men. Everybody knows Mallarmé's line *La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres*— "The flesh is sad, alas! and all books I have read," Roger Fry translates, and thereby spoils. The omitted definite article, for one thing, means something in the original, and the inversion has watered down the force. What would have been the matter with ending the line, simply, "And I've read all the books"? Even worse can be found on the page immediately preceding: *Et ma lampe qui sait pourtant mon agonie* is Englished into

“And my lamp which nathless my agony knows.” Here the inversion renders the syntax obscure, if not dead wrong, and one can feel reasonably sure that Mallarmé’s mind did not operate in terms of words like *nathless*. *Still*, with its implication of quiet, might have introduced more ambiguity than Mallarmé meant: “and my lamp which still knows my agony” is probably not exactly right, either, but it is surely less insulting to Mallarmé’s talent than that nathless-plus-inversion gambit. More than obscurity, more than difficulty, straightforwardness seems to confound and confuse the translator, and the reader is lost in an unnecessary maze of elegance, euphemism, littishness. Pound quotes Eliot as saying that Gilbert Murray’s translations interposed more of a barrier between Euripides and the reader than did the Greek language. More of this, I feel, stems from a failure to appreciate directness than from any other cause. Let us take another example. The Archpoet was a medieval cleric, a gaunt, gay, coughing rascal, who paid a mocking lip-service to repentance over the sins of the flesh:

*Et quas tactu nequeo  
saltem corde moechor*

he wrote at the end of one of his eight-line, four-rhyme stanzas. Neither

*Hands off! ah, but in conceit  
In her arms I'm lying*

nor

*She's beyond my touching? Well,  
Can't the mind do duty?*

is right for this; both versions make The Archpoet sound prim and/or coy, neither of which he was at all. Word for word comes much closer, and little harm done the meter, either: “Those I cannot touch, at least/ In my mind I make them.” (Read *heart* for *mind*, possibly; or *lay* for *make*—and then figure out which of the four possible combinations is best.) He goes rollicking along, The Archpoet—

*Res est arduissima  
vincere naturam,  
in aspectu virginis  
mentem esse puram*

and these four lines George Whicher reproduces delightfully

*Much too hard it is, I find,  
So to change my essence  
As to keep a virgin mind  
In a virgin's presence.*

*We test a translation by the feel, and particularly by the feel of being in contact with the force of a great original. The*

italicized sentence is from Pound, who sums up here as exactly as he treats minor detail elsewhere; no one interested in the art of translation should fail to read his correspondence with Rouse over the *Odyssey*, or with Binyon over Dante.

No amount of intuition, however, compensates for a tone-dead ear, as no plethora of scholarship can atone for lack of imagination. And the imagination has to be exercised beyond the phrase, the line, the canto, the volume, the collected works; it has to identify itself with the man, wear his clothes, walk his streets, eat his food, hear the talk he hears, listen to the music played him, see his landscape and the paintings he loved, smell the flowers and taste the fruits in his garden. No translator has met this requirement more fully, presented the world of her writers more happily, than Miss Helen Waddell in her book of *Medieval Latin Lyrics*; if only her prosodic apparatus were as felicitous, what a book we would have! As it is, we have a wonder, all the fresh early-morning feel of a world springing and blossoming around us: dew on the grass, and no smell of the lamp.

Such virtues, unhappily, are too often their own reward. Translation, as has been shown, is too great a responsibility to entrust to hacks. Grub Street, however, did not go out with Oliver Goldsmith; a standard rate, I greatly fear, still prevails in the trade. This is inequitable, if not iniquitous; in no position to demand, I meekly suggest that the thing to do would be suppress the incompetents and give a substantial raise to the excellent. What price Golding's Ovid now? Particularly should this apply in the public domain, where publishers do not have to expend one thin dime for permission fees. You cannot, gentlemen of the industry, overpay a really good translator; I do not think you will spoil him if you pay him handsomely. He will, if he has any sense at all (and if he has not, you don't want him), know perfectly well that whatever his take-home wage he has been performing mostly a labor of love. As well as an act of praise.

## Shelby Foote

*Shelby Foote* was born in Greenville, Mississippi, in 1916, studied at the University of North Carolina, and served in the Marine Corps in World War II. He now lives in his home town with his wife and child and spends his full time writing. *Day of Battle* is taken from his most recent novel, *SHILOH*. His previous novels, all published by Dial Press, are *TOURNAMENT*, *FOLLOW ME DOWN* and *LOVE IN A DRY SEASON*.

# DAY OF BATTLE

Private Luther Dade  
Rifleman, 6th Mississippi

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and clear against the night, but when I woke up there was only the blackness and the wind sighing high in the treetops. That was what roused me I believe, because for a minute I disremembered where I was. I thought I was back home, woke up early and laying in bed waiting for pa to come with the lantern to turn me out to milk (that was the best thing about the army: no cows) and ma was in the kitchen humming a hymn while she shook up the stove. But then I realized part of the sound was the breathing and snoring of the men all around me, with maybe a whimper or a moan every now and again when the bad dreams came, and I remembered. We had laid down to sleep in what they call Line of Battle and now the night was nearly over. And when I remembered I wished I'd stayed asleep: because that was the worst part, to lie there alone, feeling lonely, and no one to tell you he was feeling the same.

But it was warm under the blanket and my clothes had dried and I could feel my new rifle through the cloth where I had laid it to be safe from the dew when I wrapped the covers round me. Then it was the same as if they'd all gone away, or I had; I was back home with my brothers and sisters again, myself the oldest by over a year, and they were gathered around to tell me good-by the way they did a month ago when I left to join up in Corinth after General Beauregard sent word that all true men were needed to save the country. That was the way he said it. I was just going to tell them I would be back with a Yankee sword for the fireplace, like pa did with the Mexican one, when I heard somebody

WHEN I WENT to sleep the stars were out and there was even a moon, thin like a sickle



talking in a hard clear voice not like any of *my* folks, and when I looked up it was Sergeant Tyree.

"Roll out there," he said. "Roll out to fight."

I had gone to sleep and dreamed of home, but here I was, away up in Tennessee, further from Ithaca and Jordan County than I had ever been in all my life before. It was Sunday already and we were fixing to hit them where they had their backs to the river, the way it was explained while we were waiting for our marching orders three days ago. I sat up.

From then on everything moved fast with a sort of mixed-up jerkiness, like Punch and Judy. Every face had a kind of drawn look, the way it would be if a man was picking up something heavy. Late ones like myself were pulling on their shoes or rolling their blankets. Others were already fixed. They squatted with their rifles across their thighs, sitting there in the darkness munching biscuits, those that had saved any, and not doing much talking. They nodded their heads with quick flicky motions, like birds, and nursed their rifles, keeping them out of the dirt. I had gotten to know them all in a month and a few of them were even from the same end of the county I was, but now it was like seeing them for the first time, different. All the put-on had gone out of their faces—they were left with what God gave them at the beginning.

We lined up. And while Sergeant Tyree passed among us, checking us one by one to make sure everything was where it was supposed to be, dawn begun to come through, faint and high. While we were answering roll-call the sun rose big and red through the trees and all up and down the company front they begun to get excited and jabber at one another: "The sun of oyster itch," whatever that meant. I was glad to see the sun again, no matter what they called it.

One minute we were standing there, shifting from leg to leg, not saying much and more or less avoiding each other's eyes: then we were going forward. It happened that sudden. There was no bugle or drum or anything like that. The men on our right started moving and we moved too, lurching forward through the underbrush and trying to keep the line straight the way we had been warned to do, but we couldnt. Captain Plummer was cussing. "Dwess it up," he kept saying, cussing a blue streak; "Dwess it up, dod dam it, dwess it up," all the way through the woods. So after a while, when the trees thinned, we stopped to straighten the line.

There was someone on a tall claybank horse out front, a fine-looking man in a new uniform with chicken guts on the sleeves all the way to his elbows, spruce and spang as a gamecock. He had on a stiff red cap, round and flat on top like a sawed-off dice box, and he was making a speech. "Soldiers of the South!" he shouted in a fine proud voice, a litle husky, and everybody cheered. All I could hear was the cheering and yipping all around me, but I could see his eyes light up

and his mouth moving the way it will do when a man is using big words. I thought I heard something about defenders and liberty and even something about the women back home but I couldn't be sure; there was so much racket. When he was through he stood in the stirrups, raising his cap to us as we went by, and I recognized him. It was General Beauregard, the man I'd come to fight for, and I hadn't hardly heard a word he said.

We stayed lined up better now because we were through the worst of the briars and vines, but just as we got going good there was a terrible clatter off to the right, the sound of firecrackers mixed with a roaring and yapping like a barn full of folks at a Fourth of July dogfight or a gouging match. The line begun to crook and weave because some of the men had stopped to listen, and Captain Plummer was cussing them, tongue-tied. Joe Marsh was next to me—he was about thirty, middle-aged, and had seen some battle up near Bowling Green. "There you are," he said, slow and calm and proud of himself. "Some outfit has met the elephant." That was what the ones who had been in action always called it: the elephant.

They had told us how it would be. They said we would march two days and on the third day we would hit them where they were camped between two creeks with their backs to the Tennessee River. We would drive them, the colonel told us, and when they were pushed against the river we would kill or capture the whole she-bang. I didn't understand it much because what the colonel said was full of tactics talk. Later the captain explained it, and that was better but not much. So then Sergeant Tyree showed it to us by drawing lines on the ground with a stick. That way it was clear as could be.

It sounded fine, the way he told it; it sounded simple and easy. Maybe it was too simple, or something. Anyhow things didn't turn out so good when it came to doing them. On the third day we were still marching, all day, and here it was the fourth day and we were still just marching, stop and go but mostly stop—the only real difference was that the column was moving sideways now, through the woods instead of on the road. From all that racket over on the right I thought maybe the other outfits would have the Yankees pushed back and captured before we even got to see it. The noise had died down for a minute, but as we went forward it swelled up again, rolling toward the left where we were, rifles popping and popping and the soldiers yelling crazy in the distance. It didn't sound like an elephant to me.

We came clear of the woods where they ended on a ridge overlooking a valley with a little creek running through it. The ground was open all across the valley, except where the creek bottom was overgrown, and mounted to another ridge on the other side where the woods began again. There were

white spots in the fringe of trees—these were tents, I made out. We were the left brigade of the whole army. The 15th Arkansas, big men mostly, with bowie knives and rolled-up sleeves, was spread across the front for skirmishers, advanced a little way in the open. There was a Tennessee regiment on our right and two more on our left and still another at the left rear with flankers out. Then we were all in the open, lined up with our flags riffling in the breeze. Colonel Thornton was out front, between us and the skirmishers. His saber flashed in the sun. Looking down the line I saw the other regimental commanders, and all their sabers were flashing sunlight too. It was like a parade just before it begins.

This is going to be what they promised us, I said to myself. This is going to be the charge.

That was when General Johnston rode up. He came right past where I was standing, a fine big man on a bay stallion. He had on a broad-brim hat and a cape and thigh boots with gold spurs that twinkled like sparks of fire. I watched him ride by, his mustache flaring out from his mouth and his eyes set deep under his forehead. He was certainly the handsomest man I ever saw, bar none; he made the other officers on his staff look small. There was a little blond-headed lieutenant bringing up the rear, the one who would go all red in the face when the men guyed him back on the march. He looked about my age, but that was the only thing about us that was alike. He had on a natty uniform: bobtail jacket, red silk neckerchief, fire-gilt buttons, and all. I said to myself, I bet his ma would have a fit if she could see him now.

General Johnston rode between our regiment and the Tennessee boys on our right, going forward to where the skirmish line was waiting. When the colonel in charge had reported, General Johnston spoke to the skirmishers: "Men of Arkansas, they say you boast of your prowess with the bowie knife. Today you wield a nobler weapon: the bayonet. Employ it well." They stood there holding their rifles and looking up at him, shifting their feet a little and looking sort of embarrassed. He was the only man I ever saw who wasn't a preacher and yet could make that high-flown way of talking sound right. Then he turned his horse and rode back through our line, and as he passed he leaned sideways in the saddle and spoke to us: "Look along your guns, and fire low." It made us ready and anxious for what was coming.

Captain Plummer walked up and down the company front. He was short, inclined to fat, and walked with a limp from the blisters he developed on the march. "Stay dswessed on me, wherever I go," he said. "And shoot low. Aim for their knees." All up and down the line the flags were flapping and other officers were speaking to their men.

I was watching toward the front, where we would go, but all I could see was that empty valley with the little creek run-

ning through it and the rising ground beyond with the trees on top. While I was looking, trying hard to see was anybody up there, all of a sudden there was a Boom! Boom! Boom! directly in the rear and it scared me so bad I almost broke for cover. But when I looked around I saw they had brought up the artillery and it was shooting over our heads toward the left in a shallow swale. I felt real sheepish from having jumped but when I looked around I saw that the others had jumped as much as I had, and now they were joking at one another about who had been the most scared, carrying it off all brave-like but looking kind of hang-dog about it too. I was still trying to see whatever it was out front that the artillery was shooting at, but all I could see was that valley with the creek in it and the dark trees on the flanks.

I was still mixed up, wondering what it all meant, when we begun to go forward, carrying our rifles at right shoulder shift the way we had been taught to do on parade. Colonel Thornton was still out front, flashing his saber and calling back over his shoulder: "Close up, men. Close up. Guiide centerrrr!" The skirmishers went out of sight in the swale, the same as if they had marched into the ground. When we got to where they had gone down, we saw them again, but closer now, kneeling and popping little white puffs of smoke from their rifles. The rattle of firing rolled across the line and back again, and then it broke into just general firing. I still couldnt see what they were shooting at, specially not now that the smoke was banking up and drifting back against us with a stink like burning feathers.

Then, for the first time since we left Corinth, bugles begun to blare and it passed to the double. The line wavered like a shaken rope, gaining in places and lagging in others and all around me they were yelling those wild crazy yells. General Cleburne was on his mare to our left, between us and the 5th Tennessee. He was waving his sword and the mare was plunging and tossing her mane. I could hear him hollering the same as he would when we did wrong on the drill field—he had that thick, Irish way of speaking that came on him when he got mad. We were trotting by then.

As we went forward we caught up with the skirmishers. They had given around a place where the ground was flat and dark green and there was water in the grass, sparkling like silver. It was a bog. We gave to the right to stay on hard ground and the 5th Tennessee gave to the left; the point of swampland was between us, growing wider as we went. General Cleburne rode straight ahead, waving his sword and bawling at us to close the gap, close the gap, and before he knew what had separated us, the mare was pastern-deep in it, floundering and bucking to get rid of the general's weight. He was waving his sword with one hand and shaking his fist at us with the other, so that when the mare gave an extra hard

buck General Cleburne went flying off her nigh side and landed on his hands and knees in the mud. We could hear him cussing across two hundred yards of bog. The last I saw of him he was walking out, still waving the sword, picking his knees high and sinking almost to his boot-tops every step. His face was red as fire.

The brigade was split, two regiments on the right and four on the left. With swamp between us, we would have to charge the high ground from two sides. By this time we had passed around where the other slope came out to a point leading down to the bog and we couldnt even see the other regiments. When we hit the rise we begun to run. I could hear Colonel Thornton puffing like a switch engine and I thought to myself, he's too old for this. Nobody was shooting yet because we didnt see anything to shoot at; we were so busy trying to keep up, we didnt have a chance to see anything at all. The line was crooked as a ram's horn. Some men were pushing out front and others were beginning to breathe hard and lag behind. My heart was hammering at my throat—it seemed like every breath would bust my lungs. I passed a fat fellow holding his side and groaning. At first I thought he was shot, but then I realized he just had a stitch. It was Burt Tapley, the one everybody jibed about how much he ate; he was a great one for the sutlers. Now all that fine food, canned peaches and suchlike was staring him in the face.

When we were halfway up the rise I begun to see black shapes against the rim where it sloped off sharp. At first I thought they were scarecrows—they looked like scarecrows. That didnt make sense, except they looked so black and stick-like. Then I saw they were moving, wriggling, and the rim broke out with smoke, some of it going straight up and some jetting toward our line, rolling and jumping with spits of fire mixed in and humming like wasps past my ears. I thought: *Lord to God, theyre shooting; theyre shooting at me!* And it surprised me so, I stopped to look. The smoke kept rolling up and out, rolling and rolling, still with the stabs of fire mixed in, and some of the men passed me, bent forward like they were running into a high wind, rifles held crossways so that the bayonets glinted and snapped in the sunlight, and their faces were all out of shape from the yelling.

When I stopped I begun to hear all sorts of things I hadnt heard while I was running. It was like being born again, coming into a new world. There was a great crash and clatter of firing, and over all this I could hear them all around me, screaming and yelping like on a foxhunt except there was something crazy mixed up in it too, like horses trapped in a burning barn. I thought they'd all gone crazy—they looked it, for a fact. Their faces were split wide open with screaming, mouths twisted every which way, and this wild lunatic yelping coming out. It wasnt like they were yelling with their mouths:

it was more like the yelling was something pent up inside them and they were opening their mouths to let it out. That was the first time I really knew how scared I was.

If I'd stood there another minute, hearing all this, I would have gone back. I thought: Luther, you got no business mixed up in all this ruckus. This is all crazy, I thought. But a big fellow I never saw before ran into me full tilt, knocking me forward so hard I nearly went sprawling. He looked at me sort of desperate, like I was a post or something that got in the way, and went by, yelling. By the time I got my balance I was stumbling forward, so I just kept going. And that was better. I found that as long as I was moving I was all right, because then I didnt hear so much or even see so much. Moving, it was more like I was off to myself, with just my own particular worries.

I kept passing men lying on the ground, and at first I thought they were winded, like the fat one—that was the way they looked to me. But directly I saw a corporal with the front of his head mostly gone, what had been under his skull spilling over his face, and I knew they were down because they were hurt. Every now and then there would be one just sitting there holding an arm or leg and groaning. Some of them would reach out at us and even call us by name, but we stayed clear. For some reason we didnt like them, not even the sight of them. I saw Lonny Parker that I grew up with; he was holding his stomach, bawling like a baby, his face all twisted and big tears on his cheeks. But it wasnt any different with Lonny—I stayed clear of him too, just like I'd never known him, much less grown up with him back in Jordan County. It wasnt a question of luck, the way some folks will tell you; they will tell you it's bad luck to be near the wounded. It was just that we didnt want to be close to them any longer than it took to run past, the way you wouldnt want to be near someone who had something catching, like smallpox.

We were almost to the rim by then and I saw clear enough that they werent scarecrows—that was a foolish thing to think anyhow. They were men, with faces and thick blue uniforms. It was only a glimpse, though, because then we gave them a volley and smoke rolled out between us. When we came through the smoke they were gone except the ones who were on the ground. They lay in every position, like a man I saw once that had been drug out on the bank after he was run over by a steamboat and the paddles hit him. We were running and yelling, charging across the flat ground where white canvas tents stretched out in an even row. The racket was louder now, and then I knew why. It was because I was yelling too, crazy and blood-curdled as the rest of them.

I passed one end of the row of tents. That must have been where their officers stayed, for breakfast was laid on a table there with a white cloth nice as a church picnic. When I saw

the white-flour biscuits and the coffee I understood why people called them the Feds and us the Corn-fed. I got two of the biscuits (I had to grab quick; everybody was snatching at them) and while I was stuffing one in my mouth and the other in my pocket, I saw Burt Tapley. He'd caught up when we stopped to give them that volley, I reckon, and he was holding the coffee pot like a loving-cup, drinking scalding coffee in big gulps. It ran from both corners of his mouth, down onto the breast of his uniform.

Officers were running around waving their swords and hollering. "Form!" they yelled at us. "Form for attack!" But nobody paid them much mind—we were too busy rummaging the tents. So they begun to lay about with the flats of their swords, driving us away from the plunder. It didnt take long. When we were formed in line again, reloading our guns, squads and companies mixed every which way, they led us through the row of tents at a run. All around me, men were tripping on the ropes and cussing and barking their shins on the stakes. Then we got through and I saw why the officers had been yelling for us to form.

There was a gang of Federal soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder in the field beyond the tents. I thought it was the whole Yankee army, lined up waiting for us. Those in front were kneeling under the guns of the men in the second line, a great bank of blue uniforms and rifle barrels and white faces like rows of eggs, one above the other. When they fired, the smoke came at us in a solid wall. Things plucked at my clothes and twitched my hat, and when I looked around I saw men all over the ground, in the same ugly positions as the men back on the slope, moaning and whimpering, clawing at the grass. Some were gut-shot, making high yelping sounds like a turpented dog.

Smoke was still thick when the second volley came. For a minute I thought I was the only one left alive. Then I saw the others through the smoke, making for the rear, and I ran too, back toward the tents and the slope where we'd come up. They gave us another volley as we ran but it was high; I could hear the balls screech over my head. I cleared the ridge on the run, and when I came over I saw them stopping. I pulled up within twenty yards or so and lay flat on the ground, panting.

No bullets were falling here but everybody laid low because they were crackling and snapping in the air over our heads on a line with the rim where our men were still coming over. They would come over prepared to run another mile, and then they would see us lying there and they would try to stop, stumbling and sliding downhill.

I saw one man come over, running sort of straddle-legged, and just as he cleared the rim I saw the front of his coat jump where the shots came through. He was running down the slope, stone dead already, the way a deer will do when it's

shot after picking up speed. This man kept going for nearly fifty yards downhill before his legs stopped pumping and he crashed into the ground on his stomach. I could see his face as he ran, and there was no doubt about it, no doubt at all: he was dead and I could see it in his face.

That scared me worse than anything up to then. It wasn't really all that bad, looking back on it: it was just that he'd been running when they shot him and his drive kept him going down the slope. But it seemed so wrong, so scandalous, somehow so *unreligious* for a dead man to have to keep on fighting—or running, anyhow—that it made me sick at my stomach. I didn't want to have any more to do with the war if this was the way it was going to be.

They had told us we would push them back to the river. Push, they said; that was the word they used. I really thought we were going to push them—with bullets and bayonets of course, and of course I knew there were going to be men killed: I even thought I might get killed myself; it crossed my mind a number of times. But it wasn't the way they said. It wasn't that way at all. Because even the dead and dying didn't have any decency about them—first the Yankees back on the slope, crumpled and muddy where their own men had overrun them, then the men in the field beyond the tents, yelping like gut-shot dogs while they died, and now this one, this big fellow running straddle-legged and stone cold dead in the face, that wouldn't stop running even after he'd been killed.

I was what you might call unnerved, for they may warn you there's going to be bleeding in battle but you don't believe it till you see the blood. What happened from then on was all mixed up in the smoke. We formed again and went back through the tents. But the same thing happened: they were there, just as before, and when they threw that wall of smoke and humming bullets at us, we came running back down the slope. Three times we went through and it was the same every time. Finally a fresh brigade came up from the reserve and we went through together.

This trip was different—we could tell it even before we got started. We went through the smoke and the bullets, and that was the first time we used bayonets. For a minute it was jab and slash, everyone yelling enough to curdle your blood just with the shrillness. I was running, bent low with the rifle held out front, the way they taught me, and all of a sudden I saw I was going to have it with a big Yank wearing his coat unbuttoned halfway, showing a red flannel undershirt. I was running and he was waiting, braced, and it occurred to me, the words shooting through my mind: What kind of a man is this, would wear a red wool undershirt in April?

I saw his face from below, but he had bent down and his eyebrows were drawn in a straight line like a black bar over



his eyes. He was full-grown, with a wide brown mustache; I could see the individual hairs on each side of the shaved line down the middle. I'd have had to say Sir to him back home. Then something hit my arm a jar—I stumbled against him, lifting my rifle and falling sideways. Ee! I'm killed! I thought. He turned with me and we were falling, first a slow fall the way it is in dreams, then sudden, and the ground came up and hit me: ho! We were two feet apart, looking at each other. He seemed even bigger now, up close, and there was something wrong with the way he looked. Then I saw why.

My bayonet had gone in under his jaw, the handguard tight against the bottom of his chin, and the point must have stuck in his head bone because he appeared to be trying to open his mouth but couldnt. It was like he had a mouthful of something bitter and couldnt spit—his eyes were screwed up, staring at me and blinking a bit from the strain. All I could do was look at him; I couldnt look away, no matter how I tried. A man will look at something that is making him sick but he cant stop looking until he begins to vomit—something holds him. That was the way it was with me. Then, while I was watching him, this fellow reached up and touched the handle of the bayonet under his chin. He touched it easy, using the tips of his fingers, tender-like. I could see he wanted to grab and pull it out but he was worried about how much it would hurt and he didnt dare.

I let go of the rifle and rolled away. There were bluecoats running across the field and through the woods beyond. All around me men were kneeling and shooting at them like rabbits as they ran. Captain Plummer and two lieutenants were the only officers left on their feet. Two men were bent over Colonel Thornton where they had propped him against a tree with one of his legs laid crooked. Captain Plummer wasnt limping now—he'd forgotten his blisters, I reckon. He wasnt even hurt, so far as I could see, but the skirt of his coat was ripped where somebody had taken a swipe at him with a bayonet or a saber.

He went out into the open with a man carrying the colors, and then began to wave his sword and call in a high voice: "6th Mississippi, wally here! 6th Mississippi, wally here!"

Men begun stragling over, collecting round the flag, so I got up and went over with them. We were a sorry lot. My feet were so heavy I could barely lift them, and I had to carry my left arm with my right, the way a baby would cradle a doll. The captain kept calling, "Wally here! 6th Mississippi, wally here!" but after a while he saw there werent any more to rally so he gave it up. There were a little over a hundred of us, all that were left out of the four hundred and twenty-five that went in an hour before.

Our faces were gray, the color of ashes. Some had powder burns red on their cheeks and foreheads and running back

into singed patches in their hair. Mouths were rimmed with grime from biting cartridges, mostly a long smear down one corner, and hands were blackened with burnt powder off the ramrods. We'd aged a lifetime since the sun came up. Captain Plummer was calling us to rally, rally here, but there wasn't much rally left in us. There wasn't much left in me, anyhow. I felt so tired it was all I could do to make it to where the flag was. I was worried, too, about not having my rifle. I remembered what Sergeant Tyree was always saying: "Your rifle is your best friend. Take care of it." But if that meant pulling it out of the man with the mustache, it would just have to stay there. Then I looked down and be durn if there wasn't one just like it at my feet. I picked it up, stooping and nursing my bad arm, and stood there with it.

Joe Marsh was next to me. At first I didn't know him. He didn't seem bad hurt, but he had a terrible look around the eyes and there was a knot on his forehead the size of a walnut where some Yank had bopped him with a rifle butt. I thought to ask him how the Tennessee breed of elephant compared with the Kentucky breed, but I didn't. He looked at me, first in the face till he finally recognized me, then down at my arm.

"You better get that tended to."

"It don't hurt much," I said.

"Allright. Have it your way."

He didn't pay me any mind after that. He had lorded it over me for a month about being a greenhorn, yet here I was, just gone through meeting as big an elephant as any he had met, and he was still trying the same high-and-mightiness. He was mad now because he wasn't the only one who had seen some battle. He'd had his big secret to throw up to us, but not any more. We all had it now.

## THE EGOTRON

I think is what those science fellows should develop next.

**James Laughlin**

JAMES LAUGHLIN, publisher of New Directions books, editor of the NEW DIRECTIONS ANNUAL, is also the author of several books on poetry.

## Themistocles Hoetis

# AKIN AND THE SMALL BOY

*Copyright, 1952, by Themistocles Hoetis. Part of a novel, THE MAN WHO WENT AWAY, to be published by Pellegrini and Cudahy.*

*Themistocles Hoetis*, born in Detroit of parents who came from Sparta, Greece, was educated at Wayne University in Detroit, at the University of California at Los Angeles, and at the Sorbonne and the Académie Julian in Paris. His poetry has appeared in various little magazines. With co-editor Albert Benveniste, Mr. Hoetis published in 1949 and 1950 an experimental literary magazine, *Zero*, issued in Paris and Tangier. *Akin and the Small Boy* is a part of a chapter of his first novel, *THE MAN WHO WENT AWAY*, to be published by Pellegrini and Cudahy.

necktie-shaped fabric, over and around her high collar. She walks downstairs, out into the street.

She carries a pencil-box purse. A letter addressed to Alex, a half-slice of dried bread, and eighty cents in pennies wobble from one side to the other within the pencil box.

"Will I meet a friend who will invite me to lunch?" Akin automatically asks herself. And the thought quickly passes.

She walks two blocks directly ahead, four blocks to her right, then down a sloping hill which leads to the railway depot. She can see the huge clock of the church steeple just behind the station. Still only ten-fifteen. Akin walks the remainder of the street slowly, for it is early. And as she walks, she playfully presses her pencil-box purse lightly against the wire fence at her right, creating a drumming sound. . . .

When Akin enters the station, she still has seven minutes to wait for her train. After circling the waiting room several times, stopping idly at each of the double life-size photographs plastered halfway to the ceiling—*The American Worker Today*—Akin pauses, opens her pencil box and recounts her pennies. Finally she sits at the back of the station on a long, hardwood bench. The minutes pass slowly.

She stretches her legs out before her and leans back, resolved not to think about anything. Her eyes wander over the

**T**HE DOOR is closed and the key turns inside the lock. Akin wraps a silk band, a magenta

enlarged photographs to the ceiling above, which is painted brick color.

"Ugly ceiling," she says to herself just as a small boy approaches her, walking along on the seat of the bench.

The boy stops a few feet from Akin and stares at her with infantile open-mouthedness. He then brings his hands to his lips and begins giggling mischievously. Akin straightens up in her pose, crosses her knees, takes the pencil box in one hand and places one wrist over the other on her lap. The boy points to Akin's stomach while still covering his mouth with one round pink hand. He says: "I know what you've got," in a rhythmical voice.

Akin turns to him as though she has not seen him approach her, as though she had not heard him speak. Her movement is calculated and her eyes are only half open.

"What did you say, little boy?" says she.

"You can't fool me," says he abruptly. He holds his arms awkwardly and poses both feet the width of the bench. "You don't have to pretend with me, lady." He looks down at Akin and the expression on his face changes. He then speaks as though reciting a school poem: "My name is Walter. My age is eight years old. My mommy is a housewife. My daddy is a bread-truck driver." The boy smiles to himself. He is proud of his father who drives a bread truck. Akin ignores him, however.

The boy now leans forward and his face comes within inches of Akin's ear. "My mommy says little boys like me have a right to know about those things. I'm eight years old already," says he, almost in a whisper. "Mommy says Daddy put six babies in her belly. Every summer Daddy puts a baby in Mommy's belly," he says.

Akin makes believe she doesn't know the boy is standing on the seat beside her.

"Look! Look!" says the boy. And he points to the first long bench at the front of the waiting room.

One, two, three, four, five. Five small children, each one slightly bigger than the next, sit quietly in a line. At the left of the tallest child sits a woman reading a *Love Story* magazine and wearing a pink and lavender net hat. Akin raises herself, mechanically turns right, walks to the ticket window and buys a one-way fare to Manhattan. Her eyes are still half closed.

Once on the train, Akin walks from coach to coach. In the last car there are a number of vacant seats. She chooses the one farthest away from the other passengers, and seats herself comfortably. As the train begins to move, she watches the dull landscape flicker by.

The sun has come out. A few minutes pass as Akin smiles at her reflection in the plate-glass window to her left.

Just then the boy who had spoken to her in the waiting room at Roselle is seen down the far end of the car. He slowly moves down the aisle, settling himself on the seat next to Akin. She is annoyed. What could he be wanting now? she asks herself. Akin gathers her skirt tightly under her legs and covers her stomach with her arms. The boy sits quietly and doesn't speak.

Five minutes pass.

At length the child pulls on the sleeve of her blouse, very gently. Akin does not stir from her blank stare toward the seat opposite them.

"Lady?" says the boy softly. "Can I sit here?"

Akin is silent.

"Lady?" says the boy a bit louder, thinking she hasn't heard him. "Can I sit here?"

"Yes, you may," says Akin without looking at him. "You may sit there if you promise to be quiet."

"I'll be quiet," promises the boy. A tear floods his eyes as though someone was about to slap his face.

Akin is still feeling rather uneasy. She slides the top of her pencil box open and rearranges the objects within in neat piles. She is trying to clear her mind, so as to return to her own ideas.

"Lady?" begins the boy once more. "I've got to sit here because there isn't any more chairs in the coach where my Mommy's at."

"All right, then. Sit there!" shouts Akin in an angry voice. She hopes that the boy now understands she doesn't want to have anything to do with him.

After a long silence, Akin reconsiders her feelings. She has been rude to the small boy, and unless she makes some friendly remark to him, she will be upset for the remainder of the day. Akin leans close to him to say pleasantly, "What's your name, little boy?"

He smiles. He is delighted. He is overwhelmed. Says he, "Put 'n tame, ask me again and I'll tell you the same," laughingly, jokingly.

Akin centers herself back at her own side of the seat. Now she is cross with herself for having asked the boy his name.

"What's your name?" asks he while moving over to lean on Akin's arm.

She ignores the boy, trying to recall the thoughts which she had developed before he came.

"Lady? What's your name?" says he louder.

Akin rubs her forehead nervously. She wants to block away the boy's question from her mind. "Akin Arahk," she says in a quick voice, as though just having been cross-examined.

"Funny name you've got," comments the boy, who has moved back to his side of the seat. He is determined to keep

up a conversation with Akin for the remainder of the voyage. "Everybody says I've got a funny name, too." He looks down at his dirty hands. "But I don't care. My name's Walter—but I don't care. Some people's got funny names, and some people don't. I don't care though what they call people. My two brothers' names is Alfred and Willy. That's just as funny. Ain't it, lady?"

"Yes," says Akin, feeling rather silly for having become overly emotional. "Names really don't matter a great deal, you know. It's the people themselves who count."

"Names really don't matter a great deal," says the boy, repeating Akin's phrase. "My sisters are called Joanne, Mildred and Dizzy. But I don't care. Names really don't matter a great deal," parrots he, thinking that he has made a friend of Akin.

Akin looks over and smiles at the small boy. He smiles at her, moves nearer once more and places one hand under Akin's arm.

"You know," begins the boy in a profound tone, "you know, if I had a baby I wouldn't call it anything. I wouldn't call it anything until it was grown up. I'd let it call its own name. That's what I'd do."

She is amused by what the boy has said. Akin looks down to her stomach, then faces the boy. "I believe your idea is entirely sound," she says. "Children should be allowed to choose names for themselves."

"Lady?" says he in the same pleading voice with which he had begun speaking to her. "Are you going to let your baby choose its own name?"

"Yes. Of course I am. When my baby has grown up, I'll let it decide upon a name for itself."

"What are you going to call it until it grows up?" asks the boy, questioning himself as well as Akin.

"I don't know exactly," replies Akin. She thinks to herself a moment, then says, "If it's a boy, I'll call it Boy. If it's a girl, I'll call it Girl."

"That's right," says the boy, smiling at her inability to solve the problem. "But do you know if your baby is going to be a boy or a girl?"

Akin laughs. "I don't know just yet," she says, and suddenly wonders to herself. Is my baby going to be a boy or a girl?

"I'll bet your baby is going to be a girl," offers the small boy. "I bet if you let me feel your belly I can tell you if it's going to be a girl or not."

What a strange thing for a child to say, thinks Akin. Isn't it rather precocious for a child his age to want to feel my stomach, to feel my baby inside? Akin quickly glances about to assure herself that no one has heard their conversation. She then leans nearer the boy's face and says softly, "All right, Walter. You can feel my belly, if you really think you can tell whether I'm going to have a boy or a girl."

The small boy beams as though he had just won a candy-stick at the circus. With exaggerated gestures, he pulls back his sleeves and looks out the plate-glass window for a moment. Then his tiny hands approach her and he places them caressingly on Akin's stomach. He closes his eyes as he begins moving his fingers across one side, then the other, and pressing lightly each time. Akin feels rather foolish; yet she is quite moved by the seriousness with which the boy plays his game. His hands are like little butterflies.

"No. Not yet," says he. His eyes are still closed.

Akin relaxes in her seat and allows the boy all the time he wants. She is wondering what the small boy will say. Will it be a girl? Will it be a boy? Akin is wishing she will have a boy. A boy is stronger. Should she find that she is unable to support herself and a child after it has arrived, it will be easier to let a boy go—easier than a girl. Girls are sensitive and weak about these matters. Boys always manage to survive the blow of discovering that they are alone in the world. Sometimes it is a good stimulus for them. They go off and become explorers, adventurers, seekers. I do hope he says it will be a little boy, thinks Akin finally.

The jarring of the train, the movement of the boy's searching fingers, thoughts of another day when other hands passed across her stomach in this same manner give Akin the impulses of passion. Her lips part slightly.

"I bet I can tell you now!" says he as he opens his eyes. He slides his hands away. "I was wrong the first time, but I bet I can tell you now."

Akin rises from the seat and takes her pencil box in her hands.

"Wait a moment," says she, patting the boy's head affectionately. "Wait till I come back and you can tell me then. I'll only be gone a moment."

The boy's round, blue eyes follow Akin's graceful movements as she walks to the end of the aisle and disappears within a door marked: Ladies.

## Alice Dennis

*Alice Dennis* was born in Elmira, New York, and went to Elmira College. For six years after graduation she divided her time between newspaper reporting and working seriously at creative writing. Now a part-time instructor in the School of Journalism at Syracuse University, she is married to a Syracuse newspaperman and lives in Liverpool, New York, in a small house surrounded by a forest and a garden. She recently completed her first novel and is at work on another.

# THE DEATH OF MISS EMMA K. WOOD

ONE BRIGHT SPRING morning it happened that Miss Emma K. Wood of the prominent James Street Woods lay dying upon the cluttered walk of an east side section of the city.

She had been struck down accidentally and unexpectedly by a knife, and she leaned against the shirt of Henry Montague, pastor of the Negro Church of God in Jesus Christ, as they waited for the ambulance to arrive.

Whenever Emma opened her eyes very wide, there lingered over her head a patch of blue sky, a gay spring sky beyond the bobbing garden patch of dark heads peering at her, and she heard noises as of the bees in the blossoms of her own James Street garden, shrill now, and then soft. Words spoken by people crowded around her seemed to mean nothing. Occasionally she identified great hours drifting over her and lowering upon her sight a soft and violent curtain; and then abruptly she would revive to the sour breath of the man who held her upright so that her breathing was easier. His breath stirred at her ear like a summons to wake and observe.

Emma Wood was thirty-nine years old and she had been reared a lady all her life. Her parents, Dr. and Mrs. Hartley Pearson Wood, had married late but nevertheless they had wanted an appropriate heir who would liven the "family" as their meager relationship was somewhat reverently termed. Alas, they had spawned only Emma Katherine who had been "slow" from birth and who was neither a child nor a young woman of beauty and promise.

In the faltering Wood mansion on James Street, Emma Katherine had spent a good share of her life and certainly



expected to die there. The broad front hall of the house was covered by a dark and somber paper, and a mirror and a coat rack stood at the end of the corridor near the stair. Whenever Emma returned home from errands, she would hang her coat and hat upon that rack and go into the parlor to talk with her mother. Of all Emma's external life her parents were most careful to be aware: her clothes, her personal habits, and her books from the public library.

Whenever Dr. Wood thought of it, he said: "Emma, straighten up your shoulders. How can you expect to be an attractive woman if you're round-shouldered?"

Emma always replied that she'd try to remember though she often wished privately that her parents would leave her alone about such hopeless things. That seemed to be their primary regard—her round shoulders. "How I wish that Mama and Papa would love me," she often thought to herself for she knew that she was neither elegant nor brilliant, indeed the very opposite of those qualities her parents so frequently admired. Dr. Wood had been a Phi Beta Kappa at Princeton and Mrs. Wood had attended Smith. It was all a good many years ago, Emma knew, but they recalled those times, and they had expected a superior child.

When Emma Wood was in her twenties, some harshly observant young man had commented behind her back: "Emma Wood is the youngest old maid I've ever seen," and by the time that she was in her thirties, her role was confirmed—at least as far as the community was concerned.

Emma's face was extremely long and thin, and her narrow nose had about it a pinched look as though she suffered from a continual cold or perhaps the anticipation of one. Her hair was black and so meager that unless it were carefully combed, she tended to display a bald spot across the back of her head. Emma wore clothing like sheets draped upon a pole on a windless day and she carried her body with a stooping haste.

But the secret and most important inner life of the man and the woman upon the earth is so discrepant from its outward form that it is often a mistake to assume any fixed affiliation between the two. How Emma's inward secret life fed upon realities and unrealities that had no living shadow elsewhere!

It was not known to James Street nor indeed to Dr. and Mrs. Wood but once upon a time their Emma had been loved. It had been a brief and passing affair and as far as the young man was concerned, he might just as well have been dead for all that Emma Wood knew later. Yet the brief incident, if such it may be called, did take place when Emma was away from James Street for the first and only time in her life—when she attended business college in Buffalo and resided at a boarding house with other girls at the school and was taken

to the movies and the amusement parks by a phthisic young fellow named Ben Rogers.

Just at the bloom time of adolescence, despite a rather unpleasant and obvious coyness and a preliminary frigidity, Emma had been cherished and she had loved in return. As a matter of fact, the affair had even reached the point where Emma had abandoned herself completely and had spent one entire night with Ben Rogers, an experience which was as vivid—perhaps more so—to her at thirty-nine as it had been at nineteen. And then Ben had graduated and gone away somewhere and eventually Emma whose hopes had been high ceased to hear from him. She herself never finished at the business college because she simply couldn't get all that shorthand and bookkeeping through her head, and she returned to James Street to help her mother keep house and do the marketing and to live out her life in the legitimate pattern which an impish and partial Providence assigned her.

In her thirty-ninth year, with neither grace nor candor, Emma was dying. Her black straw hat had been knocked askew when she slipped to the sidewalk and her legs angled clumsily apart like stiff straws. However, Montague had removed her hat and brushed the hair from her eyes, and the upright position into which he raised her eliminated that almost obscene display of leg.

Word of the knifing had reached Montague at once and he had rushed from his kitchen without a coat although he prided himself on not appearing in public without ecclesiastical adornment. Nevertheless he always wore a clerical collar about the house, and since he had snatched his hat from a peg near the door, he preserved a certain institutional air which in such instances of panic and disorder is welcomed by a crowd.

Montague was stout and his skin so black that at times, especially in moments of spiritual ecstasy or excitement, it appeared to have a gray tinge, which was apparent on the day that Emma Wood died. His eyes bulged slightly from his skull and Emma noted in moments of vague lucidity that there were irregular brown stains upon his starting eyeballs.

"He is a Negro," Emma Wood thought, "and I do not mind at all."

Gradually her face lost its sallow dullness, for the very effort with breathing had brightened her narrow blue eyes. The knowledge that this man held her upright so that breath was a much simpler procedure was like a strength in itself, as though his unhampered respiration gave endurance to her own, and the rapid steady pulse in his stout throat was a sign of her own vigor.

"Water—a glass of water?" Emma sighed.

"Git her some water," Montague cried out to the crowd and an energetic fellow in a waiter's apron rushed off on the

errand to the back door of the Green Lantern Tavern nearby.

"What a pity," Emma thought dimly as she waited, "that this funny black man is looking at me just the way I always wanted Mama and Papa to look at me. What a pity it is that we're so far apart, this nigger an' me, because if I was black and his daughter, maybe he'd love me like a daughter, and I would love him in return. Or if he was white and in Mama's and Papa's place, perhaps he'd love me so and look at me with the same tenderness and speak softly to me and not be cross with me so often."

Emma Wood smiled oddly then, twisting her mouth in a line which the gaping throng of colored and white folks took for pain. She smiled because she remembered that at no other time in her life, except perhaps when she had been with Ben Rogers, had anyone ever looked at her with compassion, especially up there on James Street where she was Dr. Wood's unwanted lonely old maid daughter.

For several years—about five—Emma had been walking through the noisy crowded dirty east side to get away from the James Street world. She walked there because once, by accident, she supposed, a man had accosted her and although she had been terrified she had also been flattered and in her life such little adventures were not easy to forget.

It had happened about five years before her fatal accident. She had taken a short cut through the east side area from the city market to James Street. She had been in a great hurry and had to wait for a traffic light at Perry and Vine Streets. Across from where she waited was the Green Lantern Tavern and on its steps a dozen Negroes were lounging. Behind Emma was Settlement House with its vast barren clay playground swarming with screaming children, and on the other corners were several establishments including a pool room, three beer joints and a hot dog stand.

In the midst of all that clamor and braying of human voice and autos, there strolled toward Emma in contempt of the traffic a short ungainly man with a shabby umbrella under one arm. He walked with a rolling gait. He wore a turtleneck sweater under an open coat (it was October and cool—oh, Emma remembered that day!) and his face was dirty and mottled with the stubble of a beard. On his lower lip was a small pustulating sore and he seemed to have scarcely any chin at all. That he was dirty and carried an umbrella were all that Emma noticed at first because she was intent on getting away from the place, clutching her market basket and her purse securely under her arm, but when the man stepped on the curbing, he brushed against Emma's side, stumbled purposely, and he said: "Hel-lo, baby," before he straightened up in a lurching way.

"Hel-lo, baby," he repeated deliberately, pausing there beside Emma who glanced around in absolute and astonished

surprise, and when she turned her head, she saw him wink and gesture.

"Hel-lo, baby," he had said, and as Emma crossed the street, his voice continued to fondle in her mind although she had discouraged him with a severe frown. "Hel-lo, baby," he had said, giving her a meaning look from head to toe, and without glancing around, she could picture exactly how that gleam sparkled in his eye.

As Emma crossed the street and passed by the group of Negroes on the tavern corner, she began to swagger a little and she was quite aware of their several curious eyes upon her, measuring, so that her face flushed a bright unflattering crimson and she experienced a flustered embarrassment like a girl at her first dance.

"I declare, Emma," Mrs. Wood said later in the day after lunch, "I declare, I don't know what makes you so kittenish." For Emma had indulged in all kinds of silly remarks since she had come home. Later Mrs. Wood confided privately to her husband that one might almost think that Emma had been drinking.

Ever since that day Emma arranged special expeditions for herself through the east side area. Usually she made these trips on market day when she could hustle along the sidewalk with her market basket pinched under her arm as though her journey there were legitimate; and although she heard tales of assault and social outrage there, yes, even of death, nothing happened to her except that she often drew from the loiterers, black and white, glances of curiosity and appraisal and sometimes even an ironic whistle as she went by.

Later in the day when she sat beneath the great yellow hanging globe of the dining room lamp and moved her napkin carefully to her mouth as she had been taught to do, she recalled the trip she had made that day and it seemed to her that the dining room with her mother and father so precise and ultimate in their ways rocked with laughter. At such moments Dr. Wood frowned when he noticed that foreign expression on his daughter's face and he would exchange a private glance or two with his wife.

After dinner the two women might play cards or read *Good Housekeeping Magazine* or the *Saturday Evening Post* while Dr. Wood carefully perused the *New York Times*. He had discontinued evening office calls some years ago. Later, before retiring, Emma would press her mother's hand with a timid nocturnal cordiality and go to bed. Dr. Wood disliked any unnecessary display of emotion.

"Kissing is unsanitary and ridiculous," he frequently admonished the women of his household, and also in the interests of health he bought day-old bread at the grocery store and insisted that Emma sleep with her windows thrown wide open.

Lying flat in her big brass bed, his daughter mused on all the strange and wondering faces she had seen on the east side, and often as a ritual before sleep, she recalled the lost sweet time when she had known Ben Rogers and had been loved by him, and she frequently fell asleep pretending that his arms were around her and his body warm and intimate with the soft parts against her own.

So Emma Wood drew her inner life and heart's food from her youth and from those secret detours through the other part of the city. It was in those moments of measurement in the casual eyes of the loiterers that she wistfully gleaned—as though each of the laggards around the taverns and the beer joints and the hot dog stands and the pool rooms was saying as he measured her swift, odd and strutting approach: “Why—hel-lo, baby.”

She cut a figure with her touch of mincing, and her half-glimpsed shy flirting practice, because her ungainliness had something of the grotesque about it. If there was a snigger in her wake, she did not care. No one knew her and she had no desire to know anyone. Her flirtations were based on anonymity and nourished her lively paupered soul.

There came the day, however, in Emma Wood's life when her affectations found her out, and that was the May morning in her thirty-ninth year when the knifing accident took her life.

There had been a gang around the steps of the Green Lantern Tavern concentrated on a quarrel between a towering black Negro with an ugly scowl and a lighter lad in a sports jacket and open-throated shirt. At the top of the tavern steps were two young Negro women, one with a white turban wrapped around her head, and it was she who gazed down at the two antagonists poutingly with curious disdain. Emma glanced at all of these and in her stiff simpering gait she skirted the edge of the throng, and then she was past the crowd.

Suddenly the light brown boy cried out: “Yuh cain't talk tuh steel,” and he plunged out of the mob. The taller Negro followed him scowling. Someone shouted: “Stop!” to the brown boy and as he twisted near Emma, the giant Negro opened up a large-sized pocket knife and flung it swiftly and surely at the lad's retreating back. Experienced in such affairs, the natty young man ducked and the blade caught Emma Wood squarely between the shoulders. The young man and his assailant kept running and neither of them was ever seen again.

“Somebody's hit me,” Emma thought first, halting suddenly with a puff of surprise and anger and observing the brown boy slide between a butcher shop and a coal shack across the street. Then she had trouble getting her breath and in a minute she was on the sidewalk.

With shrill hysterical cries the crowd dispersed and reformed around Emma. Someone phoned for the police and

someone else summoned Henry Montague whose house and church were directly behind the tavern. The knife which had fallen to the pavement was snatched away by the girl with the white scarf around her head. Emma's pocketbook and market basket disappeared, too, but no one discovered what happened to them.

When the waiter returned from the tavern with a glass of water for Emma, Montague held it to her mouth. She raised her eyes and sipped and then turned her head drowsily away.

"How dry the water is," she thought. "More like sand," for she choked on it and it clogged her throat. She was exhausted but the man's touch held her there to life.

"No more w-water," Emma gasped.

"Hang onta this, boy," Montague instructed the waiter, handing him the glass while the crowd watched curiously. "Ah don' know ef she's gwan ta last 'til the ambulance git heah."

"Hit's comin'," someone cried. "Ah kin heah hit."

The multitude was considerably quieter now and more sedate, for it had accustomed itself to the spectacle of Emma Wood and the spreading stain of her blood on Montague's shirt. It had even inured itself to that moment of expectation of her death and so it waited, with the same frantic awe an individual waits, for Emma Wood to die.

Emma leaned heavily upon Montague and discovered that breath was actually becoming a nuisance. The air sifted through her nose with a painful dart as though it were filled with minute wood splinters and so she opened her mouth to assist the air.

"Git back. Stan' back," Henry Montague ordered hoarsely to the crowd as the ambulance stopped with a loathsome whine. Henry motioned the onlookers aside with his free arm. "Let the doc in heah," he cried.

Emma's eyes were closed but she was not dead. She felt the thud of Montague's heart; she could sense the muscles of his chest lift as he motioned for the interne. Whenever she had opened her eyes during the long period of waiting, the man had been there and it seemed to Emma that never had father or mother or even lover looked on her with such clemency.

Never had anyone given Emma such a share of voluntary benevolence as the sour-breathed man who bolstered her so that even as she seemed to sleep, to slip away from the scene and then return as in a dream to the sidewalk, she was hauled back to life by the sweaty pressure of his hand and his breath on her face.

"Tell the doc ta head in heah," Montague barked at the waiter because the interne was seeking a path at the outskirts of the crowd.

Grimacing in a puzzled way, Emma heard once more the tones of his voice at her ear though she could not at all distinguish their meaning; she reveled a century or so, it seemed,

in the great wealth of that infrequent pity of man for man, of the single naked humanity of one individual for another, anonymous and unidentified upon the earth, divested of triteness and of sex, and then, difficult as it was to forego life at that moment, Emma Wood gasped slightly, choked, and died.

## Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip C. Johnson

*Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip C. Johnson* have collaborated on a number of books and articles, the most notable of which is **THE INTERNATIONAL STYLE**, published in 1932. Henry-Russell Hitchcock is a well-known architectural historian whose books include **IN THE NATURE OF MATERIALS—THE BUILDINGS OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT—1887-1941**, and **THE ARCHITECTURE OF H. H. RICHARDSON**. He is now Professor of Art at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. Philip C. Johnson, widely known for his Glass House, is Director of the Department of Architecture and Design of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

# THE BUILDINGS WE SEE

**LOOKING** at great buildings has always provided one of the favorite occupations of the traveler. It is legitimate therefore to consider architecture visually from time to time, as does the traveler, as well as more practically in the way of those who must live and work in the buildings of which our cities are made. Men and women who are hardly conscious, in the circumstances of their everyday life, of the buildings around them, will when in Rome go to see the Colosseum; and while in Athens they will notice the Parthenon, if only on their way up from the Piraeus. Today there are at least a few modern buildings, some here and some abroad, all designed and erected in the last few years, that are not unworthy of a similar tribute from the traveling public.

In America, the great monuments of architecture have long been neither temples of religion nor amphitheaters for diversion; rather they are structures of the workaday world—office buildings, apartment houses, industrial plants. Certainly for

foreigners who visit America, that Alpine range of tall buildings, rising like a mirage ahead of the liner as it moves up New York harbor, provides the first strong visual impression of the New World and doubtless the one longest remembered. Only a very few of them, we can be sure, will ever see Eliel Saarinen's modern churches in the Middle West or Burnham Hoyt's magnificent Red Rocks Amphitheater in the Rockies.

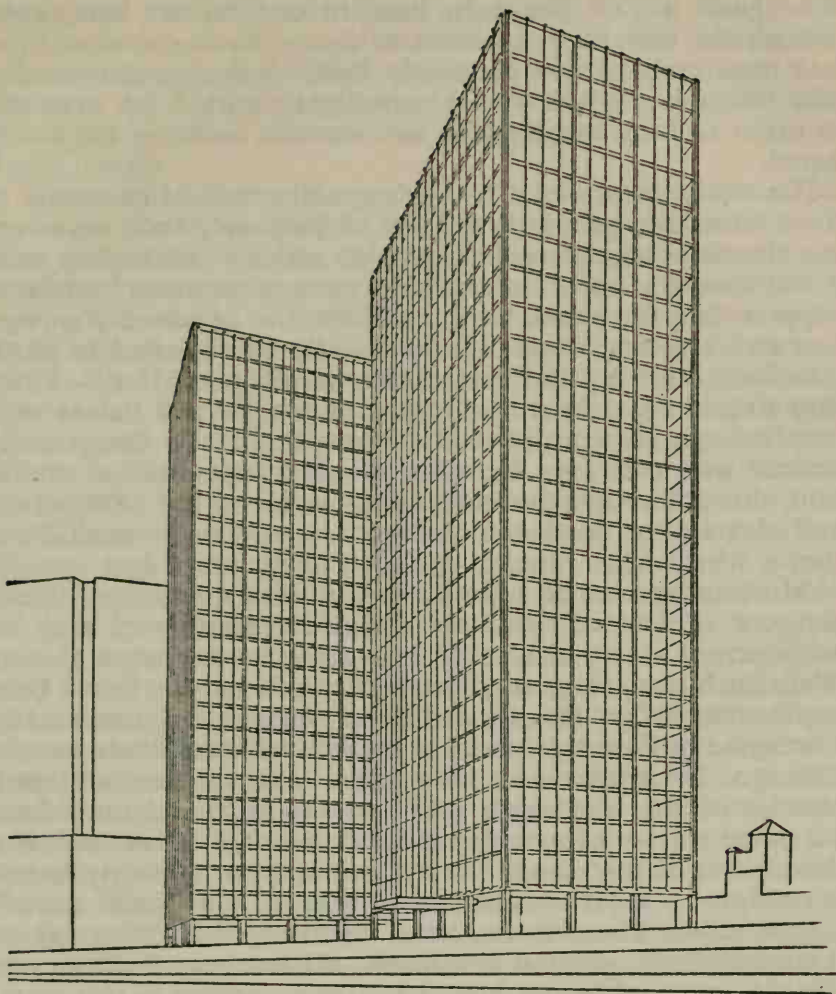
Yet, "New York is not America." Visitors who prepare themselves in advance for the new architecture on this side of the Atlantic are generally aware that Chicago, the skyscraper's birthplace, offers a more typical—and also a more distinguished—array of American skyscrapers than does Manhattan. The New York skyline, moreover, is lost to the visitor once he has landed; while Chicago's will be repeatedly deployed before him every time he travels along the Outer Drive.

To that cliff-like Chicago skyline, which has included for half a century and more several of the finest buildings of Louis Sullivan, a striking addition has lately been made. Where the city projects eastward, like a peninsula, into the lake north of the Chicago River's mouth there now stand two towers (see Figure 1) designed by the famous architect, Mies van der Rohe. The apartments in these towers are open to the lake both on the east and on the north—and open they are indeed, since all the walls of the two towers are but a grid of steel filled with glass. Unlike the United Nations Building, whose sheer glass walls rise by the East River in New York, these new Chicago towers, for all the apparent monotony of their surface treatment, have very subtle effects of surface relief and also offer considerable variety of appearance when seen from different directions. By means of projecting mullions, Mies has given the façades a three-dimensional character; moreover, they seem in perspective to change from open to solid and from solid to open as the observer moves about them.

The two rectangular units which together constitute this apartment house are identical externally in size and shape, though differently subdivided within. But the two units are so disposed at right angles to one another that their joint silhouette is never the same; indeed they are usually apprehended by the observer as partially overlapping entities. The surrounding space within the boundaries of the ample site, moreover, plays a very active part in the impression that this building makes. This space provides the open setting in which their reticulated volumes exist; it also continues beneath them between the broadly spaced metal piers that descend to the ground.

A great part of the charm of the famous American skylines created earlier in this century—like the one further south here in Chicago, facing east on Michigan Avenue—lies in their uncontrolled exuberance of silhouette which results from the casual juxtaposition of edifices of various heights and shapes. Here, however, the urbanistic effect of these two





*Figure 1—  
Mies van der Rohe, 860 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago—1950.*

related towers has been studied just as carefully as has every other facet of their design. By themselves alone, they seem to prefigure a new order of visual organization of the twentieth century city-scape.

Mies has been called an architects' architect. Few ordinary observers would be likely—or even perhaps interested—to distinguish for themselves the specific visual effects which result from his subtle treatment of these façades. To most people there might seem nothing more to say about this evidently very exceptional building than that its walls are nearly all glass. Yet few observers will be incapable of sensing that a very striking result has been achieved. Unless one studies the elevations carefully, it must seem that Mies has done this with exceedingly simple—not to say obvious—means. As is often the case, however, the more knowing soon come to realize

how great an art has been used to conceal art here, even though the extreme refinement of the particular devices Mies has used makes them peculiarly hard to isolate analytically. The width of the windows is very slightly varied, for example, in order to keep the distance between the mullions absolutely equal.

To connoisseurs of Chicago's architecture Mies seems to have taken up again here the line of Sullivan's early skyscrapers almost precisely where the older architect let it drop over a half-century ago. The average person, however, tends to suppose that the characteristic architecture of our day is rootless and anti-traditional. He can hardly be expected to know how long a history lies behind this building of Mies's—a history extending at least from the London Crystal Palace of a hundred years ago, in which Joseph Paxton temporarily housed with cast iron and glass the first international exhibition, down through the bold urban work of the 1890's here and abroad, to the glass skyscrapers intended for erection in Berlin which Mies himself designed thirty years ago.

Most architects and writers then shook their heads at those projects; if they accepted the ultimate feasibility of such an architecture at all, they saw it as reserved for some remote Wellsian future, forgetting too readily how closely it had been approached a few decades earlier by Horta in Belgium and by Chedanne in France, as well as by Sullivan and others here in Chicago. By no means all the other wild architectural prophecies of the nineteenth and early twentieth century have yet come true—nor, we may suspect, ever will come true. But this dream of the young Mies is not only an actuality today, it occupies a most prominent position in one of the world's largest cities. There in the heart of the Middle West, where America's three greatest architects—Richardson, Sullivan and Wright—worked before him, a European settled in this country for only fifteen years has made a positive addition to that mid-American city's architectural treasure. No one, whether they like them or not, can henceforth ignore these towers, nor even the particular attitude toward architectural design they so superbly illustrate.

The architecture we still call modern for want of a more specific name, the architecture which a quarter-century ago seemed to many no more than a fantastic hypothesis, is by now the accepted architecture of the mid-twentieth century. So many earlier visions have become present realities that one can trace a continuous line of development from the highly experimental projects of a generation ago not only to the major architectural monuments of our day, but to builders' "ranch" houses and even to "streamlined" drugstores as well. That, indeed, is what it means to have a living architectural style. Because modern architecture, in becoming ubiquitous, has also in too many contexts become vulgarized, there are

those who charge it with being inherently vulgar. But that is, of course, no more true of our modern building than of that of any other period which achieved a living architecture of its own: for obvious semantic reasons nothing can very well be really popular without also lying open to the charge of being vulgar.

The more serious charge against modern architecture has been not that it was vulgar, but that it was too aristocratic and also too ascetic. To this charge the few, but infinitely refined, works of an architect's architect like Mies are particularly open. Yet several of his buildings have come to have a rather wide appeal. Mies's early masterpiece and his most famous work, the German Pavilion built in 1929 for an exposition in Barcelona, was of course a highly specialized and primarily ornamental edifice. Demolished twenty years ago, it continues to live only in the memories of architects and students throughout the world. His latest masterpiece on the lake front in Chicago stands where no one can miss it, and even taxi drivers make comments on it.

Moreover, it is obviously successful from a practical point of view, providing residential accommodations of a most desirable nature, nor are the apartments (which vary considerably in size from three rooms to whole floors) particularly expensive, considering the character of the district. These towers should continue to provide, at least for several generations to come, a real monument of mid-twentieth century architectural achievement. They may even resist technical obsolescence; for the special advantages of their waterside site cannot readily be taken away from them. So Sullivan's Auditorium Hotel on Michigan Avenue has stood for more than sixty years even though it now houses a college instead of serving the multiple purposes for which it was originally designed.

The mention of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion brings to mind a very curious episode in the history of taste. In every previous epoch architecture has carried along, in its successive phases, the subsidiary art of furniture design. The present nearly universal acceptance of modern design may be confirmed by what has happened to furniture in this country in the last twenty-five years. In any given generation only a few people are directly concerned with the erection of buildings; but almost everyone (above a certain economic level at least) will have occasion to acquire some old or new furniture. For the Barcelona Pavilion Mies designed a chair of very great elegance which was also extremely expensive to produce (see Figure 2). Only a very few such chairs were made at the time, beyond those for the Pavilion itself, and the model achieved no general currency, even in the form of cheap imitations.

The apparent failure of the Barcelona chair seemed at the time to express a cultural dilemma. Its cost was as great or

greater proportionately than that of the architect-designed furniture of earlier centuries; while it was still implicit in the highest ideals of the day that modern design should not be considered acceptable on *visual* grounds alone. Unless good design (both in architecture and in furniture) could be provided so cheaply that it might rapidly be made available for everyone, it was supposed

to be castigated almost as though it were something positively anti-social! This ambition to serve everyone was not unworthy; it was moreover that of William Morris all over again. But when it was proved unfeasible some designers—like Morris before them—could see no help for the situation except through revolutionary political or economic change. The cause of modern design seemed sometimes to get lost in a sociological maze. Since beauty *per se* was at the time an inadmissible idea, the absolute visual qualities of the Barcelona chairs were disregarded.

What has actually happened in the case of the Barcelona chairs need not be considered disheartening. Eventually, without any reduction in their original cost, the Barcelona chairs were put into successful production some twenty years after they were first designed. As handsome and comfortable as ever, they may now be seen lending their special cachet to the foyers of current New York apartment houses and the newest banking rooms in the Middle West. (The solution of the problem of producing and distributing well-designed cheap furniture still remains as remote as ever.)

To the historian it must be a fascinating problem whether this late production of Barcelona chairs constitutes a sort of "revival" or, as is more probably the case, merely a lag in stylistic acceptance such as every earlier period has known. Our Colonial ancestors, in their architecture and furniture, were generally more than twenty years behind the most advanced modes of metropolitan London. When we wish to consider the pace of our own epoch, it is always healthy to check our conclusions with what happened in the past!

Parallel in some ways with the belated success of the Barcelona chair is the situation that arose several years ago regarding the United Nations Building in New York. There was no competition for this international capitol, such as had been held for the League of Nations Building in the mid-twenties—the curious machinations by which Le Corbusier's winning project of that earlier Geneva edifice failed of execution perhaps played some part in the decision not to hold a competition this time. Instead, top professional representatives of the various nations met in New York to prepare a joint

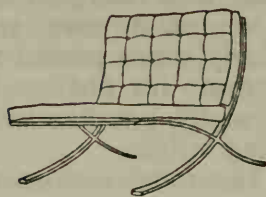


Figure 2—  
Mies van der Rohe,  
"Barcelona" chair—1929.

design. That design was eventually executed under the direction of Wallace Harrison. The "slab" skyscraper was certainly an idea contributed by Le Corbusier, who was the official French representative among the architects. As his own late projects for North African cities illustrate, however, he had long ceased proposing slabs as slick and scaleless as what eventually came to execution.

For the 1920's, the executed design which we have seen rising beside the East River would certainly have been revolutionary. Only Le Corbusier, moreover, would then have had the imagination and the courage to conceive it. But by the late 1940's the slab concept for tall office buildings had become widely accepted, indeed almost platitudinous. This particular version, having been developed by a committee of architects, lacks the strongly individual expression which might have given it a more positive character.

The underlying point here is that the United Nations Building is derivative, while Mies's Lake Shore Drive apartment house is original. Considering how much foreigners have contributed to the rising distinction of American architectural production in the last twenty years, it is a tragedy that this internationally-sponsored structure should not have been allowed to demonstrate at first hand (rather than at second or

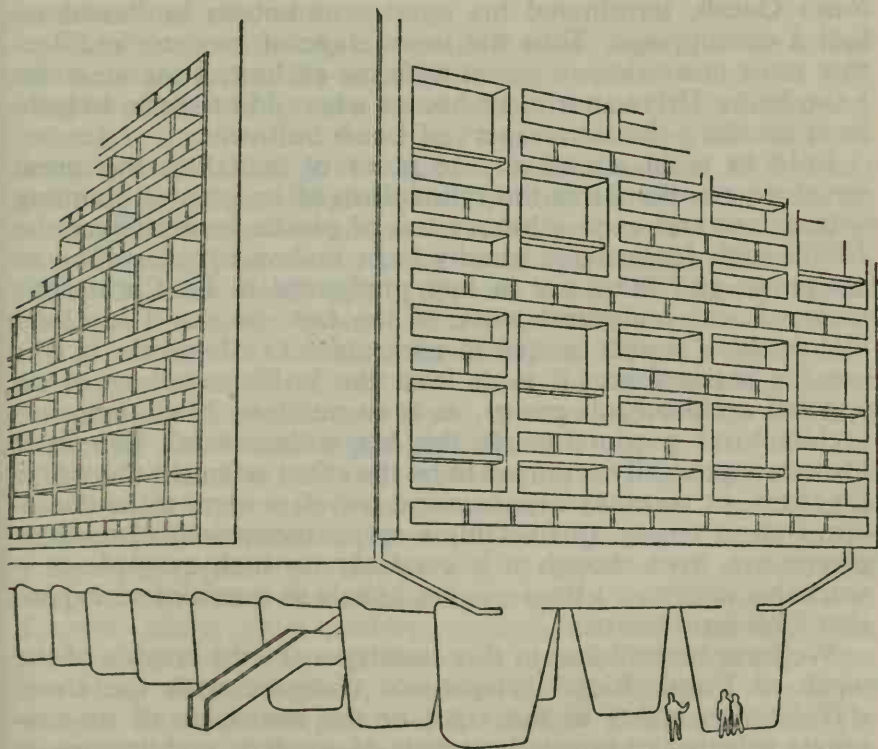


Figure 3—  
Le Corbusier, *Unité d'Habitation*, Marseilles, France—1951.

third hand) the newest and most powerful ideas of one of the greatest of modern architects.

To know Le Corbusier's late work one must see the *Unité d'Habitation* at Marseilles (see Figure 3)—the good fortune of only one of the authors of this article. This vast apartment house, a whole suburb in a single structure, is raised almost two stories off the ground on plastically modeled concrete piers. Above come eight double stories of apartments. The individual dwellings are all duplexes, not so much apartments in the ordinary sense as tiny two-story houses—only twelve feet wide. With their tall front living rooms, they follow very closely Le Corbusier's projected "Citrohan" houses of thirty years and more ago but are nevertheless very considerably smaller—so much has the minimal human dwelling space shrunk! A heavy framework of concrete supports and separates these dwellings. This skeleton provides remarkably deep reveals for protection from the Mediterranean sun. But the scale of the surface relief of the "walls" is also brought into harmony with that of the gigantic supports below. Above, on the vast roof, a complicated range of free-standing sculptural objects, which includes various ventilators, an elevator tower and even a gymnasium, offers a fantastic abstract landscape in concrete. Basically rational in concept, this landscape also recalls the rich plasticity with which that wild romantic, Antonio Gaudi, terminated his apartment houses in Barcelona half a century ago. Thus the latest stage of modern architecture once more rings a chord with the earliest, quite as at the Lake Shore Drive apartment houses where Mies seems to have been recalling the skyscrapers of Louis Sullivan.

Bold in scale almost to the point of brutality, this great structure emotionalizes the rationalism of its general planning with a free and even arbitrary use of plastic forms. Since the 1890's such forms have usually been reserved for painting or sculpture, and these are in fact prefigured in Le Corbusier's pictorial and sculptural work of the last decade. The *Unité d'Habitation* stands unique in its architect's life work. If it is not his masterpiece, it is at least the brilliant failure of an epochal architectural genius, as is so much of Michelangelo's architectural production. If the Marseillais won't live in it (which is generally reported to be the case) so much the worse for them, or so many architectural travelers seem to be deciding. Full or empty, this is truly a major monument of modern plastic art, even though it is certainly no such example of a workable apartment house as are Mies's so much more expensive Chicago towers.

We have no building in this country—at least outside of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright—to compare with the *Unité d'Habitation* either in the vigor or the assurance of its conscious solecisms against the tenets of modern architecture as first codified in the 1920's. (It is curious now to recall how

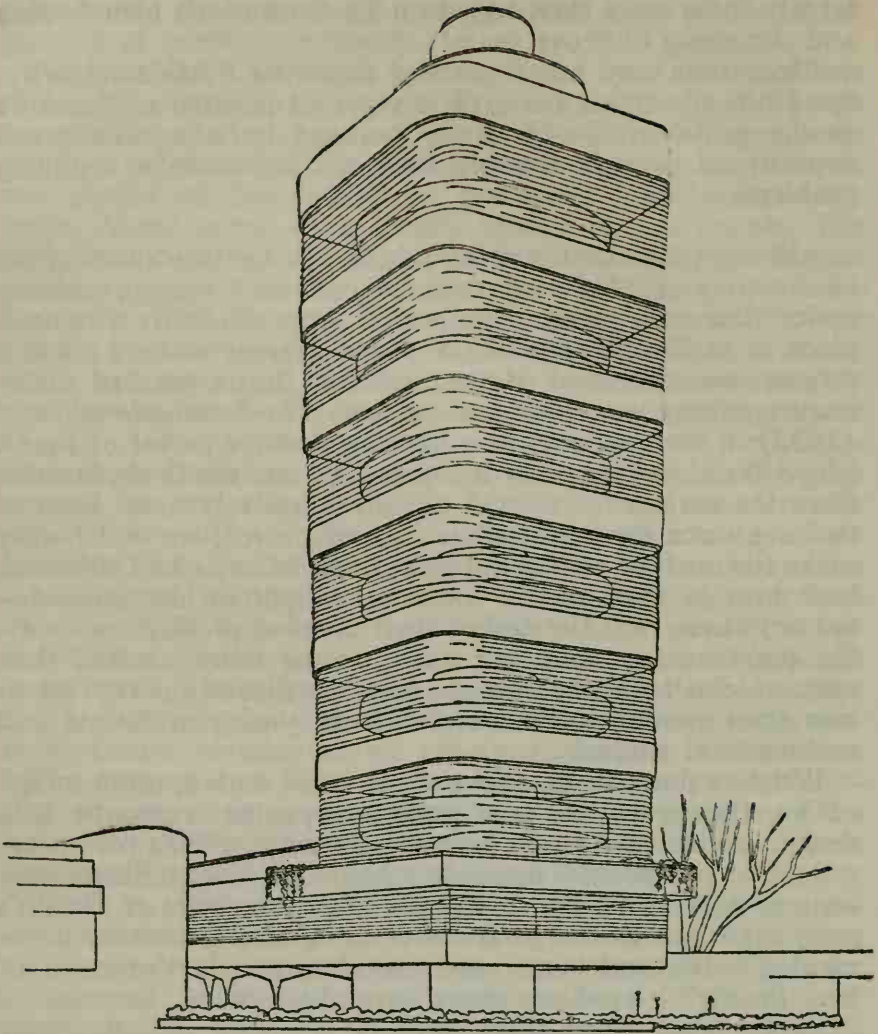
largely these were then based on Le Corbusier's own writing and designing of those years!)

More than any other postwar structure outside America, the *Unité* illustrates the artistic vigor of modern architecture in the mid-century—if hardly perhaps its now widespread capacity to provide sensible solutions for ordinary building problems.

Although the most striking of the mid-century monuments in America is Mies's apartment house in Chicago, another major American work, perhaps still more evidently a masterpiece, is in Racine, Wisconsin. If the present authors made a serious miscalculation of the probable future path of architecture twenty years ago in their book *The International Style* (1932), it was certainly in suggesting that the career of Frank Lloyd Wright—then sixty-five years old and relatively inactive since the early 1920's—was already effectively over. Both of us have since repented publicly of our error; we will hardly make the mistake now of supposing that Mies or Le Corbusier, both now in their sixties—or even Wright in his eighties!—are anywhere near the end of their creative production today. On the contrary their leadership seems more assured than ever, at least for some time to come, because of the rapt attention their newest works receive from young architects and architectural students.

Wright's production, above all, is more varied, more imaginative, than ever. He is a quite unrepentant romantic still, despite all the castigation he received in the 1920's for an approach to architecture that many then considered a nineteenth-century cultural hangover. Yet the basic classicism of Wright's early approach to design at the opening of this century is becoming better and better understood as the developments of his "Prairie" period are more carefully studied. In some of Wright's latest work there appears again an almost classic serenity, but it is combined, this time, with an almost Italianate suavity of form. This "classicism" of Wright's differs considerably from the harder and more intellectual—and hence too readily academicized—late manner of Mies; yet it is curiously parallel to it just the same.

Beside the Lake Shore Apartments in Chicago and the *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles—at that same highest level of creative achievement by which our age might aspire to be judged by posterity, can be placed the newest portions of Wright's Johnson Wax Building complex (see Figure 4) in Racine. Here, in a shabby, semi-industrial, semi-suburban area, a tall red brick wall cuts off a square court from the surrounding streets. Within, this court is as formally organized as any Renaissance piazza even though it actually provides three ranges of continuous carports around its edge. From the middle rises a minuscule skyscraper, a round-cornered tower



*Figure 4—  
Frank Lloyd Wright, Laboratory, S. C. Johnson Co.,  
Racine, Wisconsin—1950.*

full of laboratories, enclosed within glistening two-story wall-bands of glass tubing alternating with narrower bands of red brick. As with Mies's apartment towers, the surrounding space extends under the base of the tower; not however between isolated piers in this case but around a central core. Within that core the vertical services as well as the supporting structural elements of the entire edifice are concentrated, almost—and so Wright would certainly express the fact—as in the trunk of a great tree.

Here at Racine, Wright the city-hater is both urbane and urbanistic; the "worshiper of nature" has shown, moreover, how the most mechanized and man-made of materials—glass



and enameled iron and linoleum within, hard red brick and boldly-scaled poured concrete outside—can, in this appropriate context of scientific research and commercial promotion, be as warmly expressive (if in an almost antithetical way) as the rough rocks of the Arizona desert or the untreated woodwork of his domestic interiors.

Characteristically Wright chose the title, *In the Nature of Materials*, for a book (by one of the authors of this article) in which his architectural production is discussed and illustrated. And materials to Wright today evidently have rather wider aspects to their nature than might have been supposed some years ago. If, however, one recalls the interiors of his Larkin Office Building in Buffalo—now alas destroyed—for which he designed the first metal office furniture in 1905, the mechanical crispness and precision of execution at the Johnson laboratories will seem considerably less novel in his work.

This mechanical crispness—for many years almost a fetish with modern architects—is certainly no longer considered necessary in every context. The rough surfaces of the concrete elements that compose Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* at Marseilles contrast far more sharply with the paper-smooth rendering of his well-known work of the 1920's than they do with the sanded finish that Wright has used here at Racine on his plant-like piers.

Quite naturally, it has taken more than a generation to learn how to express visually the nature of modern materials to the best effect. Only time could make plain whether certain surface treatments would age gracefully or rapidly grow shabby. As modern architects' technical command of steel and concrete has increased, however, so has their capacity to give these materials variant types of expression when they are used in differing ways. The sharp edges proper for a precast concrete member are now seen to be unsuited to major structural elements poured in forms at the site. The sturdily sculptural piers beneath the *Unité d'Habitation*, with their surfaces striated by the grain of rough wooden forms, or the giant's picture-puzzles of irregular rocks, merely stuck together with concrete, in Wright's desert constructions are as remote from the brittle detailing characteristic of most work in the International Style of the 1920's as they are from the patterned cement blocks Wright was then using so exuberantly.

To men like Wright or Le Corbusier variation of expression in the handling of modern materials has come to have a very wide range. For they approach the problem intuitively, like a painter or sculptor, rather than rationally, like technical experts on materials. Different natural surroundings or the conscious pursuit of certain formal effects seem often to suggest to them themes of expression for particular buildings, rather than *a priori* conviction. To a Mies, or to other architects who follow his lead, the range of desired visual effects has re-

mained rather narrower; for they retain a conscious preference for the use of such smooth-surfaced materials—bricks, say, or exposed structural steel—as lend themselves to a relatively high degree of precision in handling.

Mies's attempt to achieve refinement of finish, exceptional for America, in the exposed concrete membering of his earlier Promontory Apartments in Chicago was none too successful. Yet like the clumsy overscaling of the concrete structure of Aalto's Senior House in Cambridge, Mies's failure there reflected a very significant fact: concrete is a material whose "nature" varies in different countries, and even in different regions of the same country according to local technical traditions. Traditionally, concrete is a more refined material in Europe or South America than in the United States.

The native connoisseur of modern architecture, quite as much as the foreign visitor to the Middle West, may well feel that the American contractors who have been designing grain elevators for many years also understand certain visual implications of concrete better than even the most sophisticated foreign architects. Poured concrete grain elevators should no more be considered architecture than old timber barns. But there are valuable clues as to the nature of various materials for modern architects in many simple edifices whose builders worked out their designs unconsciously but with an intuitive sympathy due to long, if limited, practice.

For architects now realize that they cannot arbitrarily limit their effective command of building materials to a few that are currently considered to be specifically contemporary. In using "traditional" or regional materials they are learning again both from the work of the past in general and from the living traditions of the particular locality in which they are building. (This does not mean a descent to that clumsy sort of architectural detailing described as "carpenteresque;" that is a mere surface parody of a "folk art," like the quaint misspellings used to give color to regional writing.)

Wright has always known this. And all his apprentices have been made to learn stone-laying in what is basically a local Wisconsin tradition, even though it has been much influenced over the years by his own textural preoccupations. No one has ever essayed so many variant types of visual expression for different materials—including stone—as has Wright, however. For he has always tried to be a "regionalist" of whatever area he was currently working in, from the Middle West to Japan, exploiting but never parodying local craft traditions. His pupils, alas, have too often confined themselves to a rather limited range of materials and effects, usually those in particular favor with him during their own short period of apprenticeship at Taliesin.

New York still awaits a building by either Mies or Wright.

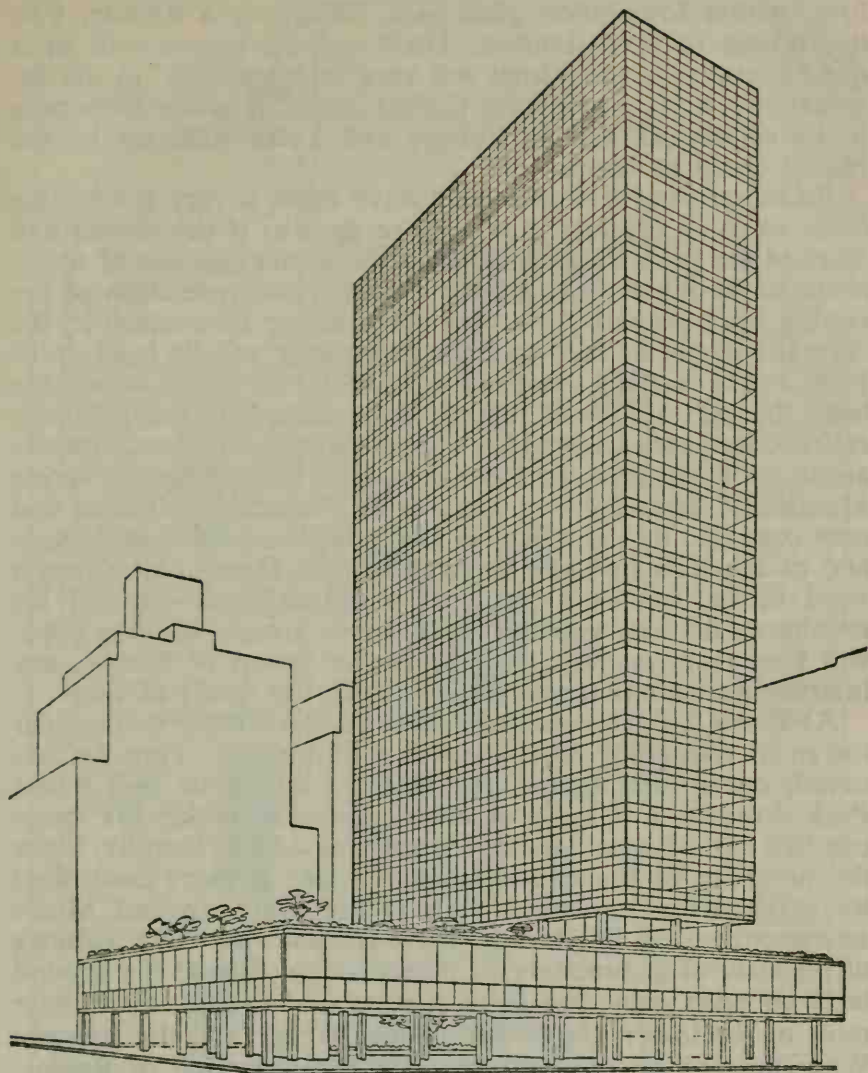


Figure 5—  
*Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Architects—Gordon Bunschaft,  
Designer—Lever House, New York—1951.*

But at least a Museum by the latter, to be erected on a prominent Fifth Avenue site, has been promised for some time, and will apparently shortly be built. In New York, as elsewhere, there is now much construction that shows Mies's influence. The most interesting postwar building in New York, Lever House (see Figure 5) on Park Avenue at 54th Street, while it lacks the ultimate perfection of finish of Mies's Lake Shore Drive apartment house, has certain important qualities in common with it. Gordon Bunschaft, of the New York office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, was the designer. This

firm, whose foundation goes back little over a decade, now has offices in several cities. Their current output—all of it quite literally, if sometimes not very imaginatively, in the International Style—spans the United States; it is also beginning to be carried abroad to Europe and Latin America by the Hilton chain of hotels.

Bunschraft and his associates have done a very bold thing here; to some critics it has even seemed as if the clients had allowed the architects to call the tune at the expense of maximum economic return. Actually subtle reinterpretation of the zoning laws prepared the way for a major innovation in the formal concept of the building. In a city as solidly built up as New York, outdoor space—not great size or height—has long been the greatest visual luxury. Once before, in the 1880's, a railroad magnate allowed his architects to group several houses around a court open to the street—the Villard houses across Madison Avenue from the rear of St. Patrick's Cathedral and now occupied by the offices of the publishers, Random House, and of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. Henry Villard soon went broke, but as a result of a railroad war—not of his architect's luxurious spatial ideas. Lever House, we may hope, will survive physically, like the earlier group of houses, any internecine wars that may break out in the world of soap.

At Lever House Bunschraft allowed the simple rectangular tower to rise from only a portion of his site. Thus he has saved, out of the excessively rentable upper air that flanks Park Avenue, a volume of empty space in which his tower can live and breathe—metaphorically as well as literally. Since the handling of the circumambient space is more controlled by neighboring structures than is the space around Mies's apartment towers in Chicago, there is somewhat less assurance of its survival in precisely its present form. But at the ground level an open court has been created that extends also under most of the tower, somewhat as does Wright's at the Johnson Wax Building on the infinitely less expensive soil of Racine, but with a less Italianate sense of order and calm. There is also less clarity and continuity in the expression of the structural elements than in Mies's handling of the recessed lower stories at the base of his Chicago towers. But Bunschraft's court has positive qualities of its own. Open at the ground level on all the three street-fronts, the enclosed space is defined above by a mezzanine which is carried all around the site.

By contrast with its too, too massive neighbors along the Avenue, the structural expression of Lever House may appear somewhat underscaled throughout; compared to the United Nations Building, however, Lever House has a clearer and more intelligible articulation of surface. This exceedingly prominent commercial monument has already attracted a great deal of public attention, most of it highly favorable, even

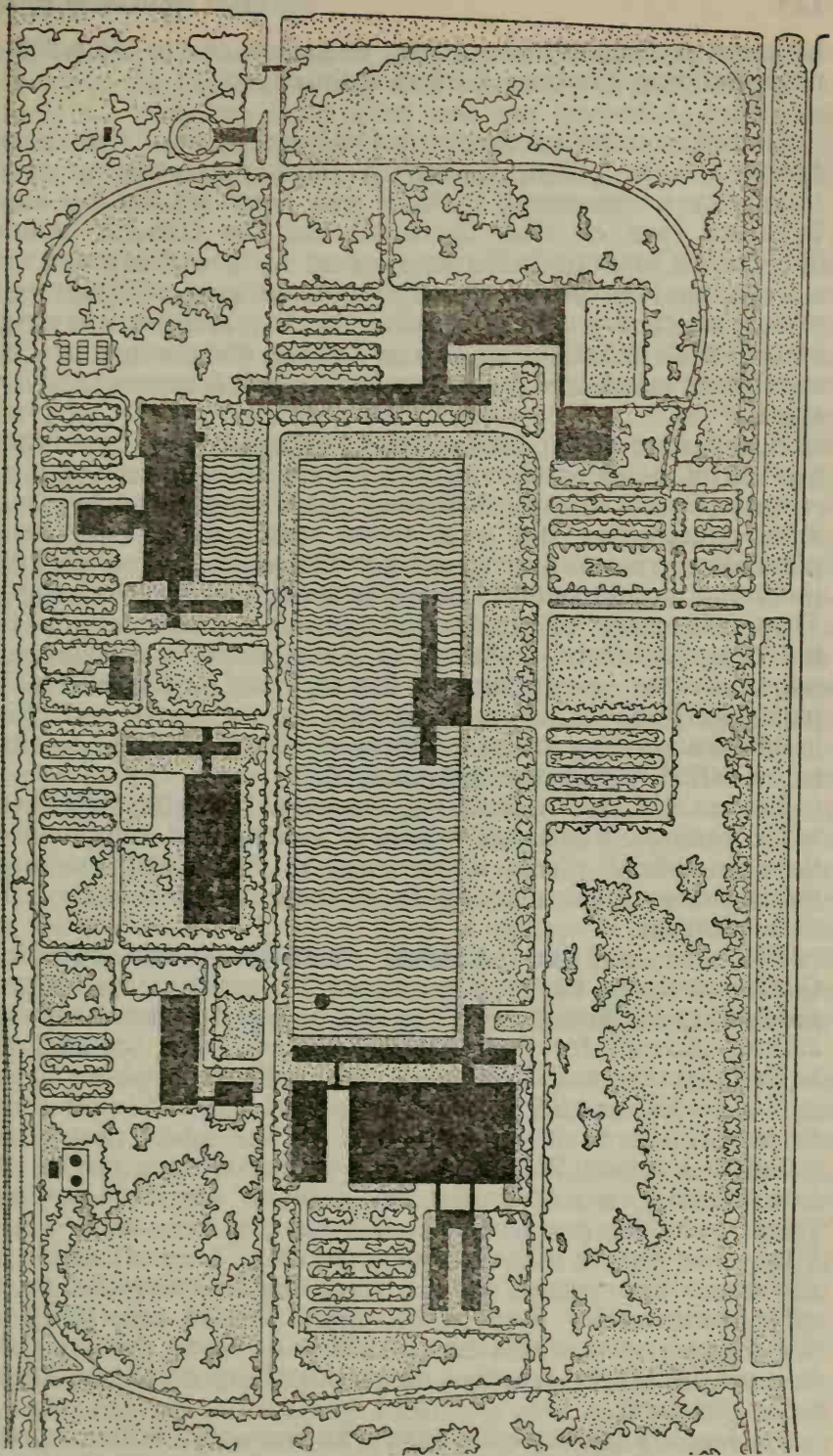


Figure 6—  
Eero Saarinen, General Motors Technical Center, Detroit—  
under construction.

before it is finished. The public reception of the United Nations Building has been far less enthusiastic.

Of rather more subtle and refined design even than Lever House are the buildings—only a small proportion of those ultimately proposed—that have just been erected by Eero Saarinen (son of Eliel Saarinen) for the General Motors Technical Center (see Figure 6) near Detroit. Here one sees a considerable variety of structures, serving different purposes, which are linked together by the architect's over-all plan (which organizes an area as large as the grounds of a big state university) and by a carefully studied homogeneity of style.

A vast rectangular lake provides the equivalent of a "campus" around which the various groups of structures are arranged. Except for the hollowed-out lake, the site has been left perfectly flat; but large trees, which are already being planted in great numbers, will provide insulation between the individual buildings and a series of graceful visual transitions. Thus "planning," to use the ambiguous term now favored for the organization of buildings in a landscape, completes and joins here the architecture of the separate buildings. This is primarily done by an architectonic use of water and plant material according to the tradition of what used more sensibly to be called "landscape architecture."

For nearly half a century Detroit's factories have been world famous. Remarkable feats of rationalized construction, these industrial plants often preserve the visual amenities rather better than many more pretentious structures of the same decades.

For many of the individual structures at the Technical Center, Saarinen has merely utilized the established structural procedures for factory building, but he has handled them with careful thought for their proportions and with considerable boldness in the use of integral and applied color both inside and out. This is still standard industrial "prose," as it were, or very close to it, as compared to the epic "poetry" of Wright's Johnson Wax Building. But the striking use of occasional end-walls of special bricks highly glazed in brilliant colors provides powerful visual accents. These color areas, bright and flat as in an abstract painting, are well scaled to the tremendous extent of the total development and to its crisp, businesslike shapes. Yet there is also something of Wright's warmth in this free handling of color, even if there is more of Mies's precision in the detailing of all the structural elements.

As has always been the case with industrial buildings, the more specialized functions of certain units provide the most interesting elements for the architect to organize visually. Thus the engine test-cell building, with its rows of round

paired stacks on either side, has the most individual character and also the highest quality architecturally. Yet it is the total complex, including both more and less interesting individual structures, which establishes the Technical Center as the first large group of buildings really designed to the scale—and that means here the visual pace—of the automobile age.

The time has come to attempt a definition of some of the special qualities of modern architecture—at least as they have been made manifest in this country—at the beginning of the second half of this century, and even to hazard some guess as to how architecture will develop as a visual art in the next decades. Modern architecture of one sort or another has been in existence for nearly two generations, even though another architecture reminiscent in its forms of the styles of the past, and miscalled traditional, seemed for whole decades to preempt the building field everywhere but in Holland. On the analogy of the known “life-spans” of most architectural phases of the past—the recognized “historic styles”—it is reasonable to suppose that for a generation or more architecture in this century will continue to follow a not altogether unfamiliar general line. For that line will presumably be in continuation of that which extends through the preceding stylistic developments of an advanced character during the whole range of time since 1890. A return to any sort of historicism or stylistically derivative design seems at present immensely unlikely for generations to come. But one may also believe that the architecture of the new historical period we are now well entered upon—what is called with a certain optimism the postwar period—will soon show evidences in architecture of a definite change of phase. Advanced buildings of 1960 will be at least as different from those of 1930 as the latter were from those by Wright and Perret and others that made history in 1900.

The modern architecture of the three decades 1890-1920 in its exuberant and divergent experimentation expressed the intense individualism of the leading innovators. In this and in its consequent inability to handle groups of separate buildings in a unified way, modern architecture for a generation had many of the recognizable historic characteristics of an “early” stylistic phase. The succeeding decades, except perhaps for the paucity of production of the key figures, had the characteristics of a “high” phase. In the brief period of the High Renaissance of the early sixteenth century in Italy also, which was much bedeviled by wars and other public calamities, the production of the leading architects was pathetically small. Thus the particular sort of architecture that the authors of this article described twenty years ago in their book on *The International Style* was “high” modern architecture. The buildings we illustrated and analyzed, largely chosen from the very

limited production of a few architects, prefigured with an unexpected accuracy most of what was actually going to happen in the 1930's and 1940's—or so it would now seem. But the work of the last thirty years in the International Style should by no means be considered to constitute the only culturally relevant building of the modern age, since it is in fact merely the production of one particular phase of it which is probably now coming to an end.

Through the two successive stylistic phases of 1890-1920 and of 1920-1950 the career of Wright has continued like a free-flowing river, turning now one way and now another. In the mid-1930's he even seemed to absorb into his personal development much that came from the International Style which he has always so loudly deprecated. In much the same way during the Italian Renaissance the career of another intensely romantic genius, Michelangelo, began before, continued alongside, and even extended a generation beyond, the brief "high" stylistic moment of the early sixteenth century. Michelangelo's late work seems to illustrate a protest against the High Renaissance just as Wright's does against the International Style. In both cases the instinctive response of the great individual genius was reflected briefly and not very happily in the work of men two generations younger.

The reaction just before and just after the last war against the excessive rigidity and formalism of some of the modern architecture of the 1920's and the 1930's certainly had analogies with the "anti-classic" reaction of the mid-sixteenth century in Italy. The critical discussions set off by that reaction undoubtedly induced a less doctrinaire attitude toward architectural design than was typical of modern architects and critics twenty years ago.

Sophistication in critical attitudes, self-consciousness about problems of style, are certainly characteristic of "late" phases of artistic development; for "high" periods are generally too busy creating the very skeleton of a new architecture—both literally and in the formulation of doctrine—to afford much subtlety or self-examination in their thinking. New doctrines are often first constituted with all sorts of support from extra-aesthetic realms. Thus the International Style to many seemed to derive its authority from the physical sciences and from sociology as the Late Renaissance did from the Counter-Reformation. Once constituted, stylistic doctrine is necessarily subject to recurrent critical revision as the axiomatic assumptions of its early proponents are increasingly questioned. Physical science in 1952 offers, to the layman at least, a very different guide from what it did in 1922, and the subservience of art to social compulsions is very widely questioned as an ideal. When "high" doctrine stays frozen and unrevisable, the result of its continued acceptance can only be a sterile academicism such as various epochs of the past deplorably illustrate.



What, then, is to be the next major curve in the route along which modern architecture is proceeding? The authors of this article at least feel sure that it *will* be a curve, and not an about-face, nor even a right-angled turn, that lies immediately ahead. If one can isolate certain elements that are common to even a few of the more striking individual edifices and building complexes discussed earlier, presumably one should be able to obtain a few relevant clues to the direction of the next curve of stylistic development.

A great concern for the handling of space outside and between buildings—which is evidenced also by the renewed interest of so many modern architects in the city-planning of Renaissance Italy—seems common to the structures by Mies and Wright and Bunschaff and Saarinen that have been mentioned earlier. It was surely present also in the minds of Walter Gropius and his associates of the Architects' Collaborative when they developed their plans for the Harvard Graduate Center in Cambridge. With an artist so infinitely various as Wright it is hazardous to draw any short-term conclusions, but the widespread new preoccupation with the shaping and defining of open spaces is nowhere more conspicuous than in the court of his Johnson Wax Building. As has been noted, there is also here a suavity and an urbanity that approaches the crisper "classicism" (so to call it) of Mies's buildings of the last few years. This is, however, almost completely belied by other late Wright work; some of that is as wildly, even expressionistically romantic as at any period of his life. But with Wright it has never been easy in any decade of his production to decide until long afterward what was the dominant trend and what were merely virtuoso pranks.

There are other common qualities in these new buildings more difficult to make readily apprehensible without photographic illustrations; by most people, moreover, these would be felt subconsciously rather than specifically recognized. If one really compares the handling of the external membering of Mies's Lake Shore Drive apartment house with that of other buildings whose façades are rather similarly reticulated—Bunschaff's Lever House, for example, or several of Saarinen's General Motors units—it should be evident that Mies has avoided a certain fragility or brittleness that seems present in the other architects' work. This he has accomplished by the arbitrary and quite Sullivanian emphasis he has given to his vertical mullions by applying continuous I-beams on their exterior.

As this reference to Sullivan indicates—and it could well be expanded to include certain European department stores of his day built entirely of metal and glass—a "late" phase of architectural development seems here to link up with the "early" phase of two generations earlier.

The smoothness, slickness and avoidance of particulariza-

tion of repeated structural elements in typical modern façades of the 1920's and 1930's already seems a little old-fashioned. The boldly decorative projecting grids on some of Le Corbusier's projects of the last decade and the *brise-soleil* so much used by Brazilian architects in the 1940's—and even proposed by Oscar Niemeyer for the United Nations Building—were perhaps somewhat exaggerated devices for bringing relief back into façade design. But the plasticity of the *Unité d'Habitation* already exceeds anything that has been seen in advanced architecture for almost a hundred years, as does also the boldness of its scaling. Where Le Corbusier has led, other architects have followed several times before in the last thirty years—and probably will again.

Among other significant changes, it should be stressed how much less hidebound architects are about materials today than they were twenty years ago. War shortages, now repeating themselves, and the brief but relatively widespread reaction of taste toward emphasis on rough textures in the last ten years or so, have brought most architects to a position that would once have seemed a positive betrayal of the basic rationale of modern architecture.

Modern architecture, many are now ready to recognize, has always been and will presumably long continue to be a *way of designing* not dependent either on the use, or the avoidance, of any particular materials currently available nor of any more or less sensible way of using them.

There is similarly a much more elastic attitude regarding particular forms. Modern architects have never been afraid that using round supports will lead them insidiously back to the Greek orders; now they realize that employing structural arches to span wide openings need not lead to a revival of the surface panoply of Rome and the Renaissance. Wright, indeed, in the entrance to his V. C. Morris store in San Francisco, used an arch a year or so ago that was quite like the ones he originally borrowed from Richardson some sixty years ago, and continued to use, from time to time, in his Prairie houses of the 1900's.

Happy in the maturity of the architecture of this day, proud of the buildings which the leading architects of the twentieth century have already produced and—whether they be in their eighties or their thirties—are still producing, there is no reason now for modern architects either to fear or to envy the past.

Architects are now *learning* from the past again, finding that many of its basic lessons of abstract form—as distinguished from its superficial decorative paradigms—have continued value in the solution of problems that have become important once more: in relation to the renewed interest in relief effects on exteriors, for example, or in the handling of spaces around buildings, to repeat two points that have been

referred to earlier. Quality in architecture is, to a considerable extent, a timeless factor. But anyone is better able to distinguish between the passable and the truly excellent in his own age if his judgment has been trained by making such distinctions with regard to the work of the past. History went out the back door—almost literally in the case of architectural schools!—fifteen or twenty years ago; now it is coming in again through the front door.

There is no question that just before the war a good deal of work by even the most distinguished architects was tending to grow repetitious and banal, almost as if they had grown tired of what they had been trying to do for a decade or more. By now it is evident that many designs which would have been considered boldly original in 1925 cannot provide much visual satisfaction when they are finally erected twenty-five years later. Balancing the tendency toward a new sort of classic order in the handling of architectural elements, however, which may seem academic, there has also been a new quality of emotional excitement in most of the finest buildings of the last few years. The excitement in Mies's work is naturally of a very different order from that in Wright's; but it is certainly present in the Lake Shore Drive apartment house. Yet it had definitely been lacking in some of his Chicago work of the preceding decade, notably in the Promontory Apartments. There is always the danger of an academic inertia setting in in late periods; once it might have seemed likely that this would stem from Mies's growing influence on young architects. Today the source of the danger is different and seems to lie in the codification of instruction in some of the major architectural schools and the repetitious dogma-quoting of certain architectural writers.

If one may ever hope to perceive an emergent development in any art by examining only the latest work of a few leaders, it would seem that "classicism with excitement" might be the briefest formula to suggest at least what is probably coming in the next few years. More explicitly, this might be elaborated as meaning the acceptance of a discipline of a formal order applied—and applied with real severity—to repeated structural elements, yet livened nevertheless by an acute awareness of all the visual possibilities of positive emotional appeal. This would be no *neo*-classicism, with largely negative sanctions, but rather a true classicism such as has always been informed in its most vital moments by a truly romantic élan. The brilliant young architect, Matthew Nowicki, who was unfortunately killed last year, but some of whose work will shortly be executed posthumously, seemed conspicuously able to illustrate this formula in his projects; toward some such prognostication as this, moreover, his admirable critical articles were also clearly leading.

"Classicism with excitement" might also be used to describe

the tendencies of architecture in Italy around 1600 at the beginning of the Baroque period. Presumably a new Baroque—which would not of course be a mere neo-Baroque—is still some generations off. The early Baroque was clearly not the end of anything. It was rather a bold new beginning. Palladio and Vignola, not Bernini and Borromini, are the morphological parallels to the late phase of modern architecture which seems to be opening in this decade of the 1950's. By the time twentieth-century architecture comes—if it ever does—to a stage analogous to the historic seventeenth-century Baroque, the particular architectural cycle our generation has known as modern will be over and a new cycle well begun. But on the performance of our present-day architects, whether they be in their seventh decade of production like Wright, or in their first like those who have begun to build since the war, we may believe that a brilliant concluding phase of modern architecture will come first—in all probability it has already opened.

## ERLINDA AND MR. COFFIN

I AM A GENTLEWOMAN in middle life and I have resided for a number of years at Key West, Florida, in a house which is a mere stone's throw from the naval station where President Truman visits.

Before I recount, as nearly as I am able, what happened that terrible night at the Theater-in-the-Egg, I feel that I should first give you some idea of myself and the circumstances to which Providence has seen fit to reduce me. I came originally

## Gore Vidal

*Gore Vidal* was born at West Point, New York, a grandson of Senator T. P. Gore.

He enlisted in the Army a month after graduating from Phillips Exeter Academy, serving from 1943 to 1946.

Though only 26, he is the author of seven novels, the first of which was *WILLI-WAW*, written when he was 19. His most recent novel,

*THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS*, was published by Dutton.

Mr. Vidal now lives in Barytown, New York, in a handsome pillared house, at one time the residence of John Jay Chapman, that has figured prominently in the social life of the Hudson River Valley.

from a Carolina family not much blessed with this world's goods but whose lineage, if I may make the boast in all modesty, is of the highest. There is a saying that no legislature of the state could ever convene without the presence of a Slocum (my family name) in the Lower House, a lofty heritage you must concede and one which has done much to sustain me in my widowhood.

In olden times my social activities in this island city were multifarious, but since 1929 I have drawn in my horns, as it were, surrendering all my high offices in the various organizations with which our city abounds to one Marina Henderson, wife of our local shrimp magnate and a cultural force to be reckoned with in these parts not only because her means are ample but because our celebrated Theater-in-the-Egg is the child of her teeming imagination: she is its Managing Directress, Star and sometime Authoress. Her productions have been uniformly well regarded since the proceeds go to charity. Then, too, the unorthodox arrangement of the theater's interior has occasioned much interested comment, for the action, such as it is, takes place on an oval platform ("the yolk") about which the audience sits restively in camp chairs. There is no curtain, of course, and so the actors are forced to rush in and out, from lobby to yolk, traversing the aisles at a great rate.

Marina and I are good friends, however, even though we do not foregather as often as we once did: she now goes with a somewhat faster set than I, seeking out those of the winter residents who share her advanced views, while I keep to the small circle that I have known lo! these many years, since 1910, in fact, when I came to Key West from South Carolina, accompanied by my new husband Mr. Bellamy Craig, who had accepted a position of some trust earlier that year with a bank which was to fail in '29, the year of his decease. But of course no such premonition marred our happiness when we set out, bag and baggage, to make our way in Key West.

I do not need to say that Mr. Craig was in every sense a gentleman, a devoted husband, and though our union was never fulfilled by the longed-for arrival of little ones we managed, nonetheless, to have a happy home, one which was to end all too soon as I have intimated, for when he passed on in '29 I was left with but the tiniest of incomes, a mere pittance from my maternal grandmother in Carolina, and the house. Mr. Craig had unfortunately been forced, shortly before his death, to jettison his insurance policy, so I could not even clutch at that straw when my hour came.

I debated whether to go into business, or to establish a refined luncheon room, or to seek a position with some established business house. I was not long in doubt, however, as to what course I should pursue. For, not being desirous of living anywhere but in my own home, I determined with some suc-

cess, financially at least, to reorganize the house so that it might afford me an income through the distasteful but necessary expediency of giving shelter to paying guests.

Since the house is a commodious one, I have not done badly through the years and, in time, I have accustomed myself to this humiliating situation; then, too, I was sustained secretly by the vivid memory of my grandmother Arabella Stuart Slocum of Wayne County who, when reduced from great wealth to penury by the war, maintained herself and children, widow that she was, by taking in laundry, mostly flat work, but still laundry. I will confess to you that there were times at night when I sat alone in my room, hearkening to the heavy breathing of my guests, and saw myself as a modern Arabella, living, as did she, in the face of adversity, inspired still by those high ideals we, she and I and all the Slocums, have held in common reverence since time immemorial in Wayne County.

And yet, in spite of every adversity, I should have said until recently that I had won through, that in twenty years as innkeeper I had not once been faced with any ugliness, that I had been remarkably fortunate in my selection of paying guests, recruiting them, as I did, from the ranks of those who have reached the age of discretion, as we used to say. But all of this must now be in the past tense, alas.

Late one Sunday morning, three months ago, I was in the parlor attempting with very little success to tune the piano. I used to be quite expert at tuning but my ear is no longer true and I was, I confess, experiencing a certain frustration when the ringing of the doorbell interrupted my labors. Expecting certain of my late husband's relatives who had promised to break bread with me that day, I hastened to answer the door. It was not they, however: instead a tall thin gentleman in middle life, wearing the long short trousers affected over in Bermuda, stood upon my threshold and begged admittance.

As was my wont, I ushered him into the parlor where we sat down on the two Victorian plush chairs Grandmother Craig left me in her will. I asked him in what way I might be of service to him and he intimated that rumor had it I entertained guests on a paying basis. I told him that he had not been misinformed and that, by chance, I had one empty room left, which he asked to see.

The room pleased him and, if I say so myself, it is attractively furnished with original copies of Chippendale and Regency, bought many years ago when, in the full flush of our prosperity, Mr. Craig and I furnished our nest with objects not only useful but ornamental. There are two big windows in this room: one on the south and the other on the west. From the south window there is a fine view of the ocean, only partly obliterated by a structure of pink stucco called the "New Arcadia Motel."

"This will do very well," said Mr. Coffin (he had very soon confided his name to me). But then he paused and I did not dare meet his gaze for I thought that he was about to mention the root of all evil and, as always, I was ill at ease for I have never been able to enact the role of businesswoman without a certain shame, a distress which oftentimes communicates itself to the person with whom I must deal, causing no end of confusion for us both. But it was not of money that he wished to speak. If only it had been! If only we had gone no further in our dealings with one another. To call back yesterday, as the poet observed, bid time return! But it was not to be and wishing cannot change the past. He spoke then of *her*.

"You see, Mrs. Craig, I must tell you that I am not alone." Was it his English accent which gave me a sense of false security? created a fool's paradise wherein I was to dwell blissfully until the rude awakening? I cannot tell. Suffice it to say I trusted him.

"Not alone?" I queried. "Have you some companion who travels with you? a gentleman?"

"No, Mrs. Craig, a young lady, my ward . . . a Miss Lopez."

"But I fear, Mr. Coffin, that I have only the one room free at the moment."

"Oh, she can stay with me, Mrs. Craig, in this room. You see, she is only eight." Both of us had a good laugh and my suspicions, such as they had been, were instantly allayed. He asked me if I could find him a cot and I said of course, nothing could be more simple, and then, correctly estimating the value of the room from the sign on the door, he gave me a week's rent in cash, demonstrating such delicacy of feeling by his silence at this juncture that I found myself much prejudiced in his favor. We parted then on excellent terms and I instructed my girl-of-all-work to place a cot in the room and to dust carefully. I even had her supply him with the better bath towels, after which I went in to dinner with my cousins who had meanwhile arrived, ravenously hungry.

Not until the next morning did I see Mr. Coffin's ward. She was seated in the parlor looking at an old copy of *Vogue*. "Good morning," she said and, when I entered the room, she rose and curtsied, very prettily I must admit. "I am Erlinda Lopez, the ward of Mr. Coffin."

"I am Mrs. Bellamy Craig, your hostess," I answered with equal ceremony.

"Do you mind if I look at your magazines?"

"Certainly not," I said, containing all the while my surprise not only at her good manners and grown-up ways, but also at the unexpected fact that Miss Lopez was of an unmistakable dusky hue, in short a Dark Latin. Now I must say that although I am in many ways typical of my age and class I have

no great prejudice on the subject of race. Our family, even in their slave-holding days, were always good to their people and once as a child when I allowed the forbidden word "nigger" to pass my lips I was forced to submit to a thorough oral cleansing by my mother, with a cake of strong soap. Yet I am, after all, a Southern woman and I do not choose to receive people of color in my own home, call it intolerant, old-fashioned or what have you, it is the way I am. Imagine then what thoughts coursed through my startled brain! What was I to do? Having accepted a week's rent, was I not morally obligated to maintain both Mr. Coffin and his ward in my house? At least until the week was up? In an agony of indecision, I left the parlor and went straight to Mr. Coffin. He received me cordially.

"Have you met Erlinda yet, Mrs. Craig?"

"I have indeed, Mr. Coffin."

"I think her quite intelligent. She speaks French, Spanish and English fluently and she has a reading knowledge of Italian."

"A gifted child I am sure but *really*, Mr. Coffin . . ."

"Really what, Mrs. Craig?"

"I mean I am *not* blind. How can she be your ward? She is . . . colored!" I had said it and I was relieved: the fat was in the fire; there was no turning back.

"Many people are, Mrs. Craig."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Coffin, but I had not assumed that your ward was to be counted among that number."

"Then, Mrs. Craig, if it offends your sensibilities, we will seek lodgings elsewhere." Oh, what insane impulse made me reject this gesture of his? What flurry of *noblesse oblige* in my breast caused me suddenly to refuse even to entertain such a contingency! I do not know; suffice it to say I ended by bidding him remain with his ward as long as he should care to reside beneath my roof, on a paying basis.

When the first week was up I must confess that I was more pleased than not with my reckless decision for, although I did not mention to my friends that I was giving shelter to a person of color, I found Erlinda, nonetheless, to be possessed of considerable charm and personality and I spent at least an hour every day in her company, at first from a sense of duty but, finally, from a very real pleasure in her conversation which, when I recall it now (the pleasure, I mean), causes my cheeks to burn with shame.

I discovered in our talks that she was, as I had suspected, an orphan and that she had traveled extensively in Europe and Latin America, wintering in Amalfi, summering in Venice, and so on. Not of course that I for one moment believed these stories but they were so charming and indicated such a fund of information that I was only too pleased to listen to her descriptions of the Lido, and her recitations from Dante, in flaw-



less Italian or what I took to be Italian since I have never studied other tongues. But, as I have said, I took her tales with the proverbial grain of salt and, from time to time, I chatted with Mr. Coffin, gleaning from him—as much as I was able without appearing to pry—the story of Erlinda's life.

She was the child of a Cuban prize-fighter who had toured Europe many times, taking Erlinda with him on his trips, showering her with every luxury and engaging tutors for her instruction, with a particular emphasis on languages, world literature and deportment. Her mother had died of an infected kneecap, a few months after Erlinda was born. Mr. Coffin, it seems, had known the prize-fighter for several years and since he, Mr. Coffin, was English, a friendship between them was possible. They were, I gathered, very close and since Mr. Coffin had independent means they were able to travel together about Europe, Mr. Coffin gradually becoming responsible for Erlinda's education.

This idyllic existence ended abruptly a year ago when Lopez was killed in the ring by a Sicilian named Balbo. It appears that this Balbo was not a sportsman and that shortly before the fight he had contrived to secrete a section of lead pipe in his right boxing glove, enabling him to crush Lopez's skull in the first round. Needless to say the scandal which ensued was great. Balbo was declared middleweight champion of Sicily and Mr. Coffin, after protesting to the authorities who turned a deaf ear to him, departed, taking Erlinda with him.

As my friends will testify, I am easily moved by a tale of misfortune and, for a time, I took this motherless tyke to my heart. I taught her portions of the Bible which she had not studied before (Mr. Coffin, I gather, was a free-thinker), and she showed me the scrapbooks she and Mr. Coffin had kept of her father's career as a pugilist . . . and a handsome young man he was, if photographs are to be believed.

Consequently, when a new week rolled around and the period of probation, as it were, was up, I extended them the hospitality of my home indefinitely, and soon a pattern of existence took shape. Mr. Coffin would spend most of his days looking for shells (he was a collector and, I am assured by certain authorities, the discoverer of a new type of pink-lipped conch), while Erlinda would remain indoors, reading, playing the piano or chatting with me about one thing or the other. She won my heart and not only mine but those of my friends who had soon discovered, as friends will, the unusual combination I was, with some initial misgiving I must confess, sheltering. But my fears were proved to be groundless, a little to my surprise for the ladies of my acquaintance are not noted for their tolerance: yet Erlinda enchanted them all with her conversation and saucy ways. Especially Marina Henderson, who was not only immediately attracted to Erlinda personally

but, and this I must say startled me, professed to see in the child thespian qualities of the highest order.

"Mark my words, Louise Craig," she said to me one afternoon when we were sitting in the parlor and Erlinda had gone upstairs to fetch one of the scrapbooks, "that child will be a magnificent actress. Have you listened to her voice?"

"Since I have been constantly in her company for nearly three weeks I could hardly *not* have heard it," I responded drily.

"I mean its timbre. The inflection . . . it's like velvet, I tell you!"

"But how can she be an actress in this country when . . . well, let us say the opportunities open to one of her . . . *characteristics* are limited to occasional brief appearances as a lady's maid?"

"That's beside the point," said Marina, and she rattled on as she always does when something new has hit her fancy, ignoring all difficulties, courting disaster with a commendable show of high spirits and bad judgment.

"Perhaps the child has no intention of exploiting her dramatic gifts?" I suggested, unconsciously wishing to avert disaster.

"Nonsense," said Marina, staring at herself in the tilted Victorian mirror over the fireplace, admiring that remarkable red hair of hers which changes its shade from season to season, from decade to decade, like the leaves in autumn. "I shall talk to her about it this afternoon."

"You have something in mind then? some role?"

"I have," said Marina slyly.

"Not . . . ?"

"Yes!" Needless to say I was astonished. For several months our island city had been agog with rumors concerning Marina's latest work, an adaptation of that fine old classic *Camille*, executed in blank verse and containing easily the finest part for an actress within memory, the title role. Competition for this magnificent part had been keen but the demands of the role were so great that Marina had hesitated to entrust it to any of the regular stars, including herself.

"But this will never do!" I exclaimed; my objections were cut short, however, by the appearance of Erlinda and when next I spoke the deed was done and Erlinda Lopez had been assigned the stellar role in Marina Henderson's "Camille," based on the novel by Dumas and the screenplay by Miss Zöe Akins.

It is curious, now that I think of it, how everyone accepted as a matter of course that Erlinda should interpret an adult Caucasian woman from Paris whose private life was not what it should have been. I can only say, in this regard, that those who heard her read for the part, and I was one of them, were

absolutely stunned by the emotion she brought to those risqué lines, as well as by the thrilling quality of her voice which, in the word of Mr. Hamish the newspaperman, was "golden." That she was only eight and not much over three feet tall disturbed no one for, as Marina said, it is *presence* which matters on the stage, even in the "Theater-in-the-Egg": make-up and lighting would do the rest. The only difficulty, as we saw it, was the somewhat ticklish problem of race, but since this is a small community with certain recognized social arbiters, good form prevents the majority from questioning too finely the decisions of our leaders, and as Marina occupies a position of peculiar eminence among us there was, as far as I know, no grumbling against her bold choice. Marina herself, by far our most accomplished actress, certainly our most indefatigable one, assigned herself the minor role of Camille's confidante Cecile. Knowing Marina as I do, I was somewhat startled that she had allowed the stellar role to go to someone else, but then recalling that she was, after all, directress and authoress, I could see that she would undoubtedly have been forced to spread herself thin had she undertaken such an arduous task.

Now I do not know precisely what went on during the rehearsals. I was never invited to attend them and although I felt I had some connection with the production, Erlinda having been my discovery in the first place, I made no demur and sought in no way to interfere. Word came to me, however, that Erlinda was magnificent.

I was seated in the parlor one afternoon with Mr. Coffin, sewing some lace on a tea gown our young star was to wear in the first scene, when Erlinda burst into the room.

"What is the matter, child?" I asked as she hastened to bury her head in her guardian's lap, great sobs racking her tiny frame.

"Marina!" came the muffled complaint. "Marina Henderson is a ——!" Shocked as I was by the child's cruel observation, I could not but, in my heart of hearts, agree that there was some truth to this crushing estimate of my old friend's character. Nonetheless, it was my duty to defend her and I did, as best I could, recounting relevant episodes from her life to substantiate my defense. But before I could even get to the quite interesting story of how she happened to marry Mr. Henderson I was cut short by a tirade of abuse against my oldest friend, an attack inspired, it soon developed, by a quarrel they had had over Erlinda's interpretation of her part, a quarrel which had ended in Marina's assumption of the role of Camille while presenting Erlinda with the terrible choice of either withdrawing from the company entirely or else accepting the role of Cecile, hitherto played by the authoress herself.

Needless to say we were all in a state of uproar for twenty-four hours. Erlinda would neither eat nor sleep. According to Mr. Coffin she paced the floor all night, or at least when he

had slipped off to the Land of Nod she was still pacing and when he awakened early the next morning she was seated bitterly by the window, haggard and exhausted, the bedclothes on her cot undisturbed.

I counseled caution, knowing the influence Marina has in this town, and my advice was duly followed when, with broken heart but proud step, Erlinda returned to the boards in the part of Cecile. Had I but known the fruit of my counsel I would have torn my tongue out by the roots rather than advise Erlinda as I did. But what is done is done. In my defense, I can only say that I acted from ignorance and not from malice.

The opening night saw as brilliant an assemblage as you could hope to see in Key West. The cream of our local society was there as well as several of Mr. Truman's retinue and a real playwright from New York named Tennessee Williams. You have probably heard many conflicting stories about that night. Everyone in the state of Florida now claims to have been present and, to hear the stories some of the people who were there tell, you would think they had been a hundred miles away from the theater that fateful night. In any event, I was there in my white mesh over peacock blue foundation, and carrying the imitation egret fan that I have had for twenty years, an anniversary gift from Mr. Craig.

Mr. Coffin and I sat together and chatted pleasantly, both of us excited to fever-pitch by the long-awaited debut of our young star. The audience too seemed to have sensed that something remarkable was about to happen for when, in the middle of the first scene, Erlinda appeared in a gown of orchid-colored tulle, they applauded loudly.

As we took our seats for the fifth and final act we were both aware that Erlinda had triumphed. Not even in the movies have I ever seen such a performance! Or heard such a magnificent voice! Poor Marina sounded like a Memphis frump by comparison and it was obvious to all who knew our authoress that she was in a rage at being outshone in her own production.

Now in the last act of Marina's "Camille" there is a particularly beautiful and touching scene where Camille is lying on a chaise longue, wearing a flowing negligee of white rayon. There is a table beside her on which is set a silver candelabra, containing six lighted tapers, a bowl of paper camellias and some Kleenex. The scene began something like this.

"Oh, will he never come? Tell me, sweet Cecile, do you not see his carriage approaching from the window?" Cecile (Erlinda) pretends to look out a window and answers, "There is no one in the street but a little old man selling the evening newspapers." The language as you see is poetic and much the best writing Marina has done to date. Then there is a point in

the action, the great moment of the play, when Camille (that's not the character's real name I understand but Marina called her that so as not to confuse the audience) after a realistic fit of coughing, rises up on her elbow and exclaims, "Cecile! It grows dark. He has not come. Light more tapers, do you hear me? I need more light!"

Then it happened. Erlinda picked up the candelabra and held it aloft for a moment, a superhuman effort since it was larger than she was; then, taking aim, she hurled it at Marina who was instantly ignited. Pandemonium broke loose in the theater! Marina, a pillar of fire, streaked down the aisle and into the night, where she was subdued at last in the street by two policemen who managed to put out the blaze, after which they removed her to the hospital where she now resides, undergoing at this moment her twenty-fourth skin graft.

Erlinda remained on the stage long enough to give *her* reading of Camille's great scene which, according to those few who were close enough to hear it, was indeed splendid. Then, the scene finished, she left the theater and, before either Mr. Coffin or I could get to her, she was arrested on a charge of assault and battery, and incarcerated.

My story, however, is not yet ended. Had this been all I might have said: let bygones be bygones. The miscreant is only a child and Marina did do her an injury, but during the subsequent investigation it was revealed to a shocked public that Erlinda had been legally married to Mr. Coffin in the Reformed Eritrean Church of Cuba several months before and a medical examination proved, or so the defense claims, that Erlinda is actually forty-one years old, a dwarf, the mother and not the daughter of the pugilist Lopez. To date the attendant legal complications have not yet been unraveled to the court's satisfaction.

Fortunately, at this time, I was able to avail myself of a much needed vacation in Carolina, where I resided with kin in Wayne County until the trouble in Key West had abated somewhat.

I now visit Marina regularly and she is beginning to look more or less like her old self, even though her hair and eyebrows are gone for good and she will have to wear a wig when she finally rises from her bed of pain. Only once has she made any reference to Erlinda in my presence and that was shortly after my return from the north when she remarked that the child had been all wrong for the part of Camille and that if she had it to do over again, everything considered, she would still have fired her.

## Wright Morris

*Wright Morris* was born in Central City, Nebraska, and now lives in Wayne, Pennsylvania. He has achieved distinction in the fields of photography and writing, and among his books in which these two are fused with extraordinary success are *THE INHABITANTS* and *THE HOME PLACE*, published by Scribner's. In the last few years, he has turned exclusively to fiction. His distinguished novels, *MAN AND BOY* and *THE WORKS OF LOVE*, were published by Knopf. His short stories have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Kenyon Review* and the *NEW DIRECTIONS ANNUAL*.

# THE RITES OF SPRING

**T**HE OLD MAN and the boy got on the train at Omaha. They walked through the coach to the water cooler, where the old man let the boy take the seat near the window while he stood in the aisle picking his teeth with a match. He was a farmer, dressed in the suit held in reserve for Sundays and travel, but the stripe in the coat had disappeared from the knees of the pants. The bend at the knee gave him the look of a man who was crouching, but within the pants; for a man of his age he stood straight enough. His name was Gudger, and he was the father of eight or ten kids, he wasn't sure which. In the state of Texas, where he had a farm, it didn't seem to matter.

The boy's name was Everett, but nobody ever called him that. His mother had called him Candy, but she was now dead. As his father was also dead there were people who referred to him as the orphan, while others, like the old man, referred to him as the little tyke. "What's going to be done about the little tyke?" the old man had said. As nobody seemed to know, the old man was taking him home to Texas where another little tyke wouldn't matter so much.

Since the boy had never been to Texas, nor out of Omaha for that matter, he kept his face pressed to the window, looking for it. As time passed he realized it must be far away. Every hour or so the old man told him that. "Don't git in such a hurry," the old man would say, and when the boy turned his head he might ask him, "How'd you like to butcher a hog?" The boy didn't know. But the old man was pleased at the thought of it. He would blink his pale, watery eyes and feel

about in the air over his head for the wide-brimmed hat he had already taken off. It was there in his lap, with the ticket stubs sticking up in the band.

In the evening the old man took from his bag three hard-boiled eggs he had brought from Texas, cracked them on the chair arm, peeled them, and gave one to the boy. The other two he ate himself. Later he slept, snoring into the hat he had placed over his face, but with one heavy hand on the boy's knee as if to hold him there. It led the boy to reflect that losing a father had not been so much. Losing a mother, however, was another thing, and it also troubled the boy to know that he was now in Oklahoma but none the wiser for it. He kept himself awake, however, just to breathe the night air. It seemed to him colder, just as the darkness seemed more black. Under the lights on the station platform he looked for Cowboys, for Indians, and where the street lamps swung over empty corners he looked for tracks. Those that went off into the darkness single file.

It was still not light when they arrived in Texas and sat in a café, eating hotcakes, and looked at the red flares burning along the tracks. The old man spoke to the man behind the counter about the hog. He said he hoped he had got back in time to help butcher it. Then he went off for his team to the livery stable and the boy stood at the window, facing Texas, and watching the daylight come slowly along the tracks. Nothing but space seemed to be out there beyond the flares. Right there in the street were the railroad yards with the pale flares still hissing, but beyond the yards, off there where a hog was about to be butchered, the sky went up like a wall and the world seemed to end. The boy didn't like it. Something about it troubled him.

When the old man came with the buggy and the team of lean mares with the fly-net harness, the boy wanted to ask just where they were going to. Would a team of old mares ever get them there? Here he was, at the end of his journey according to what it said on his ticket, but he felt in his stomach that his travels had just begun. From the rise where the buggy rocked over the tracks he could see that the road went off toward somewhere, but that it also trembled, and began to blur like a ribbon of smoke. "Buggy needs greasin'—" he heard the old man say, but the boy hardly noticed the creaking, as it seemed such a small sound in such a big world. In the soft road dust the wheels were quiet, and the lapping sound of the reins, on the rumps of the mares, was like water running under the wheels.

As the boy had never looked upon the sea, nor any body of water he couldn't see over, he had no word for the landscape that he faced. The land itself seemed to roll like the floors in amusement parks. Without seeming to climb they would be on

a rise with the earth gliding away before them, and in the far-away hollow there were towns a day's ride away. The wheels turned, the earth seemed to flow beneath the buggy, like dirty water, but nothing else changed and they seemed to be standing still. Here and there white-faced cattle, known as Herefords, stood in rows along the barbed wire fence as if they had never seen a buggy, a horse, or a small boy before. They were always still there, as if painted on the fence, whenever he turned and looked. Then the road itself came to an end and they followed the wavering lines in the grass that the wheels had made the week before, on their way out. And when they came within sight of the farm—it seemed to recede, and they seemed to stalk it—the boy knew that he was nearing the rim of the world. What would he see when he peered over it? The hog. The hog seemed to be part of it. But the bleak house, with the boarded windows, was like a caboose left on a siding, and behind this house the world seemed to end. In the yard was a tree, but it would be wrong to say that the house and the tree stood on the sky, or that the body of the hog, small as it appeared, was dwarfed by it. The hog hung from the tree like some strange bellied fruit. Swarming about it in the yard were large boys with knives, sharpened pieces of metal, and small boys with long spears of broken glass. They all attacked the hog, hooting like Indians, and used whatever they had in hand to shave the stiff red bristles from the hog's hide. As the team of mares drew alongside, the boy in the buggy could see a small hole, like a third eye, in the center of the hog's dripping head. The mouth was curved in a smile as if the swarm of boys was tickling him.

"Guess we made it in time," the old man said, and using the crop of the buggy whip he tapped on one of the blood-smeared pails in the yard. A black cloud of flies rose into the air, then settled again. They made a sound as if the roaring wind had been siphoned into a bottle, leaving the yard empty and the flies trapped inside. They pelted the sides of the pail like a quick summer rain.

From his seat in the buggy—nobody called to him, or seemed to know that he was there—the boy watched the preparations for the butchering of the hog. A tall woman with a dough-colored face built a fire in the yard. There seemed to be no flesh on her lean body, and the dress she wore flapped in the wind as if hung from a hanger, or put out to dry on the line. Drawn low on her head was a stocking cap, and the stick with which she sometimes probed the fire was crooked like the handle of a witch's broom. Now and then a cloud of steam arose from the hog as a bucket of hot water was thrown on his body, or a puff of smoke, like a signal, arose from the fire. Now that the hog was shaved, the small boys carried wood,



others put a new edge on the blades that had been dulled shaving him. An oil drum was carried from the house, and placed on the ground beside the fire, and over the fire was a large sheet of metal, making it a stove. The cutting of the hog began when the metal plate was hot. The old man worked from the ground up, first cutting off the feet at the knuckle, with the white knuckle showing like the milky eye of a blind horse. After the legs, he removed, carefully, the huge head. It was placed to one side, propped up in a pail, and although the hog's eyes were closed, it might be said that he attended his own barbecue. The smile was still on his face, as if he had long looked forward to it.

The light from the fire was like a coke burner on the greasy faces of the Gudger boys, but not the one who still sat in the buggy, out of the wind. The old man had spread the lap rug over him, and left him there. There was a lot going on, and a small city boy might get in the way. As he had eaten no pork his face was clean, but the smell of it was thick in his head and the shifting wind blew the savory smoke over him. At his back, when he turned to look, the state of Texas lay under the moon, and the thick matted grass was the leaden color of a dead sea. The house was an ark adrift upon it. Here and there, in the hollow of a wave or on a rise that appeared to be moving, lights would sparkle as if the sky was upside down. Behind him he could hear the crackling of the fire, and beyond the fire, strung up as if lynched, he could see the pale, strangely luminous body of the hog. But the great head, with the creased smiling eyes, seemed to be amused at the proceedings, and gazed at the scene in the manner of the boy. And it was this head, with its detached air, the upper lip curled back as if grinning, that led the boy to feel that he had something in common with it. He and the hog, so to speak, had both lost something. In each case they had given up more than what remained. The boy wondered how it was, in this situation, that the hog could look on the scene as he did, with what appeared to be a smile of amusement on his face. The joke seemed to be, if he could believe the hog, on everybody else. On the cursing old man with the sweating face, on his dough-colored wife, on his family of kids who stood around the fire with their faces oily with the hog himself. But when the boy closed his eyes to think about this he saw the grinning face of the hog before him, and the third small eye, in the middle of his forehead, seemed to wink. The fat that splattered in the fire that roared before him, crackled like burning twigs.

The cooking of the hog went on through the night. Small slices of the pork, no larger than a dollar, were dropped to fry on the metal sheet, and the fat ran off into the oil drum at the side. Into the fat the crisp slices of the pork were dropped. The drum filled up, layer by layer, in this way. When the fire

died down the body of the hog would appear to recede into the shadows, then it would come forward, like a ghost, when the flames rose up. There was always less hog when the boy turned to look. But the smiling head of the hog seemed larger, the amusement increased on his shining face, and between the parted lips other sounds were sometimes heard. A throaty chuckle. Such as you might expect from a well-pleased hog.

In the cool of the night the dough-faced woman sometimes leaned over the fire for warmth, or stirred, with her pointed stick, the dying bed of coals. Something about it raised the small hairs on the boy's neck. It also brought, as it did to the hog, a smile to his face. The moonlit scene, the pale-faced butchers, the ghostly body of the hog, and the great milky emptiness of the night seemed bewitched. More was going on than met the eye, so to speak. But according to the hog, it was not serious. The boy and the hog both knew this, but nobody else.

Toward morning the fire died down, and the boy must have fallen asleep as the faint honking of geese woke him up. He saw their dark moving arrow on the morning sky. There was no longer noise around the fire, or the sound of hot fat spilling into the barrel, and when the boy raised his head he saw that he was alone with the hog. With the head, that is, and the two great hams that hung from the tree. Whether the head still smiled or not was hard to say. It was still there in the pail, gazing up at the now moonless sky, and the small black hole in the head was like an ornament. Somewhere to the east, blown thin on the wind, a rooster crowed. The lonely sound troubled the boy as it meant another day, no better than the last one, and maybe a day without the hog, was about to begin. Very likely the head of the hog, and the smile, would be cut up next. The ears would be made, as he had heard somewhere, into a purse. His feet would be put into barrels and sold in Omaha. His curly tail would make a tassel at the end of a whip. Everything would be used, nothing would remain, and thinking of that the boy sat up in the buggy as if a thought had occurred to him. On the pale morning sky he could see the rope that strung up the hams. This rope had been tied to a post in the yard, but it had been loosened from time to time in order to lower the shrinking body of the hog. The boy had seen how this was done. Even a city boy might learn the knack of it. He climbed from the buggy, using the spokes like rungs of a ladder, and as he loosened the rope he wrapped the coils around his waist. He had seen this done by the fat man in a tug of war. It was hard to say what the boy had in mind, if anything. He unraveled the rope until the great hams, taking up the slack with a snap, swept him from the ground like a dummy and swung him in a wide arc. The jolt had drawn the coils at his waist, and he hung like a sack, bent like a jack-

knife, and the blurred movement of the earth sweeping past made him close his eyes. As he swung, the wind gave him a clockwise turn. As the boy didn't want to be sick with the hog still there smiling at him, he kept his mouth closed, and his eyes shut tight. His fingers swelled thick, and he could feel the pulse when he closed his hands. But he felt much better, nevertheless, and when another rooster crowed, there was a bright streak of daylight in the east. There was also a smile on the face of the hog, and as the rope stopped creaking a lamp in the house indicated another day had begun.

## THE VISIT

**T**HE BOY was sitting quietly again in the huge old car. In front of him, the backyard of the house looked still. It looked pale and sunny and green. Up ahead, the windows of the garage were green and wet with the morning light. But inside the car it was dark; the air around him seemed high and deeply shadowed.

Whenever he thought of the car now, he thought of his grandmother's eyes searching wildly for the road. And he saw, in his mind's eye, a road which disappeared in a blinding stroke of motion, like the revolving light of an airplane beacon, and then the car, black and ponderous, rushing toward a vast hill, a domed hillside jagged with great white stones. And at this point, usually, he thought of himself dying.

Now the boy turned in his seat, and began watching the house. He saw the crabapple tree, and the apples about ready to fall, and the clothesline which was stretched from the tree to a hook beside the kitchen door. He was scared—as he had

## James Turner Jackson

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CROSS SECTION.

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been for three days running. But he thought that as long as he stayed where he was, the car would remain in the yard. And nobody would find him. The sky would not grow dark. Nothing would happen.

He sat there quietly, without a motion, waiting now, watching for some sign of life in the house. And there was none. The sun was climbing. His grandmother's big cotton drawers were drying on the line; and he let his eyes follow the line back and forth from the hook near the kitchen door to the crab-apple tree.

He saw that his own clothes were missing from the line. It wouldn't be long now before it started to happen. There wasn't any doubt: he knew it now for sure. His grandmother had already taken his clothes inside to be sprinkled and ironed. And usually, after sprinkling the laundry, she let it wait a few hours, even overnight, before ironing. But today it would be different. When his grandmother said, "Tomorrow we're going to make the visit," it meant that everything was changed. It might not be the next day, or the day after that, but it meant that some day soon they would drive away to visit and honor all the graves where his ancestors were.

A jay was screaming now in the crabapple tree. And he saw a dark form, a rounding shadow, come up behind the screening of the kitchen door. The shadow wavered there momentarily, and then held fast. He gripped the steering wheel hard, his head rigid, looking straight ahead up the weed-grown drive toward the garage. Under his breath, he began counting, *one-thousand and one one-thousand and two*. He counted very slowly. Reaching one-thousand and twenty in this way, he turned back. He looked at the house. The shadow in the doorway was gone.

Then the boy began to feel a little better. Some of the fear inside him was easing down. He slipped one hand around the steering wheel, and cranking down the window next to him, glanced out sharply to right and left. Reaching down to the ignition, he made a deft, twisting motion with his fingers. He looked once more at the house, thinking to himself *I got maybe an hour yet Grandma won't have finished the ironing before noon*. And then, after running his fingers over the hornbutton, pressing it twice very cautiously, he made a quiet honking noise in his throat, and began to pretend it was really tomorrow: he was the one who was driving Grandma toward the distant graves.

The visits had begun three years ago, when he was six years old. Even before that time, however, it was his grandmother's custom to make an annual round of the cemeteries. She had never asked for company then. In the late spring—around Memorial Day, usually—she came for him, and took him to her house, where he stayed with his grandfather. Then she drove out across the state, alone, stopping wherever her kin

were buried, and visiting with her relatives along the way. She had no one buried in town at that time. Returning from her visit a week or two later, she used to say it was a long, long way to go . . . just to see your people, and then for a few brief moments only.

But in the winter, three years ago, his grandfather died; and by spring his grandmother's custom had changed. She came to the house every Sunday after church, and said nothing of her usual visit across the state. She was still frantic and wild with her sorrow, and one day—while she was carrying on about her husband—she fell off the front porch and got a splinter in her eye. The splinter was removed, and she fixed her broken eyeglasses with mending tape. But nonetheless, in a short while, her sight was failing. From that day on, he had made all the trips with her.

For almost a year, then, his grandmother never left town. She kept up her garden, and tended the ceremonial plants growing in the bay windows of her house. And she never complained because some of the flowers were, by her likes, going to waste: were blooming and fading in her yard and behind her windows, and not upon the accustomed hillsides across state, upon the proper and stately ancestral places she had so often visited and honored in the past.

It was a year of short journeys. In her judgment, surely, it would not have been fitting to call them "Visits." In the late afternoon, most often, the car was filled with flowers, and together they drove out to a nearby cemetery where his grandfather was. They were going to see (so she told him each time they went) how his grandfather's grave was getting on. After the car was unloaded, and the flowers and shears and transplanting pots arranged in orderly rows beside the grave, she would send him down to the standpipe with a pail for water. In this manner, his work began. And when he finished the watering, she would set him to picking up fallen leaves and twigs. Not a moment was wasted.

It was the year when his grandmother was still very clear, and very rigid about what she wanted. By her reckoning, every plot in the cemetery, save hers alone, was poorly tended. Each time a flower was cut or trimmed by her hand, she counted off the number of its blossoms. And pointing to an adjoining grave, she would often shake her head, and wonder how it was that people were so shiftless and lazy-minded and ignorant—how it was remotely possible, just for example, that they expected their petunias to blossom fairly, not having first dug the plants up, then replanted them in little cups of clay for the nourishment of the roots. She herself, as was only due and proper, would be painstaking unto the last detail; and for this, if for no other reason, always brought with her a mail-order catalogue, to which she might have immediate recourse for

pictures—together with complete descriptions—of monuments fashioned of enduring granite, perpetual marble.

When the flowers had been placed to her exact liking, she stepped back a few paces, customarily, and with the catalogue open in her hand sought to envision which of the pictured memorials would be most seemly at her husband's grave. She walked back and forth, glancing at the catalogue, weighing her decision. Soon, at her call, he stopped whatever he was doing, and came to help her read the fine print beneath the glossy pictures.

But each time it seemed that no final decision could be rendered. Either the time or the season was not auspicious. They would study the catalogue at length, and then his grandmother would send him back to the car. He would load the back seat, and then, while his grandmother remained at the grave alone, he would watch the long arcs of the water-sprinklers shining in the last sunlight of the day. In such a light, the cemetery looked very plain to him: the trees simple and lofty in height, and all the tombstones austere in their carving. He tried to keep his head turned decently away, but sometimes, glancing back despite himself, he would see his grandmother above the mounded earth of the grave, her arms rising up in dark weaving shapes of despair and worship. In the coming dusk he would hear the sharp whispering outcries of her lament, above even the humming sound of the water-sprinklers. And though her eye bothered and afflicted her more, month by month, that year when they started for home she still drove with lumbering and powerful speed.

Yet he hadn't been afraid then. Even though it was dark most often, and the nighthawks were usually out when she stopped the car at his house, and he got out . . . and his mother had to turn on the porch light to help him find his way.

Far away now, the noon whistle was blowing. Almost at once there was a quick slap of a screen door, and the boy saw his grandmother standing on the kitchen porch. For nearly an hour he had traveled in a flowing image of his mind, driving where a road coursed and bent and ran true, without relief, to the vast fluid circle of the past. And all this while the car had stood massive and stationary, waiting for him in the yard, and now it returned and caught him there, and held him fast. Folded neatly over his grandmother's arm were his best, his Sunday clothes. . . .

He touched his foot to the brake pedal, gently, and with his fingers made another twisting motion at the ignition lock. Rolling up the window, he felt the car grow dark again, and once more silent. He spoke just once before getting out. His voice rose up: it seemed to float above him, suspended undiminishing in his tombed enclosure of glass and old fluorescent and metal. "All right, Grandma," he heard his own voice say-

ing. "I guess I can't just run and hide from you . . . not all the time anyway."

The light struck at her face when he went up to her. But she wasn't squinting very much. She heard him come, and jerked her head around toward him. "Here are your clothes now, John," she said. "Scrubbed and dried in the sun. All fresh and clean and ironed as they should be. Now you take them straight upstairs and lay them out in your room, so as they'll be ready when the time comes . . ."

The screen door opened, slapped again. They both went inside to eat.

Before nightfall, the boy had found the claw hammer. He had been thinking about it, looking for it, most of the afternoon; and just before it grew too dark to continue looking, he found it in the basement. And by that time he had made up his mind. If worst came to worst, he had finally decided, he could wreck the car.

It was just after lunch when he started thinking about the hammer. His grandmother was clearing away the dishes.

"Get outside and pot the flowers," his grandmother said.

"They're all potted, Grandma."

"Ah then, John," his grandmother said. Her hand was closed, and she raised her thumb, pointing it at him. "You get outside and pot some more Geraniums. And I guess lily-of-the-valley too. We'll be driving all the way to Owasso when the time comes. All the way across the state, so you make sure there's plenty and sufficient for the stops we make. And see you put them in the car."

Before leaving the house, he had helped her dry the dishes, and carried hot flatirons back and forth from the stove while she ironed her big cotton drawers. Then he went out through the weedy sunstruck grass, past the lowering crabapple tree, to the flowerbeds. He was filling one of the pots when he straightened up, suddenly, and darted the flashing trowel into the earth.

Behind the garage, hurrying now, he found the dark shady place where lily-of-the-valley was growing wild. He began pulling out the lily plants and scattering them, very deliberately, over the cinders of the driveway. Standing in the barred shadow of the backfence, in the immense flowing calm, the soundless air of afternoon, he stared down at the dark waxy leaves. At least the lilies, he thought, would be out of Grandma's reach. . . .

He was hiding the leftover pots in the attic of the garage, and had just found an old tool chest, when he thought again of the hammer. He searched through the chest. Coming down the steps again, he rummaged through a work bench that stood against the rear wall. The hammer was nowhere in the garage. He pushed open the high warped door, and walking back

through the high grass to the flowerbeds, began carrying the potted geraniums to the car.

The flowers reached up, rising thick and dense to the roof of the car. He pressed them back, spreading his arms amid the choking leaves and scent, and fitted in the few remaining pots from the running board. He climbed once more into the driver's seat, the flowers hovering and shaking behind him, almost touching him.

He sat there quietly again in the huge old car: his hands placed in correct positions on the wheel, his foot moving the gas pedal in steady pulsing motions. Far-off a car roared on the highway. He stared up the driveway: past the fence, beyond the distant trees, the highway was stretching east, white and broad in the sun. For one last time, he tried to remember all the motions his grandmother made when she drove to the graves.

It wasn't easy any more. As time passed, her motions had grown more diverse and strange, more frenzied, halting, and difficult for him to follow. The year after his grandfather's burial, she had finally gone to a doctor, who told her a cataract was forming in her good eye. The doctor gave her glycerine drops to take, and asked her what she was doing with eyeglasses repaired with mending tape. Without giving him an answer, she had come straight home to doctor herself. She had tried the drops for a time, but after that—on a hunch of her own—switched over to vitamin pills. She never did change her eyeglasses.

The second winter, his uncle Jerome fell sick and died; and for months he had lost all chance of watching her. Wherever she went then, she went alone. No one saw her, nor even heard anything of her until reports began appearing in the newspaper, telling of minor collisions here and there, in which her car had figured, either as chief victim or offender.

Jerome was her first son; and he had died a traitor to her faith. She spurned his grave. That spring she again made the long trip across the state. She went and returned alone. When at last she rang up her surviving children (who were his mother and his uncle John), it was simply to announce that nobody would ever catch her—not under any circumstances, alive or dead—in St. Mary's popish roman graveyard.

Even when her vow had been broken, when she came again for him and they rode away together in the high swaying car, the thought of going to such a roman place seemed to pluck incessantly at her mind. On their way to uncle Jerome's, she always drove with many wild and random movements at the wheel.

St. Mary's lay on the other side of town, opposite a row of blackened factories. He remembered his grandmother gazing for a long time at that dark line of buildings; then, for a time equally long, and stern, gazing upon the little stone lambs



and spiny crosses in the graveyard. Jerking her head toward the figurines which were poised on the tombs, she had cleared her throat once, furiously, contemptuously. The water facilities at St. Mary's were poor, indeed sinful, she claimed after later visits; the lawns were criminally kept. Once she told him to read aloud the inscriptions on the monuments. And she had then repeated the words in a thin and outraged whisper.

And yet, there must have been something more than her son's dying heresy to so sustain her ire, and her outrage. That summer, a notice concerning her driver's license arrived from the police department. For three weeks, without any let-up, she fretted and raged, before driving down to the courthouse. When she came back, she told him the matter was settled for good and all. In view of her ceremonial activities and obligations, a special license had been issued which, so she told him, warning him to tell no one of this sanction, would hold good "unto her decease."

In any event, the trips continued; and for a time, his grandmother drove without accident. Her route through the town that summer was in the nature of a prolonged detour: an errant and wandering course which she had designed, apparently, for the sole purpose of avoiding all busy streets and junctions.

But then one day it happened anyway. The sun was unmistakably bright and full—the day she drove squarely into a chestnut tree out at St. Mary's. A week later a bill arrived from the Church, which she refused pointblank to pay. He read out to her the itemized statement, covering the many expensive services of a tree-surgeon. In response, she began to talk vaguely of carrying the fight to the higher courts.

It was early fall. On blue evenings, returning from a tour of the cemeteries, she often asked him to spend the night. After supper he would read the newspaper to her, watching always for some mention of his grandmother and the chestnut tree. No report was ever made. In the end, his mother was forced to settle the claim.

At last—a year after her son's burial, two years after her husband's death—she spoke again of the ancestral graves lying across the state in Owasso. He had no warning that night. After reading the review of the evening programs, he had put down the newspaper and gone to the radio. She had not nodded to him. Instead, she had leaned from her chair, beckoning to him, and told him once again of ancient, birdwhite stones on vaulting hills, far away to the east.

She told him then of the town of Owasso, as she remembered it from long ago. She told him of the house where she was born, where a mineral spring was flowing in the cellar. As she spoke, he remembered one afternoon out at his uncle's grave. He had been turning the spigot at the water pipe, and

suddenly she was behind him, touching his arm. He turned to face her, and she said, "Ah John, if you could only know . . ." She was looking to the east then, past the black line of the factories. "If you knew, John . . . What water cress we grew in the springs in the house on the hill in Owasso . . ." And that night, before going to bed, he heard again the running, magical flow of her voice, saying those words he had never really forgotten.

That was nearly a year ago: the night when the leaves were beating in the swift blue air outside, falling in the wind; when he thought, for the first time, of a bright road like a stroke, a shaft of light, streaming without break across dark land, land unseen, streaming beneath the wheels of the car where like captives they rode behind high dazzling glass, riding always through the dark toward an old house on a hill, an unknown place far away, where a spring was flowing in the cellar. They rode up the glittering, perilous road, and the house they found was empty. The rooms were vacant, every one. In the pool below they saw crystalline water: the flowing brim was crested with greenish leafpads, and white lilies.

The next morning, before breakfast, he had gone out to the car. Whenever she was away, after that, he sat alone in the driver's seat, remembering her motions, practicing them, working wheel and clutch in long spells of silent, urgent mimicry. The trips seemed easier to him now. For a long time, actually, they had not been the same. The old car would still make its terrible way through the sidestreets of town; and he would see his grandmother's head jerking back and forth, as she searched in her darkening vision for the proper turns, the oncoming traffic. But when they rolled at last under the lofty trees, and stopped on the wetted gravel, it would be easier, and not the same. She talked to him now, and at great length, demanding far less of him. It seemed that her care of the graves themselves, in the last few months, had become less scrupulous. She often neglected to send him down to the standpipe for water. She would even, on occasion, pick up the flowers that had broken from their stems, and, punching holes in the rounded dirt with her forefinger, place them back on the grave. And, for the most part, the mail-order catalogue remained in the car. She seldom opened it. She never asked him any more to help her in reading the fine print beneath the glossy pictures.

During the past winter—the third since her husband's death—she had finally laid up the car. It was the bright snow, she said, which made her eyes worse. Even with snow still on the ground, however, she was making plans for the spring. Whenever he came to visit, to stay the night, she spoke to him of the people in Owasso . . . the many people of his blood. Again and again, in the cold months, he had listened to the recital of their names, and heard of all the precious things

buried with them, his great-grandmother's wedding ring, and her diamonds brought by Clipper all the way from Germany, his great-grandfather's ruby stickpin—the record whole and intact, faultlessly preserved in her mind, of family and ancestral treasure given to the tomb. Yet of all things, she told him, he must keep their names first and foremost in his mind. He must never in his life forget their names.

When the thaw came, in April, a garageman arrived to service the car. He backed it out of the garage into the side yard, leaving it there on her instructions. And it seemed then, six months ago, that it was going to happen. She fell ill Memorial Day: it did not matter. The car was ready any time; her mind was set. Through the summer the rain was good, everywhere bringing the flowers to a raw, tumbling bloom, like that of weeds.

And so it was that now—not suddenly so much as merely once again: in early fall once again, and after three years' waiting—the boy knew his grandmother would surely start, knowing that the Visit must come and would. Sitting in the driver's seat, he dropped his hands from the wheel. He saw the bright road stroking from his sight, then returning and holding firm, streaming like a blade of light upon a vast hillside jagged with white stones. And he knew that such a road leads home every time but one, and then does not, can not, lead you home at all. He took his foot from the brake. He could not learn to drive in time to change what might happen (even if it would make any difference, which it wouldn't, because his grandmother, in any case, would not let him try): he was pretending only, pantomiming, making-believe to himself in a dark glassy place; and tomorrow or the day after, no matter what, the huge old car would thunder away terrifically, and both of them would be seated there, high up in the swaying seats.

He sat there a moment longer. The explosive scent of the banked flowers pressed him: he knew now the only thing left to him was to find the claw hammer, wherever it was, and open the hood of the car, and fix the hidden motor good. . . .

Leaving the car, he quickly crossed the yard. He opened the cellar door without a sound. When he had found the claw hammer, there was still enough time before supper to do the job secretly.

Before starting back, however, he wanted to make sure of his grandmother. He heard her moving above him. She was in the kitchen now, stretching curtains, it seemed to him. The thin wooden frames would be standing around her, leaning about in a crazy maze, some already taut with curtainlace, quivering with tension, some of them still empty. He heard her foot strike something. The skittering of wood. She began to give little cries of annoyance. Then, abruptly, she called out his name.

But he was already moving by then. He beat her outside. He was up the cellar steps, out into the yard, and behind the crabapple tree before she had even reached the kitchen door. He stood there, stockstill, watching. His grandmother came tiptoeing over the kitchen porch, her face drawn up, and her head jerking around and back, in a steady arc. She was trying to find out where he was. . . .

Then she jerked her head around quick, erratically breaking the arc; and at that moment a leaf blew off the tree, came whispering down. Perhaps the sound had helped her, perhaps it had thrown her off; but whichever it was, she closed her hand over the clothesline, to steady herself, and came walking toward him behind the tree.

He heard a thin snapping above him. A crabapple came down through the leaves. She began moving toward him more rapidly.

She couldn't miss him now, not with the clothesline guiding her. It was too late. Behind him the car was waiting in the sideyard. But now it was too late. He bent over, picked up the crabapple, and coming out from behind the tree, walked toward her. He walked through the high weedy grass with the apple extended in his hand.

He saw her free hand stretching toward him, her head jerking at him, and holding him now. And he handed her the fruit.

"My house is all in order now. Everything set to rights," his grandmother said. "It's been a long day, John, but tomorrow's the Visit. Now you get inside and clean your hands good. . . ."

She was fingering the apple with the speckled fingers of her free hand. The thumb brown and waxy from the ironing she'd done.

"I thank you, John," she said. "I don't expect I'll be making jelly this year."

She still kept one hand on the clothesline. She turned now, switching hands on the line. "Why, there's apple pie for dessert!" she said.

The crabapple had dropped to the ground. The boy picked it up. Holding it, he followed his grandmother up the steps and into the house for supper.

Late in the night, thinking back, he didn't know when it had started to get worse: the swift rushing of his fear, and after that, the loose breaking curl and wave of terror he had felt. At first, it hadn't been bad at all.

After supper they sat in the parlor, listening to the radio. After the cross-state weather summary and tomorrow's forecast, his grandmother felt for the switch, and clicked it off.

"God means us to have a goodly day," she said. "You draw your tub first, John."

Everywhere around him, the house had smelled of soap and

ammonia. And while taking his bath, he had thought only of going home again. He almost forgot the car standing remote and impervious in the dark, and his grandmother in the yard at sundown switching hands on the clothesline, and the long bright road streaming across the state like a blade of light. He almost forgot the birdwhite stones under the dark trees in Owasso.

He had wanted to leave the house, for good: to throw open the front door, and walking through himself, close it for good upon the flowers standing in crocks on the spread newspapers, and the windowshades already drawn against tomorrow's sun; and then run home, all the way home, and never come back again.

When he left the bathroom, she was waiting for him. She was dressed in her nightgown, a towel over her arm.

"Did you get yourself clean, John?" she said. "Do you know how far it is . . . have you any idea, John? What a long way it is to see your people. All the way to Owasso. Have you remembered that?"

He shook his head. He told her he had washed himself clean. Then he went upstairs to his room.

It hadn't started then: not yet, not that soon. When he passed his grandmother's room, he saw her big cotton drawers laid out neatly on the chair. A dress was hanging from the lightchain; a pair of shoes were neatly placed next to a hatbag. Taking off his robe in his room, he said his prayers and got into bed.

He could hear his grandmother in the tub downstairs. She was singing a quiet tune. It was a hymn, maybe, or a soft anthem. He remembered what she had said to him, a long time ago: "Ah John," she had said. "What water cress we grew in the springs in the house on the hill in Owasso. . . ." For an instant, he thought she was standing just outside his door, talking aloud to herself. He thought again of the water pooled deep in the earth, crested and ripe with green leaves and white lilies.

And then—maybe it was—he felt the first cold rushing across his stomach.

He remembered the huge old car down below him, and the claw hammer hidden now in his bureau drawer. While she was singing, he might slip downstairs, move silently, secretly toward the car with the claw hammer. . . . He felt it again, deep and renewed, the onrushing cold across his stomach. He went to the bureau and opened the drawer.

He was standing with the hammer in his hands, when the singing stopped downstairs. He listened. In the silent room, the quiet of the house everywhere around him, he let the hammer down. It wasn't the car: it must be something else. He closed the drawer. The car would not crash with them, crush them, kill them when it was tomorrow.

A door squeaked. He heard his grandmother leave the bathroom. He opened the door of his bedroom, and stood waiting. The floor felt cold and smooth to his bare feet. He heard her again now. She was roaming about the house. From time to time the sound of a struck chair, of something rapped free from a table, and falling.

At last she came to the foot of the stairs. She was calling up to him. "Will you light the lamps, John?" she said.

He put on his slippers and went down the stairs.

Turning on the parlor lights, he saw her. She had been standing there in the dark. In the instant of the light-flash, it seemed to him he saw her face, queerly. Her eyes were moving, looking at him. She was no longer turning her head from side to side. She was fully dressed now. A wet towel hung over her arm.

"Light the lamps in the dining room, John," his grandmother said.

He went past her to the dining room. He turned the lights on.

And after that, he could remember, she did several queer things. When he came back to the parlor, she was standing in the bay window beside her houseplants: the geranium and fern and elephant ear. "Take these outside in the morning," she said to him. He felt the cold rushing stronger in him now, but not yet breaking in loose waving curls in his throat. "Not those, Grandma," he said. "No. The car's all packed." "Ah John," she said. "Never you mind. Take them outside in the morning. My own plants . . . They're my own and I've grown them for myself. And you never know, John. A body never knows for sure and for certain. . . ."

He went upstairs again, and got into bed. After a while, he heard her once more moving about the house. Finally she came to the foot of the stairs. And this time, when she called to him, the rushing cold rose higher, and broke curling in his throat, choking him. He lay as quiet as he could in his bed, pretending to be asleep.

He heard her coming up the stairs.

From the hallway near him, she called again. He lay quiet. Then he heard her talking in the hall, gently, monotonously. "Very well," she was saying to herself in the hallway. "I'll go down myself and put them out in the yard myself, where they'll catch the dew. Under the tree where the sun won't come and wilt them in the morning. It's tomorrow I guess, when the Visit's over. . . . You never know for sure and for certain, but we'll go tomorrow anyway, tomorrow. All the way to Owasso, yes, all that way and maybe beyond. I guess even tomorrow would be soon enough to go. . . ."

He saw the white of her nightgown when she passed his door. He was shaking now; he couldn't stop. He remembered his grandmother said to him, and the minister said to them

all, *We make a visit to this earth, and then we leave to live in another place, we live in Heaven, Amen.* And then, because it wasn't entirely unknown to him any more, the wave broke a final time, and began to leave him; because lying in bed in the dark room, he began to know what it was:

She had taken her bath now, his grandma, and put her house in order, and the mansions of her body in order—as she said to him, and the minister said to them all, Amen. He said, the minister: *Lest the silver cord be loosed . . .* And she was, Grandma was, letting her hand slip away from the stretched and sunbright line under the tree. She was going to wander up hills now amid jagged stones, with golden light streaming from her eyes. . . .

He was speaking to her now, in a whisper she would never hear. He couldn't say it any louder. "Grandma, I can't remember all the names you told me. Those names you gave me of all the people of our blood, great-grandfather and great-grandmother and great-great uncle, all the kin and my blood long-dead in the birdwhite tombs on the hill near the house with the spring in Owasso. . . ."

He was lying rigid on his bed. He had stopped shaking. He listened for her . . . some sound. . . .

He thought now, it wasn't the car which threatened them, either of them really. The car might have gone too soon, for one of them, but it never could have gone far enough. And it wasn't the dark hill either, never the dark hill coming as it did, but when it did, coming now toward his grandmother and with what powerful speed.

He listened for her again. Some single sound even, would be enough. . . .

No, it was Grandma dying. But not just that, either. It was Grandma dying too soon for him to know the names, to learn them, to walk with her under the domed trees and read them on the granite stones. Reading them to her, repeating them after her.

He listened once more. He was quiet in his bed. There seemed no sound at all.

Someone, he knew, he was sure, would remember to order the stone for Grandpa: would make a lasting judgment and decision from the mail-order catalogue. And he would remember, if no other would, to transplant the petunias in little cups of clay for Uncle Jerome and the nourishment of the roots. But he would forget—himself the only one—he would forget the gravesides, the white stones, along the roads across all the state of Michigan. Because she hadn't told him often enough. And mostly, because they hadn't gone in time . . .

Now, coming across the hall from his grandmother's room, he heard the bony ticking sound of her hairpins, as she took her hair down.

Charles G. Bell

## FALL OF TROY

The woods are burning. Under the mournful light—  
Amid long reeds—by the ruddy banks of water—  
Run stoats and foxes from the beaks of slaughter  
While a pattering of rabbits fills the night.

And was it all for this, the years of nurture,  
Rearing the shoots, and dyking with slow pain  
The downward radiance on the terraced plain,  
For this, the sudden suicide of nature?

No sensual trace remains. And yet one ray,  
Blood-red of flame, like the last flush of sun,  
Caught on the rippled pool the ancient swan,  
Mirrored the pluming breast, and wings that day

Would greet in the new land by the unfired river;  
And on that dying world woke such a song  
As melodized immortal wrong;  
And this has wrung the heart of God forever.

CHARLES G. BELL was born in Greenville Mississippi, studied at the University of Virginia, and attended Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. He is now teaching at the University of Chicago.

James Schuyler

## SALUTE

Past is past, and if one  
remembers what one meant  
to do and never did, is  
not to have thought to do  
enough? Like that gather-  
ing of one of each I  
planned, to gather one  
of each kind of clover,  
daisy, paintbrush that  
grew in that field  
the cabin stood in and  
study them one afternoon  
before they wilted. Past  
is past. I salute  
that various field.

JAMES SCHUYLER, who lives in New York City, has been previously published in *Accent*.



John Malcolm Brinnin

## CARMARTHEN BAR

Hung between stretched wings, the sea bird sat—  
A shape of pain—not far from where we walked  
In heavy light from off Carmarthen Bar.

“Mad Christ,” I said, “Christ of the cormorants,”  
But you interpreted him differently—

“He thinks that’s what a cormorant *should* do,  
Nobody ever told him otherwise.”

All morning and all afternoon, we ached  
To see his Satan-pointed shoulders make  
A shrinking crucifix on the wet sand.

Perhaps, had we had more to do than climb  
Sir John’s Hill for the seaward view, or read  
Half-finished verses in the summerhouse,  
We should have heard his limp cry less, or less  
Insistently. But, as it was, with words  
Falling and rain falling and a drum  
Nobody heard, the bird’s predicament—  
Was he a god in whose reach, uttermost  
And pitiable, only himself was caught?—  
Embroidered us when we had least heart for it.

That night within Laugharne castle when the moon’s  
Seagoing trumpet blew out half the stars,  
And field mice whimpered, and a chuckling owl  
Cartwheeled above us in the roofless light,  
The human darkness of eight hundred years  
Bled from a cry. It was the cormorant.  
As if, by speech, we might still overtake  
A mystery we could not escape, I said,  
“Sweet Christus of the cormorants outstretched,”  
And you said, “Bloody bird,” and nudged me home.

By morning our old albatross was gone.  
Did the tides take him, sprawled on his black rack?  
Or was he mustered upward, his dead wings  
Beating toward immolation ceaselessly?  
The angel in him, or the idiot,  
Had driven us away. Yet when I cried,  
“Christ Cormorant, that you might scavenge me!”  
Without reflection you looked down to find  
His black cross posted in that shining sand.  
Together then we smiled, and walked inland.

JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN, director of  
the YMHA Poetry Center in New York  
City, is the author of four books of  
poems, the latest being *THE SORROWS OF  
COLD STONE*, published by Dodd, Mead.

## THE PEACOCK

A pen at the zoo contains  
(In odd juxtaposition) three bison  
And several of the more glorious cocks and hens.  
And all seem intent on appearing not to listen

To the remarks of the audience  
That hang above their heads as vaguely as trees  
And summer clouds. A sense  
Of mutual appreciation pervades this

Keep, if only in the way the fowl  
Sidestep with neat precision  
The truck shape of the shaggy cow,  
As ponderous as indecision;

Or vice-versa how the heavy,  
Alcoholic eyes appraise the proud grace  
And unbelievable colours. Noah's navy  
Never, in all its importunate and close

Two-and-twos, spelled such apparent  
Harmony. Until the peacock cried.  
Moon-ridden, almost extinct, it sent  
A truer bird (still unatrophied

By space) flying up one evening to a mild  
Astonishment of sky, crying a lost fable,  
A lost kingdom where only beauty ruled;  
Where peacocks stepped leisurely and inviolate, unable

To admire themselves enough, and all  
The other creatures' acquiescence was a throne.  
And the people watched it spangle  
From its muddy ditch, alone

And furious, brilliant as a Spanish dancer,  
Renouncing their whole uninterested race  
With such a fiery answer,  
It brought the darkness crashing down upon their ugliness.

MARVIN SOLOMON is 28 years old and has studiously avoided a college education. His first poem was published when he was six and his current work is appearing in such magazines as *The Tiger's Eye*, *The Hopkins Review* and *The New Yorker*.

## THE SKIERS

All night we listened to a silent space  
Treading on darkness its enormous hall.  
From air, as vaporous as moonlight carved  
On icebergs sliding from the glacial train,  
We took our element: breathed in, breathed out,  
Breath was the only sound we ever heard,  
Except the hiss of snow.

Time's heirlooms branched beneath us as we sped  
Down vacant valleys, as the frozen dead  
Piled their neat packages across the ice  
And distance made the wounded disappear.  
We dropped upon the pastures of pure snow  
Into that winter worn explorers know,  
Defining worlds with alphabets of snow.

Now at the arctic pole, we yearn  
For the jungle only, the green rain.  
Hope fells the neophytes who cough in snow,  
Start for the tropics, and row and row  
Through the dead islands of the jagged snow.  
Where did we wander? Are the branches real  
We touch in sleep? Is it spring or fall?  
The light evades us when it most defines.

Think of whom we left, gasping among pines.

HOWARD MOSS, who lives in New York City, is the author of a collection of poems, *THE WOUND AND THE WEATHER*, published by Reynal and Hitchcock. His poetry has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.

J. C. Hall

## THE BURNING HARE

Ages have passed this riddle down,  
Today I seek its meaning out—  
How, when the sapless bracken burns  
Unquenchable in summer's drought,  
A hare, lucky in liberty  
From farmer's gun and poacher's gin,  
Crouches too late upon her form  
While merciless nature hems her in.

What holds her there? What secret bond  
Of earth, too old for intellect?  
Inscrutable powers shape her will,  
She bows before the fiery fact.  
Still, if she chose, a path lies clear  
Across the heath, beside the bog.  
Galloping there, she'd cheat her fate,  
Yet lies as motionless as a log.

Pondering this, I muse how once  
Buddha, incarnate as a hare,  
Leapt in voluntary sacrifice  
Into the flames some brahmin there  
Had lit; and therefrom, all unharmed,  
Stepped forth, in glad surprise to meet  
Sakka, almighty arbiter,  
Adventuring from the holy seat.

And thus was proved and justified,  
Purged of all grosser elements . . .  
So legendary lore might still unlock  
Riddles of blind experience  
If heart, not head, could read that book  
Wherein the hieroglyphs of time  
Are set—nature and beast and man  
One in the great heraldic rhyme.

But no, ironic with knowledge now  
We witness this drama on the heath—  
The sieging flames, the sudden dash,  
The screams, the reeking fur, the death  
In some deep covert. Blind and dumb  
We stand in piteous wonder there  
Nor guess how our pounding pulses prove  
The terror and triumph of the hare.

J. C. HALL is a young British poet who has published in *The Listener*, and in *New Writing*. A collection of his verse, *THE SUMMER DANCE*, was recently published in England by John Lehmann.

## Giuseppe Berto

*Giuseppe Berto*, a young Italian writer who lives and works as a journalist in Rome, is the author of two novels, *THE SKY IS RED* and *THE BRIGAND*, and one book of short stories, *THE WORKS OF GOD*, all published by New Directions.

The son of poor shopkeepers, he began writing while a prisoner of war in Texas, during World War II.

A prison camp is the setting of *The Seed Among Thorns*.

# THE SEED AMONG THORNS

Translated by

Ben Johnson

*Ben Johnson* is an American living in Rome. His recent translation of *THIS INDOLENCE OF MINE* by Italo Svevo appeared in the Winter 1952 issue of *The Hudson Review*.

And some fell among thorns,  
and the thorns grew up, and  
choked it, and it yielded no  
fruit. Mark IV, 7

**A** MAN CAN LIE in bed, and be racked with pain, and not suffer greatly. Blood churns through his brain, his back seems always too slack or too taut, his belly has a scalpel wound which has been stitched and bandaged with gauze. The wound is the main thing because this is the source of all his afflictions, including the ache of his head and his back. When he has to cough, his stomach contracts and the wound lances him with a pain that lingers on and on and does not die. But what makes him suffer is something else entirely.

Out in the corridor an orderly passes, heavy footed on the planking. A nurse appears briefly at the door: "Hello," she says, in a businesslike way. In a room not far away somebody is whistling "Lovely Way to Spend an Evening," over and over again. These are the things which, if anyone pays attention to them, cause suffering. One must ignore them; the fact that others do not care must not be allowed to mingle with one's anguish and generate self-pity. For a man, a prisoner, consumed with pain, feeling sorry for himself is dangerous, much more dangerous than a surgical wound in his belly or purely physical suffering.

There is not much to distract one in a little hospital room. The walls are of beaverboard painted yellow, almost white, and the ceiling is of beaverboard too, the same color. And just below the ceiling, running from one wall to the other, there is a pipe, which must be for water, and it is painted yellow,

almost white, and it has a sort of valve on it in case there should be a fire. In the center of the ceiling there is a light bulb with a thin cord, to pull the light on and off, dangling from it.

There is also a window, of course, but this is behind the man, and he is not able to turn around to look out. All the things, then, that might be seen from the window—the barbed-wire fences, the wooden towers—no longer assume for him the tremendous importance they once did because he cannot see them.

The sun, for instance, when there is sun: in fixed hours of the day it enters the room where the man lies sprawl, but the sun's entering is not what is important. Before, when he was back in camp, the man used to enjoy watching the sun's fall at day's end. Not that sunset is a spectacular thing on a barren, yellow prairie; just that he always used to look at it from the same barracks corner, and every day the sun would set a little more to the north or a little more to the south, and that was important, the passage of time. Important because it is always a fine thing to know that time is really passing, even though it is not at all certain whether the straits one finds oneself in will have an end or not.

At all events, one can keep occupied even in a little hospital room. It's enough, let us assume, for one to decide to count nailheads. The nails are in the ceiling, holding the slabs of beaverboard in place. All of them, naturally, cannot be seen, else counting them would be too easy. Only a few of them, a few which were not hammered all the way in, and some others, around which the paint is peeling a little. No matter: there must have been some order according to which the nails were placed, so all one has to do is examine them closely and figure it out. One might get mixed up, or forget the count, and then have to start all over again. But for a man racked with anguish all of this has value: he does not have to listen to somebody whistling "Lovely Way to Spend an Evening," or care because of the inadvertent appearance of a nurse, or mind the clumping steps of an orderly. To human-kind it is a small matter if one of their number is about to go to pieces in anguish; even so, one need not fret over this.

The hospital is made up of a series of barracks buildings joined together by corridors. The rooms, though mere cubicles, are comfortable enough. Each has a steam radiator, and the windows in no way resemble the ones in the camp, which leaked rain water and sand. So you hardly care if it is cold outside, or if it is raining, or if the wind is blowing. The only thing that can be bothersome is the searchlight mounted on top of the wooden tower outside the window, where the guards are, and the machine-gunners. At nighttime it prowls along the fence, and in among the barracks, and at times its fierce light crashes into the room. The man must remember to have the shade drawn before the orderly leaves. He must remember,

too, to ask for water because he is often overcome by thirst at night, and to have to spend hours wanting a drink of water is not a pleasant thing.

But it is not difficult to get water. You simply have to think of it in time, and then ring the buzzer, and the orderly comes. If he fails to come at once, you ring for him again, and then he comes, sooner or later. He comes with the water—looking a little sour, perhaps—but anyway he comes, and he puts it on the stand beside the bed, a tumbler with a curved glass straw in it so the man can drink without lifting his head.

Thus the man prepares for night, though he is never quite prepared because at night the pain increases and his temperature rises, and then he must seek help. So a nurse comes. She is dressed in white and wears a cap which is not really a cap but a starched halo or something like a halo. She rolls the man over on his side, banks him with pillows, and massages his back; and when he feels the pressure of her fingers along his spine, it can even be pleasurable. Then she has him take a red capsule, or a yellow one, and she injects a little liquid in his arm. And when she has gone, the man regrets not having looked at her more closely; he regrets not being able to remember what she looks like, or whether she looks somehow like other persons he has known so that color be lent to his recollection of them, now long since faded.

Before leaving, she pulled the cord and the bulb on the ceiling went out, and now a faint light glimmers in from the corridor where there is a bulb which burns continuously. Now he is left to while away the hours by himself. The pain is not very serious if one capsule and an injection are enough to induce a state which seems one he has always known. Still, he has a prickle in his throat, and he has to be careful, he has to watch himself lest it make him cough and the pain suddenly become piercing and the wound tear open, because then he might really be in trouble.

A little room in semi-darkness can become a world. Looking at a beaverboard ceiling or an overhead water pipe running from one wall to another can give rise to untold thoughts. Not simple thoughts about these things, but images which seem to spring from them, even though they have nothing to do with the ceiling or the pipe. And the marvelous thing is that they fill the mind, and a new image always displaces the one before it in such a way that neither anguish nor regret lingers after.

Then comes bed check. Two of them come by in helmets, and they have nightsticks. A flashlight probes the room: they really want to see whether the man has escaped or not. This is funny, of course, their coming the way they do, in twos, with helmets on and truncheons in their hands, checking on a prisoner who has just had his belly cut open and who can barely manage to stretch out his hand toward the water glass.

This must be a regulation, and regulations have their place in prisons, in colleges, in armies, and in places like this, which is a mixture of all three. At any rate, they are not concerned: they march through the hospital as though through a drill yard.

The man is alone now for a while. From time to time the wooden building creaks; at times something goes off inside the radiator and proceeds to rumble a little, rhythmically. And there are the images, always the images, so that sprawling wide-eyed abed is like sleep burgeoning with dreams.

At a certain hour—one o'clock? three o'clock?—the night-duty nurse comes around. The nurses have soft rubber-soled shoes so that even when they do not actually walk softly they do not make a noise like the orderlies, or the soldiers coming through for bed check. She passes along the corridor, flashlight in hand, and since she is required to know whether the man is sleeping or not, she pauses a moment in the doorway. Regulations prescribe that she jot down a note in the register as to how the patient is passing the night. But even a regulation is understood to have a certain leeway, especially a night regulation, and it is never expected that the entries be absolutely exact since most likely nobody looks at them.

Anyway, the nurse appears at the door. The man is not asleep; in an effort to keep the tickle in his throat from making him cough, his breathing is strangely labored. She says something which the man does not understand.

Then she repeats slowly, "Do you need an-y-thing?"

"No, no—nothing," the man answers.

She leaves. She goes to make the entry. And the man is alone again. Presently it occurs to him that he did not even say Thank you, but it is so hard for him to say anything in that accursed language: his whole effort goes into the way the words are pronounced, and he cannot make himself say what he would like to say.

For long hours now the man remains alone, until the light at the window is brighter than the one from the corridor. Throughout all this time he dozes, or merely lets time run on, with the pain creeping back and growing more and more intense, because a single capsule and an injection are not enough to last for all time.

The morning light seeps in through the waterproofed shade, and a little later the orderly comes clumping in. It is strange that he should walk like that, with a tramp that would indicate self-confidence, a certain satisfaction with life. It is hard, since he is a prisoner himself, to determine where this self-confidence and satisfaction come from. Still, he seems confident and satisfied, and he has a face like a seal. The day begins when he comes in, raises the shade and lets in the new-born sun. At this time he would usually bring in the breakfast tray, but the man is still unable to eat.



Next, a soldier who is seldom seen arrives in the ward; he is seldom seen because he spends nearly all his time in the office at the head of the corridor. A free man even though a soldier, he has great responsibilities because he is not a prisoner, and so he is neither satisfied nor self-confident. He is sad, and a bit drowsy. He slouches into the prescribed position of relaxation, with his feet propped on the desk top, and all the while he listens closely for the sound of footfalls in the corridor lest he be caught loafing. Glum as he is, his morning tunes are rather cheerful: he is whistling "Take It Easy" and "Make Believe."

Meanwhile, the orderly goes about tidying things up; and he is careful to see that it is a job well done because he is proud of his position there, and he does not want to risk being fired, being sent back to drudge in the camps. Afterwards, the morning nurse arrives. She is likely to behave in a variety of ways, all depending on her mood and a number of other things which have no connection with the man lying in bed.

She says, "Hello, youngster." She also says, "What sort of a night did you have?" or "How do you feel this morning?"

She might even come into the room and lift the man's head with one hand and shore his pillows up behind him. This must be beyond the call of duty because she does not always do it. But when she does, it is a fine thing.

Now everything is set for the doctor's visit. He is very polite, the doctor, and perhaps even kind, and he must be a major or a captain, though there is no way to tell: he comes in wearing pajamas the color of ashes in water, and on his head he has a sort of white stocking. There is always a fat woman doctor along with him, with gold-rimmed glasses, and a gown, and a stack of record pads.

"How are you?" the doctor asks, in Italian. "*Come stai?*" he says. But it's not necessary to tell him, mainly because he does not know Italian. He peers at the bandage covering the wound and says something in English which the woman puts down on one of the pads.

Thus the hours of the day go by. At eleven o'clock, and at five in the afternoon, the orderly comes through with his trolley taking food to those who are able to eat, and three times a day the man has a thermometer stuck in his mouth. The soldier in the office has returned to his tune of yesterday, "Lovely Way to Spend an Evening." It must be a popular song of theirs.

And then it is time to remember the shade again, and the water, and the evening nurse who comes in with her little glass with a red or yellow capsule in it. And then the light from the hall begins to creep in again through the open door.

A man racked with pain may sometimes fear he is going

to die. Mostly, this feeling comes from his aloneness and from his feeling sorry for himself, but partly from the thought that his coughing might burst the stitches of his wound. Still, it would be incorrect to term such a feeling fear, because the man is not really fearful of what might follow, nor is he grieved at what he might be leaving behind should he die. Life as a prisoner is too miserable, too uncertain, to mourn its loss. There can only be a kind of resigned indifference toward such a life.

Anyway, that feeling of his, that he might die, does not come often these days because, little by little, he is getting better, and when he is seized by a fit of coughing it does not hurt as much as before, and he can even manage to push himself over on one side thereby greatly easing his back.

In this state the man now begins to eat a little, and counting nails no longer helps him. More and more he looks toward the window, and he sees brief stretches of *chevaux-de-frise* and wooden towers mounted by machine-gunners, and great naked sweeps of sky sometimes banked with clouds. The prairie is underneath, out of sight, but the man knows what it is like—yellow and treeless.

But what is incredible is how, in the passage of a few days, the man has changed, and how indifferent he has become to all he sees from his window. Even as he looks he loses interest in what is outside, and he now turns his attention to the soldier who is whistling. This morning the soldier came into the room and asked the man if he knew "Santa Lucia." Every so often he stops whistling and sings the words, softly, in English. This soldier has blond hair and a blank, reddish face. Maybe he's a decent sort of a fellow; maybe he's a bastard. The orderly says that he even runs his fingers across the top of the door looking for dust.

One morning, no sooner has the orderly arrived than he has a story to tell. He's bubbling with excitement.

He says, "Did you hear the siren last night? They beat up everybody last night over in your camp. They bashed in a lot of skulls."

The man does not want to betray interest in what he has just been told, but still he asks, "What did they do that for?"

"I don't know," says the orderly. "They just beat them up."

The man turns to stare at the ceiling. He lies there without saying anything. And the expression on his face says nothing.

After a while, the orderly says, "It was because a barracks caught on fire over in your camp. Nobody knows who did it. But the fact is that they were already standing by, more than two hundred of them, outside the fence. They had blackjacks, and some of them even had pistols, and as soon as the siren went off they rushed in and beat up everybody in sight and anybody who resisted. Some fought back with Coca-Cola bot-

tles, but it didn't do any good because the others had helmets on."

So saying, he goes but comes back a little later with another story.

He says, "I've been in the operating room and it's still a mess—hair and bandages all over the place. They really must have been busy last night! There's blood splattered on the wall and one spot that shows that one of them fell while he was waiting to be treated." Then he stops for a moment and chuckles over something that has occurred to him. He says, "The funniest thing was when they realized that one of them didn't have anything wrong with him at all. They had made a mistake by bringing him in. When the doctor saw there was nothing wrong with him, he sent him on out. The men with the blackjacks were standing at the door and when they saw there was nothing wrong with him either, they bashed him over the head and carried him back in again to be sewed up." This seems to please the orderly no end. He says, "Then they locked them all up. Twenty-four of them." This seems to please him a great deal, too, and it is strange how attachment to a place and to other things can alter a prisoner so that he becomes more like "them" than like "us." There is nothing to be done about it, because we are a broken people. It is better forgotten.

So the man is pleased when the morning nurse comes to the door and says, "Hello." He smiles at her, and then she comes in and tucks his covers in and arranges the things on his night table. The man follows her with his eyes, no longer smiling. There is something shy about the way he looks at women, something at once tremulous and cautious. He realizes that he has to watch himself, behave in such a way that an ordinary gesture or expression does not assume any unintended value. He knows that this might very well happen to a man looking at a woman after so long a time, after so much horror and misery. And horror and misery alike lie behind him: months and months of war, and months and months of imprisonment. And there are things that can happen in unforeseen ways to a man with a woman before him. He can be made to look eager, or sentimental, or simply foolish.

The nurse is called Mary and comes from Nevada, and she leaves without incident.

By now the man knows all the nurses. There are five of them, and it is the same to him if they are homely, old, or just so-so. There is the one called Mary, and Miss Lane from Kentucky, and Mrs. Kennedy from Texas, and an old woman who is a Catholic and must be from Ohio. The nicest one is Mrs. Kennedy, who lives with her son in the barracks just outside the camp. "Miss Mary" is fat-fleshed and walks like a duck. They have eight-hour shifts, all except the old Catholic woman from Ohio, and she turns up so irregularly that it is

impossible to tell when she is coming. Over them is the head nurse, a first lieutenant who grumbles eternally because the beds have been made sloppily, or for some other reason. She grumbles in a deep-throated voice, almost a man's voice. But it is not a bad thing to have somebody around who is bothered by a prisoner's bed not being well made.

The prisoner is a little better now, but he will have to stay in bed for another five or six days, and this is rather a bore. He has books to read, but such banal books that simply holding them before him is a useless effort. And in the evening he can hardly sleep because they have stopped giving him the capsules, and the injections are over too. Even so, his belly is not so terribly painful any more, nor is his back. But even without pain, a long time passes before sleep comes upon him.

By now there are many things he knows, and many people. Once, one evening, a sergeant stopped in the doorway: one of the sergeants checking beds. He had no reason to stop because he had already seen that the man was there. But he stopped anyway, for a minute or two. He even talked a little, and laughed, and the man laughed too because they were not able to understand each other. Then the sergeant said, "Okay" and left. And the man thinks that he must get a little sentence together, something good, something in case he should stop again, next time he comes back, in a few evenings or so.

The nurses' shift has changed, this being something that takes place once every two weeks, on Sundays. It is Wednesday now, perhaps, or maybe Thursday. Mrs. Kennedy is on mornings, "Miss Mary" evenings up till midnight, and then Miss Lane, from Kentucky, comes on.

Miss Lane is very thin, and very funny, so funny that sometimes it is hard to tell what to make of the way she acts, and you never know what to think of her. His first nights there she was never seen, or at least the man never saw her all the time he was awake. Maybe she was in the American ward where they have a radio, and had sent someone else to get the register so she could write in it whatever it is she had to write.

Then one night she appears. The man is still awake and he hears footsteps in the corridor. She walks straight into his room and pulls the cord, and the man has to blink because the light is so strong. She sits on the edge of the bed, takes a cigarette from the night table, and lights it.

She says, "Why aren't you sleeping?"

When she wants to, Miss Lane speaks very slowly and can be understood. Also, from the looks of things, she has her own opinion of regulations.

The man looks at her. She has blond hair interspersed

with a few strands of gray, thin lips, and a tiny nose, and she sniffs a great deal.

The man imitates her, sniffing himself.

And she says, "Sniff."

"Cosa?" the man says. "What?"

"Sniff," she says. "Sniff."

The man shakes his head No, and she seems surprised that he does not understand. Then she notices his little dictionary lying on the night table. She reaches for it and then points out a word to the man: *Sniff=tirar su col naso*. Miss Lane has a vertical furrow in her forehead, beginning right between the eyebrows.

"Sniffing is a bad habit," she says. "And why aren't you asleep?"

"I don't know," he answers. "I can't. I try, but I can't."

"You're going to grow old before your time if you don't sleep."

She has finished her cigarette. She gets off the bed and crushes the butt in the ashtray. She takes hold of the light cord but does not pull it right away: she dawdles a while, gazing into the man's eyes, and a certain tenderness might be read in her glance.

"Go to sleep now," she says.

Afterwards, it is even more difficult to sleep. From time to time the building creaks, and occasionally the radiator raps and rattles, and when the searchlight falls across the outside of the barracks a yellow glow seeps in through the shade. It's annoying, that light which never lets the man forget he is a prisoner. And now, of all times, he would like to forget it, no longer to feel it. But outside the light stalks across the barracks wall in search of who knows what, and on the street outside the camp area vehicles never stop running as they inspect the fences and change the guards in the wooden towers.

Time is a curious phenomenon: you never know whether it is passing faster or more slowly if you are waiting for something. The man is not quite sure that he is waiting for something, but some hours seem endless, and others flash by without his noticing them. At any rate, his head burgeons with thoughts now, and certain of the thoughts are like precious stones for a man who might otherwise have to face an empty present, whose past is a faraway thing and sad, and whose future is vague and hazy.

Night falls again and the man has become certain that he is looking forward to something. Not wishing to sleep, he waits. The hours confound themselves in his brain, and he no longer knows whether it is just past midnight or, now, close to daybreak. At last, footsteps are heard: she is arriving! She goes into the office. The man, of course, cannot see her, but he strains his ears to the sounds and guesses at what she is

doing. She has turned the radiator on so that the steam makes a hissing sound inside. Maybe, even though he has not noticed it, maybe it's cold. Then he hears the jingle of keys. Now, of course, she's checking the yellow and red capsules and the vials of morphine which are locked up in the drugs cabinet. Regulations prescribe that drugs be checked by everyone going on duty, and Miss Lane shows a surprising respect for regulations, sometimes. And now he hears nothing, and it means that she is writing in the register. The chair moves. She has got up. Now she is going to come. He hears footsteps in the corridor but at once realizes that the sound is dying away. Then he hears nothing but the creak of the barracks and, at times, the rap-rattle of the radiator.

It is hard to sleep.

In the course of events, whenever something ridiculous comes up, reason must prevail: one must convince oneself that the thing is actually ridiculous. Miss Lane is just so-so, and by now she must be more than thirty, though she looks like a girl, but that is because she's so thin. She already has some gray hair, and it would not make a bit of difference. . . . But this is no way to reason, and one must start all over from the beginning. The thing that makes it so ridiculous is something else—not the fact that Miss Lane isn't so young any more, or so very good-looking. It's because you can't walk up to her and say: *For us there is no such thing as war and imprisonment.* You can't say: *We are not enemies, you and I.* Nor: *It's just as if we were the only two left on earth.* You can't expect anything when you're a prisoner: nothing can happen. They feed us, more or less, or beat us up, or keep us out for hours in the sun or the rain, or even leave us alone. But that's all. We live in two different worlds. And even if the people here are not mean to us, it's because meanness is not allowed over the threshold of a hospital. But that is not to say that goodness is let in. Goodness is not for prisoners. Anyway, it would be foolish to expect goodness merely because one day, when we no longer had strength enough to go on fighting, we put up our hands. Before, *we ourselves* had killed, and men out there were still killing each other. So there can't be goodness. Compassion perhaps. There might be that, because we are a broken people. But compassion is something that cannot be accepted. Too often it is mixed with derision, and accepting it makes one feel uneasy deep down. And if a girl comes in and sits down on one of our beds and smokes a cigarette, it simply has to be taken like any other act, like breakfast or a shot in the arm. There is nothing to it beyond the simple fact of smoking a cigarette. It has no meaning one way or the other.

A man case-hardened in solitude does not want to look forward to anything. When night falls, and the room lies in semi-darkness, he turns toward the wall and decides he is

going to sleep. Naturally, he is not immediately successful. Soldiers come through on bed check, and the barracks creaks and the radiator rattles from time to time, and vehicles move along the road outside. His fists are clenched, and he thinks he can sleep. If she should come later on, so much the better: she will find him asleep, and she will leave just as she came, whatever her reason for coming was.

When day breaks, the man is still facing the wall, and he is not asleep. The orderly comes tramping in, and a little later he shows up with the breakfast tray. The man asks him a few questions: What's new over in the camp? Is it cold outside? Actually he wants to ask him something else: whether Miss Lane is sick, for example, or whether she's on leave. But if he were to ask him this, Sealface would laugh and the man would become embarrassed, so he does not ask. Anyway, what difference would it make if Miss Lane *had* left or even, let's suppose, if she were dead? His relations with her have been so tenuous, neither good nor bad, that the man mustn't expect anything or be too concerned.

Miss Lane, however, has not left. She comes back that night.

And she says, "Why aren't you asleep?" And she says again, "You're going to grow old before your time if you don't sleep."

She has not pulled the light cord, so the room remains in half-darkness, and this light pleases the man: for many reasons he is pleased.

For a little while, sitting on the bed, she is silent. And then suddenly she does something, nothing very special, but still something she shouldn't have done. She goes into the lavatory and turns on the light, leaving the door open. She takes off that sort of starched halo she wears and begins to comb her hair. She has a little head, one that would be good to hold in one's hands. She has taken his comb from the shelf over the washbasin and is combing her hair standing between the mirror and the door, and all the while she is talking, very naturally, as though the man were not a prisoner. Standing like that, with her arms upraised, her body seems slenderer than ever, except where her breasts are, and her skirt falls in at the knees just where it should.

And the man looks at her and listens, and inside he feels excited. He attaches too much importance to trifles, such as the vision of a woman with her arms raised, combing her hair, talking to him with bobby pins in her mouth so that not a bit of what she says can be understood. Still, she has a nice voice, a warm, sing-songy kind of voice that gives him a vague feeling of exhilaration.

When she has finished, she comes back to his bedside. The man is still excited inside. He doesn't quite understand why the woman came and why she combed her hair the way she

did. How can it be that she is unaware of the good things she can do, and the bad things?

Anyway, in the half-light, he musters courage enough to talk.

He says, "Why didn't you come those other nights?"

She laughs. "I can't come all the time," she says. "They would talk too much. Do you know what 'They would talk too much' means?"

Now she is being spiteful again, worse than when she was combing her hair.

"Of course," the man says. "But I'm unhappy when you don't come."

She is shaking her head. "I'll come," she says.

So he can look forward to seeing her, now. He realizes that the whole thing is ridiculous—waiting and having his mind filled with the thoughts he has—but, still, he waits. And she has promised to come.

And she does come, after dark, late the following night. He hears her footsteps in the hall. But she is not alone. There are the footsteps of someone else along with hers, and they come up, tripping gaily and singing together in hushed tones. They stop for a while in the office before coming into the room. Mike, a soldier with fan-like ears, is with her. She turns on the light. She is carrying a bundle of magazines under her arm, and she puts it down on the night table.

"These are for you," she says. "When you've read them, send them over to your camp, to your buddies."

"Thanks, Miss Lane."

She is sitting on the bed, as she did the first time. Mike, however, is sitting in the chair, and they are talking, between themselves. The man, of course, cannot understand much of what they are saying because they are speaking too fast and they laugh a great deal. And suddenly she does something else—nothing so very important: she leans all the way back across the bed so that her head rests against the wall. Her skirt is up above her knees, so high that from where Mike is sitting her thighs can be seen.

"I'm sleepy tonight," she says, and she stretches and laughs.

The man does not understand whether all this is seemly and proper. Her slight body is lying across his own, and he doesn't quite understand it all. Still, he knows that this situation must end as soon as possible. Then he takes his glass from the table and gulps down the last of the water.

"I'd like some more water, please," he says.

Miss Lane sits up slowly and says, "Mike, darling, go and get a glass of water, will you?" And at the same time she takes off that sort of halo she wears because it has slipped out of place.

Now, for a few minutes, they are by themselves. The man



could take her and pull her to him, but instead he does nothing because he is angry.

He says, "Couldn't you have come alone?"

She doesn't answer; she simply laughs, teasingly, and he is overwhelmed by a desire to slap her, and he would do it too if the whole thing weren't so ridiculous. But now she has stopped laughing. She is staring at him with anxious eyes, and she takes hold of his hand and strokes it. And his anger immediately passes, and now he would like to kiss her, and he doesn't do this either, because it would be equally ridiculous. He lies still and in silence, and she strokes his hand, and probably he can't even gauge the importance to her of what she is doing.

You can hear the slam the refrigerator door makes when Mike closes it, and he has not managed to remember a single important sentence he had prepared for her. But Mike does not return at once. Perhaps he has stopped for a drink of water himself. And suddenly the man remembers something.

And he says, "I'd like it if you ran your fingers through my hair."

Mike is already in the doorway with the glass of water, and probably he has heard what the man said, and the man is annoyed with himself. Miss Lane gets up and, still talking to Mike, straightens the bed. And when she is through tucking the covers in, she stops and lets her hand rest on the man's head, and he can feel her fingers running through his hair, tenderly. And all the while she goes on talking to Mike. Then, before turning out the light, she smiles down at the man earnestly.

"Go to sleep now. I'll come to see you tomorrow night."

As soon as they reach the corridor, they start humming the tune they were singing before, and they walk away in step. And their voices die out, and shortly afterward their footsteps. And the man is left alone and disconsolate. Disconsolate because she came with Mike, because she behaved the way she did, because he did not slap her or kiss her or do anything else as thoroughly stupid as what he did do. Still and all, she stroked his hand, and she ran her fingers through his hair, and she promised to come the next night. He can wait. But now he knows he would wait anyway.

The man can consider himself just about recovered. Some days back, the woman doctor with the gold-rimmed glasses came in to take the stitches out. She bent over his belly, working with scissors and tweezers, and every time she took a stitch out, she would look up at him, smiling.

"Does it hurt?" she would ask, in Italian. "*Senti male?*"

This morning the doctor said that the man could get up. Naturally, this is more easily said than done, the first time. His legs are wobbly and his head reels and there is still some-

thing about his belly that is not quite right. Nonetheless, he gets up and over his pajamas he puts on a wine-red corduroy bathrobe which they have brought him. The man gawks at himself, dressed the way he is. One might go so far as to say that he had forgotten what it felt like to be wearing something so handsome and clean. He goes back to bed immediately because he does not yet feel steady on his feet. But as evening approaches, after the orderly has left, he gets up again and sits in the wheel chair and ventures as far as the end of the hall, where there is a window. He gazes out, anxiously, the way he did during his first days there, long months before, and looking at the prairie, he feels something that surprises him: something about his being there, where once he never thought he could be.

A prairie is yellow and boundless, and it ought to be the same everywhere. But it isn't. A railway line cuts across it diagonally and, when the wind is not blowing, the smoke from the trains hangs in mid-air, a long streak over the horizon. The trains make a wailing sound and the wail can be heard for a long time, and at night the rumble of steel against steel. But the most important thing is a faraway cluster of neon signs which lights up in the evening at a point to the north. From the camp site, that point is impossible to make out because the view is blocked by other barracks, but from here it can be seen: a little town about five or six miles away.

The trains and the town are the only things that can be seen of the outside world. And they give rise to many thoughts—depression or hope or yearning for freedom, like a fever in the mind. But they can also give rise to nothing. You look and you feel nothing, but this happens only when you hope that even inside a fenced enclosure something will happen, something will delimit your world. The man looks and waits, his heart throbs with expectancy, and it is evening now: a tiny cluster of lights is burning on the prairie, and he has no desire to be there or anywhere else. Not even if he could.

When time for bed check comes, the man is still looking out of the window. One of the soldiers goes down into the ward, but the other stops and leans up against the wall. The man waits for him to rap on the back of the wheel chair with his nightstick and tell him to get back to bed. But the soldier does neither this nor anything else. He just leans there against the wall and looks at the patient. So, little by little, the situation becomes embarrassing for both of them, as it always is when things happen which you don't expect.

At last the soldier moves. He goes over to the window and points to the cluster of distant lights.

"Hereford," he says.

"Si," the man says.

Then, somewhat surprised, he looks at the soldier, who is an old man with a chubby, red face, and is wearing a helmet.

But he does not look in his eyes because he still expects to find something evil in the man.

"It's not much of a town," the soldier says. "Every other town I've seen in America is nicer than this one."

"Where do you come from?" the man asks.

The soldier says something which the man does not understand. He says it again, and the man smiles because he still has not understood. Then the soldier writes it on the white of a pack of cigarettes and shows it to the man. He writes: Norge—Norway.

Norway had not occurred to the man, and that was why he did not understand. He knows practically nothing about Norway. They don't have much land for farming, so they have become fishermen and mariners and emigrants—fine people, traveling the world over.

"That's a fine country, Norway," the man says.

Now he can also look the man in the eyes. There cannot be many Norwegians, only a few million, and maybe those who have come to live in this great land feel lonely, like the Assyrians or the Armenians, about whom he has read. The soldier wrote *Norway*. He did not say Los Angeles, California, or Boston, Massachusetts. He said Norway, so he must feel lonely. Maybe he feels lonely even when he is with other soldiers who are dressed just like him. And a prisoner can look without fear into the eyes of a man who feels lonely. It does not matter that he is a soldier or that he has a nightstick in his hand which he might have used to beat up prisoners the other night. Now, at any rate, he is very peaceable, and rather pleased that the man said that Norway is a fine country, and the man cannot bring himself to hate him. He simply does not *feel* like hating him, and perhaps this too stems from the fact that we are a broken people and there is nothing we can do about it.

When the other soldier comes back, they leave together, walking on the plank floor as though swinging across a drill yard.

Nothing remains for the man to do but go to bed. It must be late now, and there will not be many more hours to wait. He lies down on his back and thinks to himself, in the half-light of the room. He has so many things to tell her when she comes, and it is so hard for him to make himself understood speaking that accursed language.

When she arrives, the man is still on his back, and he does not move. He merely follows her with his eyes. She comes over to the bed and strokes his head.

The man feels the play of her fingers in his hair, just as he had wanted, and his heart begins pounding wildly, but he succeeds in controlling himself. He wants to retain his self-possession mainly because he must talk to her.

"I love you," he blurts out, and he is at once sorry because that was not the way he had planned to begin.

But she is not annoyed. Instead, she smiles, with those thin lips of hers.

"But you can't," she says. "It doesn't make sense."

Tender and sad is her voice tonight, and her smile, and what she says.

The man knows very well that it doesn't make sense, but he also knows that he can't help it, the way things are.

"It just happened," he says. "It's not my fault. Are you sorry?"

She smiles, shaking her head again. She draws back her hand and sits down on the bed. Then she talks to him for a long time, her voice slow and earnest. The man does not understand quite everything, but he understands the gist.

She says, "This happened because you were all alone and lonesome and because you have a longing to *live* again. You're very lonely and I know it, and I'm doing what I can to help you. I try to be nice to you though I don't always succeed." As she talks, she is looking the man straight in the eyes. "You must realize it," she says. "I do things for you I don't do for any other patient." She also says, "Because you seem lonelier than the rest."

"Thank you," the man says.

"But it's not true that you love me."

"I do love you," the man says.

She shakes her head again, and she is disturbed now, and the furrow in her forehead is very deep.

"It just seems like that," she says, "because we're here. If we had met on the outside, you wouldn't even have noticed me."

"I don't know. All I know is that I love you," the man persists obstinately.

The woman smiles sadly.

"Look how much older I am," she says. "I'm nearly thirty-five. I could be your aunt."

"That doesn't make any difference," the man says. "In my whole life I've never loved anyone more than you." And he is convinced that what he says is true.

She leans over him a little and caresses him, his hair, his face, his neck. So tenderly, as one's mistress might do, or one's mother. And the man himself reaches out with one hand and ruffles her hair with his fingers and discovers that her head is really as small as he had thought, maybe even smaller. His fingers play in her hair because, caressing her, he wants to think. He wants to think that he has never been so happy in all his life, and he is convinced of it, even though he is aware that this is a flimsy happiness that might vanish in an instant.

And now that it is just the moment to kiss her and forget everything, she gets up and says she has to go.

"I'll come to visit you tomorrow night," she says.

The man is left alone, turned toward the wall with a world of thoughts. He is turned toward the wall not because he wants to sleep, but the better to protect himself against his thoughts, and in order to rearrange them in some sort of order. Even a so-so-looking woman with some gray hair and a deep furrow in the middle of her forehead can come to mean everything to you, all depending on when she enters your life. He knows it cannot last long. But maybe she will manage to get a letter to him when he goes back to the camp, and then he will have an untold number of things to think about. Wonderful things that will take the place of the misery and the inertia, the interminable, endless hours spent supine staring at a barracks ceiling. That way, his happiness could even survive this all too brief span of time.

The man continues to think. Not many thoughts, but thoughts fit to water the parched and desolate regions of a prisoner's heart. And all the while the planking of the barracks creaks and every so often something in the radiator starts to rattle.

Then, suddenly, he thinks he hears someone walking in the corridor. He hears steps coming toward him, softly. It is she again, but she is with somebody. Mike probably, since he is on night duty. Maybe they think that he is sleeping, maybe that is why they are walking so softly. He smiles, grateful for their consideration. Usually they do not bother to walk so quietly.

He hears steps, but they are so faint that he cannot tell who it really is. Of course: Miss Lane has forgotten to make her entries in the register and now she is coming back to do it.

Trying not to make any noise himself, the man gets out of bed. He'll go down to the door of the office and she will smile because she will not be displeased to see him. He hobbles slowly down the corridor, holding on to the wall, and he appears in the doorway and she is not there. There is no one in the office. The man thinks the sounds have deceived him, though this seems impossible. He had heard footsteps.

He turns to go back and sees a light coming out from under a door. It is a room like his own. This one is room number two. It has a bed in it and a night table and a chair, and the light should be off because the room doesn't have anyone in it. The light flicks off just as he hobbles by, on his way back to bed, so there must be someone inside, and he hadn't been tricked when he thought he heard footsteps. The ones inside know now that he's out there, and he feels sick at heart, and he is ashamed of himself. Then he hurries back to bed. If he had had any idea, he never would have got up: he would

have let them think that he was asleep. But now it's too late. He waits to see what they will do.

A minute goes by. Maybe two. And finally he hears a door open noisily, and then Mike appears in his doorway. He has a flashlight in his hand and he shines it on the sprinkler pipe.

Under the covers, the man stiffens, and he clenches his fists, because he has to overcome his despondency and anger. And Mike's face is so stupid-looking, with those fan-like ears of his, that the man even has an impulse to laugh, and however bitter it would be, he would still like to laugh.

"You're not sleeping?" Mike asks. He is ridiculous, trying to look nonchalant. Mainly, he's ridiculous worrying because of a prisoner. Because Mike is one of the masters, and he can have all the women he wants, and wherever he wants, and if he has to worry about someone he certainly doesn't have to worry about him.

"I'm sorry," the man says. "I can't sleep very well at night."

"The fire alarm went off," Mike says.

"Oh, did it?" the man says. "I'm sorry, but I didn't hear a thing, Mike."

Whereupon he calmly lights a cigarette. Mike ought to know that he's in no hurry to sleep. Now that things are the way they are, it's better that he not try to look too naive.

Mike remains jittery, because of the fire alarm, naturally. He even goes so far as to inspect the entire sprinkler system, all the way down to the end of the ward. Then he comes back to the door.

"The pipes are all all right," he says.

"Don't worry too much about any fire," the man says: "I didn't hear anything."

"It would be better if you'd sleep at night," Mike says.

"I'll try, Mike. But don't worry about any fire."

The man carefully puts out his butt and immediately lights another cigarette. Mike goes off, annoyed. A little later he hears a door open, and a light step, and he would swear that Miss Lane had never before walked so softly through the halls of the hospital. Mike, however, walks in his usual way—perhaps, even more so.

The man does not want to smoke. He crushes the cigarette in the ashtray and once again turns toward the wall. Now he has to return to before that ridiculous situation; become resigned again; not think about it any more. He cannot even stir up hatred. Still, what she did was like a fabulous present, and it has to be accepted as a plaything, or as treatment for unhappiness, because he was ill and lonely. And she does not behave like that toward all the patients. She said so, and one can believe her and be grateful, though that was not what the man was thinking. Only she shouldn't have gone into the room right next to his. This she shouldn't have done.

When the orderly arrives, the man is still facing the wall,

and he does not want to eat, and let Sealsnout think whatever he wants. Certainly he can't make things any more unbearable than they already are.

Mrs. Kennedy is nice all the time. She is always smiling, so that one doubts whether there is anything behind her smile. Still, she is very nice, so when she comes in the man rolls over and looks at her, her face.

Mrs. Kennedy seems sad about something.

"You're going to make yourself sick," she says. "If you don't eat and you don't sleep, you're really going to get sick."

"How do you know I don't sleep?"

"It's in the register, of course. Miss Lane wrote that you didn't sleep last night." Mrs. Kennedy has an unshakable confidence in registers because she's a very conscientious woman. "Come on now, let's eat something," she says.

"I don't feel like it, Mrs. Kennedy. Really, I just can't."

Mrs. Kennedy tells the doctor, and when the doctor arrives, he asks the man whether he feels well enough to go back to the camp.

"Yes, I think so," the man replies.

"Fine. Then tomorrow you can leave," the doctor says. "I suppose you'll get better being in the camp."

"Of course," the man says.

So tomorrow he will be discharged. But there is still a whole day ahead of him, and a whole night. And the night is what is important, because Miss Lane has promised to come.

The man waits for her for hours, with his face toward the wall, and the building creaks and the radiator rattles from time to time, and outside on the road vehicles go by on tours of inspection and in order to change the guard. And he forces himself to think, to imagine that nothing has happened, that he must not suffer, because meanness cannot enter into a hospital. At least not the kind of meanness exhibited by men when they want to be bad.

Actually, everybody is kind in the hospital, even the soldiers coming through on bed check with their helmets and their nightsticks. Here it does not seem possible that one can make another suffer. And least of all Miss Lane. There were nights when she came, the time she caressed him, and when she let herself be caressed, and she does not behave like this with all the patients. Only with some who are more unhappy than others. Maybe she was nice like that only with him.

And so she arrives. She stays a while in the office before coming to his room. And when she comes she does not turn on the light, but she stops and leans against the bed. The man's eyes are closed and he is breathing regularly. She coughs a bit, not very loudly, and the man remains still, still sleeping. Now she tiptoes away very, very softly; turned toward the wall the man has his eyes closed tightly, and he does not want to cry. He suffered so much before, he saw so many people die, and

the world was still filled with so many people dying, and his are a people ruined, irretrievably ruined. It would be foolish for him to start crying, now, over something like that.

Even though it is over, and he will not see Miss Lane again: perhaps never again in his entire life, in this world.

At nine o'clock he leaves the hospital. The man goes by the office, dressed now in the tatters of his prisoner's clothing, stenciled P W from top to bottom. There is a soldier sitting at the desk, the one who whistles all the time, and Mrs. Kennedy is straightening out instruments and crucibles on the treatment table.

"Thank you and good-by, Mrs. Kennedy," the man says. "Good-by, Auxley."

Mrs. Kennedy smiles, vacantly kind. The man suddenly remembers that she has a child at home.

"How's your little boy, Mrs. Kennedy?"

"Very well, thank you," she says. "Except that he's broken a tooth. One of these in front, out playing with his friends."

The man makes a gesture with his hand as though caressing a child. Oh, how long it has been since the time when he could think that a child might break a tooth out playing! Months have passed since he has even seen a child.

He says, "You must forgive me if I have done anything I shouldn't have."

"But you haven't," she says.

"We are always doing something we shouldn't, Mrs. Kennedy."

The orderly accompanies him through the corridors to the administration building. There a girl tells him to wait. He sits down and looks at her as she putters about getting his papers ready. She walks in a special way because she knows that a man, a prisoner, is looking at her. She has long legs, this girl, and yellow hair and a made-up face—so made up that there is a perpetual expression of wonder on it, because of the too-high arch of her eyebrows. She does not look like Miss Lane. Nor like any of the other girls he had been in love with before.

Then a soldier comes in and takes the papers.

"C'mon—*andiamo*," he says to the man.

At the exit there is another soldier who quickly frisks him. The man has to make the odious gesture of raising his arms.

"Excuse me, it's a formality," the soldier says.

"Of course," the man says.

It is several hundred meters from the hospital to the camp, four or five hundred in all, and the asphalt road runs between two barbed-wire fences. The soldier with the papers is in front. The man is behind, straining to keep up, because he is not very strong yet, and the wound on his belly is hurting again.



The soldier turns and says once more, this time harshly, "C'mon!"

Behind him the man does not answer. He walks slowly, more slowly than before, and deep inside him he feels a resurgence of hatred for the evil within men.

The camp is before him, its green-roofed barracks in well-ordered rows. This evening he will be able to see what progress the sun has made in all these days. And he will have to return to things as they were before: henceforth not to suffer from things as they are, but as they have been, or, perhaps, will become one day. And suffering like this is different. It is little more than a basis of melancholy on which to pitch one's workaday activities—eating and sleeping and making roll call. And so to live and so to wait again for life, if it come, and the time when the impulse to do evil shall have exhausted itself within man.

Such a wait is a long one.

# THE INCREDIBLE ITALIANS

**M**ANY AMERICANS who were in Italy during the war and many who have gone there since, have had the impression they were discovering an unknown country. They knew of the proverbial "culture" of Italy but such knowledge in most cases had no concrete human connotations. It has them now.

War brings people brutally in touch with the countries to which it sends them; but along with its infinitely lamentable aspects there are vague positive elements deriving from the fact that war generally leaves time and opportunity only for essential human relationships; thus sometimes it seems to foster a special intensity and integrity of feeling in the very midst of its horror, ravage and boredom. Speaking of such

## P. M. Pasinetti

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matters, one is always aware of the grave dangers of sentimentalization: for example, idyllic pictures of G.I.s and Italian girls have probably been as numerous in fiction and films since the Second World War—and as rich in clichés—as those of soldiers and French nurses were after the first. But there has been more than that; and it seems certain that to some Americans the human contacts and experiences in Italy have been an important catalyzing element in their own self-clarification. Some successful novels like John Horne Burns's *The Gallery* are cases in point.

Hence also the interest in new Italian literature. A considerable number of Italian novels have been translated into English in recent years. Some outstanding titles are Alberto Moravia's *The Woman of Rome*, *Two Adolescents*, *Conjugal Love* and *The Conformist*; Riccardo Bacchelli's *The Mill on the Po*; Vasco Pratolini's *A Tale of Poor Lovers* and *A Hero of Our Time*; Giuseppe Bertolucci's *The Sky is Red* and *The Brigand*; Elio Vittorini's *In Sicily* and *The Twilight of the Elephant*; Ennio Flaiano's *The Short Cut*; Elsa Morante's *House of Liars*. Especially when seen from the other side of the Atlantic, and by the writers themselves, all this is simply evidence that English and American critics and publishers have taken cognizance of an Italian literature which until recently they had disregarded. This disregard before the war was due—but in a relatively superficial sense—to the fact that anything that came from a country under totalitarian rule was considered suspect.

Most of the Italian writers who are now well known in this country and taken to be instances of the postwar revival, like Alberto Moravia, were already recognized in Italy before the war; and while they were trying to manage as well as they could under the exacting circumstances created by civil curtailments, they would probably have welcomed the spiritual support of some sort of American interest. Such support was not then available. On the Italian side, there was considerable, and justified, interest in American literature; the writers who fostered it, like Elio Vittorini, are partly responsible for the present reception of Italian work in America, because, even in a difficult period, full of discomfort and distress, they kept alive a sense of this art which transcended national boundaries. I think this may be a lesson worth keeping in mind when we now wonder about intellectuals "behind the curtain."

It would be inaccurate to explain the current shift in attitude toward Italy by saying that postwar Italian literature suddenly became relevant and exciting. It is of course true that fascist oppression and conformism had imposed certain taboos on writers and that postwar freedom from restrictions put at their disposal, among other things, certain themes which either politics or "morals" had made untouchable until then—

from crooked politicians to characters committing suicide (forbidden in fiction under fascism), from crying poverty to brothels, etc. Even pity, in a sense, was forbidden during the regime under which everything, as the well-known saying went, was either forbidden or compulsory; and one writer, defining the eternal "fascist" traits, once desperately said that every form of intelligence was obviously considered "intelligence with the enemy." It is also true that the ferment created by the war and its aftermath offered new and important visions and experiences to writers. But it is not true that such ferments necessarily bring about a resurgence of creativity: literary standards do not depend on the topicality of themes; and, more importantly, they cannot be improvised.

Thus if we turn to actual writing, again taking the case of Moravia, we may compare his two novelettes published in this country under the title, *Two Adolescents*, with a story he wrote around 1930 called *A Sick Boy's Winter* (*Inverno di malato*). We cannot fail to realize that the quality and also to a certain extent the themes are similar, and that the older work remains one of Moravia's best. If it had been published in this country at the time it was written, it would have passed unnoticed as did two novels by the same author published in an American translation in the thirties. To give another example, Elio Vittorini's *In Sicily*, which was quite widely acclaimed in England and was accompanied in this country by Ernest Hemingway's presentation, was reviewed on the front page of at least one major weekly book review; it had been written and published in Italy before the war. It is a safe bet that if it had been suggested to an American publisher at that time it would not have seemed an interesting investment.

The mechanism of literary success is difficult enough to analyze within one country; it is even more so on the international level. Italian literature has not been prominent on that level for decades, in fact perhaps for centuries; so that the present focusing of attention takes in even work of the past, with the appearance of a popular new version of the *Inferno* by Dorothy Sayers and with serious recognition being given to Alessandro Manzoni's nineteenth-century novel *The Betrothed* in the new Colquhoun version. Italian writers of a European caliber, such as Leopardi in the early nineteenth century, never received the success which they certainly deserved; the few serious students of Italian at American universities usually discover them with amazement.

Historically, the neglect of Italian literature was also due in part to the discouraging provincialism of the writers' atmosphere. In our own century, the last Italian to achieve any recognition before the present revival was Luigi Pirandello—though not for his very valuable, however "provincial," fiction, but for his drama. There is such a thing as a social history of literature, the kind of history that is made in "influential cir-

cles," salons, cafés, groups, editorial offices. A young writer finding one of these at his disposal from the start in his own country has, like a boy born into a wealthy family, a considerable advantage; he is recognizable, placeable. Otherwise he has to advance alone, as far as international recognition goes, without support from his native background, eventually perhaps grafting himself onto an already existing cosmopolitan tradition and its facilities. Pirandello's drama availed itself of channels of international success which were, roughly speaking, those that had been opened a few decades earlier by Ibsen. Pirandello, like Ibsen, became very popular in Germany where the metaphysics of his plays had great appeal; and in Paris, where advanced literary figures still usually received their world baptism. World recognition came to him with the Nobel Prize and with a Hollywood version of one of his plays as a vehicle for Greta Garbo.

Before winning such solemn and safely commercial accolades, Pirandello had been *avant garde*. For instance, his famous play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* had caused violent indignation and controversy, even fist fights; the bourgeoisie of Europe at first had granted him something of a *succès de scandale*. It is important to recall this because such a form of success seems useful, in fact almost necessary at times. In other words, it seems that there must always be spurious elements in the workings of literary fame; the semblance of outrageous novelty, a "scandal" of some sort, or even a successful though perhaps irrelevant slogan or tag applied to a group. Slogans and tags may be vaguely explained to, and even more vaguely understood by, the public, but they help give the idea that a literary event is taking place. They give audiences a point on which to focus their attention, whether it be an attention born of admiration, outrage, or of some sort of magnified gossip. Many people who buy and read the recent French writers would be at a loss to give a workable definition of existentialism, yet it is partly through that inexplicable name that they have been drawn to the writers; it is also typical that some of the writers themselves refuse connection with the movement they are supposed to belong to, or fail to recognize such a movement at all.

Thus the recent "emergence of a new group" of Italian writers and film makers vaguely tagged as "neo-realistic" is quite illusory since those writers and film makers are neither necessarily new nor a group, nor are they in any specialized way "realists;" yet the existence of some tag, however imprecise, helped them to be recognized, to become visible on the international literary scene, whether they were conscious of what was happening to them or not.

On the whole, they were not conscious of it. Italian writers were no longer used, as we have said, to any sort of world success *en masse*. In the early part of the century, the only

other Italian writer known internationally besides Pirandello had been Gabriele d'Annunzio, the nature of whose fame had extra-literary connotations, and whose literary example the new Italian writers abhorred. In an important sense, Italian literature, and especially poetry, had been characterized after d'Annunzio by a reaction against him and his rhetoric.

Around the time of the First World War, an attempt at obtaining international importance, even using some of the modern methods of propaganda (manifestos, speeches), had been made by F. T. Marinetti with his movement called "futurism," a noisy affair intended to influence not only literature (e.g. with an idea of poems as *parole in libertà*, "words at liberty," and other such harmless, mildly offensive and hence catchy bywords: "Let's kill the moonlight . . . The gondola is the rocking-chair of cretins," he would say for instance in public speeches to the Venetians), but also art styles in general and even manners and feelings. The movement had no lasting literary importance or influence. Marinetti's strategies are indicative in connection with some of our earlier remarks: to launch his movement he went to Paris; his first manifestos, in French, were published in a Parisian newspaper (he was himself bilingual).

After the First World War a less noisy but literarily more significant attempt at capturing international audiences was made by Massimo Bontempelli with his review entitled *900*. During its first years, it was published in French. Such writers as Corrado Alvaro and Alberto Moravia published their first stories there in the late twenties. Again a tag was possible, the notion of a movement called "900" (standing in Italian for "twentieth century"), though entirely indefinite in its nature, was often repeated as a kind of formula.

A slogan that never caught on, as far as serious literature is concerned, is the "fascist" slogan; a fascist literature in Italy to all practical purposes did not exist. To some this may seem a pity, for a shelf of tales about fascist hierarchs and warriors drawn to heroic scale, or a collection of odes celebrating the dictator could have had some interest as period-pieces or literary monstrosities. The world expected a critical, rebellious or satiric literature reflecting life under fascism; for obvious reasons this could not openly come out of Italy as long as the totalitarian regime lasted. Nor did foreign audiences possess sufficient interest and linguistic equipment to appreciate a certain type of between-the-lines, allegorical, or cryptographic writing which was not uncommon in Italy during the last years of fascism (cf. the already-mentioned *In Sicily*, or some of the allegories in Moravia's collection entitled in Italian *I sogni del pigro*, not to mention his novel *The Fancy Dress Party*, or the definitely cryptographic *Man Is Strong* by Corrado Alvaro).

What readers outside Italy wanted, they found in the only

Italian writer who had attained a wide American reputation between Pirandello and the present revival of interest, Ignazio Silone. Italians generally, as is well known, find it hard to grant Silone a high place in the history of their recent literature; his character-drawing seems shallow and *passé*, his writing and his dialogue clumsy, his situations scarcely persuasive however noble the spirit that animates them. Nor did success seem to help him; his first novel *Fontamara* possessed an intensity and a vernacular forcefulness not to be found in the succeeding and more ambitious ones. Since his return to Italy from exile, he has written little; he has been most active as a wise and influential member of one branch of the Socialist Party. *A Handful of Blackberries*, his only novel to be published here since *The Seed Beneath the Snow* in 1942, will appear this year.

While Italy did not develop a fascist literature of apologia and celebration, and on the other hand could not develop one of topical satire and invective as long as the dictatorship lasted, we should recall that during those years most of her writers did manage to maintain what seems an essential premise for the existence of any sort of literary civilization: the sense that literature is one of the arts. By art, I suppose we all mean not only something emphatically different from documentary information or propaganda but also something which, as a form of knowledge and a record of experience, is infinitely more relevant, subtle, and mature than those forms of communication; and also, incidentally, more entertaining. There is nothing exceptional about such notions yet I suppose Italian writers have in the ordinary practice of their craft implied them as clearly and naturally as anyone working today.

In maintaining such artistic concepts of literature, the Italian counterparts of the "little magazines" obviously played their role. In the period following the First World War, besides the already mentioned *900*, a considerable importance is attributed to the Roman *La Ronda*, whose function was a sort of "call to order" in the name of classicism against the noisier and shallower varieties of the *avant garde* on the one side and literary commercialism on the other. Some of the principal exponents of a kind of literature which is most difficult to translate (because it depends on an especially intense and subtle use of linguistic effects) emerged from the Roman circle around that review—Emilio Cecchi, Vincenzo Cardarelli, Antonio Baldini; and the most classical of the recently translated novelists, Riccardo Bacchelli. There was formed, in that and other groups, a kind of *avant garde* which had no longer the aimless bombast of the "futurists" but had, instead, quite subdued and exclusive qualities.

This *avant garde*, especially in its poetic products but also in its prose and criticism, was often accused of ivory-tower preciousness, of lack of real content, of obscurity, of hermeticism.

While fascism lasted, some of those accusations were more clearly suspect than they are in other countries, for the critic could conceal within them the recommendation that a specific, propagandistic political coloring be adopted by literature. This did not happen to any important extent, but it is only fair to say that in the peculiar situation of Italy the so-called "difficult" writing did contribute to the preservation of certain standards of artistic integrity at a time when language, style (and style is, in the last analysis, the concrete sign of a moral attitude) were daily being degraded by hollow official rhetoric.

Although there is a tendency among the younger postwar writers to disregard their "little magazine" precursors, there can be no doubt about the spiritual and practical role they played in providing, if not a market, at least a meeting place and training ground. Another instance is that of *Solaria* published in the twenties and thirties in Florence (Italy, a recently united country, continues its vigorous provincial literary life, which is not centralized as is the French), the review which later was transformed into the quarterly *Letteratura* and continues now as *Lettere e Arti*. For example, a writer like Vittorini, often cited among the representatives of the postwar revival, published his first stories in those early magazines, and also his first books, including *In Sicily*: the magazines, following somewhat the example of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, had a publishing firm attached, the typical "new writing" firm.

But other publishers as well, even among the most prominent and most commercially organized like Mondadori, had cordial relations with the *avant garde*. Mondadori's book series *Lo Specchio* is largely a new writing series. The distinction between the *avant garde* and other current literature is less sharp in Italy, perhaps, than anywhere else. One reason for this, of course, is also that what I call current literature does not have phenomenally high sales either and never represents a big commercial investment. Costs are much lower, too. In such a scantily industrialized literary scene there are no attempts at "producing" a writer the way studio publicity offices create a star. Perhaps the only relevant exception to this rule is Leo Longanesi, an extremely sharp and successful publisher (he published Berto's *The Sky is Red*, a best-seller in Italy, and Flaiano's *Time to Kill*, here translated as *The Short Cut*). Longanesi is also possibly the closest thing to an "editor," in the U. S. sense, that Italy has. In general, more scope is left to the Italian author to develop, undisturbed, his own intentions; after all *editore* in Italian simply means publisher, while the very concept of "editor" as literary hand and eye helping the author and representing the firm does not really exist.

The smaller gap between the *avant garde* and current literature facilitates the existence of periodical anthologies of "new writing;" one of them is *Paragone*, published in Florence and

resembling in shape the late *Horizon*; another and bigger one, in fact one of really international scope, is the Italo-American *Botteghe Oscure* published in Rome.

If we keep this background in mind in considering the recent translations from the Italian, we see that we have here a number of novelists belonging to a long-neglected literature who not only now arouse a certain amount of curiosity and interest but also occasionally reach the best-seller lists and, in several instances, the inexpensive reprint circuit; and they are all writers whose attitude and formation have been artistic and not primarily commercial. At a time when some entertain doubts about the possibilities of literature's surviving as a popular art, this sign, within its limitations, can be taken as a positive portent.

If we look for the places, and for the training grounds, from which the new Italian writers emerge, there is another area we must watch besides the *avant garde* of the little magazines; in fact, a much wider one. This is comprised of a number of weekly magazines (like *L'Europeo* and *Il Mondo*), and by the *terza pagina*, or "third page," of the daily newspapers, traditionally devoted to literary articles and travel pieces. These institutions may have grown out of necessity; for obviously, Italian writers don't live on their books, and they must depend on newspapers and on periodicals that pay, when they don't depend on film scripts or (what is much rarer than in this country) on teaching. Whether the "third pages" and the weeklies grew out of necessity or out of public demand, or both, their literary consequences cannot be overestimated. The standards of a certain type of journalism are greatly raised. Novelists like Guido Piovene Enrico Emanuelli, or Moravia himself, have travelled broadly, and reported on their experiences in a literary tone which is acceptable to the better category of readers, which in fact contributes to the formation of such a category. Moravia's readers know that the *Corriere della Sera* brings them, along with the daily news, his short stories; and that *L'Europeo* brings them his weekly, extraordinarily intelligent film reviews. Flaiano, the novelist, is an editor of *Il Mondo* and its film critic. The daily, *La Stampa*, carries articles on American literature by Vittorini, on English literature by Mario Praz. The informality of the connection thus maintained by the writer with the public is indicated by a kind of half-literary, half-personal essay which is practically a specialty of the "third pages;" there are writers who keep a sort of public diary, like the novelist Vitaliano Brancati (whose *Don Juan in Sicily* and *The Handsome Antonio* are outstanding serio-comic works of recent years).

Examples could be multiplied at will. The weekly magazines are produced according to a formula that includes the article on current political news along with the short story, the society column (often written with obvious tongue-in-cheek)



along with the foreign correspondent's reportage or, say, the "human-interest" record of a current trial. These weekly magazines are in rotogravure, about one third of their space occupied by very large and in varying degrees eye-catching or even "shocking" photographs. *Il Mondo* is the most sedate of them, but it has the same general format; and it is in this magazine that Italians, for instance, can read fairly frequently the prose of the nation's venerable philosopher, Benedetto Croce. This seems on the whole a sign of vitality.

These magazines, and the "third pages," are then, in spite of a certain flamboyant appearance, *written* products: the use they make of language, the tradition they belong to, are literary. To give one example, the editor (or to use the Italian terminology, the "director") of the extremely popular *L'Europeo* is Arrigo Benedetti, himself a writer of very subtle works of fiction, a man whose origins are in the literary *avant garde*. Practically all Italian writers are connected with one or another of the weeklies and dailies, or with several of them. Eugenio Montale, regarded by many as the leading Italian poet, and by the philistines as the very essence of the ivory tower, is permanently employed by the daily *Corriere della Sera*. The "third page" breaks through the distinction between *avant garde* and popular writing; and taking an optimistic view of things, one cannot think of a better training ground for a type of writing that is both respectably artistic and capable of reaching a wide audience.

The danger, of course, is that the necessary pursuit of such more practical and ephemeral forms of literature may leave writers little time for the more durable and traditional ones, like the novel. Besides, there is a tendency now in Italy, as everywhere among the younger writers of "highbrow" origin, to take a sort of pride in commercial success; it is a kind of *revanche* against the accusations of ivory-tower obscurity and lack of practical sense which beset them in the past. In Italy this has been more obvious than elsewhere because it has coincided with the restitution of freedom to the writers to handle whatever themes they please, and with the consequent eagerness with which some of them devoted themselves (in stories, films, and most especially in the weekly magazines) to a certain type of "shocking" exposure of realities. The spectacles offered by their age and country were, to be sure, shocking enough and justified them fully; it is regrettable if those manners become mannerisms. But perhaps the "shocking" qualities of certain themes and techniques are the necessary spurious elements without which a literature remains unadvertised and unknown abroad. This is confirmed by the type of success that the recent Italian novels and films have had; Moravia is a serious artist, but there is no doubt that his best-selling success began the day people found out that his eighth novel was the autobiography of a prostitute. There are similar

situations in the motion pictures; *Bitter Rice* was advertised, at least here in Hollywood, on the basis of the heroine's figure and attire, and it achieved astounding commercial results; while a considerably better film like Germi's *Path of Hope* passed almost unnoticed.

As things now stand, the notion of literature as an art is far from having disappeared in Italy; but it may be seriously threatened by everyday hand-to-mouth necessities. We shall have new novels from Italy if writers have time to write them. As long as they do, it seems fairly certain that such novels will remain the more serious part of their activity. In fact, the echo of whatever international success these writers are having does not seem to represent a danger. In Rome last summer, in the offices of *Il Mondo*, I remember talking one evening with Ennio Flaiano and mentioning several reviews of his book in English which I had read; one of them, in an English magazine, especially enthusiastic. But since it happened that I had flown in from Los Angeles practically the day before, Flaiano seemed more interested to hear about Hollywood than about himself. As for the reviews of his book, he apparently had never seen or heard of them.

## Michael Seide

# THE FIGURE OF A MAN FALLING

Copyright, 1952, by Michael Seide. Part of a novel, *THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE*, to be published by Little, Brown & Co.

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sight of it, like the daft and emblematic rush-hour it is often imagined to be, or it may simply remain seated, so that the proud calligraphy of its profile may be admired, with one passive paw raised like the ampersand thus: & -sign which sees

**T**IME MAY—or it may not—skip a heartbeat thinking of it. It may scuttle away from the

nothing, yet seems to know it all. Or it may be that stylized eye which looks awful whenever it sees an additional soul, in a sort of bug-like maneuver, try to force itself through a tiny crack into the future. Before going any further, would not this be a good time to ask the birds to come out and cheep more lucidly—if not more gaily—between the syllables? Ah, this Joe of ours—confound his innocence, confound it now and always. He and his possessive case. Quite nimble at deception by nature, he foists it on the first slow-thinking sissy he meets because he, Joe, has misbehaved, and knows it, and so must have something quick to sweeten his existence, that is, something in lieu of an answer to that question which is not his only, that question which is beginning to be piped so pathetically by so many everywhere—do I still belong to you, world, do I? What? No more talk of owning it, only of belonging to it? Trample on the roses, and throttle the nightingale, if the war-waging begin to quack, and the murderous to quake, how is anyone to know what topsy-turvy item will be tossed at him next? Hah, Joe? Verily, when a man regards the mollycoddle of today with his supersubtle life of a lunatic, with his neurotic concern with the shadow instead of the substance, with his bloated penances, interior and personal, he is pricked by nostalgia for the singular brutality of the past which can be measured, weighed, and dissipated, for the olden days of the roisterer with his red cheeks and his smoldering soul which was never easily bruised or easily sorry—never. It may not be wise to praise so a pagan interlude. But he might well drop his head and suck his finger—this Joe—and closely consider it. How significant it is, and typical of him too, that his brilliant venture of yesterday should seem to him today like the fuzzy invasion by a caterpillar of a clean and communal wall onto which it had quietly crawled, and as quietly clung, another hairy affair, cockily baking in the sun, musing on its metamorphosis, feeling so sure of itself—and so safe. But what was it that suddenly convulsed it? Why did he have to have that outburst which betrayed his innocence? And made him feel so ashamed that it was he, himself, who brushed himself off? They were impatient words, deformed by captiousness as of old, a dinky boast of watch-and-see, which revealed to him the measure of his own buffoonery and bluffing. Ah, well, perhaps there is a world elsewhere, a world in which such a blunder is nipped in the bud by an earlier visitation of angels. If so, why not persuade the whelp to make a safari in search of it? Perhaps all he has to do is trust his nose and he will find a bone with more gristle on it, and stranger air with which to refrigerate the heart, and a quincunx of trees in a grove where he can fool more with flowers and less with prickles, where he can get rid of his fleas, and his distemper, and scabless at last, lift a leg, and learn finally how a man differs from a dog.

Sign of a sty this morning—was it an omen? But by noon

it had disappeared, as well as those private movements of prayer, panic, and wrath—and of the usual blues which clot a Monday. Which even a ridiculous original can sweat out in work, since even he knows the efficacy of the physical kind—so all praise to his manual dexterity, and a snicker at least for his final observation of the morning which went like this, since it had to—everybody is ticking, that's for sure, yet no one ever tells the right time. Well, anyway, it went. And thanks be to bossy, it was more solidly replaced by a vision of a spanish omelette—a hot-plate special already steaming in his mind as he tore across the street to the Nathan & Mitchel Cafeteria with Kitzel and Frankie, and Hymie and Felix, hardly lagging behind. The first to pluck a green check—they switched the color on him every day—out of the machine which snatched on him with a bong as he did so, a new scientific effort to keep him on the straight-and-narrow, for with *two* checks—here is the way he works it—have coffee and cake punched on one, and as high as a steak dish with mushrooms and french-fried potatoes on the other, and pay for the pittance of the first with a straight face. The trick is to get those two checks first, then it is simple—he was the last of the gang to get himself served—now what selfish reversal to meekness is this? Is it something premeditated? Has it been caused by a glance from the cashier's pretty head with its static permanent wave to the electric clock hung ticklessly behind her, and enticing him to it with the suavity and correctness of its naval observatory time? That such a clear turn of the mind, as pardonable as the twist of a wrist, should seem so enigmatic.

But to deal with Joe is to be jolted—now and then—by surprises. For the more unnatural and inconvenient, and time-consuming it is, the more impulsively will he declare the arbitrary moment to be the inevitable one—and so decide he must discipline himself. So there—so now he peacefully despises his most valid hunger and disdainfully keeps it in check, allowing himself to be shoved and mauled and shouted down, the goon, refusing to grapple with that hydra which calls itself the public in today's lunch-hour crush. Sometimes his kind of defiance can be a dilly. He scorns their theory of the survival of the loudest and follows his own of catch-her-eye and gentle-does-it which it will eventually, of course, but right now—what does it get him? A hand creeps into his pocket. Hemmed in as he is, he tries to discover whose it might be, and when he encounters the cool set expression of the pickpocket's face, what does he do? Nothing but shake his head as he smiles directly at it in two ways, first, to show surprise that he should be chosen as a victim, and second, how amused he is that anyone should covet two keys on a ring, tobacco crumbs, and the stub of a movie ticket. Recanting, and philosophically enough, the thwarted hand retrieves itself to try again some other day. Another incident—another omen? Oh, ye cops and robbers, if the

meek inherit the earth—though it is difficult to imagine what they could possibly do with *that* particular object once they clamp their provincial claws on it—they will instantly become relatives, and as such, will try to steal it from each other. It will be the last revolution—endless. The policeman's whistle will shrill perpetually.

Peep-peep, Joe imitated a Cadillac horn to warn the throng he was coming through. His loaded tray was his football. He imagined he was a quarterback with swivel hips who knew how to slip through the smallest hole to reach his goal which, in this case, was the very last table in the rear, roughly preempted each day by the same old gang for the same old reason—to exchange banter and compulsive boasts, especially after they had depleted their coffee cups and dredged their soup bowls to pile them all on whatever blue plate had been desecrated—their hunger demanded such a splurge daily, a true meal with all the trimmings, but it was not often they could borrow the price of it—or had tried to trip a trim ankle, in passing, or bum a cigarette from a bus boy, or salt the sugar, or sugar the salt to show they were full of extra-curricular gumption, and superfluous wind and beans. The seats against the wall were best, but now they were taken. When he sat down on the outside, Kitzel was the one who winked at him. As for the rest, they barely glanced at him as if he were a stranger, or as it seemed to him, as if he were becoming one, and that seemed so much worse. And it was all done so naturally. He ate—he had to eat. Now how could the dust and heat of their table-talk increase without him? How could they continue to make bets without *his* hypothetical millions? Or without him still seem so witty—so obscenely so? Was this an omelette he was eating? Or was it straw? Odd dish, fresh intimation at every bite, he took note of each tasteless mouthful as he exercised his jaw in their air, and in their air, he breathed. How generous of them to allow him to hang on to the periphery of their clique by the usual eyelash. Camaraderie so often falsely exalted, his former position at the very heart of it had shifted to the rim inexorably. Ah, it was plain now. He was building his own barricade, and behind it now, the bad moments were beginning to multiply—ever since Saturday.

Yet what lies they tell. They so rarely believe each other. They are contesting now for the new finisher hired today, for her kewpie-doll lips, her perfectly-muscled butt, her black staring eyes, her stiff and separated lashes. Whose is she to be? A hack-knife into the liver—indian-givers all—giving with one hand, and taking away with the other. Doubt is what will form that peptic ulcer. And in the loose eyes of the law, the innocence of the transgressor is no excuse. They agree she may be syphilitic. Frankie has his mouth wide open—for flies. He wonders at these men, his admirable elders, who seem to know how to exploit women other than their wives. Kitzel passes

around the chiclets. Joe also takes one. As he chews, he is aware that he is posing as a man who is in a sad decline. It is such a little vanishing pleasure. He ought to flirt with the wisecrack as they do. And as they do, greet Georgie as if he were a prime example of a vaudeville nigger who, lacking white brains, is expected to lick his plate as if it had been permeated by the spirit of quail on toast instead of two stale and skinny frankfurters. Where is that old thunder of ethical condemnation? Where is the sneak who spits on the preacher? Into each life a little prejudice must fall. Hymie is a cutter. Hymie is a refinement—a simpler simple-simon. Still the snippet of an idea does flutter semi-annually, and always with great distress, in the vast empty arena of his size seven-and-three-quarters skull. In short, he is thought to have a bird-brain, though there is no bird at the Prospect Park Zoo, for one place, which can match his biceps, or his lachrymal nature, or his squawking against his natural enemy, Felix the Fox, his immediate boss, a cleverer one who loves to annoy this bull with the german hair-cut, as he calls him, this tear-jerker who feels most alive when he feels most infuriated. If one has an enemy—and the need to have one is universal—it is fun to have him face to face. Just to hate, and just to be afraid, is wrong, children, and a rotten fate. But how sweet almost, and delicious, and cherishable even, it becomes when fear and hate can be shared by tossing it around in a free-for-all kind of together-ishness. Is there a toddler or a teen-ager in the classroom who can think of anything more charming—or more brotherly?

“Me,” said Hymie. “I can.”

“Sure, sure,” said Felix who sat beside him, yet never turned to look at him when he spoke. “Who’s for getting some water? Georgie?”

“I’m eating.”

“You’re the nearest to it.”

“I’m eating.”

“Sure I can,” said Hymie. “I can tell you. I’ve been watching it. Christ, I can remember when this place was really mobbed.”

“What?” said Felix. “More than this?”

“Sure—much more.”

“Fooyey. You see things like you stretch silk—all cockeyed.”

“Oh, yeah?” said Hymie. “So tell me this. Where’s that snake who used to come in here?”

“What snake?” said Felix. “Listen to this, men—he’s off.”

“You know who I mean. That guy who always had his mouth to your ear—making like a bookie. And that schlang, Maxie, who could whistle—what about him? And Berkman who used to wear those big bow-ties? Does anybody ever see him? And that shrimp who used to eat yeast for the pimples on his face? What the hell was his name? And yeah—that

crazy truck-pusher, Kalinsky—where is he now?"

"Still pushing. Kalinsky. Say—I remember him. Wasn't he the one who used to brag about the size of his dick?"

"I heard he's dead," said Kitzel. "Squashed against a wall or something."

"Naa," said Frankie. "I still see him around. Hold everything. Who wants to buy a raffle? Huh? I got it right here."

"Well?" said Hymie. "Why don't you tell me? What's happened to all those guys? Why don't they ever come in here?"

"You win a watch," said Frankie. "And a chain too. Hah, fellas? It's only a dime—that's all it is. Who'll be the first?"

"The first?" said Kitzel. "I won't even be the last."

"Just look at it," said Hymie. "Just look around. See what's happening? I'm telling you—in another few months this place'll be so empty, you'll be able to run a dance in here."

"Listen to him," said Felix. "He's selling tickets for it already. A schlub—I didn't even know he could dance."

"Sure," said Hymie. "I can dance."

"Then dance yourself right out of here, will you? What're you bothering me for? You got spring fever or something?"

"Hey, Joe," said Kitzel.

"What?"

"There's your brother over there. See him?"

"Yes," said Joe. "I see him."

"Aw," said Frankie. "Come on, you guys. Don't be so cheap. It's only a dime. If I don't sell fifty—I get kicked right out of the club."

"Good," said Kitzel. "Tell them I'll help them—any time."

"Sure," said Hymie. "I know. You think I'm sick in the head, eh?"

"What the hell," said Frankie. "Nobody's going to buy? How about you, Georgie? I got a feeling you'll win. You once told me you won, didn't you?"

"Okay," said Georgie. "Give me a cigarette first."

"That's the stuff," said Frankie. "See that? There's the only real guy around here."

"Spring fever, shit," said Hymie. "It's more like winter for everybody—that's what it is. And that's what it's going to be from now on—all the time."

"That does it," said Felix. "That finishes me. Hop around and get me some water, Frankie, and what the hell—I'll buy one too. Anything not to listen to him."

"Oh, boy," said Frankie. "That's the ticket. Now I'm doing business. Who else before I go? Hymie? How about you, Joe? Need some water too?"

"No," said Joe. "Just some fresh air."

Is it so good then to feel so alone? It is not so bad. Or to go out into the street again and pause near a doorway where lambs do not gambol or the lilacs grow, and catch the wistful little wind full in the face, and look up to see a family of four

clouds, and wonder why they submit so pompously to being fleeced, and why, if the mind is so cocksure as it suns itself, should the heart remain stubbornly wicked, and scoff at such a spectacle? Yes, that is good too—that somehow *it* should know that if its owner, Joe, folds his arms across his chest and stands there with his feet apart like a conqueror who has this second been crowned that he is suffering from that common tic called delusions of grandeur—hardly anything else. Why is it that these clowns who clog the street do not tumble in adoration at his feet? Or that Mazie Dubrow, the floorlady, who limps by, says hello without noticing his wings or his halo? His answer is a boy's answer. They are blind. But he can see. The sense of his own uniqueness and invulnerability blinds *him* so that he does not see any of the cars which swerve and just fail to kill him as he jaywalks arrogantly across the street. Thus nature, a master chef, can churn ice-cream for the ego out of simple air and sunshine, and force the Joes and Janes of each generation to swallow it greedily each spring at least, as if it were manna for the soul and not that mish-mash so necessary to insure the giddy survival of the flesh.

Old stuff—a partial statement at which he smiles as he stations himself near the entrance of his building. For after all, the youthful joy of his soul in its own individuality is as real to him as that particular sneeze which is caused by breathing in a pinch or more of the peppery snuff of the sun. Certainly, if the soul is a contraption, it has not been rashly built out of a few old ripped cards, goose feathers, and broken book-matches, and has its own pledges and avowals to make, and to break, and its own endless trials, and enthusiasms, and its own bold lies to tell. What has it to do with the inherited caution and hesitation of the heart? This is its time to crow independently—this is its heyday. It may be a nuisance, but it *will* aspire, even if it does not have an olive jar of pennies in back of it or six or seven dimes in a piggy bank. The very tiresing of its fearlessness—and the possibility of its failing. A reasonable soul, this soul of Joe's, he views it so ironically, and tries to train it to be sensible and remember that if ever it does succeed, its success will merely be that it will fail in its own peculiar way.

Such a thought, so conclusively trite, made him look so gentle and obliging that when a Postal Telegraph boy bounced up on the sidewalk with his bike, he did not hesitate, as he parked it, to ask him to keep an eye on it—hah, bud? Joe slapped the handle-bar and begged him to be easy—he would guard it with his life. Three women he did not know were felicitating a fourth he was sure he did not know either on her tremendous luck. She was going to quit work and have a baby. The vestal delight of the three was such that it seemed they were already having it with her. An airplane droned overhead as if it were bored—as if it too had overheard. Ho



hum, what newspaper does not know that its readers will be more fascinated by the taking away of a life than the giving of it which at best is so mere and mimetic? Last night, according to a little item in the *Times*, a two-months-old babe refused to be shushed, wailed so long and insistently that finally its mother, in a marvelous fit of rage, just stuffed it entire into a live stove. Whether she subsequently warmed her hands over that crackling good fire was not revealed—some reporters are too polite—but when she was told she was a murderer, she protested, and swore by her saint, a very minor one, that her babykins was so much better off now, that if once she had heard it mew on earth, she could now hear it coo in heaven where its diaper will never have to be changed—she was sure of it. So sure, said one man to the lapel of another, should we all be. Said the other, We should—say it and believe it—the missis will live and laugh and bring light yet into the house again—all people die—but must it always be from an operation on the eye? Yes, said the buttonholer, how right—if she lives, I promise, I buy her something. And if she dies? sneered the other, suddenly tired of it all. If she dies, said his leech, *then* it will cost me—I will have to bury her. Jiminy, what legs—what accident brings such a ritzy-looking dame so far downtown? She wore a dark-orange pillbox hat with a dotted veil, and pigskin gloves to match, and a raglan coat blowing open, and a frankly-nippled blouse of beige, and seams on her stockings terribly straight. Is she naughty when she kisses? Does she refuse to use her tongue? Is she as stern and distinguished as she looks? She clip-clopped by him with a kisser on her like ice, as if she had never shared a quilt, or plumped up the pillows, or suffered a sheet-burn on her royal behind, this faker, as if, now really, as if she hated to excite this world full of oglers for such a—for such a nasty reason. He smiled ambiguously. If only she had a bike. He would have loved to watch it for her.

The boy came out briskly to reclaim his two-wheeler, offered gum, accepted the refusal without any fuss, crammed three slices into his mouth, said thanks clearly enough, and streaked away, simple, responsible, eupeptic all the way. Joe watched him whizz around the corner. Gone now—but would this be the boy who would bring him a merry, and revolutionary, message some day? The sight of Rosalie coming was a shock. The sun was in her eyes. He stepped back into the shade. Why should it frighten him sometimes when he sees her—when he sees her and has to think of her as his? To love—give in order its forms in several colors, search like a sonof-a-gun for a more immaculate conjugation, relinquish none and do not surrender to any. He loved. What did he love? How was it clothed? With sister's shoes resoled and dyed blue, with a hand-me-down cloth green coat with a musty collar of plush, with a utility hair-do, and a useless hatlessness, with patched

panties once flashy and a clashing shade of brassiere, and with the doubtful blessedness of looking benign and little in all of it. And yet, whenever she mourned the appearance of her working outfit—her week-end one was as weak for other reasons—he asked her angrily not to speak of it, as if unknown to himself, he was perpetually struggling with a subliminal preference for the insidious blankness and ornamented malignancy of the clothes-dummy. She just naturally beamed when she spied him. Her legs—they did twinkle. She sought for his eyes with a desire so direct that apparently she failed to see that a button on his coat was split or that his knitted tie had begun to unravel at the knot or that the pesty sun had brought out the provoking rain-stain on his hat. So then the love which is critical has something crooked about it and constantly seems like a crime. Hooray for the idiot. He has stumbled on a cliché and has conked himself with it.

“Hey,” she said. “That’s not your face, is it?”

He smiled as he used his right hand to capture her left.

“I’m afraid so,” he said. “It’s a new thing. It comes and it goes.”

“Let it go then. What’d you want it for? Whew—I’m telling you, I sure had a tough time getting away.”

“I know,” he said. “She wasn’t hungry—but this is what she ate.”

“Oh, no,” she said, “that’s not the reason. I’m not that rich. I just got into an argument. Why don’t you stand in the sun?”

“It hurts my eyes. What argument?”

“Oh—that Big Bee. I swear—I’ll never eat again where she eats. What’s wrong with the lady anyway? You know? It’s always out of a clear blue sky. Your hand is so cool. Maybe you can tell me—what makes her try to boss everybody lately?”

“Because she’s becoming more and more miserable. She’s a real case.”

“How do you mean?”

“Let’s go in and sit down.”

“On such a nice day?”

“That’s the trouble,” he said. “All this fresh air—it’s killing me.”

To hear a girl laugh so purely is to be reminded that such a laughter is laudable and precious.

“I believe you,” she said. “It’s just the way you looked. Bend down a little. Is my face red?”

“Where?”

“I mean—am I a little sunburned?”

“Don’t be whacky.”

“I must get sunburned. That’s what my mother always says—and she’s right. I need the sun.”

“I thought it was money.”

“That too. Ah—remember me last summer?”

"How can I forget. I never saw such blisters. You and your Coney Island."

"What blisters? Did I have blisters? I mean my tan. Didn't I look good in it? I looked good then, didn't I?"

"If it makes you so happy—yes."

"Well, now—don't strain yourself."

"Come on, nature-lover. Let's go in and sit down on the stairs."

"Okay," she said. "But this time, try not to drag me, eh?"

"I need the exercise. Oops, watch that swinging door. Damn it all, I must admit it. I envy you, kiddo."

"Why?"

"I like the way you can be happy—for no reason at all."

"For no reason?"

"For no reason at all."

"Why—you're a dope, you know that? I'm in love. Isn't that a reason?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "I forgot that."

"You forgot that."

"I mean. You know what I mean. I was thinking of something else."

"That's right," she said. "Be a gentleman. Let the lady sit down before you."

He jumped up.

"What the hell's the matter with me?"

He pulled her down beside him.

"How much time have we got? Say—maybe I'll ask you something. Why not? Maybe I will at that."

"What?"

"No—not yet."

"Your eyes are so big."

"Let's just sit first, eh?"

"All right," she said—and smiled. "Let's just sit."

To assure him that he was free, if he so wished, to fumble for the apocalyptic in their humble position, she placed her hand over his hand which he had placed on her knee, thus paying with her sympathy for her passage with him in his wanderings, strangely proud of him because he was capable of thought, even if his thoughts did often carry him away from her so foolishly. Oh, how often, yes, but not this time—this time it was not true. He actually shook his head. But his was, and so all at once, such an anguish of appreciation, that he felt it would be sacrilegious to enter into the initial stage of stuttering about it, even that, that all his words would seem as fake as the marble of the pink walls of this lobby, and as inelastic and opaque as the step on which they sat like orphans—more stone—like a couple of beggars who seem insufferably crushed, yet, aggravatingly enough, remain so well-behaved. No doubt she was more civilized than he when she curtsied to the caprice which had wafted them to this spot as if it had

been willed to them, when she said it was plainly theirs and so could be called "ours," when she idealized it without worrying about it. If time topples all pillars, then love erects them wherever it plants itself, being so confoundedly eager and able. And blind? If Rosalie is in love—if, the man says, imagine—has love then, with one of its famous scratches, permanently impaired her eyesight? How awkward then to realize that her nearsighted vistas of a future with him, that all of her hopes for him, each of them firmly grounded on these stairs, were far superior to the supposed airiness and breath of his visual flights, and deeper somehow than the depth he imagined as terrifying of the hole he had dug in a deserted acre of his mind in order to secure what is positively silly—himself as he will be when he is a ghost. His fragrant jailer, all she had to do was sigh and, by her breathing which became funny, show him what she craved, and the clay of his nebulous longings crumbled about him.

Take her then—make an end of it. Or chuck her away altogether as if she were really an untouchable. For she has that terrible nerve of the simple soul which is always profoundly humiliating to resist. To curb and check her forever because she delights in him—can that ever seem glorious? Has it ever seemed so? Challenging bit of jail-bait, sixteen and a half years old, when first she joined the chorus at Colish, the very first thing she did was to outstare him. He knew then that he had to run away from her. And that is almost a year and a half ago. Is there a little axiom tucked away somewhere which says that mere propinquity can succeed at last in linking a girl who is pure with a boy who is perverse? If so, let no one resurrect it and try to use it here. Or be too quick to seize upon this blarney about the invincibility of daily nearness, how it draws together, and tangles so and knots that it appears to be the only reason why finally the so-called sage mounts the apparent jackass, or vice versa—what difference does it make? On the contrary, here is an example of an encounter—common enough, yet fabulous each time—which is as naked and naughty at the first glance as it will be at the last. What of this is invalidated if it is true that an animal can reach the same far-from-unpleasant conclusion with one quick sniff? But then, who cares about such inept comparisons with furred or feathered creatures, be they foxes in a bush or owls on a branch, who have these secret meetings, who stealthily conjoin to act out their painful moments of passion? Concentrate rather on this man—Joe, with *his* coat of many colors—this shattered specimen of a man who, according to his sorry version of it, has had the misfortune to collide in the daytime with what he itched for, dreaming that it could happen to him only at night. Anyway, he ran. And she was hilarious.

Pepper-pot, seductive dumpling, high-breasted brat, he could kill her for that, for her flush, her public glee. The more

he stiffened and squirmed and snarled at her, the more she exulted. She knew she would snare him. It was ordained. Swinging her legs as she perched on his packing table, she made him work around her and closer to her until he saw red—and let them all look—he had to lift her bodily and carry her off as far as he could, and set her down rudely, and warn the little witch—but warn her of what? Ah, sing him no songs of a siren like Cleopatra who still floats down the river Nile in her monotonous barge, hazy tantalizer, let the eunuchs squeal as they fan that ember of concupiscence, that pin-pricking immortal bored with lust whose historic charm depends too much on silks, chinks, condiments, potions, and paint-pots. She is a reek, a shimmer, a slithering in a man's mind—no more. Why should he be a mutt? Why should he magnify these mystic sinuosities, this oriental languor and fustiness? Why should he try to revive the grand manner just to declaim about such an obscure and dusty fragment of desire when he has had to grapple with a temptress more formidable by far, Rosalie, an American kiddo who has simply flowered out of an ash-can on the East Side? For months she paraded before him, showing him everything. He could easily see—she wore so little—that to bite into any part of *her* person, was to bite into the absolute. She was shameless. All of a sudden, she would sneak over to tickle him, then step back to duck the swing he took at her, and pull her dress tight, and ask him to please look and tell her if she was getting too big there. It was tempting—but he never spanked her. One day as he passed the dressing room, he heard her laugh at the mention of his name, then boast to the other girls that, as wonderful as he was, she was sure she had him going, she could tell—he was weakening. He waylaid the giggler then to swear that if he ever heard one more peep out of her like that, so help him, he would strangle her. She offered him her neck. He pushed her. If to push her was to touch her, what could he do? He had to push her away. For she was too compact for him, too vital—too real.

Such too-ing was as good as oo-ing—he knew he would always envy, and curse, the mongrel who would finally mount her. As for him, he confessed he was afraid. What was his fear then? His fear—and it was such a young one—was to be overwhelmed by that one thing too early in life, that by annexing, he would be annexed, that it might suddenly turn out to be the last twinge and the last tumult of its kind—and all for a little piece of tail. The wiseguy who wenchs where he works often sees his phase of dancing around cut short—except for a last waltz at his own wedding. Pale now, what is his prize? A horseshoe of anemic flowers. Giant and sanguinary dreams of a love which is wild and unbelievable, again they perish at the altar. Why not, therefore, follow that policy which is so punctilious that it reserves all the various acts of panting and

pouncing for the after-hours only when the appetite is most anonymous, or if pressed, can leave a false second-name? Damn the hide of *this* bouncing baby, if she had a scheme, she boldly announced it, while all *he* could do was to maneuver around like a sneak.

She began to delay his incoming calls by demanding that first he exchange with her a word or two of nonsense as crude as baby-talk. All that did was to increase his vocabulary of names by which to call her. Soon she was ringing him on her own. Repeated and irresistible intrusion of her tonic breath, she forced their voices to mingle intimately over the telephone, extracting from him farcical lectures on the nature of good and evil, on the sin implicit in her flaming impulse to fling herself on him, on the merits of patience and reason, on the contempt he had for her over-eagerness to be fingered, on her stupidity in believing that he was out of the ordinary, on his firm resolve to hold out against her appearance which he was frank enough to describe as a natural disaster. Her laugh reached its crest—then began to break. She absolutely refused to believe it. What was going on here? He seemed to mean what he said. Oh, this crazy man of iron—he began to make her look foolish, as if she were really a child who, for its own rare amusement, has been clopping along allegorically in its mother's shoes, chasing after, and vainly, its father's face painted on a balloon. For he held out—for exactly eleven long months—he *did* hold out against her.

Surely the worms, whose charm is not altogether inconsequential, quarrel less when they crawl on each other, wriggling under and over, or do not speak of it at all. Further, it is monstrous to assume that they can ever be puffed up by pride, since they have never been known to perform a lucky act of levitation, and so cannot be accused of looking down with withering contempt, with whatever serves them for a nose, upon the comparatively less inspired and lumpish, that is, upon their fatuous companions, their fellow-devourers. But of course with a he-man like Joe, well, there it is quite different. That is to say—it was. For on the basis of what he had *not* done, he did something that was ridiculous—he fell, as they say, head over heels in love with himself, tumbling very far—for it was a great fall, a very great one. It was noticed. True, he still condescended to wear his apron, but only as a lord would wear it, with a sort of haughty finesse and forbearance, often shucking the disguise to flabbergast the squirts around him, especially one, with his icy comments on their cringing manners and their empty ways. But, hoity-toity, the result was that they snubbed him, and she became sad. The whole proud and mettlesome frame of the rambunctious filly began to sag. It was a cruel situation. Saltless eater of his shrinking flesh, of all the maddening sights to see daily, brazenly slouching by him with a livid nose and a rigid eye as if she were deader

than dead, as if she were a ghost practicing to be a ghoulish as well, gathering material to compose a nightmare for him which would be so forked and cyclonic that it would jab and whirl and whip him for what he had done to her, he and only he. God Almighty, what could he do? He had to exaggerate it all because she did. She—he just hated her. But collect his bones in a number three carton and bury them in his own courtyard, just when he thought his hate would swell forever, his surprising heart suddenly went out to her, floating toward her tipsily. She was so delighted, she almost wept, almost dived in to—but somehow she knew that she must not try to tip it over as yet. Her smile became dangerous. He was not that blind—he could see it. But he talked to her and he talked to her until one day, as they sat on these same stairs, she quietly took his hand and brought it to her mouth, and that was how she scuttled him—how this bright boy, the carefree swimmer, finally sank.

“Oh, you dirty dog you.”

“Hello?”

“You fat little fever-giver.”

“Fat?”

“You nemeses. So now you’re mine. So that’s the way it has to be, eh?”

“Excuse me,” she said. “But that’s my leg you’re squeezing.”

“Your leg?”

The avenger smiled without relaxing his grip.

“I thought I was further up than that,” he said.

“Ow. So help me, Joe, if you give me another blue mark, I’ll—”

“You’ll what? Okay—don’t hit. What the hell. A guy has to try to show he’s boss sometimes, doesn’t he?”

“Oh, sure. Aren’t you going to give me one?”

“Give you what?”

“A cigarette, stupid.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. I always forget you smoke.”

“Only yours, dear.”

“Wait,” he said. “I use opium. Would you like to try that too?”

“A match, mister.”

“At least hold it like a man.”

“Fooley. I hate the stuff. You think I should get a holder? Did I ever tell you what happened to my sister once when she tried to get fancy? What did you mean when you said so now you’re mine? You never said that before.”

“That’s all right,” he said. “Don’t let it worry you. There’s a lot of things I’ve never said before.”

“That helps. Another funny answer.”

“Funny! What’s funny about it?”

“Look, Joe.”

“What?”

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure, why not?"

"No—let it go. I'm sorry. I can't."

"Now don't die on me. What'd you want to know?"

"I feel sick."

"Throw it away then."

"No," she said, "I'm not talking about that. I mean something else. Don't laugh now—but I'm going to tell you something. I don't think I really like it."

"Don't like what? It's not about me, is it?"

"I mean it, Joe. The whole thing is making me sick."

"What thing?"

"Oh," she said, "you know. This damn love business."

"Yow," he suddenly seized and drew her back. "Watch out."

"What's the matter?"

"Glickman. I don't want him to see us."

"Oh."

"Sick of it? Did you say you were sick of it? You're improving, you know that? All right—turn your face away. I understand. Sure, why shouldn't you be sick of it? Don't you think I know? Here you are waiting—and I'm still fooling around. But I warned you about that, didn't I?"

"A lot of good that does me now."

"I told you. I would go so far with you—and no further."

"It's driving me crazy. I shouldn't say that, should I?"

"Why not? You'd be a liar if you didn't."

"I'm ashamed of myself. I can't think of anything else."

"Don't be so ashamed. What do you think I think about?"

"Oh, this—this business. Who invented it anyways?"

"Be careful," he said. "God is listening."

"You mean the devil, don't you?"

"Now don't be that kind of a virgin. Look. Let me ask you something. You still like me, don't you?"

"Of course—what a question."

"Then all right," he said. "The hell with it. Let's get married."

"What?" she cried.

"Sure."

"Just for *that*?"

"Why not? Why be afraid to think about it that way? Let's say it's for that reason to begin with—for your sake. All right—for mine too. It seems silly, but they tell us we all have to get married sometimes, don't they? So all right. So it'll be you to me—and me to you. What's the difference? The hell with it all. It'll work out somehow. At least we'll be able to think of something else for a change. What'd you say? How about it?"

Frankie charged in on them.

"Ah," he cried, "that's good. I knew I'd find you here. How about it, folks? Hurry, hurry, hurry. Get them while they last."



Only a dime—the tenth part of a dollar. Come on, you millionaires. Get your money up.”

“Get my money up?” cried Rosalie. “You little pest. If you don’t get away from here, I’ll murder you. What’d you mean jumping on me that way?”

Frankie stepped way back.

“What’s a matter with her?”

“Can’t you see?” said Joe. “She loves you. She wants you to live.”

“Gee,” said Frankie, “what’d I do? I didn’t do anything.”

“Ah,” said Joe. “You see? You’ve hurt his feelings.”

“But what does he want?” said Rosalie. “My God, do I have to think of him too? Hey, you—come here.”

“It’s only a dime,” said Frankie.

“What is?”

“This raffle. You need a watch, don’t you?”

“A raffle,” said Rosalie. “Can you imagine? Give it to him, Joe. Lay it out for me. And don’t you start calling me sweetheart, you hear?”

“I won’t,” said Frankie, “I won’t. That’ll be two, eh?”

“Two?” said Joe.

“Well,” said Felix. “This I like. He’s hooking them too.”

“But not me,” said Kitzel. “I didn’t fall for it. See that, Hymie? I told you I’d be the only one.”

“More company,” said Rosalie. “This is so unexpected.”

“Ah,” said Felix, “dear Mrs. Astor. Tell me, if you’ll be so kindly—how’s the old love-life?”

“Is somebody talking to me?”

“She gets prettier and prettier every day, doesn’t she? Remember what I said, babyface. Just let me know when you get rid of this guy.”

“I’m sure I hear somebody talking.”

“Hey,” said Hymie. “You guys staying here? I’m going up.”

“Go ahead,” said Felix. “Who’s holding you?”

“By the way,” said Joe. “Nobody’s holding you either.”

“What?” said Felix. “You mean to say we’re not wanted?”

“Think about it when you’re gone.”

“Okay,” said Felix, “I get it. Come on, Kitzel. Who’re we to interfere? Life must go on. You know that, don’t you?”

“Brilliant,” said Joe. “Isn’t he?”

“Say,” said Frankie. “What’d you give me, Joe?”

“You still here?”

“Was that a quarter you gave me?”

“Yeah,” said Joe, “a quarter. You have to give me a nickel change, get it?”

“But I haven’t got a nickel.”

“Then you’ll owe it to me. Go on, now. Get upstairs and start packing. Shoo. Jesus Christ—a fine body of men, aren’t they?”

“But how would we live?”

"We'd live. Since when has *he* been calling you babyface?"

"How? On my salary? Don't be so good to me."

"Look," he said. "Who's been talking to you about money?"

"Or does it mean you're staying? Does it mean you're staying, Joe?"

"Hell, no. Who gave you that idea?"

"Then what're you talking about?"

"You know."

"What're you trying to do?"

"Give you a chance to sleep with me—isn't that what you want?"

"All right," she said, "I don't care if you get fresh. That's what I want then. So? When does it come off? Come on, tell me. When?"

"Why, I told you, didn't I? When you marry me."

"Marry you," she said. "On what? You know it's impossible. Is that why you're asking me?"

"Of course," he said. "I had it all figured out."

"I bet you did."

"I knew you wouldn't have the guts."

"Ah," she said, "why didn't you say it? I would've said yes right away. All you had to do was say it—didn't you know that?"

"Say what? Tell me."

"Oh—that you love me—what'd you think?"

"Oh," he said, "that. Okay, then—I love you. Will you marry me?"

"What time is it? There's no sense in being late now."

"You don't like the way I said that, do you?"

"I don't know about you—but I need my job."

"Goddamn, Rosalie—what do you want? You want me to melt at your feet? You want me to become a grease spot? Is that what you want?"

"I want you to leave me alone. You hear me? Just leave me alone."

"The hell I will."

He was almost floored by an incredible shriek.

"Fire," Karl screamed, clawing at the wall. "Run for your lives, you rats."

"Of all the crazy bastards."

"Oo, mamma, I'm burning up—I'm burning up."

"Ah—I hope so."

"Hello?" Karl suddenly halted, spitting into an imaginary receiver. "Is this the morgue? I got two bodies for you. Yeah, that's right. Rosalie the Rose—and Joe the Gyp. What? No—the hell with a check. Send cash."

"Jesus," said Joe. "Come on, Rosalie—this is more than I can take."

Karl rattled a real pair of dice.

"Shoot a dollar," he cried. "Who fades me?"

"Rosalie?" said Joe. "Hey, now—what's this?"

She was actually crying.

"You're not going to do *that* to me, are you?"

"Oh, no," he said.

He put his arm around her.

"He scared you? He scared you, didn't he?"

He turned on Karl.

"You crazy sonofabitch. Don't you ever know what you're doing?"

"Hah?" said Karl, intensely puzzled.

He took a step nearer.

"She's crying," he said. "The little lady's crying."

"Hooray," said Joe. "He sees something."

"But that's wrong," said Karl. "I never make anybody cry. Tell her, Joe. I was only trying to make her laugh. That's all I was trying to do."

Dark as he was, he had become very pale.

"Now, look," said Joe. "Don't *you* start crying on me."

"Tell her, Joe. You'll tell her, eh?"

"All right," said Joe. "Take your hands away. Your bell's buzzing. Can't you hear it? Come on, Rosalie. Stop it now. He's not here any more. See? Was it me? The louse—he scared me too. Are you all right now? Come on, we'll walk up, eh? That's it—now you're doing it. Was it anything I said? Tell me. I wish I could remember. You'll be a good girl. You'll tell me, won't you?"

But she did nothing of the sort as he continued to chatter like a stubborn mule, painfully adding one hee-haw of a supposed wisecrack to another, and all because he hesitated, like the comical love-maker he was, to accept her crying as a tribute to his unaccountable charm, if not to his congenial power, straining instead to make a dishonest mystery of it, as if its true explanation rested in some hyperborean nest, in some blue hollow on the unreachable side of the moon. The leaves will rustle in June, and again the rains will harangue the pavements in April, sounds self-appraised, fatalistic, world-wide and great. But he shall stomp through the nagging calendar of his days, with its bright ones and its black, the iron clappers on his heels traitorously confessing his distress, and whether he turn timid or turn wild, or be civil or boisterous, only he shall hear it as it should be heard—and possibly one other. O this funny tale of an arm against a body. In the name of all, he reached his around hers, anxious to give his lust the more exalted name of compassion. His what? She stumbled. He snorted like a bull as he seized and kissed her. She kissed him back savagely. At it so blindly in a tigerish renewal of the rapacious life between them, how could they know that their saddened ape, Karl, had crawled out of the elevator, had bitched his furious climbing of the cables, had tumbled seven and a half flights, and had broken his back in

too many places? How their faces flamed as they slowly toiled up the stairs to the fourth floor in a union as close as that of bride and husband. They looked like two very promising criminals.

## William Gaddis

*William Gaddis* was born in New York City, and educated mainly in New England. He has spent time in Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, and now lives in New York. *Le Chemin des Anes* is part of the second chapter of his first novel, **THE RECOGNITIONS.**

## LE CHEMIN

## DES ANES

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I.C.I. . . . . E. . . . . S.  
T.L. . . . E. . . C.H. . . . . E.  
M. . . . . I.N. . . D. . . E.  
S.A. . . . . N. . . E. . . . S.

**O**N THE terrace of the Dôme sat a person who looked like the young George Washington without his wig (at about the time he dared the Ohio Territory). She read, with silent moving lips, from a book before her. She was drinking a bilious cloudy liquid from a globular goblet; and every twenty or so pages would call to the waiter, in perfect French,—Un Ricard . . . and add one to the pile of saucers before her. —Voilà ma Sainte Chapelle à moi, she would have said of that rising tower (the sentence prepared in her mind) if anyone had encouraged conversation by sitting down at her table. No one did. She read on. Anyone could have seen it was *transition* she was reading, if any had looked. None did. Finally an unshaven youth bowed slightly, as with pain, murmured something in American, and paused with a dirty hand on the back of a chair at her table. —J'vous en prie, she said, lucid, lowering *transition*, waiting for him to sit down before she went on. —Mursi, he muttered, and dragged the chair to another table.

Paris lay by like a promise accomplished: age had not withered her, nor custom staled her infinite vulgarity.

Nearby, a man exhibited two fingers, one dressed as a man, one as a woman, performing on a table top. Three drunken young Englishmen were singing The Teddy Bears' Picnic. Three dirty children from Morocco were selling peanuts from the top of the basket and hashish from the bottom. Someone said there was going to be a balloon ascension that very after-

noon, in the Bois. Someone else said that Karl Marx's bones were buried at Highgate. Someone said, —I'm actually going to be analyzed. *Psychoanalyzed*. A boy with a beard, in a state of black corduroy (*corde du roi*) unkemptness which had taken as long as the beard to evolve, said —I've got to show these pictures, I've got to sell some of them, but how can I have people coming up there with him there? He's dying. I can't put him out on the street, dying like that . . . A girl said that she had just taken a villa right outside Paris, a place called St. Forget. —Of course it's a hideous place, and Ah had to pay a fearful sum to get the tiresome family living there out of it, but it's such a sweet little old address to get mail at. Another girl said, —My conserage has been returning my mail marked *ankonoo* just because Ioney gave her ten francs *poorbwar*. People who would soon be seen in New York reading French books were seen here reading Italian. Someone said, in slurred (*blasé*) French, —Un café au lait.

Over this grandstand disposal of promise the waiters stared with a distance of glazed indulgence which all collected under it admired, as they admired the rudeness, which they called self-respect; the contempt, which they called innate dignity; the avarice, which they called self-reliance; the tasteless ill-made clothes on the men, lauded as indifference; and the far-spaced posturings of haute couture across the Seine, called inimitable or shik according to one's stay. Marvelous to wide eyes, pricked ears and minds of that remarkable erectile quality betraying naïf qualms of transatlantic origin (alert here under hair imitative long-grown, uncombed, on the male, curtly shorn on the girls), was this spectacle of Culture fully realized. They regarded as the height of excellence that nothing remained to be done, no tree to be planted nor building torn down (they had not visited Le Bourget; found the wreckage up behind the Hôtel de Ville picturesque), no tree too low nor building too high, no bud of possibility which had not opened in the permanent bloom of artificial flowers, no room for that growth which is the abiding flower of humility.

A mon très aimé frère Lazarus, ce que me mandez de Petrus l'apostre de notre doux Jesus . . . wrote Mary Magdalene. Notre fils Cesarion va bien . . . wrote Cleopatra to Julius Caesar. There was a letter from Alexander the Great to Aristotle (*Mon ami . . .*); from Lazarus to St. Peter (concerning Druids); from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius; Judas' confession, to Mary Magdalene; a passport signed by Vercingetorix; notes from Alcibiades, Pericles, and a letter to Pascal (on gravitation) from Newton, who was nine when Pascal died. But Monsieur Chasles, eminent mathematician of the late nineteenth century, paid 140,000 francs for this collection of autographs, for he believed them genuine; they were, after all, written in French. So the Virgin appeared to Maximin and Mélanie at La Salette, identified Herself by speaking to them

in French which they did not understand, broke into their local patois for long enough to put across Her confidences, and then returned to Her native language; any wonder that transatlantic visitors approached it with qualms? murmured in tones spawned in forests, on the plains in unrestricted liberty, from the immensity of mountains, the cramped measure of their respect, approached in reverence the bier where every shade of the corpse was protected from living profanation by the pallbearers of the Academie Française.

Before their displacement from nature, baffled by the grandeur of their own culture which they could not define, and so believed did not exist, these transatlantic visitors had learned to admire in this neatly parceled definition of civilization the tyrannous pretension of many founded upon the rebellious efforts of a few, the ostentation of thousands presumed upon the strength of a dozen who had from time to time risen against this vain complacency with the past to which they were soon to contribute, giving, with their harried deaths, grounds for vanity of language, which they had perfected; supercilious posturing of intellect, which they had suffered to understand and deliver, in defiance; insolent arbitration of taste, grown from the efforts of those condemned as having none; contempt for others flourishing from seedlings which they had planted in the rain of contempt for themselves; dogmata of excellence founded upon insulting challenges wrought in impossible hope, and then grasped, for granted, from their hands fallen clenching it as dogma.

From the intractable perfection of the crepusculous Île de France (seen from the Pont des Arts) to the static depravity of the Grandes Boulevardes, it was unimpeachable: in superficializing this perfection, it absorbed the beholder and shut out the creator. No more could it have imitation than a mermaid (though echoes were heard of the siren of Djibouti).

—Voici de l'eau Perrier, M'sieur. —Mais j'ai dit café au lait, pas d'eau Perrier . . . A small dark man in a sharkskin suit said, —Son putas, y nada mas. Putas, putas, putas . . . Someone said, —Picasso . . . Someone else said, —Kafka . . . A girl said, —You deliberately try to misunderstand me. Of course I like art. Ask anybody. Nearby, a young man with a beard received compliments on the success of his recent show. It was a group of landscapes in magenta and madder lake. Très amusant, gai, très très original (he was French). It was quite a rage. He said he had walked four kilometres out of St. Germain en Laye, found he'd forgotten all of his colors but magenta and madder lake, so he went ahead and painted anyhow. He said, —Quelquefois je passe la nuit entière à finir un tableau . . . Someone said that there was a town in Switzerland called Gland. Someone told the joke about Caruthers and his horse.

On the right bank, a lady said, —You'll like Venice. It's so

like Fort Lauderdale. At the same table, a man said, —I'm going to look her up. She's lived here for years, right outside Paris, a place called Banlieu. At another table, someone said, —By God, you know, they're almost as rude to us as they are to each other.

On Montmartre, someone looked up at the Sacré Coeur and said, —Now what the hell do you think they call *that*? The woman with him said, —Why bother to go all the way to the top? I haven't got my camera. A girl said —Voulez vous voir le ciné cochon? Deux femmes . . .

Near the Bourse, a girl said, —Des touristes, oui, mais des sales anglais . . . là, regardes ce type là. She indicated a figure across the street, not a dirty Englishman, as she noted, but Wyatt, who lived nearby. He had worked all night, and come out for coffee. With no idea of Paris when he arrived, he had been fortunate enough to find quarters in this neighborhood which maintained anonymity in the world of arts. Few people lived here. Activity centered round the stock exchange. On Sunday it was empty.

After almost a year, he had finished seven pictures. He worked with a model named Christiane, a blonde girl with a small figure and features. As she exposed the side of her face, or a fall of cloth from her shoulder, he found there a suggestion of the lines he needed, forms which he knew but could not discover in his work without this allusion to completed reality before him. The paintings were to be shown in a week. Wyatt knew few people, and them he saw infrequently. He had not written to his father for three years. He had by this time very little money, and so in addition to his own work he did some restoring of old paintings for an antique dealer who paid him regularly and badly. But he liked that work. He did not spend time at café tables talking about form, or line, color, composition, trends, materials. He only worked on this painting, or did not think about it. He knew no more of *surréalisme* than he did of the plethora of daubs turned out on Montmartre for tourists, those arbitrators of illustration to whom painting was a personalized representation of scenes and creatures they held dear; might not know art but knew what they liked, handpainted pictures (originals) for which they paid in the only currency they understood, to painters whose visions had shrunk to the same proportions. Wyatt walked up there sometimes and saw them, the alleys infested with them painting the same picture from different angles, always the same painting, varying from easel to easel as different versions of a misunderstood truth; but the progeny of each single easel identical reproduction, following a precept of Henner who called it the only way of being original. Wyatt looked at them with no more interest than if they had been men whitewashing walls.

The central figure in these originals was the national church

of the Sacré Coeur, that dead white Byzantine-Romanesque surprise which, in the late nineteenth century, was heaped in bulbiferous pyramids atop the Hill of the Martyrs, soon after the city had finished installing an immense new sewage system. It was a monument (the church) not, as many had it, to the French victory over Prussia, but to the Jesuit triumph over France. It was early understood that the only error in the birth of Ignatius of Loyola was a slight one of place; that to properly fulfill its purpose, his Society of Jesus could best advance in the medium of the French mind. Spain was origin; but none has ever excelled France in vocational guidance for the ideas of others. The Jesuits labored with marvelous industry, with results so well appreciated that they were expelled from one country after another, and at one point even from Holy Church Herself. In the mid-seventeenth century, one of those Frenchmen who helped to ransom his country's radiance by violating the complacency of those whose descendents are becomingly proud of him because he was French, published his Provincial Letters, noting the very logical efforts of the Jesuits to perpetuate men's wickedness, for the priests would lose their hold on them if they became virtuous. The Jesuits were having difficulties then with the Jansenists, and the contributions of Pascal upset them almost as much as the Miracle of the Holy Thorn, a relic which cured little Marguerite Périer of fistula lachrymalis, for it was a Jansenist miracle.

The Jesuits recouped. They found their own Marguerite; and with the kindly instruction and encouragement of Père LaColombière, her confessor, she revealed to the world a parade of the marvelous which shocked even those who were compelled to believe. The account of her Affair with the Lord made a cure of fistula lachrymalis, never a pretty thought, pale into organic commonplace. At age four, Marguerite Marie Alacoque had vividly realized the danger men offered to those virtues whose very existence few little girls suspect, and few men seek to despoil until they are grown within convenient reach. She'd have fled to the desert, but for fear of meeting a man there. She did escape, to a Passion whose expression left her "almost incapable of any physical exertion, and it was a subject of such strange embarrassment" to her that she dared not show herself. As she said, in the words of a sympathetic biographer, the Lord "made me to understand that he wished me to taste all that was most sweet in the tender caresses of his love. In fact, these divine caresses were from this time forward so overpowering that they made me quite beside myself . . ." Not satisfied with putting the girl off her feed, the Lord took her heart out, opened the wound in His side, and put her heart in beside His Own, which she had seen through the vent "glowing like a furnace." Having seared it, He put it back where He had got it, and she, for all a woman and indiscreet, told. Whether she had, in addition, ever fondled the Babe,



presented her briefly by Its Mother so she said, remained a matter of speculation for some two centuries; but in 1864 Pope Pius IX was assailed by a petition signed by twelve million French believers asking the highest recognition for the Sacred Heart.\* Marguerite Marie Alacoque was beatified. A bare decade later a papal decree consecrated the Universal Catholic Church to the Sacred Heart, and the Society has ever since defended its successful exploit against all comers with the same dexterous swashbuckling that they showed in its achievement; against the Virgin of La Salette, against the promoters of the Devotion of the Perpetual Rosary, and even against the prodigal Virgin of Lourdes, whose bottled testimonials were soon flowing in many a tidy corner of the world when proved not liable to the excise and export levies of the French Republic. With a crowd of devotees equaling the population of Afghanistan, the Sacré Coeur launched its church on the crown of the hill which St. Denis had climbed carrying his head under his arm. The new "public utility," so it was called, was dedicated by Cardinal Archbishop Guibert, disdaining insular whispers which said that the Society had plagiarized the Sacred Heart from England's leading Puritan, William Godwin, who thought of it first.

La Salette, The Devotion of the Perpetual Rosary, Lourdes, and the Sacred Heart made truce: after all, as Monseigneur Ségur said, the Virgin shows very good taste in choosing France as the theater for her apparitions.

The seasons passed. Adonis, unmanned by the boar, beloved by Aphrodite, who refurbished him in the juvenescence of the year, in annual repetition; juvenescence, virile beauty, the boar, and death apparent. Winter and death, night and its darkness, and darkness the climate of evil, activated in sin, perpetuated in guilt, and guilt blooming in fear, and fear's flower once blown spreading the seeds of hope, scattered on a cold wind: it is in those hours of night which predict only perpetual darkness that we become accustomed to evil's commissions, and perpetuate them with undivided allegiance; fear's flowers blow, guilt's garden fills, and the deeds of creation, the deed of life itself, which should share the glory of the sun, are committed in darkness, in the mystery of sin and the shadow of death.

Wyatt painted at night. In the afternoon he worked at restoring old pictures, or in sketching, a half-attended occupation which broke off with twilight, and Christiane went on her way uncurious, uninterested in the litter of papers bearing suggestion of the order of her bones and the arrangement of her fea-

\* One annotator to this history notes that at that time in many enough districts of France, 67% of the grooms and 98% of the brides could not write their names, and suggests miraculous multiplication of the signatures on the petition.

tures which she left behind, unmenaced by magic, unafraid, she walked toward the Gare St. Lazare, unhurried, seldom reached it (for it was no destination) before she was interrupted, and down again, spread again, indifferent to the resurrection which filled her and died; and the Gare St. Lazare, a railroad station and so a beginning and an end, came forth on the evening vision, erect in testimony, and then (for what became of the man who was raised?) stood witness to a future which, like the past, was liable to no destination, and collected dirt in its fenestrated sores. Is death so evil, then?

He painted at night, and often broke off in a fever at dawn, when the sun came like the light of recovery to the patient just past the crisis of fatal illness, and time the patient became lax, and stretched fingers of minutes and cold limbs of hours into the convalescent resurrection of the day.

The streets, when he came out, were filled with people recently washed and dressed, people for whom time was not continuum of disease but relentless repetition of consciousness and unconsciousness, unrelated as night and day, or black and white, evil and good, in independent alternation, like the life and death of insects.

This can happen: staying awake, the absolutes become confused, time the patient is seen at full living length, in exhaustion. One afternoon Wyatt went to sleep, alone, woke at twilight, believed he had slept the night through, lost it, and here was dawn. He went out for coffee. The streets were full, but unevenly. There was a pall on every face, a gathering of remnants in suspicion of the end, a melancholia of things completed. Wyatt, haggard as he was, looked with such wild uncomprehending eyes on a day beginning so, that he attracted the attention of a policeman, who stopped him.

—Où allez vous donc? —Chez moi. —Vos papiers, s'il vous plaît. —Mon passeport? Je ne l'ai pas sur moi. Il est chez moi. —Où habitez vous? —24 rue de la Bourse. —Qu'est-ce que vous faite dans la vie? —Je suis peintre. —Où donc? —Chez moi. —Où habitez vous? —Mais . . . —Avez vous des moyens? —Oui . . . Wyatt reached into his pocket, took out what francs he had, showed the money. Pocketing a note, the policeman said,—Il faut toujours en avoir sur soi, de l'argent, vous savez . . .

After a glass of coffee he climbed the stairs to his room. Someone was waiting in the dim light of the hall. As Wyatt approached he turned and put out his hand, and murmured a greeting. —My name is Crémer, he said. —I met you last week, in the Muette Gallery. May I come in for a moment? He spoke excellent English. Wyatt opened the door to his room, ordered and large, blank walls, a spacious north window. —You will be showing some of your paintings next week, I believe?

—Seven pictures, Wyatt said, making no effort to expose them.

—I am very interested in your work.

—Have you seen it?

—Oh my dear fellow, hardly. But I can see here (motioning toward the straight easel, where a canvas stood barely figured) that it is interesting. I am writing the art column in *La Macule*.

—I see. Wyatt stood smoothing the hair on the back of his head, his face confused. Crémer looked rested, in order, hardly a likely visitor at dawn. —I shall probably review your pictures next week, he said.

—Oh, said Wyatt, —of course. Would you like to look at them now?

—Don't trouble yourself. You studied in Paris?

—No. In Munich.

—In Germany. That is too bad. Your style is German, then? German impressionism?

—No, hardly that, said Wyatt, thoughtfully. —I did do one picture very much in the manner of Memling. That will give you some idea. But I lost it there. Would you like to see these pictures I've done here?

—Don't trouble yourself. But I should like to write a good review for you.

—I hope you do. It could help me a great deal.

—Yes. Exactly.

They stood in silence for almost a minute. —Will you sit down? Wyatt said.

—No, really. I must get on.

They waited again.

—Reviews can make a great difference. All the difference, Crémer said finally.

—Difference?

—To selling your pictures.

—Well then, Wyatt said looking at the floor. He put his arms together behind him, twisted until he'd got hold of both his elbows, and his face, thin, exhausted, seemed to drain of life. —That's up to the pictures.

—It's not, you know.

—What do you mean? Wyatt looked up startled, dropping his arms.

—I am in a position to help you greatly.

—Yes, you are.

—Art criticism pays very badly, you know.

—Well? Well? His face creased.

—If you should guarantee me, say, a tenth of the sale price of whatever you sell . . .

—You? You?

—I could guarantee you excellent reviews. Nothing changed in Crémer's face. Wyatt's eyes burned as he looked, into green.

—Are you surprised? Crémer asked, and his face changed now, into studied surprise, scorning to accept; while Wyatt suddenly looked about to fall from exhaustion. —You? For my work . . . you want me to pay you, for . . . for . . .

—Think about it, said Crémer, turning to the door.

—No, I don't need to. It's insane, this proposition. I don't want it. What do you want of me? he went on, his voice rising as Crémer opened the door.

There was hardly light, not enough to cast a shadow, left in the room. As they had talked, each became more indistinct, until Crémer opened the door, and the light of the minuterie threw his shadow across the sill. —I regret that I disturbed you, he said. —I think you need rest, perhaps. But think about it. Eh?

Wyatt followed him to the door, crying out, —But why did you come here? Now? Why do you come at dawn with these things?

Crémer had already started down the stairs. —At dawn? he called back, pausing there. —Why my dear fellow, it's evening. It's dinner time.

Then the sounds of his feet on the stairs, the light of the minuterie failed abruptly, leaving Wyatt in his doorway clutching at its frame, while the steps disappeared below, unflinching in the darkness.

Il faut toujours en avoir sur soi, de l'argent, vous savez . . .

Like lions, out of the gates, into the circus arena, cars roared into the open behind the Opéra from the mouth of the rue Mogador. Around it this faked Imperial Rome lay in pastiche on the banks of its Tiber—though the Tiber's career, from the Appenine Ravines of Tuscany, skirting the Sabine mountains to course through Rome and reach with two arms into the sea, finds unambitious counterpart in the Seine, dyked and dammed across the decorous French countryside proper as wallpaper. Nevertheless, they had done their best with what they had. The Napoleons tried very hard. The first one combed his hair, and that of his wife and brothers, like Julius Caesar and his family combed theirs. J. L. David (having painted pictures of Brutus, Andromache, and the Horatii) painted his picture looking, as best he could manage, like Julius Caesar; and a picture of Josephine doing her very best (the Coronation) to look like Cornelia. Everyone rallied around, erecting arches, domes, pediments, copying what the Romans had copied from the Greeks, Empire furniture, candlesticks, coiffures . . . somewhere beyond them hung the vision of Constantine's Rome, its eleven forums, ten basilicas, eighteen aqueducts, thirty-seven city gates, two arenas, two circuses, thirty-seven triumphal arches, five obelisks, four hundred and twenty-three temples with their statues of the gods in ivory and gold. But all that was gone. There was no competition

now; not since Pope Urban VIII had declared the Coliseum a public quarry.

As the spirit of collecting art began in Rome, eventually it began in Paris, reached the proportions of the astounding collection of that wily Sicilian Cardinal Mazarin, murmuring to his art as he left it in decline and exile, —*Je l'ai tant aimé*, French enough to add, —*et il m'a tant coûté*. If the Roman connoisseur could distinguish among five kinds of patina on bronze by the smell, French sensitivities were as cultivated. If, to please the Roman connoisseur, sapphires were faked from obsidian and sardonyx from cheap colored jasper, French talents were as versatile. They knew the value of art, or of knowing the value of art. As Coulanges said to Madame Sévigné, —*Pictures are bullion*.

From Louis XIV on, Paris withdrew from any legitimate connections with works of art; and directly increased its population of loafers living for art's sake.

In an alley, a dog hunting in a garbage can displayed infinite grace in the unconscious hang of his right foreleg. Little else happened that Saturday night in August. St. Bartholomew's Day was warm. It was the dead heat of Paris summer, when Paris cats go to sleep on Paris window sills, and ledges high up, and fall off, to plunge through the glass roof of the lavabo. The center of the city was empty. A sight-seeing bus set off from the Place de l'Opéra. A truck and a Citroën smashed before the Galeries Lafayette. At the pont d'Auteuil, a man's body was dragged out of the Seine. Among the fixtures, tiled and marbled shapes remindful of a large outdoor bathroom, in the cemetery at Montrouge a widower argued with his dead wife's lover over who had the right to place flowers on her grave. In front of the Bourse, a deaf-mute soccer team carried on conversation in obstreperous silence. On the quai du pont Neuf, a Frenchman sat picking his nose. Then he put his arm around his girl and kissed her. Then he picked his nose. It was Sunday in Paris, and very quiet.

On the terrace of Larue, under the soiled stature of the Madeleine's doric imposture, Wyatt considered a German newspaper. Taxis limped past, bellicose as wounded animals, collapsing further on at Maxim's, late lunch. Unrepresentatively handsome people passed on foot. Some of them stopped and sat at tables. —In Istanbul in summer, a lady said, —it was Istanbul wasn't it? we used to take long rides in the cistern, in the summer . . .

Wyatt read slowly and with difficulty in *Der Fleischflaute*, an art publication. His show was over. No pictures had been sold. He had thrown away *La Macule* quickly, after reading there Crémer's comments on his work, —*Archaïque, dur comme la pierre, sans chaleur, sans coeur, sans sympathie, sans vie, en un mot la mort sans espoir de Résurrection*.

But at this moment the details of the failure were forgotten, and the thing itself intensified, as Wyatt made out in *Der Fleischflaute* that there had just been discovered in Germany an original painting by Hans Memling. The rack on which the Roman emperor was stretched while being flayed had been overpainted by a bed, and those engaged in skinning the old man were made to minister to the bedridden figure: crude overpainting, with the same purpose as Holofernes' head transformed into a pile of fruit carried on the tray by Judith. The whole scene had been made into an interior, and it was the fragment of landscape seen through an open window which had excited the attention of an expert. It was cleaned at the Old Pinakothek in Munich, and there identified as being possibly the work of Ghaerhaert David, but more likely that of his master Memling, from which, very possibly, David had drawn his "Flaying of the Unjust Judge," now in the National Gallery in London . . . There followed a eulogy on German painters, in this case Memling in particular, who had brought the weak beginnings of Flemish art to the peak of their perfection, and crystallized the minor talents of the Van Eycks, Bouts, Van der Weyden, in the masterpieces of his own German genius.

St. Bartholomew's Day in Notre Dame, commemoration of the medal which Gregory XIII had struck honoring Catherine de Medici's massacre of fifty thousand heretics. The music surged and ebbed in the cathedral, and in the Parisian tradition of preconcerted effects the light suddenly poured down in fullness, then faded, together they swelled and died. At the end of the service, as the organ filled that place with its sound, the body of the congregation turned its many-faced surface to look back and up at the organ loft, and from the organ loft they formed a great cross so. Then the cross disintegrated, its fragments scattered over their city, safely returned to the sty of contentment.

Paris simmered stickily under the shadowed erection of the Eiffel Tower. Like the bed of an emperor's mistress, the basin she lay in hadn't a blade or stitch out of place; and like the Empress Theodora, "fair of face and charming as well, but short and inclined to pallor, not indeed completely without color but slightly sallow . . ." Paris articulated her charm within the lower registers of the spectrum. So Theodora, her father a feeder of the bears, went on the stage with no accomplishment but a gift for mockery, no genius but for whoring and intrigue. As empress, she triumphed: no senator, no priest, no soldier protested, and the vulgar clamored to be called her slaves; bed to bath, breakfast to rest, she preened her royalty. —May I never put off this purple or outlive the day when men cease to call me queen . . . She died of cancer.

Toward evening the shadow of the Eiffel Tower inclined to the Latin Quarter across her body. She prepared, made herself

up from a thousand pots and tubes, was young, desperately young she knew herself and the mirror forgotten, the voice brittle, she lolled uncontested in the mawkish memories of men married elsewhere to sodden reality, stupefied with the maturity they had traded against this mistress bargained in youth. Revisiting, they could summon youth to her now, mark it in the neon blush uncowed by the unquerulous façades maintained by middle age, and the excruciating ironwork and chrome, the cancerous interiors.

At a bar in rue Caumartin a girl said to an American —*Vous emmenez? Moi, je suis cochon, la plus cochon du quartier . . . tu veux le toucher? Ici? Alors, donnes moi un billet, oui un billet, pour le toucher . . . ici . . . discrètement.*

A girl lying in a bed said, —We only know about one per cent of what's happening to us We don't *know* how little heaven is paying for how much hell.

Someone said, —But you've been over here so *long*, to an American in a hotel room who was showing his continental *savoir faire* by urinating in the sink. He said, —I wanted to marry her but you know, she's tied to her environment. Someone said, —I never knew him very well, he's of the Negro persuasion. On the left bank, someone had just left his wife and taken up the guitar. It was at home in bed. —I dress it in her bathrobe every night, he said. Someone else suggested using a duck, putting its head in a drawer and jamming the drawer shut at the critical moment. A young gentleman was treating his friends to shoe shines for the seventh time that hour. He was drunk. The dirty Arab children sold peanuts from the top of the basket and hashish from the bottom. They spoke a masterful unintimidated French in guttural gasps, coming from a land where it was regarded neither as the most beautiful language, as in America, nor as the only one, as in France, but for the whining necessity it was. At that table someone said, —This stuff doesn't affect me at all. But don't you notice that the sky is getting closer? —Of course, love art. That's why I'm in Paris, a girl said. The boy with her said, —*Je mon foo*, that's French for . . . —*Putas, putas, putas*, muttered the man in the sharkskin suit. Someone said, —My hands are full, would you mind getting some matches out of my pocket? . . . here, my trouser pocket . . . Someone said, —Do you like it here? Someone else said, —In the morning she didn't want to, so I put it under her arm while she was grinding the coffee. A man in an opaque brown monocle said, —*Gzhzhzhzhzt . . . huu . . .* and fell off his chair. Someone told the joke about Carruthers and his horse.

On the quai, the man kissed his girl and returned to his more delicate preoccupation. Along the rue de Montmartre stubby hands lifted glasses of red wine. These were the people, slipping, sliding, perishing: they had triumphed once in revolu-

tion, and celebrated the Mass in public parody, installing the Goddess of Reason with great celebration, she proved, when unveiled, to be a dancing girl with whom many had extensive acquaintance. The People, of whom one of their officers, Captain de Mun, said "Galilean, thou hast conquered! Ah, for them no mercy; they are not the people, they are hell itself." They knew what they wanted . . . Liberté, égalité, fraternité . . . evaded the decorous façades decreed by their elders, or betters, and gathered in public interiors of carnivorous art nouveau.

In Père Lachaise an American woman bought a plot so that she might be buried near . . . who was it? Byron? Baudelaire? In the Place Vendôme another transatlantic visitor overturned a stolen taxicab at Napoleon's feet, was jailed, fined, and made much of by his friends. In Notre Dame du Flottement a millionairess from Maine married her colored chauffeur, and was made much of by his friends. On the terrace of the Dôme, beset behind the clattering bastion of her own Sainte Chapelle, the young George Washington read with silent moving lips, broke wind pensively and looked around to see if she had attracted notice. On the boulevard de la Madeleine a girl walking alone, swinging her purse, paused to glance in at the feet showing below the shield of the pissoir, and waited to accost their owner. Someone, looking above, cried out —What's that? What is it? —The balloons. The balloons have gone up. In the washroom of the Café de la Régence, someone scrawled —Vive le Roi over the sink.

To one side a man read the *Tribune*. To the other, *Al Misri*. —Votre journal, m'sieur, the waiter called, waving *Der Fleischflaute* —votre journal . . . but Wyatt turned away, turned from Paris as that young Borgia had turned from the corpse of Isabella of Portugal, so confounded by her beauty in death that he entered the Jesuits, where he became a General.



## Robie Macauley

Robie Macauley was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and educated at Kenyon College. He served in the Army Counter-Intelligence Corps during World War II and now teaches at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro.

He has published both fiction and criticism in little magazines and is at work on a novel. *The End of Pity* is one of a series of stories about the same group of characters. Others in the series have appeared in *The Kenyon Review* and *Furioso*, one of them winning the *Furioso* fiction prize in 1949.

## THE END OF PITY

**I**F YOU LOOKED, you could probably find Gillespie in your family photograph album. He would be that Uncle Thomas or Uncle Edward from Milwaukee who stands shyly clutching the crook of his umbrella and stares with shocked eyes at the camera as if he had just witnessed something remarkably lewd. Perhaps the painted drop behind him will suggest some Venetian scene or the Swiss Alps, for this is the uncle who traveled. Dozens of summer trips took him all over the continent of Europe and frequently into the Holy Land. He was, most likely, an architect or an amateur of architecture with an extensive and loving knowledge of the cathedrals of seven countries and a great penchant for describing them—to the annoyance of the rest of the family. He is remembered as tender-hearted, generous, nervous in the presence of large animals and, of course, a bachelor.

Shave off the sideburns, take away the umbrella and the frock coat; put him in o.d.'s, a helmet, combat boots, and there is Gillespie.

There was something infinitely charitable about him although, with the rest of us, he belonged to a most uncharitable organization, the Counter-Intelligence Corps. On some dusty road in France he would suddenly stop his jeep saying, "That child looks hungry." Then he would get out and, cajoling the dirty boy in a mellifluous French that would have charmed Racine, would hand him his dinner k-ration.

In the eyes of the Quartermaster Corps Gillespie was a bottomless well. No sooner was he issued clothes or supplies but they disappeared, a bounty shared by all the northern prov-

inces of France and half of Belgium. Whenever Gillespie came back to a village he had visited before, the commotion was extraordinary. The kids came running; women leaned out of windows to yell and even the idle drinkers at the café raised two fingers in greeting.

There was a story about Gillespie that somebody told. One evening he stopped in a border village in Alsace because he had noticed a parked convoy of trucks that were bringing Polish d.p.'s, former slave-laborers, out of Germany. Major Stoneman, a crusty and somewhat pedagogical G-2 officer from New England, was with him, fuming at the delay and telling Gillespie to be quick about it. In a few minutes Gillespie had got rid of his monthly cigarette and candy ration among the clutching hands and, smiling, had come back to the jeep.

"What're you, a one-man relief organization?" the major had asked.

On the road again, the major had grown philosophical in his own way. "The quickest way to crack up is to admit everybody's plea," he said. "There is such a thing as too much compassion."

Gillespie only laughed as if it were a joke he had not quite understood. "Some day it will hurt you," the major had said abruptly.

It seemed at the time that Gillespie had been hurt as much as possible. When he stood in the rubbish in the interior of Cologne cathedral a look of pain came over his face and he had to sit down for a few moments. He kept his eyes shut when we drove through Aachen. When an old farmer who had been hit by a stray bullet in some village skirmish died while Gillespie was trying to give him first aid, he was depressed for days afterward. In his eyes there reappeared again and again a look of anguish and dismay that he could not hide. It was as if a gentle antiquarian had come home to discover that housebreakers had not only wrecked his collection but had murdered his family on the way out.

If Gillespie had not been so efficient at his job, he might have been ridiculed more often. Captain Hind, the detachment commander, would sometimes refer to him as "Florence Nightingale," but he respected Gillespie and depended on him. Gillespie had mysterious sources of information. Sometimes he heard something of value to us from old sacristans in village churches, refugees who had come through the German lines, or perhaps from a child who had watched the German troops from her bedroom window at night as they moved out.

He was chief of the detachment office and he kept the records, wrote most of the reports, knew all of the directives and was the only one who could handle our G-2 colonel when he called up in a fit of rage.

Only Gus Desroches seemed to despise him. Desroches called him "Lady Bountiful," gave imitations of his odd, gentle way of talking and saved his most grisly stories for moments when Gillespie was near.

Gus came into the dining room singing in his harsh whoop:

*Goodbye Piccadilly,  
Farewell, Leicester Square  
It's a long long way to Tipperary,  
But my heart's right there.*

Nobody paid any attention because in the past two weeks we had all become used to his joke. He liked to call the English "blighters," the Germans "Boches" and us "The Old Contemptibles." "If they got rid of Kitchener and Joffre," he'd say, "we might win this war."

He was a Cajun Frenchman of about thirty, lean, black-browed, sunburned and rough as a swamp fox. Without being educated, he had a great assortment of information, all things of odd shapes and sizes. He had been a G-2 sergeant in an infantry outfit until a month ago when one of our men had been taken to the hospital and he had been sent as replacement. He became known for his reckless driving, his ability—like a divining rod's—for finding cellars with wine and liquor, his tough way with German civilians.

The captain looked up from the paper he was reading. "Don't sing to me, sing to the Germans," he said. "You'd be worse than poison gas. By the way, Gus, I have something I want you to do."

With elaborate motions he came to attention—this was his good-soldier parody—and said in a monotone, "Yes, sir. What is it, sir? Ask me anything, sir."

"You may not know it," the captain said, "but we have a tent, a damn big pyramidal tent that was issued to us back in France. We've never used it and we've dragged it halfway across Europe with us so far. I'm tired of wasting the space in one whole jeep trailer and we can't abandon the thing because we're charged with it. So this afternoon I want you to take one of the jeeps and a trailer and haul that tent down to Divisional Quartermaster at Neuss and get rid of it. Make 'em give you a receipt. Don't bother to come back until you're shed of it. Understand?"

"Understood," said Desroches. It was plain that he didn't care for the job. It would mean several hours wasted in hunting up a reluctant supply officer and persuading him to accept a mass of canvas that he wanted no more than we did. The captain was never quite sure what was considered expendable and what wasn't.

"Now where's lunch?" the captain asked.

Desroches strode over to the dumbwaiter and yelled down

the shaft to the kitchen. "Hey, Maria Louisa! Essen! Kuchen! Raustoff!" An answering wail came from below and in a few minutes the dumbwaiter appeared. "Professor Koch's house incorporates all the newest inventions of the nineteenth century," Gillespie said. The whole place depressed him.

Professor Koch had left Oberkassel in haste; we were his unforeseen heirs. His was a tall grim stone house on a street of similar houses. It was quite dark inside and though Professor Koch had gone away physically, his soul could never be evicted. His clothes and his old-fashioned frock coats still hung in the closets upstairs; his pipes still stood in their racks on the library shelves; his walking stick's ivory head still gleamed in a corner of the hall; his personal smell of tobacco, powder, boot-polish and hair-oil still drifted in the rooms. He himself, luckily framed and behind glass, watched us balefully from a table in the library. His autographed copy of *Mein Kampf*, his personally-inscribed picture of Rosenberg and some other similar paraphernalia lay on the junk heap at the back of the garden.

The dining room was as dark as the rest of the house. There was a dingy Turkey carpet on the floor and a great deal of oak furniture that seemed to have been designed out of a love for mere obstinacy. In the corner was a Dresden stove, a smooth brown cliff of tile. The Koch family portraits burdened the walls like lessons against the sin of gluttony. Each of them seemed to have been painted after a particularly heavy meal while the artist suffered with indigestion and the sitters from torpor. Their cheeks seemed stuffed, their breathing difficult and even their eyes seemed to swim in a pale lustrous gravy. It was hard to enjoy food here.

Gillespie left as soon as he could and went along the hall to the small front sitting room that served as an office. He found that Desroches had left without his noticing it; he discovered him sitting in the front room with his feet crossed on top of the desk. He had been talking to an old woman who must have just come in. She was sitting in a chair in a dark corner of the room near the bookcases. Gillespie started to turn around.

"Don't go away, Gillespie," said Desroches. "Here's an interesting monument for you." He went over to the window and pulled the curtains wider apart to let in more of the reluctant gray light.

She was unusually tall even as she sat there and when she arose in alarm she gave the effect of a great flagstaff covered with ragged pennons. She wore an ancient lavender dress from which flew and fluttered a hundred filmy points of cloth. On her head was a round straw hat with a hard brim, a kind of huge saucer, and in her hand she carried a knitted bag.

Gillespie had to look upward to her face. It was a queer face, all creases and canals and it was covered with heavy

powder of an orange tint; even at that there was something handsome about it in a Brobdingnagian way, something that suggested lost looks. Her lips were working and she started to speak, but Desroches held up his hand. She sat down. Then he stepped into the middle of the floor with his arms folded, giving her a critic's stare out of half-closed eyes.

He imitated Gillespie's deliberate way of talking. "Now isn't this splendid," he said. "An excellent example of an early Gothic ruin. Notice the vaults, the spires, the flying buttresses, the wonderful gables on this old crock. Early thirteenth century, wouldn't you say, Gillespie?"

Gillespie, for once, was suddenly angry. He felt the skin of his face getting tight and cold. He suddenly stepped between Desroches and the old woman, only a few inches away from Desroches, breathing almost into his face. "Either tell me what she wants in a decent way or get out of here and let me talk to her myself." Gillespie realized that it wasn't his own voice—it was harsh and quick. There was a look of astonishment in Desroches's black spot-like eyes and he pulled away. Then Gillespie realized that a moment before he had thought of lashing Desroches across the face and had even seen the place on the bridge of his nose where his knuckles would land. He was amazed at himself and he too stepped back, his fingers trembling.

Desroches went over behind the desk and sat down again, lighting a cigarette. He looked suspiciously at Gillespie and then he smiled. Possibly it was a contemptuous smile, but, Gillespie noticed, it was also a cautious smile.

"It's nothing," Desroches said. "She's just another one of those crazy characters that come in with some story or something they want us to do for them." Gillespie was going to do it, whatever it was.

"What does she want? Who is she?"

"She's French, she says—used to be married to some German. She's been head housekeeper or governess or something at the Portuguese legation for a long time. A big house down by the river, she says. The family moved out during the raids and she's lost track of 'em. The troops moved in and they won't let her into that area. She says there's some important property of the Portuguese government that she ought to get and she wants one of us to take her down there. I doubt it." He turned again to the old woman and said in French, "You're wasting our time. Get out." But he had already seen what was going to happen.

"I'll talk to her," Gillespie said.

"All right if you want to. She's your type." He walked to the door, then paused and said, "Wait'll you get a load of her. She's off her rocker. She don't know whether she's speaking French or German." He went out.

As if nothing had happened, the old woman leaned for-

ward at Gillespie and smiled humorously. "Monsieur, *vous êtes très gentil*," she said in a sweet miniature voice. "Notre haus ist . . ."

## 2

Their house was a considerable distance away. Gillespie and the old woman, a strange couple, walked down the long street in the stony afternoon light. She had begun talking again almost from the moment they left the door, talking amiably in her comic mixture of the two languages as if she were a child who had never learned the difference between a speech half forgotten and one partly learned.

Gillespie was inattentive, wondering at his own rage of a few minutes before. He thought now that Desroches had not backed down because he was afraid of Gillespie's somewhat womanish anger, but because, in his tough practical way, he had discovered a joke in the situation, a good example of the absurd daydream in which he thought Gillespie existed. With the closing of the door, the old woman would no longer be a reality for him but, to Desroches and the others, Gillespie would always be an unbelievable continued story that went on daily before their own eyes.

There were occasional holes in the street and more and more often they had to avoid piles of dirt and broken stone shoved up against the gutters. Oberkassel is like a dock stuck out into the river Rhine and beyond that, on three sides, is the great industrial sea of Düsseldorf. Over on that side the German troops kept up a pretense of war like a natural habit of life whose origin and purpose is no longer remembered. At night the artillery fired across the river with varying sounds, depending on the kinds of guns and their distance. In the minds of sleepers on this side the sounds had become domesticated: the dull slamming of a door, an iron pot dropped in the kitchen, the wind banging at a window sash. Mortar shells had a hollow pop like the bursting of an electric light bulb in the next room; but that was different. They were fired mostly in the daytime and sometimes you would round a corner and find a child or a stray dog dead in the street and the austere gray fronts of the houses pocked and pitted for yards from the recent burst.

In her small tuneful voice Mme. Laurec was telling him all the unnecessary things that came into her head. "Je suis sehr traurig," she said gaily, but that was an indefinable feeling it seemed, coming partly from the loss of M. Laurec, a jewel of a man, who had passed away some seven years ago, partly from the little flat with the nasty kitchen where she now had to live, and partly from worry over "her darlings" of the da Camara family—the consul's—with whom God knew when she would ever be reunited again.

There was a trolley car like a great toy dragon with a smashed face, abandoned on its tracks in the middle of the square. A line of people formed in front of a butcher shop. An extremely bowlegged old man in a German army cap was sticking a military government poster on a wall. In the little park there were signs of spring and in places cut branches and green leaves littered the pavement.

But as they went along the narrower streets toward the river damage became more frequent and the town more empty. Jeeps passed them once or twice. Two soldiers leaned against the doorway of a shut-up church, smoking and arguing, their voices sounding like the quarreling noises of squirrels at a distance. A heavier shell had smashed the pavement in one place and they had to cross the edge of the crater on planks. At the bottom of the hole lay exposed a tangled crisscross of pipes and wires, the city's iron veins and tendons under its concrete flesh.

There was a barrier at the end of the street made of three lines of bright new barbed wire strung between a lamppost and an iron railing. A corporal with a fixed bayonet on his rifle was meandering alongside it, ducking a cigarette behind one cupped hand. He looked at them speculatively out of the corner of his eye and then decided not to throw it away.

While Gillespie explained and showed his credentials, Mme. Laurec supplemented with smiles, incomprehensible sayings, and a fluttering of all her flags. The corporal stared, then grinned. "All right," he said, "but don't get out on the river bank." As Gillespie helped her through the barbed wire he laughed and yelled after them, "And watch out for the dame; she's got her eye on you."

She pointed to a gate further down the street. Evidently in front of them were the back gardens and rear entrances of a number of large houses that faced along the river, which was invisible from here. An almost continuous stone wall ran along the sidewalk and beyond it Gillespie could see trees and the tops of voluminous bushes. The street was carpeted with leaves and twigs clipped off by the mortar shells, wanton gardeners that had left ugly gaps in the foliage.

At the gate she produced a large brass key, but it was not needed and they passed through into the handsome disordered garden of the da Camara house. Following her along the path, Gillespie began to realize that this was no ordinary garden, but a prospect, a miniature country laid out in front of him, an imitation Portugal perhaps. The gravel path wound through a small forest of pines. Along a small knoll wooded with dwarf trees ran a baby river with its own islands and bridges, flowing away from them off through the model forest. Beyond the grove, was an open space like a small meadow at the end of which was a little turreted summerhouse like a castle and back of that, in a surprising illusion, a long dark mountain

range stretched out of sight. It was a boxwood hedge, carefully clipped and carved to look like distant sierras.

But Mme. Laurec was clucking at the bushes she saw up-rooted and the branches of trees that had been broken off. Once she stopped to examine a flower bed and another time to set up a wooden bench that had been overturned. Her lips pursed and she looked around censoriously.

She had another key in her hand, but the back door was half open, hanging on loosened hinges with its bolt torn out of the wood. She touched it in surprise and wanted to examine it closer, but Gillespie urged her on. They came into a hallway and she led him through a door that opened off into a large low kitchen with a white tile floor and a great black range that took up the whole of one end of the room. The tables and counters were full of empty wine bottles, opened cans, orange skins, waste and litter. Mme. Laurec shook her head in astonishment and stared at Gillespie for a moment with parted lips.

He was beginning to get impatient. He reminded her gently that they could not linger too long and reluctantly she went back into the hall. They followed it until they came to another door which, she explained, was the door to her own room. It was small and when the blackout shades had been pulled back, they saw it had not been disturbed. A low dresser, a bed with the mattress folded back, a mirror, a fat white jug on a washstand, were what it amounted to. She fumbled in the drawers among some clothes, put a few things in her bag, then led the way out.

The next trip was up a narrow flight of steps that led off the hallway. When they reached the top Gillespie was no longer sure of his geographical position in the house. The silence, the musty smells, the echoes made him feel uneasy. Mme. Laurec no longer paid him any attention; he could go or stay as he pleased. She went from room to room with some idea behind her fixed frown that she would not express and that seemed to have no connection with the "valuable property of the Portuguese government." Gillespie, watching her, began to feel that she was looking for something intently but without any notion of what it might be.

She halted in an upstairs sitting room, her back to him. Then dreamily she moved across the room to a chair with a dust-cover on it. She shoved it out in front of the fireplace, then, leaning on the back, she stroked her fingers over the cloth, smiling and murmuring. Then she crossed over to the sofa and leaned down, stretching out her arms. After a while, with a sadder expression, she went to the table and traced her fingers over the polished surface, no longer seeming to notice the layer of dust they disturbed.

She moved out to the center of the room again. She paused, nodding at someone Gillespie could not see. She gave a little



suppressed laugh, made a kind of half-curtsy and reached out her hand to the empty air; then, turning, she quickly walked out of the room.

He did not try to understand this except in a visual way. For a few minutes he lingered in the room, getting out a cigarette, staring at her fingermarks in the dust, noticing the oblong lighter patches where the pictures had once hung on the walls, holding off a few minutes before he should go to her and warn her they must leave.

During the moments of pantomime, he had realized a change in her, or in his view of her: it made all the difference. While he had talked to her in Professor Koch's parlor and later when he walked down the street with her she had been a queer old thing, the coquettish grandam, dainty giantess. He had just been crossing up Desroches. But he had been all overwhelmed in feeling sorry for her in those last few seconds, not for her queerness but for her sudden familiarity. She had abruptly moved into human scale, become real, personal, living, appealing to him.

Then he went into the hall and on to an open door beyond which he could hear her voice in muttered exclamation and conversation. He came on her silently and stood in the shadow. She had opened a little wardrobe dresser and had bent down to reach into one of the drawers. It was obviously a nursery. The walls were a bright blue and two small beds were shoved up against the further wall. Mme. Laurec at first had seemed to be merely straightening and examining some clothes. Now she took out a small sailor blouse and held it at arm's length in front of her. In the dim light her face looked scarred: tears had worked out two wavy runnels in the orange powder and one hung, delicately uncertain, on the end of her nose.

Gillespie stepped away from the door, further back into the hall. He waited, hearing a confusion of whispers, sighs, endearments, mumbled talk. Drawers opened and shut. There were long moments of silence. Finally he heard her coming out.

She smiled at him thankfully. "Wir gehen," she said and led the way down the corridor which widened at last and drew light from some windows. Gillespie saw that they had come to its end and that here was the main staircase, an open one that made a broad gradual turn and descended to the entrance hallway of the first floor. At the end of this hall was the outer door, double-sized and of heavy oak. They went down. To the right of the stairway one of the inner doors was partly ajar and toward this she walked confidently.

Again they stepped into a half-dark room and Gillespie could not adjust his vision at once. He could see three extremely tall narrow windows almost entirely shrouded by blackout curtains at this end of the room. It seemed to him that directly

in front of the middle window was a black dully-gleaming piece of furniture, a grotesquely carved elaborately ornamented object flanked by piles of pillows on either side. He blinked and stared, trying to make it into some familiar shape—table, chair or flower stand. He touched the blackout curtain. A little light sprang in. It was a heavy thirty-caliber water-cooled machine gun standing there on its tripod.

"What's this?" Someone walked out of the darkness at the far end of the room. A light came on and Gillespie was facing a bulky surprised sergeant with a carbine in his hand. Another soldier came in from a doorway Gillespie had not seen in the darkness.

"God, I thought it was the captain at first," the sergeant said. "Whad'ye want?" Gillespie told him, indicating Mme. Laurec who was staring at the stripped room with all its furniture piled against the far wall.

"All right," said the sergeant. "Don't go near any of the front windows though, and when you leave, go back through the garden." He rested one hand on the pile of sandbags near the machine gun and squinted out through a peephole in the window shade. "We got a delicate mutual-assistance agreement with them Heinies across the river. They don't fire on us unless somebody makes an ass of hisself and shows a light or sticks his head out the window, and us likewise.

"Some air-corps guys come up here looking for souvenirs last week and they probably made too big a target or some officer was around, so the Heinies blasted 'em. So we shot up their o.p. in the factory over there. No trouble since."

"We'll be careful," said Gillespie. "Ah!" said Mme. Laurec. The sun had suddenly come out and the black shades were punctured and threaded with sparks of gold. She turned at once and went back through the door they had come in by.

"O.K., sergeant," Gillespie said. "We're going now. Sorry we bothered you." He followed her out into the hall.

"Are you ready to go now, Mme. Laurec?" he asked in French.

She had moved across the hallway toward the front door. She turned around and faced him, her back against it. "Yes," she said with dignity. "I have found what I was looking for."

With all its mottled powder, dried tears, lines and wrinkles, her old face looked serene and young. It had the same distant innocence that had come over it during the minutes she had smiled and gestured and moved around in the room upstairs. She was smiling again and Gillespie felt stricken because, assenting with his heart, he was powerless to raise his hand. He let her go.

She was opening the door. She was standing on the terrace outside. She was raising her arms in the sunlight, the thin dress clinging to her tall body while the tag-ends of her cloth-

ing were ruffled and flipped by the breeze from the river. Automatically, Gillespie recoiled into the shelter of the inner doorway, waiting.

## 3

Gillespie still felt dazed an hour later as he sat alone in the dingy, dark, red-and-brown room that had been Professor Koch's parlor. More than anything else he felt a dull disgust and hatred for himself. He felt self-betrayed by all the feelings that had been so natural to him and now it seemed that the old woman could not have been real at all but a delusion that he had made up against himself, a knife he had sharpened to cut his hand, a trap he had set for his own foot. As he remembered her smile in the doorway it returned to him not with warmth or meaning, but as a bony grin. The afternoon lengthened, the room grew even darker; he sat with his face in his hands.

He had not noticed the noises on the stairway, the distant slamming of doors in the house, the chiming of a clock. But suddenly there were voices in the corridor; the door opened and Captain Hind walked in, followed by Desroches.

Desroches laughed, exploded. "I got rid of the old bitch! What do you think of that?"

"How do you mean?"

"Enemy action, enemy action!" crowed Desroches. "The Boches shot her up themselves!"

"Here, what's this?" said the captain. "There's something the matter with Gillespie." The captain went over to him.

But Desroches didn't notice. He turned to another man who was just coming in the door. "You know what happened, Langer? I took that tent out in the trailer this afternoon—on my way to Neuss to try to turn it in—and I got down to the next street, just going around the corner when what in the goddamn hell do you think happened? A mortar shell dropped right in the middle of the trailer! Didn't hurt me, didn't hurt the jeep, cut the trailer up just a little—but it blew that old mess of canvas into a million rags!"

Charles J. Rolo

Charles J. Rolo was born in Alexandria, Egypt, of English parents. He was graduated from Oxford in 1938, and received an M.S. from Columbia University School of Journalism in 1939. At present literary critic and travel editor for *The Atlantic Monthly* and Lecturer in English at Columbia University, Mr. Rolo was U. S. war correspondent in the Middle East and Europe for *The Atlantic Monthly* during World War II. He has contributed articles to *Reader's Digest*, *Harper's*, *Town & Country* and other magazines. His books include *WINGATE'S RAIDERS* and *THE WORLD OF ALDOUS HUXLEY*.

# SIMENON AND SPILLANE:

The Metaphysics of  
Murder for the Millions

IN APRIL, 1841, the world's first mass-circulation magazine, *Graham's*, published a story which connoisseurs of the whodunit regard as the first detective story—*The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Allan Poe. The new form caught on fairly rapidly, and for a century its popularity has steadily increased. Last year, one out of every four works of fiction newly published and reprinted in the United States was a murder mystery. The total sale of mysteries was around 66,000,000 copies.

Even *aficionados* of murder fiction will concede, in a moment of honesty, that except in the hands of a few writers it has been a subliterary product—characters unreal, dialogue artificial, plots highly improbable. Raymond Chandler, who writes classy shockers of the hard-boiled school but prefers to read the old-fashioned, jigsaw-puzzle kind, has indicted his preferred reading in two lethal phrases: "They fail to come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction." A critic impervious to the seductions of the whodunit, Mr. Edmund Wilson has said that reading detective fiction is rather like having "to unpack large crates by swallowing the excelsior in order to find at the bottom a few bent and rusty nails."

And yet, as mystery fans love to point out, the detective story, besides delighting millions, has regaled great men and great minds—chiefs of state (F.D.R. and Woodrow Wilson); men of letters revered by the highbrows (Gide, Eliot, Yeats); college presidents, renowned generals and scientific geniuses.

There have been maestros of the detective story who, like Jimmy Durante, could lay claim to being "duh toast of duh intellectuals." What charms has this unreal, mechanical brand of fiction which soothes the troubled breast of lowbrow, highbrow and middlebrow? What do we find in its corpse-strewn cosmos that makes an escape there so refreshing?

These are solemn questions worthy of being explored with the ant-like industry of aspirants to a Ph.D. But alas, no such scholarly excavations have been made, presumably on the theory that nothing of consequence is buried beneath the frivolous façade of the murder mystery. This theory, as I hope to demonstrate, if only in strictly amateur fashion, is grievously in error. As a start, let's take a look at the main explanations advanced for the detective story's popularity.

The commonsense explanation is that most people enjoy trying to solve a puzzle and derive a peculiarly intense satisfaction from seeing it solved. The mystery story draws us into a suspenseful game, in which we can't lose. If we figure out the answer, we feel devilishly smart; if we don't, we enjoy a juicy surprise. There are at least three clues, however, which suggest that this view doesn't close the case: 1) A number of confirmed addicts frequently cheat—as soon as the puzzle has taken shape they look up the solution—and still they are able to go back and read through the book with considerable enjoyment. 2) Several whodunit fiends have confessed to me that they don't care a hoot who killed Sir Archibald; don't bother to master the ground plan of Footledowne Manor; and never notice half of the clues. 3) The mystery writers of the hard-boiled school have actually junked the jigsaw-puzzle formula—to follow their plot line with comfort sometimes calls for a mind at home with differential calculus. Their books nonetheless sell in vast quantities.

Mr. Somerset Maugham has suggested that a great many people have been turning to the detective story because it is the only department of fiction where pure story-telling survives; the serious novelist, says Mr. Maugham, has gotten "namby-pamby" on the story level—too philosophical, too psychiatric, too symbolic. Any self-respecting highbrow would either disagree with Maugham that, say, Proust and Faulkner don't tell a good story, or would reject his emphasis on story-telling as immaterial. As for the other categories of reader, they can find plenty of popular fiction which is yarn-spinning and nothing else.

Thirdly, there's the psychiatric explanation which claims that in murder mysteries we are able to "act out," guiltlessly, the aggressive fantasies buried in the unconscious: we kill with the killer and we gratify the hunting instinct as the killer is tracked down, a kind of heads-I-win-tails-you-lose psychological deal. If this were the whole story, one would expect the success of detective fiction to be bound up with the quantity

of mayhem between the covers—and this just isn't so: some of the most famous whodunits have contained but a single tidy murder. It's true that there's a trend toward more corpses and blatant sadism in the murder mystery, but the form has done nicely in the past with all hands, except for one pair, behaving in the most genteel manner.

The preceding explanations probably contain varying degrees of truth, but none of them fits all of the facts. The solution to the mystery of the murder mystery's appeal must apply to all types and all times. It must be something very basic to explain an appeal that has proved so enduring, so potent, and so widespread. This something, I suspect, has little to do with the concatenation of clues or the accumulation of corpses, and a great deal to do with the largest of all fictional themes—an accounting of man's destiny. My hypothesis is that the murder mystery is, in essence, a metaphysical success story.

To examine, as light-heartedly as possible, the relationship between murder and metaphysics I am going to look into the work of two writers who stand at opposite poles—Mickey Spillane and Georges Simenon—but who have one arresting thing in common. Mickey Spillane is the author of super-tough whodunits which belong, intellectually, to approximately the same world as the comic strip. Georges Simenon, who has published a raft of detective novels featuring Inspector Maigret and also a great deal of serious fiction, has been mentioned as a candidate for the Nobel Prize. The common denominator between Spillane and Simenon is that both are phenomenally popular. Spillane, during the past three years, has become the fastest-selling writer in America; Simenon, over the past twenty years, has been probably the fastest-selling writer in Europe.

## 2

Spillane's first novel, *I, The Jury*, has to date sold over 2,000,000 copies in its hard cover and reprint editions; his next three—*My Gun Is Quick*, *Vengeance Is Mine*, *One Lonely Night*—have all passed the million mark. The New American Library, which publishes the 25-cent edition of Spillane's books, launched his fourth title, *The Big Kill*, with a record-breaking first printing of 2,500,000 copies. When Spillane's latest, *The Long Wait*, is released for the mass market, there will be well over 10,000,000 copies of his books in print.

In a crude way, Mickey Spillane is something of an innovator. He has hopped up the hard-boiled murder mystery into a shocker which combines features of the western, the animated film strip, the pulp sex story, William Steig's "Dreams of Glory" cartoons, and the sermons of Savonarola. His setting is the world of organized crime—the kind of world

we glimpsed in the hearings of the Kefauver Committee—and his hero, private detective Mike Hammer, is what Joe Doakes might see himself as in a daydream that compensates his most acute frustrations: a Superman who goes crashing through life beating hell out of the bad men and getting lustfully played by females who are Sex Appeal personified—smooth, impossibly beautiful sirens who are killers, and dames who are just impossibly beautiful; a Superman who, in many respects, is a very ordinary Joe.

Mike Hammer is a New Yorker. He owns two suits (one custom-built to conceal his underarm artillery). He smokes Luckies incessantly, and downs a fair amount of liquor, but he is no booze-hound. His favorite dishes are steak, fried chicken and pie. He drives an old automobile, "the heap," whose engine has been souped up for professional reasons. He is sentimental about children, and he has a fixation about plunging necklines and the female bosom in general. Intellectually (though we are told he has a "huge" mind), he is a smutty-minded primitive. His ignorance of world affairs is such that he is amazed and driven berserk when he stumbles upon the fact that the Communists are up to no good right here in the U.S.A.

Hammer is on fairly good terms with the police and respects them—Pat Chambers, Captain of Homicide, is an old and loyal friend. But the police, Hammer feels, are tied down by rules and regulations. Often dirty politics prevent a clean cop from doing a clean job; often it's a hard thing to prove murder in a court of law. And this has made Mike Hammer God's Angry Man: he has appointed himself detective, judge, jury and executioner. To Chambers he says: "Tell me I'm interfering in police work, and I'll tell you how sick I am of what goes on in this town. I live here, see? I got a damn good right to keep it clean even if I have to kill a few bastards to do it."

A six-footer weighing 190 pounds, Hammer is unquestionably the toughest, most sadistic detective in the annals of murder fiction. "I do my own leg work," he says, "and there are a lot of guys will tell me what I want to know because they know what I'll do to them if they don't." Here's a sample of the Hammer treatment: "I brought my knee up and smashed his nose to a pulp and when he screamed he choked on his own blood. I . . . yanked him up and held him against the car, then used my fist on his face." Here's another: "He came right at me with his head down and I took my own damn time about kicking him in the face. . . . He smashed into the door and lay there bubbling. For laughs I gave him a taste of his own sap on the back of his hand, and felt the bones go into splinters."

Mike can dodge a bullet fired at point-blank range, and his hand travels faster than the eye to the .45 under his jacket.

Occasionally—with a gun in his ribs, another in his back, and a gloating voice saying that in ten seconds he'll be dead—Hammer *does* become a trifle anxious. But the bad men get careless for a second, and he blasts them from here to eternity.

Where women are concerned, Hammer might be described as an *homme fatal* in every sense of the phrase—he slays the girls with his rugged virility, and the girls around him are apt to get slaughtered for keeping him company. He can't so much as hand his coat to a hat-check girl without getting propositioned, and no sooner is a female alone with him than she whips off her clothes and strikes an inviting pose in the nude. Hammer, I'm sorry to say, is a terrible *voyeur*: he looks the lady over, lecherously, then usually goes off after the killer. But unlike most fictional detectives, he does, occasionally, succumb—two or three times in each story, to be Kinsey-ish about his private life.

In spite of his boudoir-hopping, Hammer is quite a romantic and an idealist about marriage. His great dream is to marry his stunningly beautiful secretary Velda, who, naturally, is madly in love with him. Aside from a rare kiss and a smutty wisecrack, he is the parfit gentil knight where Velda is concerned, though she, too, parades before him in a transparent nightgown. A couple of books back, Hammer gave Velda an engagement ring. But in the sequel their engagement was still "an engagement to be engaged," and Mike was getting himself seduced all over the place.

Spillane has, incontestably, a remarkable talent for keeping the action moving fast and furiously; and his climaxes (until you get to know his plotting) are packed with suspense and surprise—melodramatic beyond belief. But his imagination, though it dreams up sensational stuff, is pretty limited in range—in book after book, he uses the same scenes, the same gimmicks, the same overall formula. A friend of Hammer's is killed or Mike is at hand when a murder is committed. The trail takes him to night clubs for the sucker trade, gambling joints, call-girl establishments and brothels. He finds himself tangling with a big-time racketeer and his hoods. Bullets miss him by inches, blackjacks come crashing on his skull; and he, in turn, dishes out terrific punishment. The people who help him or who seem to offer "leads" get murdered one by one, and Hammer goes crazy with "kill-lust." No writer of whodunits has given the customers so much mayhem and murder as Spillane. According to my count, there are (as Mr. Hemingway would put it) fifty-eight "deads" in his six novels, and the signs are that Spillane is caught in an inflationary spiral—the last three books contained almost twice as many "deads" as the first three.

As Hammer closes in, he uncovers a big-time network trafficking in narcotics, or prostitution, or blackmail based on



compromising photographs. When the professionals in the outfit have been liquidated or exposed—the high-powered racketeer with connections, the torpedoes, the middlemen—there remains, still, the master mind to be unmasked. In one story, after knocking off part of the opposition, Hammer compares his mission to eating “a turkey dinner”—the killer’s outfit is the meal, “the killer the dessert.” In each case the “dessert” turns out to be a person whom Hammer has been closely involved with—a woman who has bewitched him with her admiration and her glamour, or a man whom he has deeply respected.

Spillane’s books have been described by Mr. Max Lerner as “really prolonged literary lynchings, strip-teases and rapes,” which pander to “our sick cravings.” There is, I’m sure, a good deal of truth in this, but I don’t think that the supercharge of sex and sadism is the decisive factor behind Spillane’s unique popularity—those ingredients are being used by plenty of other whodunit writers without anything like the same box-office results. While the Spillane books may be bliss to the peeping tom and a delight to respectable folk who like their fictional murder laced with rough stuff, the Hammer stories also answer an altogether different, primitively moralistic set of cravings. I suspect this is the crucial underlying factor in their phenomenal appeal.

During the past two decades, monstrous evils—total war, political purges, the systematic sadism of the Gestapo—have become part of our everyday consciousness. And lately, Americans have been made more sharply aware that, here in the United States, there flourish crime networks organized on the lines of big business and well-barbered racketeers who have found answers even to the income tax. The signs are that more and more people feel personally steamed up about all this, and, at the same time, have a frustrated feeling that the individual can’t do much about it. Perhaps the acutest frustration of our time is this sense that the individual has been reduced to impotence in a world where the principle of large-scale organization has spread so far into human affairs, legitimate and nefarious.

This moral indignation and this frustration in the face of large-scale evil (and neither can properly be called “sick”) are reproduced more intensely in the Hammer books than in any other murder mysteries. Hammer, unlike most fictional detectives, is personally touched by the initial murder, much as we, nowadays, are touched by aggression wherever it occurs; and he is enraged (as we are angered) that smooth deadly criminals should go unpunished and even prosper mightily. Now begins the compensatory daydream in which the Superman fights our fight against the forces of evil. Hammer is not just any superman—he has *The Call*. Hammer is Jehovah’s

messenger; he is the avenging hand of the Jehovah of *Proverbs*, who ordains that "destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." When Hammer, in the apocalyptic dénouements, pumps a bullet into the killer, he kills a part of himself—love or respect. His mission is to be the Flaming Sword.

## 3

In Spillane's books we see, as through a magnifying glass, the drama inherent in the formula of the detective story. Every murder mystery poses symbolically (in the form of the initial murder) the problem of Evil—and resolves it; every detective story therefore meets a deep metaphysical need. Some reflect more sharply than others the needs of a particular time and a particular place.

The detective story began to flourish in an age in which science was beginning to undermine the traditional teachings of religion, notably the belief that man's life was ordered by a Divine Providence. Science offered, as a consolation prize, the doctrine of inevitable progress, which affirmed that man would eventually solve all of his problems by applying to them the methods of Science. This is the credo enshrined in the classic detective story. Sherlock Holmes, with his microscope-like eye, his tireless pursuit of clues, the flawlessly empirical march of his logic, is—and has often been called—"the scientific detective." Holmes himself, of course, is a uniquely inspired figure, but he was preceded and has been followed by detectives galore who are prophets of the Scientific Method.

The nineteenth century's optimistic rationalism was reflected in another classic type of detective, first cousin to the "scientific detective"—the Thinking Machine. He did not bother much with footprints and bits of fluff, but put the "little gray cells" to work. He was the prophet of Pure Intellect (the forerunner of today's theoretical physicist who finds the key to the universe by messing around with mathematical equations).

The promise of science began to lose its sheen in the disillusionment that set in after World War I; and rationalism in general lost face as Freud's theories spread the idea that reason was outmaneuvered and outgunned by the irrational forces of the unconscious. These changes were followed, after a certain time-lag, by noticeable changes in the murder mystery. To be sure, the scientific detective is still with us and also the Thinking Machine. But they are decidedly less in evidence (especially in America, which has always had more faith in men of action than in intellectuals). Generally speaking, there is less sifting of clues in the contemporary whodunit and more banging around with guns and blackjacks; the trend is away from the puzzle story toward the action story.

Out of the turbulent thirties and forties came a new kind

of detective fiction—the hard-boiled murder mystery, pioneered by Dashiell Hammett. The old-fashioned puzzle whodunit—with its slow, stuffy plot, its detective of exquisite gentility and impossible deductive powers, its sexless romantic heroine and pat unraveling of the tangled skein of crime—was well suited to the genteel nineteenth-century book-buyer, to whom killing was not (as it has since become) an ugly commonplace, but a piquant eccentricity; and who, anyhow, didn't like to face the seamy side of life. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and other gifted practitioners of the hard-boiled school have tried to get the murder mystery closer to contemporary realities. They have taken murder fiction away from the upper classes, the week-end house party and the vicar's rose garden and have turned it over to the people who are good at it, the pros; they have placed it in a setting—the glossy underworld—where crime is part and parcel of everyday reality.

The hero who marches down these mean streets is, at his finest embodiment, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, private dick. He is *the man who gets things done*—a tough hombre behind whose rude wit and cynicism there lies the *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*; a pistol-packin' knight errant who sallies forth on his trusty charger, a Chrysler convertible, to do battle with the dragons, the bad giants and the weavers of black spells that infest Los Angeles and surrounding California. Chandler's shamus—forever ploughing into the heart of trouble, a sucker, at heart, for a dame in distress—represents the wish-fulfillment of an ideal not yet quite dead. In Marlowe we see reincarnated, with a Democratic New-Look, ye olde champion of the Chivalric Code.

## 4

The moral fabric of any age, any society, is a tapestry in which there are strikingly different and even antithetical motifs. Our popular art forms show that the prevailing fashion in heroes runs to the extroverted he-man, the tough guy who saves the world with a terrific sock on the jaw of the transgressors, and the bang, bang, bang of his pistol. But even this generation, so much exposed to philosophies of power, has its hankering for the light that comes from within; and in its folklore there appears, intermittently, a new kind of priest-hero—the psychoanalyst. He offers us a full-blown metaphysic in which the Fall has become the Trauma; in which man is redeemed from Guilt by wrestling with the Complex on the *via dolorosa* of the Couch. He tells us—and the notion has gained official acceptance to a limited degree—that crime is not so much willful sin as the product of sickness. He tells us that even he who murders is not Gruesome George but a fouled-up unfortunate whose parents didn't get him started right.

This outlook has deeply colored the fiction of Georges Simenon.

Simenon was born in Liège, Belgium, in 1903. He published his first novel when he was seventeen; and in the next ten years, writing under a score of pseudonyms, he produced some two hundred potboilers which he regarded as an apprenticeship for more ambitious things to come. In the early nineteen-thirties, he launched his Inspector Maigret detective stories, which instantly achieved enormous popularity. A few years later, he also started writing "straight" psychological novels. To date, he has published (not counting his anonymous early works) thirty-nine Maigret books, seven whodunits without Maigret, and seventy-five serious novels (he writes a whodunit in a month, a straight novel in three). His books have been translated into seventeen languages, and more than twenty of them have been made into movies. The two Simenon novels published in the United States since the war are climbing rapidly toward the million mark in their N.A.L. reprint editions.

In addition to pleasing the millions, Simenon has been highly praised by exacting judges—not merely as a superior confectioner of mysteries but as a literary artist. André Gide has described him as "the most novelistic novelist in French literature today"; and a leading British critic, Raymond Mortimer, says: "I suspect Simenon to be among the most gifted novelists now alive."

Simenon has said that thanks to mass communications—the press and radio, photography, the movies, and now television—the reader's horizon has been so enormously enlarged that elaborate documentation no longer has any place in the novel; the novelist should be able to suggest a setting, evoke an atmosphere, in a few swift strokes. The time has therefore come, Simenon believes, to try to write what he calls "*le roman pur*"—the quintessential novel—which should do for our time what was done by the tragedies of ancient Greece. Starting at the moment of decisive crisis, it should pose the problem of man's destiny; should give an accounting of a man's life. Simenon was attracted to the murder mystery because it offers a convenient way of doing just this in terms of the murderer, the detective serving as an explanatory prop akin to the Chorus in Greek tragedy.

In working his way toward the "*roman pur*" via detective fiction, Simenon brought a crucial innovation to the whodunit. He made it an exploration of personality—a quest whose goal is not so much punishment of the crime as understanding of the criminal; a mystery whose solution unravels not so much a tangled skein of events as a tangled skein of motives. In Simenon's hands, the whodunit is essentially a whydunit.

Though the detective story leaves no room for portraiture-in-depth, Simenon's sharply sketched characters are living,

three-dimensional individuals. His décor, achieved with masterly economy, is marvelously authentic. His plots seldom contain anything far-fetched.

It is impossible to categorize the world of Maigret because it is the real world—Paris, the provincial towns of France, the Riviera—and the crimes in it are committed by ordinary people deranged by jealousy, or ambition, or greed, or to cover up some scandal which threatens them with ruin. Maigret himself, in his habits and appearance, is a typical French *bourgeois*, married to a *bonne bourgeoisie* who tries, vainly, to make him cut down his incessant pipe-smoking, and who knows better than any chef how to prepare her husband's favorite dishes—creamed cod and *crème au citron*. Always clad in a black suit and a derby, Maigret is a quiet, unexcitable man, who detests hurry; a stolid, peaceable figure who might be a schoolmaster or a country doctor.

Maigret has little interest in fingerprints, footprints, alibis, how the murderer entered and how he got away, in most of the data which are the foundation of the conventional whodunit. Sometimes he doesn't even give the corpse itself more than a casual glance. In one sense, Maigret is the least realistic of Simenon's characters; he will hardly pass, under rigorous scrutiny, as an Inspector of the Paris Police Judiciare—he simply doesn't know his job. He is very real, however, as a man, a man of deep humanity, with a profound insight into people.

Maigret's compass is not the logic of events but the logic of passions. The clues he follows are looks, words, gestures. He works through his feelings, his intuition, his knowledge of men. He tries, and the reader tries with him, to grope his way toward the psychological crisis which provoked the murder. The disclosure of the truth, with its revelation of the dire pressures that shape human conduct, usually brings a measure of sympathy for the criminal, a kind of absolution. The leit-motif of Simenon's work is: "It is a difficult job to be a man."

This theme is treated with far greater complexity, finesse and depth in Simenon's serious novels, which are really psychological mystery stories. *The Snow Was Black* is the drama of an adolescent whose mother runs a flourishing brothel and who has never known his father. Out of a cold, defiant despair, Frank Friedmaier is trying to destroy, systematically, everything in him that is human. For no other reason than this, he kills; he engineers a revolting betrayal of the young girl who loves him; he robs and murders an old woman who cared for him in his infancy. While he is in jail, awaiting execution, there occurs an event which reconciles him both to life and death. We finally understand, completely, the source of Frank's terrible life-hatred, and our disgust is transmuted into compassion.

In *The Heart of a Man*, the mystery hinges on the savage

unhappiness of an aging Parisian actor, "the great Maugin," who with the aid of *vin ordinaire* and a periodic shot of cognac is drinking himself across the river and into the trees. At the novel's opening, Maugin hears a specialist's verdict that at 59 he has a 75-year-old heart; and the story describes the last weeks of his life with flashbacks into his past. Interweaving past and present, Simenon tries to show precisely what has made Maugin the man he is—a tortured colossus, hounded by rage, irrational jealousy and self-disgust.

Simenon's latest novel, *The Girl in his Past*, is his most daring exploration of the role of sex in the inner drama of a man's life. Albert Bauche, after murdering his employer—a movie promoter, Serge Nicholas—surrenders himself to the police. He refuses to plead that the murder was "a crime of passion," though he knew his wife to be Nicholas's mistress; and he insists that he is sane. His motive, he explains, was the discovery that he had been deceived into aiding and abetting an unscrupulous swindler. Eventually the police have him examined by a psychiatrist, and with remarkable subtlety and suspense we are led back into his hidden obsessions and frustrations until, in a moment of shattering awareness, he himself understands the *real* reason why he killed.

The answers in Simenon's books always penetrate to the deepest recesses of the unconscious and they are never glib or patly presented. Simenon is too much of "a natural"—a born story-teller and a magnificent creator of character—to write clinical case histories. A comment he made on the work of another writer admirably conveys the flavor of his own work: "There is no psychologizing, and yet every personage has a private life which is his own and his alone. There is no sound and fury, no striving for the picturesque, but always the people have the universe glued to their skin."

Like the psychoanalyst, Simenon does not condemn. Nothing shocks him, for he believes that between the cruelest murderer and the most decent citizen there lies but the turn of a screw in the psyche. The catharsis his climaxes provide lies in the revelation that human beings are not evil but merely human. "It is a difficult job to be a man."

## 5

We have shown how, in different ways, the mystery story is involved with the problem of evil; how it provides us with a hero who answers deep-seated needs. It is time, now, to tidy up loose ends; to go straight to the root of the murder mystery's appeal. It is time to anatomize the underlying metaphysical pattern—the *detective story is modern man's Passion Play*.

In the beginning is the murder, and the world is sorely out of joint. There appears the detective-hero and his foil, the

latter representing the blindness of ordinary mortals—Dr. Watson, or the police, or, if the hero is a policeman, his bumbling associates. The detective is a man like the rest of us, with his share of human failings—Nero Wolfe swills beer; Maigret is helpless without his pipe; Hammer goes in for venery. But this mortal has The Call—he is a Savior. In him is Grace, and we know that he will bring the Light.

The hero suspects everyone, for the murderer is Everyman; the murder is the symbol of the guilt, the imperfection, that is in all of us. In his search for the hidden truth, the hero is exposed to danger, thrashes about in darkness, sometimes suffers in the flesh, for it is by his travail that the Savior looses the world of its sins. In the detective's hour of triumph, the world is, for a moment, redeemed. Unconsciously we die a little when the murderer meets his fate, and thus we are purged of guilt. We rejoice in the reassurance that beyond the chaos of life there is order and meaning (the writer who leaves bits of chaos lying around condemns the reader to Purgatory). We exult that Truth has been made known and that Justice has prevailed. All this the lowly whodunit offers. And still that is not all.

By his personality, his deeds, his methods, the hero bears witness to a system of belief, a secular credo or a religious doctrine. He is the apostle of Science, like Holmes, or of Pure Reason, like Hercule Poirot. He may, like Maigret, believe that Understanding is the highest good and that its fruit is Compassion. He may, like Hammer, be the vessel of wrath which executes Jehovah's vengeance on those who plowed iniquity. There are other kinds of hero detectives, and they are true prophets all. For in the detective story, Paradise is always regained. And still this is not all.

If the reader—be he anything from Anabaptist to Zoroastrian—truly enters into the detective's quest, the hero's spirit lays its hands upon him. He becomes compassionate with Maigret and condemns no man; he waxes savage with Hammer and rejoices as the wicked become the dead. Whatever system of belief the hero acts out will, for the duration, infuse something of itself into the reader. He will find himself saving the world with a borrowed credo which is temporarily *his*. And herein lies the hidden seduction of the whodunit. Mystery stories are bloodstained fairy tales which enact the cycle, Paradise Lost—Paradise Sought For—Paradise Regained. *They allow us to play, vicariously, the role of different kinds of Savior.*

You pays your money, and you takes your choice.

## THE WEALTH OF HILLS

This lavish hill has spent itself on flowers.  
See how the squandering ground has flung its purse  
And poured into the wind how many myrrhs  
Where jewel weed and the goldenrod have powers

More to enrich the gaze than the gathering.  
Our sight is debtor thus to spendthrift sod.  
Beloved wastrel, Midas of petal and pod,  
Your golden touch becomes your bankrupting,

I thought, but every nodding flower meant no:  
They were on loan to seed a fallow eye  
But they'd be drawn to dungeons by and by  
As ransom for the prisoner of snow.

How praise enough the largesse of this hill?  
Show us again that the giver is most wise;  
Fill us with flowers up to the top of our eyes  
Before a miser winter shuts the till.

GRAY BURR, born in Omaha, Nebraska, was educated at Harvard, and served three years in the U. S. Navy during World War II. He has published in *Accent*, *Poetry*, *Quarterly Review of Literature*, and now teaches at Tufts College, Medford, Massachusetts.

Howard Nemerov

## THE GOOSE FISH

On the long shore, lit by the moon  
To show them properly alone,  
Two lovers suddenly embraced  
So that their shadows were as one.  
The ordinary night was graced  
For them by the swift tide of blood  
That silently they took at flood,  
And for a little time they prized  
Themselves emparadised.



Then, as if shaken by stage-fright  
Beneath the hard moon's bony light,  
They stood together on the sand  
Embarrassed in each other's sight  
But still conspiring hand in hand,  
Until they saw, there underfoot,  
As though the world had found them out.  
The goose fish turning up, though dead,  
His hugely grinning head.

There in the china light he lay  
Most ancient and corrupt and grey.  
They hesitated at his smile,  
Wondering what it seemed to say  
To lovers who a little while  
Before had thought to understand,  
By violence upon the sand,  
The only way that could be known  
To make a world their own.

It was a wide and moony grin  
Together peaceful and obscene;  
They knew not what he would express,  
So finished a comedian  
He might mean failure or success,  
But took it for an emblem of  
Their sudden, new and guilty love  
To be observed by, when they kissed,  
That rigid optimist.

So he became their patriarch,  
Dreadfully mild in the half-dark.  
His throat that the sand seemed to choke,  
His picket teeth, these left their mark  
But never did explain the joke  
That so amused him, lying there  
While the moon went down to disappear  
Along the still and tilted track  
That bears the zodiac.

HOWARD NEMEROV is a graduate of Harvard and is now teaching at Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont. He is the author of two books of poems and a novel, *THE MELODRAMATISTS*, published by Random House.

POEM

The eager note on my door said "Call me,  
call when you get in!" so I quickly threw  
a few tangerines into my overnight bag,  
straightened my eyelids and shoulders, and  
headed straight for the door. It was autumn  
by the time I got around the corner, oh all  
unwilling to be either pertinent or bemused, but  
the leaves were brighter than grass on the sidewalk!

Funny, I thought, that the lights are on this late  
and the hall door open; still up at this hour, a  
champion jai-alai player like himself? Oh fie!  
for shame! What a host, so zealous! And he was  
there in the hall, flat on a sheet of blood that  
ran down the stairs. I did appreciate it. There are few  
hosts who so thoroughly prepare to greet a guest  
only casually invited, and that several months ago.

FRANK O'HARA graduated from Harvard in 1950. In 1951 he received his M.A. from the University of Michigan, and the Avery Hopwood Award for Poetry. He has published poems and stories in *The Harvard Advocate* (in which *Poem* originally appeared), and poems in *Generation, Accent, Poetry* and *Partisan Review*.

Lloyd Frankenberg

VILLA D'ESTE

*"The Surprise Fountain"*

The fountains of the Villa d'Este  
Mist the air, *o bella vista!*  
But they used to mist it faster.

See them toss their jewels clear  
Of the pine and cypress there;  
But they used to toss them higher.

All those waters pouring, roaring,  
At a rate that's great but sparing,  
Make a sight semi-inspiring

As their course they half reverse  
Toward their Sabine hillside source.  
Feeble the fountains, few and sparse,

Rearing up to fall back heavily  
Basined squarely, roundly, ovably  
On the terraces of Tivoli.

Anything that's from on high  
Wants to gravitate that way,  
The way the fountains used to go

When the Sixteenth Century Pope,  
Gregorio, in papal cape  
Was taken on his first trip

Around the gardens. (Freud and Marx,  
Hide your smirks at the pontifex  
Delighting in the waterworks.)

At each in turn, as each they passed,  
By its tall deportment pleased,  
*Il Papa* paused and praised and blessed.

The "Hundred Fountains" mounting evenly,  
The "Organ" playing water-drivenly  
Proved the earth is really heavenly.

Today the Ministries dispute  
Beauty and use, an old debate.  
Circuses and bread compete.

Which of the two, cry con, cry pro,  
*Turismo, elettricità,*  
Yields the fatter revenue?

The Minister of Public Works  
Wants no water in the parks  
That could be put to public works;

While the Minister of Parks  
Wants no water put to works  
That could adorn the public parks.

So like a cautious amorist,  
Fan, spray and column are released,  
In baffled ecstasy, half-mast.

Not so when Gregory graced the *pasta*,  
Guested at the Villa d'Este,  
Hasty the water, high and misty,

Cooling the air where, lit by lanterns,  
Night caressed the restless fountains.  
What were his dreams where water wantons?

At break of day, from his apartment  
Gazing on their tall deportment,  
*Il Papa* felt a strange excitement.

Of the fountains wavering sweetly,  
Straight before his window, stately,  
One had sprung up overnightly.

While the Holy Father slept,  
His cardinal host in haste on tiptoe  
Oe the water tapped and piped

That in the morning there might greet  
The Pope's glad eye this shining jet  
Of beauty, passion and delight.

LLOYD FRANKENBERG has been published in *Botteghe Oscure*, *Horizon*, *Poetry*, *Yale Review*, and elsewhere, and is the author of *PLEASURE DOME: On Reading Modern Poetry*, published by Houghton Mifflin. Since 1950 he has arranged the poetry readings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

## FACES OF HATRED AND OF LOVE

Translated by  
Adolphe Gourevitch

*Adolphe Gourevitch* was for a time a translation expert with the United Nations. His translations include Carlo Levi's *OF FEAR AND FREEDOM*, published by Farrar, Straus and Young.

## Jean-Baptiste Rossi

*Jean-Baptiste Rossi* was born in Marseilles in 1931. His first novel, *AWAKENING*, appeared in France in 1950, when the author was but nineteen, and was immediately compared to *DEVIL IN THE FLESH* by another extraordinary young French writer, Raymond Radiguet. Harper's introduced this precocious new talent in the United States early in 1952. Mr. Rossi studied at a Jesuit school, and at the Sorbonne. He now lives in a small country house where he is at work on another novel.

IN THE EVENINGS, when he was coming back from his strolls along the harbor, his mother used to wait for him, motionless and silent on the stone steps, and she did not talk until dinner was over.

There was no need of talking. She knew all there was to

know. At night, when he was falling asleep in the armchair, holding his pipe, always unlit, in his fingers, she used to spy on the sleeping face: she could then recapture something of his childhood features, untouched, spared by time.

—Oh, look, look!

Thus he used to cry out, long ago, in wonder and joy, while leaping among the rocks of Cornwall. Asleep, he still retained this expression of boundless hope—a hope now lost.

—Oh, these are the islands, the islands! he shouted.

—These are Colombo and Singapore! Mother, this is Singapore!

Today she did not dare to look him squarely in the face, for fear of reading in his eyes some message of reproach and despair. But he too kept quite silent, for he had ceased to believe a long time ago.

—You shall go there, my darling. We shall go there together . . . But so many depressing years had gone by, full of his coughing, full of the sour smell of drugs and the gloom of doctors' offices. There would never be time now to sail away on a ship.

—You shall sail, my darling. . . .

—To Colombo? to Singapore?

—Wherever you wish.

—To the coral reefs?

—Yes, when you feel better.

He never felt better.

A dialogue so often repeated that she could spell it out, now, on the wrinkles of his sleeping face. Under his closed eyelids he must have been watching the islands and the horizons and the reefs which now dwelt only in his own heart. He must have been sailing, for a few hours each silent night, upon some ocean of his own, amid a confusion of distant ports of call.

All alone.

She had come to accept this loneliness. He would never seek beyond her that which could be given him no more. He had even given up reading. Perhaps he had forgotten the opiate pages of the "unspeakable" Conrad, the greatest enemy his mother had ever had.

She held him, and he did not try to escape. Sometimes a fit of raucous coughing made him bend double. When he looked up again there was death in his eyes, like a conviction. He would not run away; he could not.

—Oh, look, look!

The child had become the young man, already too old for the discouraged physicians. Since they had come to Monte Carlo—the only journey they had allowed themselves for years—he was gaining back something of his lost vitality. He used to go out in the evenings, before dinner. When he was back, she knew what he had seen, what he had felt and touched

with his fingers—as if she had been with him. He told her nothing. But his face kept the smell of the sea, the dazzling light of white sails in the harbor, the hope, the excruciating pain of a hope regained.

As for him, in the evenings he leaned motionless and silent against some half-ruined breastwork, watching the sailing ships, his heart full of inexpressible sorrow. He was no longer interested in his mother's presence. All day he remained in his room, staring at the ceiling. At mealtime both kept silent, for they had nothing more to tell each other.

After dinner, when he sat in the armchair and slumbered, he knew that she was quite close; often he pretended to sleep in order to watch her through half-closed eyelids. He found her features repulsive, both ashamed and satisfied. But she did not know how well he could dissemble, how well he could pretend—asleep and awake.

She thought he was hers, and she wore his death on her face, like a mask. He would escape only for one last journey, and until then he would remain as he was, shut in, locked up, every day farther from her and always at her elbow, in a slow agony.

—Paul, don't forget to put on something when you go out.

—I am warm enough.

—You are not well today.

He put on a sweater and a scarf. He had to obey her, make her complacent in her domination. Then, a day would come. He was still young, and nothing was lost yet. He knew a way out, and she did not suspect it, for she was too sure of him and of herself.

The occasion would come. He did not go out often and he knew few people in France. But he would make friends, at least among his mother's visitors. He had only to wait.

In the evenings, he would come back to the villa as late as possible. He sat on the old breastwork above the harbor, watching the shadows settle down around the white sails inside the breakwater. Sometimes a ship would sail away, and his eyes would follow her for a long time. Where was she bound? Who was on board? Suddenly, the tiny black dot was lost on the distant sea. He too felt lost, thrown into emptiness, hurled back onto the cold stones which he had never left.

For hours he stayed there, unable to dismiss an old hope which now seemed meaningless, for too many sails had sped away.

Colombo, Singapore, the islands. He walked home through wide, clean streets, darker and emptier at each return. When he reached the high-perched upper town, he did not dare look back.

He still could see the harbor from afar, and the lighthouse, and the sea; but not the ships, not really the ships. They had sailed away, one by one, all of them.

Paul met the young woman for the first time in late September, the second year of his stay in Monte Carlo with his mother. She came one summer afternoon. Paul drew close to the window to watch her when she rang the bell. She was tall and very ugly. Her hat, an atrocious green velvet thing with faded feathers, was down on her forehead and she did not even try to put it back in place.

Lady Foley had many guests that afternoon. There was an old gentleman with a goatee sitting on the sofa, who stood up when Paul came in. The ladies did not stand up. Paul was introduced to the old gentleman, and then to the young lady with the green hat: the hat slid down a little more when she nodded, acknowledging his greeting. When seated, she seemed much less tall. She sat on the edge of an armchair, with her knees tight together and her feet quite flat on the rug. He noticed only her first name, and kept her hand in his own for just a brief moment. Her hand was moist and warm. Then he went to sit down near an old friend of his mother's.

That afternoon, the girl did not talk much. The old gentleman with the goatee, short and lean, had taken her over and did not give her a chance to open her mouth. Paul heard her voice distinctly only once. It was a harsh voice, somewhat like his own, but flowing without strain, slowly, with some elegance. He was able to study her face very well. She listened to the old gentleman attentively, a cup of tea in her hands, nodding from time to time and looking down.

By and by, Paul grew accustomed to her ugliness. In profile her erratic features seemed more dignified, grew solemn, almost noble.

When she left he accompanied her to the door. In the garden he walked by her side and they stopped at the gateway.

—I hope we shall meet again, he said in French.

—I hope so too. I am glad to have met your mother.

—She is glad too.

He glanced at the house, then at the gravel of the garden path. She waited for him to say "good-by," but he was in no hurry to do so.

—The old gentleman has bored you, he said.

—Not at all. He was talking about China. Do you know China?

—No, but I would like to. I would like to know everything. She did not reply and put her gloves on.

—Perhaps we shall meet again soon, she said, looking up and stretching out her hand.

—Do you live in Monte Carlo?

—Yes, indeed!

—Then we shall certainly see each other again.

He glanced once more at the gravel at his feet and ran his fingers through his hair, absent-mindedly.

—Have you been here for a long time? he asked.

—About a year.

—Like ourselves, said Paul. —We came last year, and I think we shall stay on. I like living in Monte Carlo.

—I was born here; but I have not been back since I was a child.

She smiled and once more held out her hand. The hot sun was blazing down on the garden; the girl's make-up had started to run and was mixing with her perspiration. He did not dare look into her face, afraid that his glance would convey how ugly he found her. He took her hand and pressed it.

—See you again, he repeated.

He watched her walking away, very straight, with the inappropriate feather on her hat pointing skyward. For a second she looked back and smiled at him.

—My name is Paul, he said.

But she was out of earshot.

After the guests had gone, he stayed in the drawing room with his mother. Cups and cake-crumbs were still on the tea-table. When Etienne, the butler, had finished clearing away, Paul drew nearer Lady Foley. She seemed surprised.

—What is the matter? she inquired.

—Nothing, said Paul. —Aren't you tired?

She let her hands rest flat on the arms of her chair.

—A little. Mrs. Jourdan talked all the time.

—Who is Mrs. Jourdan?

—The old lady who ate all the cakes.

—I didn't notice, said Paul.

He remained seated nearby and smiled.

—How nice of you to come so close, said Lady Foley.

—You don't do it often these days.

—I'm no longer a boy, you know.

—Well, well! You are not even thirty. Under thirty, one still is a boy, my darling.

She put her arm around his neck.

—And you, you shall always remain a boy.

He let himself be kissed and sat down on the arm of her chair, close by. Thus they remained together for a while, and then he drew away.

—Who was the old gentleman? he inquired.

—A friend of your poor father.

—He knew him well?

—I think so.

—He is very talkative, said Paul. —He kept that girl to himself all the time.

—You would have liked to keep her *yourself*?

She seemed almost disturbed.

—Oh mother! he said. Did you look at her? She is just about as plain as they come.

She laughed with him in a strained manner. But he knew her suspicion was gone.



—Her name is Simone, is it not?

—Yes. Simone Périnet. She was introduced to me by the old gentleman. She also knew your father, I believe. But she must have been a very little girl at the time.

—Of course, said Paul.

He drew away completely. The sun was shining in his mother's face; he went to the window and closed a shutter.

—Is that better? he asked.

—Yes, much better, thank you.

She closed her eyes and smiled. She must feel happy because he was still at her side, and because he still showed her such consideration. He took his pipe from the mantelpiece and went up to his room. On the stairs he met Etienne who was coming down.

—Do you have some tobacco? he asked in a low voice.

—You know you should not smoke, replied Etienne shaking his head.

He was broad-chested and bald. When he shook his head, his ears seemed to work loose, and the veins stood out on his temples.

—All right, said Paul. —I haven't smoked for such a long time. It isn't any fun always sucking on an empty pipe.

—I shouldn't do it, said Etienne. —I know Madame will not be pleased.

—Hand it over, please.

Etienne took a little package wrapped in gray paper out of his pocket. He gave it to Paul.

—Don't smoke it all, he added, turning his face toward the door of the drawing room. —And not a word to Madame!

—I know. You are very nice.

Etienne shrugged his shoulders. —It is Monsieur who is not nice. What if Monsieur fell ill?

Paul went up a few steps without replying. Looking back he saw Etienne still leaning against the bannisters.

—I am sick already, said Paul.

He laughed.

—In fact, I'm dead already.

Etienne shrugged his shoulders again and then went down. Paul entered his room, closed the door and stood quite motionless.

He was dead already. That much was quite certain, and nobody could change it, not even *she*. In fact, she must have wanted it this way. But there remained perhaps another hour to live, another instant, the space of a lifetime. After which she would be able to speak of him, as she spoke of his "poor father," saying dubiously: "I think . . ." Never quite sure and always quite certain—this was her strength. Thus she had condemned him—while he went on coughing and sucking on unlighted pipes.

He stretched out on the bed and opened the package of to-

bacco. Afterwards she would send even Etienne away. She would hold him responsible too. But until then she would say nothing, strong in her relentless uncertainty.

—I think we could live in France, Paul. In Monte Carlo for instance. It would be a change for you and the climate is fine.

—But the sea? The sea is bad for the lungs, you know that. The doctor said so.

—I think it would do you good. Anyhow, you would be bored in the mountains . . .

She let his sickness run its course. She even hastened his agony. Later, she would say: "How he loved the sea!" But she would keep to herself the dreadful silence of his life, she would go on stirring the same ashes, happy to have kept everything, even the memory of it all.

He smoked, remembering the girl and laughing quietly to himself. My God, how ugly she was, and how silly! But her ugliness was a point in her favor. Mother would suspect nothing. The news would explode in her guts like a bombshell. He went on with his lonesome and cheerless mirth, stretched out on his bed, silently laughing in the summer evening, watching his own breath and pressing his hand nervously against his heart.

That night he did not want to go out for his usual walk near the harbor.

He saw the girl again a week later, while he was coming back from one of his daily strolls. Now, in late summer, night was coming fast: he did not recognize her at once, a few paces away on the sidewalk. He had stopped in front of a jeweler's shop and the girl's image went by on the windowpane. It took him several seconds to realize that it was Simone. She had on the same worn dress as the week before, and he could not fail to recognize her incredible little hat. He caught up with her easily.

—How are you? he said and touched her arm.

She stopped, betraying no surprise.

—How are *you*?

—I was going home. I did not expect to meet you.

—I work not far from here.

—What a happy coincidence!

They started moving slowly. It was getting dark and cool. After a moment of silence she turned her face toward him:

—Have you seen our friends again?

—No, nobody has come to see us since that day. Mother has few friends in France. Only my father's acquaintances.

At the corner of the street the traffic forced them to stop.

—Are you going my way? asked Simone.

—I'll see you home. I feel lonesome before dinnertime, and a little walk at night won't harm me.

—That's very kind of you.

Then she added, smiling:

—Your French is very good. Where did you learn it?

—I didn't learn it, I've always spoken it. My mother is French.

She nodded.

—Were you down at the harbor?

He took her arm crossing the street; she did not withdraw it when they reached the sidewalk.

—I walk along the harbor almost every night, he replied. I am fond of the sea and the ships.

He hesitated.

—I think that is about all I am fond of.

He shrugged his shoulders, in self-disparagement. He was glad to see she was not smiling.

The streets were more crowded now; it was quite dark and the shop windows were brightly lit. They went on silently, not looking at each other. He grew accustomed to this silence. She had wanted to say something when he shrugged his shoulders, but now she kept silent, which was a way of appreciating the importance of his remark.

She stopped before one of the apartment houses. She had a two-room apartment on the third floor.

—We shall probably meet again as we did tonight, he said.

—If you always go home the same way, we shall certainly meet again.

She pushed the button to open the door.

—Well, see you later . . .

She held out her hand, but it was not the same hand as the week before; that other hand had been polite and indifferent.

—My name is Paul, he said.

—I know.

He stepped back, and she smiled at him, with her hat on her forehead and her small eyes very close together.

—Good-by, he said.

She nodded, still smiling, and he started to move away.

—Paul! she cried out.

—Yes?

She shrugged her shoulders and stepped into the doorway, then stood still. He too stood still in the middle of the sidewalk, and a man brushed past with a curious glance at both of them. When the man was gone she was still smiling.

—Yes? Paul repeated.

—Nothing.

He waited and Simone's face grew grave again, as it had been the other day in his mother's drawing room. But the expression in her eyes had changed since then.

—I have not even ships to be fond of.

He did not reply. She stepped inside.

They met almost every evening at the same hour. He waited

for her and brought her home after her work. She was a stockbroker's secretary. But she told him very little about herself, and on the sidewalks of the dying summer they walked silently together, sometimes choosing the longest possible route.

When he came back home, it was already night. His mother, as always, waiting motionless upon the steps, her back against the door, could no longer see on her son's face that expression of pain which used to set her mind at rest. He had changed somehow. One day she told him so.

—I have not changed, Paul replied. —It has grown cooler, fall is coming fast. I suffered from the heat.

—I feel uneasy, she said.

The next few days he went home earlier.

She felt confident again. Before going to sleep he even chatted with her about the past. She thought he was bored being all alone, and that he was drawing closer to her.

—You still go to the harbor, my darling?

—Yes, as always. There are some new yachts in this week. But they will sail away, to God knows where, before the first rains.

—I'll go with you, one evening, if you like. But perhaps you'd rather be alone?

—No, no. It would be nice to have you with me.

She never went. The harbor did not interest her, and she knew they would be unhappy together, each with the same depressing memories and the same hopes which never came true.

—Oh, look, look!

Colombo, Singapore, the islands . . . He had been so small, at that time, long ago, so tiny standing in front of the big rocks and the measureless sea!

—You shall go, my darling, you shall go . . .

—For sure, for sure, repeated another voice.

The voice of the wind.

Rain started in October, and Monte Carlo became a dark and shiny city by the sea. For several days Paul could not go out of the house. He did not see the girl. On a Saturday he went to see her at her home. He hesitated a long time before ringing the bell, but she did not seem to be surprised at all when she opened the door.

—How are you? I have been waiting for you all this week. I thought you would never come.

She made him sit down in the large, badly furnished room. She remained standing while he glanced at the furniture and the pictures on the walls.

—You have a nice place, he said.

She did not reply at once, and he felt ill at ease. Without looking at her, he knew she was annoyed.

—Don't lie to me, she said.

—I am not lying. I really find it nice here.

—That's what one always says.

She went to a little chest in the far corner of the room. The chest seemed untidy, covered with papers. She came back with a bottle and two glasses.

—What have you been doing? he asked.

—This week?

—Yes.

She half-filled one of the glasses and handed it to him.

—I worked.

He tried not to look at her. He did not wish to regret his visit, but she was simply unbearable.

—I like being with you, he said.

—Don't lie.

—Then why am I here?

—Yes, why? she echoed.

He attempted a smile, the glass still in his hand and his eyes upon the window-curtains. Why was she always on the defensive? Why did she always have this attitude of distrust and incredulity? It would have been so simple otherwise.

—Don't you like being with me? he asked.

He dared to look at her. Now it was she who looked down and avoided his eyes, blushing abruptly. "Now," he thought, "she is playing the part of a bashful, innocent girl." But at the same time he knew that she was not playing, that she was really unhappy and rather stupid. She remained standing before him, as if watching that bottle she still held in her hand, swaying absent-mindedly.

—You know it well enough, she finally replied.

And her voice had suddenly lost all its harshness, turning soft and alarmingly sad.

Her disconcerting smile came back, as if she were making fun of herself—then disappeared. He wanted to take her hand, but she immediately drew away. When she looked at him again, he did not know whether she was sad, just startled, or very disturbed, but it was plain that if he spoke another word, she would start crying. He bent over her:

—Now really, what is it?

She was still withdrawing, hunching her shoulders. Her features became more and more tense, she was on the verge of tears. But he was happy to see her in this state, so silly, standing in the middle of the room, fidgeting with the preposterous bottle. She would cry, he wanted her to cry, there, in front of him, still forlorn and stupid.

—You know full well, she whispered.

Then she shook her head in a kind of rage:

—I am so ugly.

Again she hunched her shoulders, and then suddenly she threw herself into a chair, hiding her face in her arms, crying and crying, her big body crumpled on the cushions.

He did not move.

A savage joy surged in him, and for an instant he saw his mother's face, ashamed and satisfied. Now he must be wearing this same face, that face *she* wore when she was spying on him at night, her prey.

He said nothing. She stopped crying and remained motionless in the armchair. The silence must have been burdensome to her, but she did not seem eager to break it. She kept her face turned to the back of the chair and it seemed she would never dare look at him again.

—Excuse me, she finally said.

Two pitiful words, barely audible, spoken in a weak and wailing voice. Then, without a glance at him, she drew herself up and walked briskly out of the room. He emptied his glass, his eyes still upon the armchair from which she had arisen, and he tried hard to repress a fit of coughing. Water was running in the next room. She would certainly come back with that smile, and then all would be well. Neither of them would ever mention the incident again.

He put down his glass and went to the window. The sky was dark above the roofs. It was not raining yet, but the rain would soon start. He watched the street for a moment, and when he heard the girl's steps coming toward him, he turned and smiled.

She too was smiling.

Later, they went together to a small tearoom in the harbor. It was empty when they came in, except for the girl who waited on them. They sat down at a table, facing each other. Outside, the sea was dark and merged with the sky. It had been raining off and on for a full week and the harbor was deserted. Nobody wanted to walk by the water.

—How do you feel? said Paul.

Her eyes were red and the waitress had been watching her. Tears are always an interesting mystery. Why this one? Why not myself? Time is sad, the world is sad.

—Everything is all right, said Simone.

She put her elbows on the table and propped her chin in her hands, looking up at him from time to time, awkwardly. She did not want any cakes, she was not hungry. When he started coughing—a dismal spell that seemed to last forever—she averted her face and looked through the window at the harbor with concentrated attention.

—Excuse me, he finally said.

But they were through with their game of hide-and-seek. "Excuse me, excuse me," one takes the other by the hand, one enters the round dance, and that's that. Smilingly, he tried to imagine his mother's face when she learned from him that—if die he must—she could not hope to share his grave, that there was now somebody else to share it. A brief moment, he said to himself, a moment, yet a lifetime.

—You are very ill?

—From time to time. The sea is not good for my health.

—Then why do you stay here?

—Until now I really did not know. Maybe for my mother's sake. But now I am staying because of you.

A still face, a quite still face.

—Don't be silly.

—You know it is true, said Paul.

She drank her tea. When she put down her cup, she turned again to the window and dabbed at her lips with a tiny white handkerchief.

—Do you still love ships? she asked.

—Yes, still, Paul replied.

But she must have been expecting something else.

—I love you too, he added.

She was not looking at him and her lips were trembling. The waitress must have been spying on them from the far end of the room, but it seemed now of no importance.

—You are cruel, she said.—Why are you making fun of me?

He seized her hand above the teacups and pressed it softly. For a second he was sorry for her and for himself. Her face stood out sharply against the dark windowpane, a face which was drawing closer to him, preposterously ugly, preposterously tense. She left her hand in his and leaned forward with her shoulders drooping.

—I love you, he repeated.

—Please . . .

—I love you.

She got up, took her handbag, and stood silent before the table, looking like some grotesque apparition. "A huge shape without color and life," he thought, "something desperately disgusting. This is it."

—Don't go away, he said.

She was shaking her head back and forth, without hearing him, and at each beat of her heart the same words—he knew—must be sounding in her ears.

—Please, she repeated.

For the space of a breath, he was sorry for her again—for himself, for both of them here, equally lonely and dejected. Outside, it had been raining for several minutes already, but they had not noticed it. Now the drops were drumming on the windows and the room had grown darker.

—Sit down, he said. —I must speak to you.

—Have you never seen me as I really am? Why do you make fun of me?

She glanced at the waitress in the back of the room, and promptly turned to the door.

—You cannot go out in the rain, he argued, and got up.

—Be sensible.

But she was already out the door and he saw her through the window, walking with her head down. He called the wait-

ress, paid, and went out after her. She was walking fast now, stiff and straight, and he had to run—cough, cough, cough—to overtake her.

—What is the matter with you, for God's sake! he exclaimed when he took her by the arm. —Will we chase each other forever, when everything is so simple?

—Let me go, she cried out, let me go!

He did not let her go and forced her to stop.

It was raining hard now and they had to take refuge in a doorway. Without a word he put a hand on her shoulder. And then all at once she pressed herself tightly against him.

—You will catch cold, he said.

But he knew Simone could not answer. Something had snapped inside her. He kept her wet face against his shoulder, not daring to move, not daring any longer to tell lies, looking out, like herself, to the dark and distant sea and listening for the first time to the words she was speaking to him in the unknown language of silence.

Two strangers forced them apart by opening the door against which they were leaning. As soon as the door was closed, she came back and nestled against him.

It was later, much later, that she whispered his name and turned her face up to kiss him.

That same evening Paul told his mother about the girl. It seemed to him that he had waited for this moment for years. Half reclining on the sofa, her features drawn in painful surprise, she listened without understanding. It was impossible. It was quite impossible. Walking up and down in the drawing room, a lock of hair falling over his forehead, his hands in his pockets, he smiled as he described the events of the last few days. He seemed suddenly bigger and stronger, and when she dared whisper—oh, quite, quite feebly, and with a voice so strange to herself—that he “was sick,” he went into gales of laughter, a laughter she had never known, with his head thrown back and his eyes peering at her with savage determination.

—Sick, he cried out, sick?

He went on laughing, laughing, laughing . . . Was he not enough afraid? Would he suddenly run away, so that she could never catch up with him? He put on a calmer expression for a short time without taking his eyes off her, and slowly he came closer.

—Sick? he repeated. —So what?

Then, again laughing and laughing, he went on pacing the room, his pallid, delicate face drawn forward. So far she had stuck fast to her attitude of incredulity. It was too unexpected, too absurd; too many years had gone by, mother and son, all those dinners, and the cough, cough, cough.

—That girl? That awful girl? But why? Why?



She was clinging to the sofa, getting back some of her vitality. Surely, he was not strong enough. All this was nothing but a joke.

—Why? he said. —Not to see you any more, isn't that enough? This girl or another . . . it's all the same to me.

—And you want to marry her? But what of me? And the family? Are you crazy?

Now he had stopped laughing, but his eyes kept that strange expression of disgust and ferocity.

—The family, he said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

—And I, your mother? Do you realize how much it hurts?

—Are you trying to move me? he replied.

She was stunned. One could hear the big clock in the hall ticking reassuringly. Everything was quiet, that game was finished. He watched her in silence, and went to sit in the arm-chair by the fireplace.

—Have you made up your mind? he heard her say behind him.

Her voice was very calm, but broken. He smiled inwardly, looking beyond the closed windows, at peace with himself as never before.

—I have made up my mind.

She did not move. She did not cry. He felt behind his back that she was quite still, as if dead already, suffering from her helplessness and unable to stem the flood of her own memories. But could she be thinking at all? Even memory must have faltered. Nothing had happened. This too was dead. Nothing would happen any more.

—And you will leave me? she added angrily.

—Certainly. Am I not old enough?

He did not turn his head. He had thought that there would be much to tell, much to confess for the first time—but their glances had been enough. When she got up, he did not move. She went slowly to the door and stopped before opening it.

—So it was that, she said. —And you hate me? But you are ill, you are lost. What will this "fiancée" of yours say, when she learns about your health?

She tried to smile, but could not. Her features were taut, and all her wickedness, all her resentment rushed to her face and to her eyes.

—So what? he replied.

—You won't last long, you know.

He shrugged his shoulders again and smiled.

—And you, will you last long? he asked.

She opened the door, turning to him once more:

—I shall speak to her. You will not leave!

He noticed that she was trembling, ghastly and very old against the door.

—I shall speak to her, she repeated.

But he did not reply. She could not reach him any more.  
—Paul? she said.

He stopped seeing and hearing her. Colombo, Singapore, the islands—maybe they meant escape from her: not to see, not to hear her any more, to leave her alone with her egoism and hatred, to kill her from afar through silence. She went out noiselessly and he listened to her walking up to her room, leaning heavily on the bannisters. She would begin now to realize what had happened, with this vision clinging to her brain like a bad dream, which she would vainly try to unravel until her last day.

Later, doubled up, unable to breathe, he was almost glad to be coughing endlessly. It was pleasant to feel sick, but alive, and to know that it was no longer important.

—And you, will you last long? he had said.

It was very well to have said that to her.

That night, from Saturday to Sunday, the wind swept Monte Carlo, raised the waves on the sea and chased the bad weather away. Paul did not sleep much. Lying on his bed, his body moist with perspiration, he tried to guess the thoughts that were oppressing his mother. No noises came from the other rooms. But he knew she could not be asleep. Like himself, she must be remembering and stirring up her hatred. Tomorrow, there would be another scene, and then another. Until he left she would not own defeat. His decision was too sudden for her to yield easily. Few words would be exchanged, but each of them would be full of that deadly resentment which neither he nor she had ever admitted before. Even their silences would not spare them. She would soon find her smile again, ironical and persistent. Once the masks were thrown away, each would have to look at the other's frightening face, day after day, hour after hour, and fight it out.

He listened to the wind grappling with the window shutters and she must have been listening too, straining to hear the harsh, raucous cough that she knew so well, the cough he would not be able to endure all alone. He would call for her, as he had always done before, and she would stroke his forehead with a deceptively loving hand. What an occasion for her to make him even more dejected! But no, he would keep his head under the pillow, he would check his breath: his pain and fear would belong to him alone.

When finally he was about to fall asleep, he perceived the first signs of dawn. The wind had ceased to blow and the sky was clear. Slowly each separate thing in his room took on its familiar shape, and he felt secure. Another day, he said to himself, and everything is so simple. A reddish tinge was creeping onto the windowpanes and he imagined without hearing them all the noises of morning.

"The distressing dawn," he thought.

Tonight he would see Simone again, he would tell her about his health before his mother could speak to her. The girl would listen to him, and he could see already her affectionate face, like the face of a delighted frog, and that incredible hat with the feathers. The girl, silly, stupid; his mother; his escape. For years, he had let his shoulders droop, he had closed his soul to every voice. And there was now no voice, no call. Everything stayed quiet and empty, Simone, Simone, the words of love, the poets and the coral reefs. He must stand unmoved upon his own grave and mock this octopus which was living in the next room. Mock her—he must be glad and proud of his own pain. Death, sails and sky, all this was immutable, the sea, and this life, and the coral reefs.

O Lord, the coral reefs, and the silence . . .

During the bad season, Paul decided that his meetings with the girl should have a more formal character, and several times he invited Simone to the villa. He found pleasure in these visits, upon which the presence of his mother bestowed a constant uneasiness. All through the long afternoons, the three of them would sit in the drawing room, each one trying to be as charming as possible, while avoiding the topic of marriage. Lady Foley's attitude was quite undefinable. She did not seem to resent the girl and was perfectly correct with her.

At night, Paul remained alone with his mother, and each word spoken took on added significance, each word led to others, solid and hard as blows. She spoke of the past, she recalled his father and himself, as if everything were already dead between them. She kept herself as remote as possible from her son, sometimes lifting her head to look at him, to see him once more, and letting it fall back again, as if nobody were there, as if she had seen only a fleeting shadow. And while she tried every day to make fun of him, wounding and torturing him expertly when she discussed his lungs—he did not mind it at all: he knew his mother was killing herself in the process.

He caught a cold that winter, and had to stay in bed. As in other years, he now had to suffer his mother's somber solicitude, tempered with sarcasm. Perhaps she hoped that he would die, that everything would be finished for him before her own finish. When he asked for a doctor, she seemed so happy to see him own to defeat, that he did not want to insist.

That same day she had an access of cheerfulness and kept on watching him until evening with amused eyes. He learned why the next day.

In the morning, the main door opened and he heard somebody coming up the stairs with his mother. But it was a stranger who entered the room, a lean man in black, who never understood why this boy with the beautiful face, pale and woe-ful upon the pillow, had watched him in surprise and terror, and turned savagely to the wall before bursting into tears.

He had asked for a physician. She had brought him a priest.

From this day on, he clung to Simone and avoided scenes. He knew he could not trust himself until he was married, and in the presence of his mother he kept an attitude of mute indifference. He listened to her; he sensed the meaning of her words, of her smiles, and even of her silences. But he did not try to intensify her distress and her resentment. Soon, very soon, she would be alone, forever alone, and disconsolate at keeping only a part of her son's memories, while he himself was manufacturing new ones, from which she would be excluded. This, more than anything else, would be unbearable to her: to know him beyond the reach of her power, with another woman, creating memories unshared by her, all their own, all his own. When he was a child, she hated even his toys and somehow always managed to break them absent-mindedly. She was used to seeing each thing he saw, to touching everything as he touched it. One day his father had left her, for other women, for other memories. But the son had remained, with the same memories, with the same face, and she had been able to find again what she had lost; she had kept him in front of her, far from her heart, and transferred to him all her hatred of that other one—so soft, so beautiful, in the shadows of a past she could never forget. Now she would witness once more the flight of a man, and it was not her son she would be losing, but the image of that other one.

She grew more and more restless as spring came nearer. Suddenly full of spirit, and just as suddenly depressed, she was wasting away and still she flared up daily, like one who is dying and yet finds new strength in his very agony. And the words, the words! . . . She was bringing them out, and furnishing them with care. And losing all hope, when they failed to make any impression upon that indifference.

A week before her son's marriage, she left Monte Carlo and returned to England, to the old house in Cornwall where she had lived so many years, and the silence of which she would not be able to bear—intolerable silence, heavy with all the noises, all the whispers of the past.

After his mother's departure, Paul sold the villa. He went to a doctor who advised him not to marry, and to enter a sanatorium instead; but he had accepted his condition a long time ago, and needed no respite and no mercy.

Only a few of Simone's relatives were present at the marriage. The ceremony was brief, without much color, and almost soothing to him. When he returned with his wife to the villa where Etienne was packing their bags, he wished to go along the harbor and look at the sea. The sky was light above the water, so light he did not dare to lift his eyes.

They went to Savoy after the marriage. They had planned

a long honeymoon in the Orient, but Paul's health would not allow it. They had to postpone this journey to the East, and rented a tiny chalet on the mountainside, perched high above a silent village. They spent some time furnishing it and setting up a home which would be pleasant enough to make them forget Monte Carlo. During the first few weeks, Paul almost felt as if he had buried the past, and was starting a new life.

The young woman was affectionate, more affectionate with him than anybody had ever been. She was always moving through the small rooms of the chalet, constantly at his elbow, not leaving him alone with his thoughts for a moment, and he got almost used to the sweetness of this presence without subterfuge. She seemed to have gained a happiness beyond utterance, and sometimes, at night, she was afraid of the dark, as if she needed every minute to make sure that all this had really happened, that he was still with her. She did her best to be pleasant, she smiled when he smiled and got upset as soon as she was alone. All this was so new to him that he almost stopped playing the comedy, almost fell really in love with her.

Almost. He got tired soon. At the end of spring, without knowing it, without the shadow of a quarrel between them, he started to feel uneasy, to feel bored.

The weather was glorious, the sky burnished by a few brief showers. But the village of Araches, far down below the chalet, took on such red hues at dusk that the young man, one evening, suddenly had a vision of the sun plunging to crimson death in the darkening sea.

He thought that the sea and the sun were all he missed. He bought maps and atlases in the village, and even brought back an old, ugly painting representing a most classical "Sunset on the Ocean." In the hardware store he found a box of oil paints and tried to touch up the picture, to add the certain something which he missed. But he was no painter, and soon he threw the thing away in disgust.

One morning, when she came home after shopping in Araches, Simone found her husband near the fireplace in the living room. He was burning the picture. Motionless, as if he were feeling sick, with his head down and one hand against the wall, he stood there for a long time, without a word, watching the fire die down. When he turned back to her and hid his face in her shoulder, she did not dare to ask him what had happened.

The couple spent two weeks on the Côte d'Azur in summer, then returned to Araches. Paul's health did not improve and they could not go to live in Paris as they had wished. But this did not matter; something else was obsessing him.

What was his mother doing? What was she thinking now?

For a long time, he had hoped for a letter, for some token which would remind him of their quarrels; but since his marriage there had not been a word from her. As time went by, he could not escape the mysterious grip of remembrance. Separation, for which he had longed so much, was becoming unbearable: she did not reach out to him any more, she was dead in his heart, but she was rotting in it and poisoning it. She used the weapon he himself had chosen; now it was she who was out of reach.

Summer was very hot that year, hot and dreary, all through the mountains. After dusk, when night was falling down on the village and the woods, he went out with Simone and walked away from the chalet. Sitting down near the edge of the road, they chatted a little, then were silent, pressed together and holding each other's hands. But then, with his back bent and his long legs outstretched, he would peer into the darkness beyond the hills, chewing at his pipe and feeling the bitter taste of an ancient hatred. His pipe was unlit, as always, and he had to fight this dreadful silence again. He wanted to write to his mother and to hurt her once more. One morning, when Simone was not there, he did write. But he did not send the letter. His mother would have been only too glad to receive it. The thing to do was to wait a little longer. She too would not be able to resist forever this separation, which did not allow her to hit back; soon she would miss him, his coughing, the opportunity to hurt him. She was alone. Some day, she would stop holding in her hatred, she would refuse to die without watching him die, she would give up hoping for an impossible return and straining her ears for sounds that had vanished. One day, sooner or later, if only he kept waiting, she would not be able to stand it any longer, she would break this wall of silence.

He waited.

From his trip to the Riviera he had brought back a great many maps. Simone had invented a game. For hours, taking turns, they threw dice and moved diminutive squares. The winner was the one who reached Colombo first, or Singapore, or the Leeward Islands. They could follow any route, call at any harbor, listen to the music of exotic names. The game fascinated him. She too liked it, seeing him so quiet and serious while they played. He believed in it, apparently, and she believed in it too. He made his ship follow a devious route, missing no harbor, and was so relaxed and happy that he continued to smile even when he coughed and swallowed his drugs.

But when he was not at his maps, he went on remembering. Each morning, at the letter box, there was the same frustration. His mother would write, this was quite sure, but when? Once more he tore up a long letter he had almost sent her to break the silence.

Simone used to watch him when he was thus pensive and remote from her. But she never asked questions. She drew near him, nestling in his arms, not quite able to understand.

—I am here, darling, she used to say. —I am quite near.

He did not reply, lost in distant dreams. She kissed him, and he did not notice. She insisted, kissed him again.

—I am happy! But he did not hear.

At the end of the summer, Paul had his thirtieth birthday. They went to Chamonix, where Paul had never been; the snow in summer was something quite new to him. Simone left him at the hotel for an hour and returned with her arms full of flowers. She also brought him a gift, a large, heavy box which she put on the bed. She stepped back when he wanted to kiss her.

—Open it first, darling.

He tore away the wrapping.

—Can't you tell me what it is?

He was afraid to open the box. He felt uneasy and foolish, and she read bewilderment in his eyes.

—Open, don't be afraid! I think you will like it.

He hesitated. Something unknown quickened his pulse. What if he did not find the proper smile? What if he disappointed her?

—Open, she insisted. —If you don't like it, I will not be cross. I will give you something else—anything you want.

She came near him, put an arm around his waist. She seemed shy and upset, she was blushing, and he knew that something was happening which would presently draw them close together.

He finally opened the box and saw at first only a jumble of plywood, metal rods and wooden cubes. Then he understood. He took her in his arms with an impetuosity that surprised her.

—I never thought of it! he exclaimed, and smothered her with kisses. —And *you* did, *you* did!

But this could not be expressed in words. He stopped talking and kissed her again, on the forehead, on the eyes, and finally, almost quietly, on the lips. She was laughing now against his shoulder, and closing her eyes, and her subdued laughter seemed close to tears. All at once, how beautiful she was!

—We shall build them together, she said. —Big, big ships.

He drew away as abruptly as he had embraced her, took hold of the ship-model box, put it on the floor near the window and went down on his knees like a child, spreading the contents all over the rug.

The sight of all these small things around him made him laugh and cry out in delight. He turned to Simone, as if suddenly remembering her presence. She stood near the bed, still

smiling, and in her eyes there was a touching tenderness. He wanted to say something when he saw her eyes, something that would convey the unfamiliar feelings welling up in him, which were blotting out the ugliness of the world, erasing the days. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, that he was happy—that or anything else. But there were no words. He only shook his head, and without getting up stretched out his hand toward her.

—Come to me, he cried out, come to me . . .

That evening, they had dinner in a restaurant. The place was empty, narrow and dimly lit. It was raining outside, and this made them feel closer to each other. They remembered the past. This woman was his own wife, she was the girl who had fled, one day, in the rain and who had wept, crumpled in an armchair, because she did not believe in happiness. Yet, now, in the soft shadows, she was sitting in front of him, her elbows on the table, whispering the reassuring words which lovers whisper.

He did not find it strange any more. Listening to his wife, he enjoyed more calm in a single evening than he had experienced in his whole life. Her quiet well-being enveloped him as she spoke. She was telling a story, possibly their own story, but he was not listening to the words, he was not trying to understand them. Probably he knew them too, the plain, silly words, buried so deep in some corner of his heart that it would take another few minutes to recognize them. They could not be unknown to him. He could not mistake their rhythm and their melancholy vibration. Were they not those very words which he had whispered to himself, a long time ago, in the dreadful nights of loneliness?

Later, he coughed and took her hand.

—Do you feel well? she asked.

—Much better than usual. In fact, I never felt so well.

—You do not regret . . . ?

—Regret what?

—Having married me, she said. —At first, you were so remote, you seemed so strange.

—I am through with that. I feel so well with you.

He had lost his taste for lasting, bitter resentment.

For a while he felt weak enough, happy enough to tell her everything, to ease his burden by speaking of his mother. But he was unable to break the spell, and his pain seemed to him so negligible now that he thought of it without rebellion, with a kind of inner shrug.

At that moment a gypsy entered the restaurant and walked toward them. She had a brown face, with showy make-up in red, black and blue, and enormous dark eyes. Her step was noiseless and carefree, her arms swinging with her body, her head bent a little to one side. She replied in a low voice to the



owner, a little old woman seated in the back of the restaurant, who wanted her "customers to be left alone." Then the gypsy came over to Paul, put her two hands on the table and began speaking very fast with such a strong foreign accent that it was impossible to follow her.

—No, no, said Paul, and shook his head.

Simone was smiling, and shook her head too when the gypsy glanced at her.

—You do not want to learn about your future? the woman asked. —I shall find very nice things in your hand.

—Don't bother, said Paul.

—Are you afraid? Give me your hand. I already see things in your face.

He looked at Simone and smiled.

—You do not believe? asked the gypsy.

She explained that one *should* believe, that she foretold the truth, that many fake gypsies were spoiling the business, but that she herself was truly from Bohemia and did it very well.

—Of course, laughed Simone, of course!

—You too do not believe?

—Not in the least, said Simone. —And then, it isn't fun to know the future. I don't want to know it.

—I see many things for you, replied the woman. —But I know: you are afraid. You should not be afraid, what must happen shall happen. Let's start!

They laughed, a little uneasy at her insistence. Was her accent also genuine? She kept her hands on the table and Simone gave her a cigarette.

—So, do we start?

—Don't bother, said Paul again.

—You should say yes!

—I know.

The gypsy sighed, and was about to leave. Then she looked at him again with her large dark eyes. Her long silk dress, in gaudy green and red, smelled of incense and filth. Paul drew away a little, still smiling and watching his wife.

—All right, he finally said. —She will get us anyhow in the end.

He put out his left hand.

—You will not be sorry, said the gypsy.

—Of course not, said Simone.

But when the woman had left, he could have been sorry for the loss of the strange quiet of that day—had he but thought of it.

Once more, the face of his mother, full of scorn, invaded his mind. Hatred and distress seized him again, the calm he had felt since morning was giving way to a savage joy. Maybe something was true, after all, in the gypsy's tale. She had spoken at length, and he had laughed—of money, happiness and love, the usual stuff of star-gazers. But could she not have

discovered, in some mysterious way, something that was true?

She had read the death of a relative in his hand.

The next day, the bus brought them back to Araches. Walking up to the chalet, Paul leaned on the arm of his wife and felt more and more the weight of the previous night; while Simone was searching her handbag for the key to the door, he did not dare to look at the letter box. In the living room, he stretched out on a couch. He felt cold. Simone was making coffee in the kitchen, and he tried to forget his mother, to still the anxiety of his heart. A letter must be here, her letter, and he could imagine the broad, tired writing, the short, irregular lines, the last words which she had thrown at him, across the silence. But what could she add? When Simone brought him a cup of hot coffee, he had lost even the appearance of quietness. His face was ghastly, and she went to fetch him a blanket.

—We must look into the box, he whispered, when she came back.

He did not recognize his own voice. Was she appealing to him in vain, kneeling down and beseeching him—on paper? Had she put aside her weapons, her relentless smile, and bowed her head, waiting for a gesture of pity that he would not make?

—The box? asked Simone.

—There must be a letter.

She understood and went out without a word. It was not a letter. She came back with a cable that she tried to hide. He raised himself a little and took it from her, and she sat down at his side.

—Don't read it at once, she said.

But he knew already. He opened the cable without hesitating, so fast that his heart missed a beat. He did not read the words, the words leaped at him.

He tried to imagine his mother during her last moments, and he let the paper fall to the rug. He tried to see her, motionless and dark, hunched over in an armchair which was closing down on her; he tried to recapture once more the sound of her voice, and the words that she used to pronounce while watching him with her hungry eyes.

So many years, so many years—and the words, the voice, the smile, everything was dead, ridiculously dead. He remembered a kiss. It must have been so long ago that he did not know whether he should laugh or cry. She had kissed him one day, and he recalled that day, and his mother; and by and by, everything else became a bad dream, opaque and divorced from life. For an instant, so brief that he was hardly conscious of it, he recaptured her face and her manner.

—Oh, look, look! . . .

Her features rigid in death, she would stand upright among all the furniture and knickknacks she loved. And her wrinkled

forehead would bend toward him, in nightmare after nightmare, her smile would haunt him and pull him back to the past. But no, she was dead, and the smile had died with her. This priest who had come one day, this priest, and so many words, so much pride, resentment and silence . . .

Remembering, he looked down at the cable, and felt against his shoulder Simone's arm which pressed him to her. He re-read the words, the inexorable words for which he had hoped so many months, and which Etienne—bald head, veins standing out on the temples—had written out for him in a telegraph office. Then, slowly, he relaxed and lay back.

He had no feeling for her any more. One night, quietly, she had bowed her head and somebody later found her dead. But all joy had gone, all hatred of her.

—Do you want me to leave you alone? Simone whispered against his cheek.

—No, no, it doesn't matter. Stay with me.

—I am sorry, my darling . . .

—Sorry?

—It pains me for you.

She embraced him more tightly, and he bent his head toward the rug, reading that cable again. It had been so brief and sudden. She had said nothing, nothing. She had remained alone, she had waited, and died—smothered by hatred and silence.

—It does not matter, he repeated.

He considered Simone, on the couch, with her big body all crumpled up, and he took the cable. He made a ball of it and threw it into the ashes of the fireplace.

—How did it happen? she asked.

One must talk, talk, talk. One must talk until the end of time, every day and every night, listen to all the world's noises and chase out the awful silence of a life, of a heart, of a love.

—It is nothing. It had to happen.

—Was she ill?

—No. It was worse than that.

Simone seemed quite upset. Her voice was dull and trembling. She was afraid for him, that was it. He took her in his arms, pressed her to him as tightly as he could, and suddenly began to laugh. The sky, the sky, the villa, the stone steps and the priest she had brought! And it was she who was gone! He laughed, all alone, feeling miserable, laughing and remembering, and hoping that it really didn't matter, that the sun would come back and that he would forget. Simone kept him in her arms, repeating in her lowest voice the soothing words one uses with animals and children—while he went on laughing: "O Lord, Lord, what a story!", laughing with his forehead on his wife's shoulder, unable to bear any longer the rending of his heart.

Later, still laughing and laughing, he shrugged his shoulders, like a little child, and started to cry.

In the evening, he sat down on the doorstep. He called Simone, and she came to kiss him. Then she remained standing, trying to smile, and he took her by the hand and made her sit at his side.

—Stay near me, he said. —Would you care for a walk on the road?

—Now? she replied. —I thought we would go after dinner, darling. But we could do it now, if you wish.

—No, no. Stay here. We will go later.

He drew his legs nearer to Simone's, and kept her hand in his.

—How do you feel? she asked.

—Very well, now.

—Do you want anything?

—No, I am very well. It was so sudden, but now it belongs to the past.

—You will go there alone for the funeral?

He did not reply at once.

—I shall not go, he said after a little while. —There will be a lot of relatives to take care of all that. They do not need me.

—What will they think?

—I don't care what they think!

She smiled, put her cheek on his shoulder.

—As you wish. It would not be pleasant for me to stay without you, alone.

—You will not be alone. We will be happy together.

—Certainly, she exclaimed and kissed him. —Didn't the gypsy say so yesterday?

She gave a little laugh, in self-disparagement, and glanced at him. She regretted her remark at once, for he had turned pale.

—Oh, don't be angry, my darling! It was stupid of me . . .

He was shaking his head. It did not matter at all.

—I was not thinking of that, she said.

—I know. And then, gypsies' words do not make much sense. The cable has already been sent yesterday morning, when we were in Chamonix. That girl did not foresee anything: it had already happened.

He fell silent and shook his head again.

— . . . it had already happened, he repeated.

The sun spread gold on the treetops along the road and there was a pink and yellow glimmer behind the village. Soon, maybe in an hour, it would be night.

Fall had come. Paul spent entire days making ship models and Simone had to buy him two more boxes of building materials.

—How serious you are! she used to tell him.

Gluing, hammering with zest, he seemed to have lost all notion of time. He was surprised at each sunset, surprised at the lights that were switched on, at the need of wearing warmer clothes, of putting aside for the night the plywood and the wires.

—One would think you were building real ships, she remarked.

Then she took his face in both her hands and stroked his neck, as if to warn him that it could not be real, that one night he would tire of it all and cease to believe. But he kept his eyes on the brightly painted, diminutive hulls.

—No, he objected, it is quite real.

Their fondness for each other, since that trip to Chamonix, had been growing steadily. When night came, he would caress her with more abandon; in the darkness of their room, he would be closer to her than he had ever been, he would whisper words he had never uttered before.

In this chalet, perched above Araches like a bird's nest, he grew accustomed to a warm feeling of seclusion. He even found pleasure in it. He was forever asking for a glass of milk, for a cup of coffee, for an extra blanket; and often it was pure caprice. Simone was always on the move, and did not neglect him for a moment. In the mornings, when she went shopping in the village, she always hurried back, making sure that the road, the doorstep, the chalet were still there, that he was still there. When she had been out for an hour, one could see it on his face, in his gestures; his ghost of a smile, a slight nod of his head would say to her plainly: "How I missed you, you were far away, and I was left alone."

Winter came.

The village, drowsy in the cold air, was waiting for the snow to fall. It came on an evening, softly, unhurriedly, through the woods and down the road. The trees were bare and black, the sky was dark above the church tower. From time to time, as if muffled by a white blanket, the bells were chiming through the windows of the chalet, and the panes were greenish and misty, like portholes.

—Where are we? Paul wondered. —Nobody will disturb us any more, winter will have no end. We have traveled too far.

He had to stay in bed again, as he had the previous winter in Monte Carlo, but he was not really ill. Fever brightened his face, parted his lips, made his eyes shine.

—Stay with me, he would say, —lest I should go, lest I should die suddenly, without your knowing it . . .

And his smile had the fascination of the smile of the dead. He liked to have her near him, to have her read aloud to him. Even if he did not listen. He would spend hours without saying a word, but he was close to her as never before.

—You could not die, whispered Simone, you are too nice and beautiful to go away and leave me.

She took good care of his beauty, and tried to protect it as best she could. She had learned to shave him, to comb his hair. She even wanted, despite his protests, to perfume all his body with Eau de Cologne. When he expressed some surprise at the pleasure she seemed to find in touching the skin of his shoulders, in kissing his smooth body, she held still for a moment, as if grieved.

—It is because your beauty must do for both of us, she replied.

Whereupon she embraced him so tightly, so desperately, that he did not dare break the silence and beg her to forgive him.

But she gave little thought to herself. Always dressed in a skirt and sweater, her long hair drawn tightly to the nape of her neck, she never looked at her face in the mirror. He teased her: they would never be able to spend all the money he had, she should buy herself dresses and jewelry. But she merely laughed at his teasing.

—The nicest dress would do me no good, darling; jewelry would make me ridiculous. I don't want to be ridiculous.

He tried to tell her that she was not bad looking, that dresses would make her look even better. She did not listen. In the chalet a skirt and sweater would do. She had no desire for fine clothes.

—Don't you like me as I am?

—Oh yes, I do. And you know it!

He was quite surprised to realize that this was not a lie. She was not ugly any more, she could not be. He had even come to like the irregular features of her face, to love her tightly-drawn hair, and the way she walked. All that had seemed unattractive in her had vanished after their year together. And he was aware that this was due not so much to his being used to her; but to her fondness, her thirst for him, and to the gracious ways of love she had found without having to learn.

Then spring came. Paul and Simone went out again for their evening walks. In the clear twilight they sat again near the footpath, huddled against each other on the doorstep of the chalet, or walked in silence through the surrounding woods. They knew few people in the village, and Paul hardly ever went there. Before the trees put out their first buds, some of Paul's relatives who had spent the winter in France came to visit them in Araches. But they were received with such evident coldness that they did not stay long.

One day, Paul received a letter from Etienne, who was still looking for suitable employment. There were a few words about Lady Foley and the last moments of her life. But this reminder of the past did not move him as he had feared. He read the letter without a stirring of hatred for the departed, and he did not reply. Instead, he sent to Etienne a small pack-

age of tobacco, hoping he would understand. And that was all. He felt only a fleeting uneasiness—which would disappear, he thought, which would disappear like that nostalgia for the past seasons, for the lost years.

One afternoon in June, Simone left the chalet and was away for three hours. He learned then how much he could miss her. When she came back, she went straight to her room and threw herself on her bed. He reproached her for being so late, but she interrupted him with a half-smile.

—But you should listen to me.

He listened. She had gone to the doctor. It was not on his account. It was something else, and he would soon know. But would he be happy to learn it? She was afraid he would not. While she was talking, he drew near, watching her face, and after a time this very face seemed to fade away. The room, the bed, Simone, everything faded into a marvelous, overwhelming darkness. His fingers clenched the sheets, he was listening now but not hearing, unable to stir, petrified, his lips moving without a sound. Could it be true? She seemed to be quite certain. The physician could not be wrong. But was it really so? She spoke plainly, repeating herself several times, holding out her hand to him, wondering at his silence. Then she started to explain again, believing he had not understood her. But it was all very remote. He saw again the face of his mother, he recalled the kiss she had given him one day, and so many, many other things . . . He felt like taking his head in both his hands, to try to put some order into his own mind.

—You did not want it? she asked.

He was looking at her all the time, but had to make an effort in order to smile, to see her—"Her . . . my God, it is true, she and I."

He threw himself upon her, thinking, "This is Colombo, this is Singapore, everything may yet happen, someone will go there—not myself, but one who *is* myself." Then he drew back suddenly:

—Are you sure? he exclaimed. —Are you absolutely certain?

She was laughing, taking him in her arms like a child, like a child . . .

—What a fool you are making of yourself, she said in a very low voice. —And so you are happy? Tell me, are you happy?

—Happy! . . .

He was kissing her, laughing with her. It was not happiness, it was not a mere word, a phrase, something having a name. It did not belong to this present time, to this world—it was both of them, she and he, already, still and again, she and he.

—And are you feeling well? he asked. —How do you feel?

—I am very well. Do not worry, my darling. I was so afraid you would not like it. But now I am very well indeed.

Something had to be done. But what? What *does* one do? Maybe one should think about it, just think so hard that it cannot fail to happen, just believe in it so much that some day it will become real and alive.

—Above all, don't get tired!

Did he cry aloud? He went on laughing and kissing her, suddenly afraid of pressing her too hard against his own body; then he let his fingers slide along her breasts, and her belly.

But it could not be there yet. One could not feel it.

They lived in this hope.

Paul made plans, and displayed a cheerfulness such as his wife had never known in him. He wanted to leave Araches at the proper time, and go to Paris, where she would enter the best available hospital, have the best surgeons. During the following months, he did not cease for a moment to think and worry about the child. It would certainly be a boy.

Simone let herself be carried away by this exuberant happiness. She shared his dreams, following him into a future of which, in the secrecy of her heart, she was somehow afraid. Sometimes she missed the quietness which they had enjoyed together, and resented his thinking only of the child. How would they educate him? What name would they give him? These were questions he considered every day. He was immersed in them for hours at a time, and when he came up with an answer, he would burst with joy, then fall silent for a long time, and finally yield to utter depression.

—No, no, this is not the name we want. Everybody is called Philippe. As for Patrice, it sounds affected.

He had discovered a new world, and discovered it by mere chance. He would not have dared believe in its existence, it was so strange. That it could belong to him—no, this was beyond imagination. Paul remembered his game, the earth and the sea: there were so many things to teach the child when he came, so many things to tell him and try to reach again, and try not to miss this time—all the ships, the memories, the dreams that his father (“My God, his *father!*”) had seen carried away on the great waves which no one could possibly stop.

He forbade her to walk too much, to move about too much in the chalet, to rise too early in the morning. It was a new form of tyranny.

—My poor dear! Simone used to say. —And what if it is a girl?

—Never mind. We shall call her Virginie, Paul said.

A girl or a boy, it was all one to him. There would soon be a little creature, a living being all his own, another self, who



would be trotting around, laughing, trying to strike matches, a sweet miracle on earth, a sweet miracle of man and God.

The morning they left, a bleak and cold morning in a silent countryside, the words they spoke in closing up the chalet were almost like a prayer.

—Will we come back? said Simone.

He put his arm around her, while the man from the village carried their bags down the road to the bus stop.

—Will we come back?

—We will, he answered. —The three of us.

—I am afraid.

He pushed her softly away from the door and made her turn her face toward the road.

—Come, he said. —We are not abandoning our home.

—And if we never come back, if we have other plans?

She was going down the footpath, leaning on his arm, wanting to look back, and not daring to.

—It won't be long, he answered. —We will come back soon, and find everything here as we left it.

—I am afraid, she repeated.

When the bus started, she was still pressing her forehead against the window, while Paul, at her side, forgot for a moment the reason for their departure and felt a pang of regret, even of revolt. On the hillside, the empty chalet was growing smaller behind them, remaining discouragingly motionless, and at a turn of the road it had become so lonely and small that they did not even notice its disappearance.

—It was so beautiful, said Simone.

She took his hand. They closed their eyes.

In Paris, they rented a suite in a hotel near the Madeleine. The windows looked on the boulevards, and the intense life of the sidewalk made Paul nervous. He had taken his ship models with him, but his mind was not on them. He stayed with his wife, unable to hide his growing impatience, and it was she who had to cheer him up. Simone did not want to go out. It was December, and there was a dry cold in the air, but no snow. But this was not the reason. It was because she was ashamed of her appearance.

He smiled when she dared admit it to him. He would have liked to make everyone aware of her big belly, to walk around with her, holding her firmly and confidently by the arm. But she was willing to walk only a few steps, for the sake of her health. She felt uneasy even with the doctors; in fact she found them unbearable.

The physician from the nearby maternity hospital, which she preferred to enter as late as possible, came to visit her. He found her in good health, somewhat nervous, but otherwise quite well. That evening she wanted to go out to a restaurant

and see people; she had a little champagne, which made her feel gay at once. Paul noticed that the light from the big chandeliers was reflected in her eyes.

At night she was restless in her bed. He would kiss her, and sometimes she wouldn't even wake up. Then he would watch her for a few minutes, and lie down again with his eyes wide open in the dark.

On Christmas eve, she was taken to the hospital. He stayed at her bedside until evening, biting his nails. At seven, unable to stand her first moanings, he went out for a walk.

Well after midnight, he met the doctor at the door of her room. Even before Paul was able to ask a question, he was reassured.

—She is quite all right. You will be able to see her in a little while, but for the time being let her rest.

—There has been no trouble?

—None at all. It went well.

—And he?

—He? Oh, but it is a girl . . .

—A *girl*? said Paul, stressing the word, enjoying its wonderful sweetness.

—And . . . is she all right too?

The doctor did not avert his eyes.

—Not so well, he answered.

—Is she . . . ?

—No. But she is not doing so well.

For a moment, Paul found nothing to say. He had thought of everything except that.

—But she will live? She may live?

—The baby?

—Yes.

—Perhaps, said the doctor. One can never tell. She is not doing so well, that is all.

He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, watching Paul, and finally he took him by the arm. Paul asked:

—May I see the baby?

It was shown to him. Something darkly red, still and grotesque among all these nurses in white. Paul looked at it, his head bursting, and he felt his legs going limp. The doctor steadied him.

—It must, it must live!

The doctor did not reply, but shook his head and led Paul out of the room. In the hall, Paul let himself down on a bench, his face in his hands, repeating the same words in a low voice, as if to say to himself: "I am not guilty."

—Try to be calm, said the doctor.—You know we shall do our best.

—It is so ugly, so ugly . . . One would never believe it was alive.

—But it is, replied the doctor.

And he gave him a gentle pat on the shoulder:

—And maybe it will look like its father. In that case, you would have a very good-looking daughter.

Paul had not even the strength to cry. He just rested his neck on the back of the bench, and opened his eyes in profound wonder.

—A good-looking daughter, he repeated.

The child died three days later.

In early January, Paul stopped seeing anyone. Locked up in his rooms with the ship models, he choked under the weight of memories he felt unable to escape. Simone had come back alone from the hospital. She found him somber and dejected, stretched out in his room on the rug, with empty eyes and a face that had grown ten years older. She had come to him with open hands, but without bringing him what he had wanted for months. Now he wanted nothing else. When she came in, he looked up at the door, hardly noticing her, and fell back again into that stupor in which he had been ever since he had learned of the baby's death.

In these rooms, with their windows on the boulevards closed, he meditated with a bitterness of which he had believed himself cured. His child grew out of time, out of space, out of the world of men, it grew up, then became very young again, very ill, and it died every day.

He ceased talking almost entirely. She watched him with her small, closely-set eyes, and knew in advance each of his gestures. At night, when she went to bed and stretched out at his side, he would move away a little, so as not to touch her, giving her no more importance than a shadow. And she seemed to accept her role. Every day, facing each other, they bowed their heads each upon a separate illusion, carried on in silence, in dismal monologue.

She came to him, one evening, and put her hand on his shoulder to try to recognize him, find him again. He looked up abruptly, and she read in his eyes so much surprise, such a mournful resentment, that she recoiled as though frightened. Then, with her head bowed, she left the room. When he saw her later, she wore her old face again, that same stupid, ugly face that had struck him when they first met.

Time itself did not seem to lessen Paul's grudge, and time failed to bring them closer together. The first days of January went by slowly, so slowly that he lost all notion of the passing hours, and waited at the closed windows, throughout the afternoons, for the sun to set, for night and peace to come.

Simone seemed resigned, despite his aloofness. Perhaps, she thought, he is too aggrieved to find the word, the gesture that could bring us together. Perhaps he is exaggerating his tor-

ment, and will come back soon, more confident and open than ever.

And she stood there, as calm and ugly as before, while the world fell apart once again.

But she was waiting, apparently. Later on, it would be easy to forget their behavior. Only the words counted, only words could smash the ties and destroy forever the hope of reconciliation.

He stopped building models. He took his meals outside the hotel. But she did not ask questions, did not look at him.

One night, tired of this depressing atmosphere, tired of himself, he went out and came back in the small hours of the morning, disheveled and stumbling. She was waiting in the drawing room, half asleep in an armchair. When the door creaked, she opened her eyes, lifted her face, and saw at once that he was drunk.

—Where have you been? she asked, and rose to her feet.

She spoke now in her voice of Monte Carlo, which he knew so well, a harsh, strong voice that stopped him in the middle of the room. She stood erect, her face tense and her arms behind her back, trying to hide from him the trembling of her hands.

—Well, can't you answer? Are you that drunk?

She took a step forward and he retreated, running his fingers through his hair.

—I was out, he replied.—You didn't miss me too much, did you?

She considered him silently, took hold of him when he tried to go away.

—I have a right to know, she repeated in a louder voice.—You haven't said a word to me for days, not a word, not a word! How much longer do you think I can stand it?

She paused for breath, and he slipped from her grasp, trying to make his way to the bedroom. But she followed him, seeking the quarrel which he now wanted to avoid. He stumbled against a table, reached the door and leaned against it.

—Good for you, he heard her saying at his back, good for your health, the way you are behaving!

She was speaking in a lower voice, more calmly, and he turned back to look at her. Only two steps away from him, she was standing by the table, leaning forward, her face very dark against the bright window. He could not make out her expression. The whiteness of the dawn was unbearable; he turned away and entered his room. She stepped forward again, overtaking him.

—Where have you been? she repeated.

The tone of her voice was more sorrowful than angry. She remained on the threshold, pale and trembling, and for a moment this sight made him so weak, so tired, that he wanted to

let himself go into her arms and feel her warmth again. But he did not move.

—I was out drinking.

—That much I know. But *why*?

This was the point she would press. He had known it on his way home. But he had known he would not have the strength, he would no longer be able to speak all the phrases he had so carefully prepared. He dismissed her question with a vague gesture.

—Leave me alone. Please, leave me alone.

But she would not leave him alone.

—Tell me *why*! I want to know.

He pushed her away gently, but she came back to him on the threshold and he had to push her away again to close the door. She got hold of the handle and started shouting. He locked the door.

—I want to know, do you hear me! I want to know what is going on!

She was sobbing now, at the door, and he retreated to the bed, hoping not to hear her voice.

—Is it my fault? she cried out through her tears.—Is it *my* fault?

He stood still, his chest hurting, his throat dry.

—Why do you act like this? Is it my fault? I did not want it, you know that!

—What is it you did not want? he called back loudly. Am I reproaching you with anything? I did not say a word to you.

—That's it, exactly.

She tried again to open the door, then pounded on it with her fists.

—Open, she cried, open to me!

He came to the door, stood in front of the lock without touching it. The dawn light was sliding between the curtains, playing on the walls.

—Leave me alone, I beg of you, he said.—We shall talk about it later.

—We must talk now. If it is because of the baby, we must talk now.

She fell silent for a moment, and he heard her breathing hard behind the door. She stopped crying and grew calmer.

—I thought we would have a baby, she said after a while. I thought we would be happy, all three of us. But it is not my fault that it died.

—Leave me alone, he said again.

—No, I will not. I have had enough of it.

She was quiet.

—I thought you were only grieving for the baby. But you did nothing to come back to me, and I know now that you hold it against me. I know it by the way you look at me.

He could not hear her very well, for she was speaking in a low voice, through the door.

—Listen, go to sleep. We shall speak of all this later. I can't stand it any more.

—You are drunk, she replied.—This is the way you are taking care of yourself. How can you expect to have a baby in such a condition?

He did not understand at once; all his fondness for her was gone, and his body felt so tired, so tired, that he had to seize the doorknob with both hands in order not to fall down.

—Are you crazy? he finally exclaimed.

—And what was the cause, in your opinion?

—You are crazy!

—Then ask the doctor, she rejoined, lifting her voice.  
—Ask him.

He pulled himself up, hit the door twice with his fists and threw himself against it. He must strike back, find his strength again; he could not let himself be knocked down, not by her.

—You filth! he said.

She did not reply. He only heard her nails scratching on the door, while her breathing grew shorter and harder.

—Paul, she said, please . . .

Again he beat his fists against the door, and then felt furious enough to open it, to throw himself at her and strike her. But he was overwhelmed by coughing. She spoke again when he started to cough, but he could not make out what she was saying.

—You filth! he repeated.

He thought she was laughing, but she was not.

—You are rotten, she said after a while, all rotten.

He could not listen to her any longer.

He threw himself down on the bed, his head in his arms, shaken by a nervous fit of coughing. In the other room she had started screaming again. He kept his face in his hands, wiped on the sheets the blood which was trickling from his lips, and tried in vain not to listen to her screams.

—Open the door, Paul, open the door!

He did not move. His head against the pillow, his heart full of unbearable hatred for her and for himself, he heard her, for a long time, pounding savagely on the door—and later, while she was still kicking against it, he wanted to get up, open the window and look at the rising sun. But his strength failed him.

He switched on the light at his bedside, and looked in fascination at his own blood on the sheets. She was tiring out, she was going away with slow steps, and he, watching the red blood of his lungs, remembered his mother and that little ball of lifeless flesh. It was morning. She was silent, she was gone, while he remained lying on the blankets, fully dressed, mo-

tionless, looking at his own blood. And even the light itself would not let him alone.

He went out of his room the next day. She seemed quite calm again. When he entered the drawing room, she was sitting in a corner, near the window, with a book on her knees. She did not look at him. He gave her a brief glance, his head withdrawn into his shoulders and his throat dry. He did not want to speak to her, but he was hungry.

—Is there anything to eat? he asked, with his back to her.

She did not answer. He stood still, looking down, waiting for a reply.

—I am hungry, he started again.

She must have shrugged her shoulders behind his back; at least, he would have done so in her place.

—There is your lunch on the sideboard, she said in a very low voice.—The one you did not eat yesterday. If you want it . . .

She was treating him now like a stranger, maybe like a small boy. Had she smiled while saying these few words? Had she looked up with a smile, to observe him and to notice his bent back, his drooping shoulders?

—I don't see any lunch, he replied harshly.

He saw the tray on the sideboard perfectly well. But suddenly he was not hungry any more. She did not move, she remained silent.

—I don't see it.

—On the sideboard, she said again.

She would not get up. She would never get up again. Her very movements belonged to the past, they were forgotten, they were dead. He went to the sideboard, touched it with his hands, and waited another moment before looking down at the tray. The wallpaper was pink. He hated this color. It seemed ridiculous in this spot, at this time; it looked quite out of place.

—Pink, he uttered.

But she was not listening. He took a slice of bread from the tray, cut it in two. The bread was stale. He picked up some cold meat with his fingers, made a sandwich, began to eat. He forced himself to turn toward the window, to rest his elbows on the sideboard. It must have been very cold outside, but the rooms were well heated. It was a good hotel.

—It is hard, he said in a low voice, munching his bread.

He did not know himself what it was that was hard. Simone was reading, or pretended to read. She would not talk.

—Have you slept? he asked.

Sitting still in her armchair, her hair seeming brighter in the daylight, she did not move and did not show surprise. He tried to find again a soft voice to speak to her. But it was not the wallpaper that seemed hateful to him.

—I was unable to sleep, he went on, eating his sandwich and walking toward the window. —I tried, but I could not.

At her side, he pressed his forehead against the windowpane and looked at the boulevards beyond the balcony. But the balcony was very large, one could see only the roofs.

—I was drunk, he confessed.—What I did doesn't matter. We cannot go on quarreling as we do.

He turned his head, saw her eyes on him. She was astonished, but too wary to believe him. He was eating his bread with a half-smile, and the meat in his mouth had a flat taste, the taste of feelings that are dead.

—Please forgive me, he added.—I did not really mean what I said to you yesterday. I was simply drunk.

She continued to watch him with utter indifference, without answering, and he squatted on his heels, so as to be on a level with her face.

—Don't you love me any more?

She averted her eyes, started reading again. When he had finished his sandwich, he wiped his hands on his robe, and remained squatting on his heels.

—What did the doctor tell you? he whispered after a while, in as low a voice as he could.

—You know, she replied.

—You mean that it was my fault? He told you that the baby was doomed to die? And you too thought so, without admitting it to me—is that what you mean?

She glanced at him, went on reading. He was not interested in the least in the wallpaper. It could be pink, blue, green, or any color in the rainbow. He had just found his mother again.

—I don't believe the doctor, he said.

He rose, bumping the latch of the French window, started to rub his back.

—Whom do you believe? said Simone.—Do you believe your own words?

—No, he replied.

She had finally got to that point, then.

—Do you believe me? he asked.

—I used to.

—My fine phrases?

She closed the book and stared at the wall.

—Shut up!

Then she rose and walked swiftly toward the bedroom. He followed her with his eyes until she had reached the door, the book still in her hand and her head high.

—Poor fool! he exclaimed.

She stopped on the threshold, standing very straight in the open door. He saw only her back, but he knew the expression on her face.

—Very fine phrases, he added.—And you believed them, you big, stupid horse.

He put his hands in the pockets of his robe, and smiled



when he saw her fold up, stricken from behind, unable to move on or turn back.

—Do you know it now? he said.—Do you know it, or shall I explain it to you?

—You married me, she answered.

But it was almost a question she was asking. Her voice had lost its usual intonation, and was hardly reaching him. "One would say she was bleating," he thought. "That's what her voice is like."

—Of course, he replied.—For your beauty.

He started to laugh out loud.

—Did you ever look at your eyes? he said. —Did you ever look at yourself in a mirror?

Still standing in the same spot, she put both her hands to her forehead.

—You married me, she repeated.

—You or anybody else! What difference did it make? I wanted to go away, that's all.

—You lie, she said.

She finally turned, her face ghastly, her shoulders drawn back, her neck outstretched: she looked exactly as before her marriage, disconsolate and grotesque.

—You lie, she said again, and shook her head.—You could have left your mother without marrying me. You were old enough. I know you were sincere.

He laughed and came up to her, and as he drew near, he could observe each detail of her disturbed features and enjoy all the pain and disbelief which they expressed.

—No, he said, I could not, it was much more complicated than that. If I had left my mother and gone away alone, do you think she would have died?

—Shut up, she cried out, hiding her face in her hands.

—Shut up, you don't know what you are saying!

—O yes, I know! I shall have to tell you all that, some day. How I came to hate her, how she came to hate me, and how she died.

He put his hand on the girl's shoulder, drew her quite close to him.

—You have a right to know. After all, you helped me kill her.

She slapped him in the face and withdrew, her eyes full of tears, her body trembling; she slapped him with all her strength, then took refuge in the bedroom.

—I wanted so much to marry you, he shouted, laughing, before she could slam the door.—I loved you so!

Still chuckling, he let himself down into an armchair and stretched his legs.

—I loved you so, he said again in a low voice.—I loved you.

But he did not know quite what he was saying. A few minutes later, hearing no sound in the next room, he knocked

gently on the door. She did not answer, and he thought of having another sandwich. While he was eating it, there was a big crash, as of broken glass, in the bedroom. He stopped munching, and listened. There was nothing but silence.

—It brings bad luck, he remarked, his mouth full, but loud enough for his wife to hear.

She must have smashed a mirror.

He went out again that night. There was a surprise for him when he came home. The drawing room was in a half-darkness lighted only by a shaft of light from the next room, and there was something strange about the apartment, something almost unreal. At first Paul noticed only the distant light which was falling dimly on the floor of the drawing room. Then he saw Simone, kneeling on the rug, disheveled, with her robe drawn tight around her waist.

His breath failed him: calmly, methodically, unaware of his presence, she was demolishing the ships he had built, bending the masts, pulling out the wires, smashing the hulls—all this in complete quietness, without any trace of anger, hammering steadily with a heavy book end.

He was so startled that he could not even cry out. On her knees in the half-darkness, she resembled one of those ghosts he had seen in picture-books, a long time ago. She had the same face, whitish in a beam of light, the same appearance of unreality, the same gestures, fantastic and calm. But he got hold of himself at once. Kicking the door shut with his foot, he seized Simone by the shoulders and violently pulled her to one side. She did not relinquish the book end, and for a second he thought that she would strike him with it. But her only movement was to fall again upon her knees and to go on with her work of destruction.

—Are you mad? he shouted at her.

He seized her again, forced her to stand up, threw the book end away from her.

—Let go, she said quite calmly.—Leave me alone.

He placed himself between her and the ship models, and as she came back again to smash them, he slapped her face with the back of his hand. She staggered, looking like a wounded animal.

—You are rotten, she cried out, all rotten!

Then she threw herself at him, scratched him, managed to get away and to trample what remained of the ships under her heels.

—You are mad, he shouted, slapping her again.

But now she was hitting back and forcing him to retreat. He saw her face in the beam of light, a horrible, twisted face, with insane eyes, and when she struck him again, he felt his chest burst and his legs fail.

—Cough and cough, she cried, —that I may hear you! You

thought I would stand for everything? You thought it would go on forever?

—Stop it, he whispered, drawing back until he felt the wall behind him.

But she went on pounding him with her fists, scratching him with her nails. Suddenly he bent over, slid to the floor by the wall and lay there coughing and coughing in the darkness, with his eyes closed, till she at last let go of him. Two seconds later, when he tried to pull himself up, still coughing, his lungs on fire and his mouth full of blood, he saw her going back to the ship models, with the book end in her hand.

—You will see, you will see . . .

—Stop it, he gasped, stop it . . .

But she was laughing now, smashing what remained of the hulls and sending a thousand splinters into the dark corners of the room. He had to look on, unable to stop her, shaking from his cough, while she went on hammering with her book end, making the most awful noise and turning to him, from time to time, a face which had ceased to be human.

When she finally stopped, there remained around her nothing but fragments of wood and shapeless metal. Then she came back to him, smiling and relaxed, and he had to look at her from the floor.

—Do you feel better? she asked.

She enjoyed her victory, watching his futile rage. He could not stop his tears and hid his face in his hands.

—I hate you, he whispered.

But this was all he could say now.

She was cruel enough to bring him a handkerchief to wipe the blood on his clothes, and to lift him up and help him to his bed. He could not breathe, his lungs were burning, there was no life left in his body.

—Do you want something to drink? she asked when he lay down.—Or did you have enough drinks with your friends?

He shook his head.

—Go away! he implored.

—I'll take care of you. I'll take care of you until you are dead.

He lifted himself upon his elbow, for just a second, and lay down again.

His lungs were less painful, he breathed more easily.

—Leave me alone, he said.

An hour later, she went down to the telephone and came back to his bedside.

—The doctor will come.

—I don't need a doctor!

—I know, darling.

He bit his lips, looked around the room like a trapped beast. He would not die this morning. Nor this afternoon. Nor the

day after. He would find some strength and run her out of his life.

—Don't let him in, he insisted.—I don't want to see him.

—You must see him, darling. Maybe you are not as sick as you believe.

—You filth!

—You carcass.

She put her wrist to his cheek and laughed.

—You have a temperature, darling. Do you think it is serious?

—I don't need a doctor.

—I know it, darling. It is not a doctor you need.

He shuddered. He was seeing his mother at his bedside. One by one the ties are untied, and things repeat themselves twice, three times, until life is gone.

—I am no Catholic, he said.

—You want a minister, then?

—I want nobody.

She came closer.

—Be sensible! I cannot leave you in this state.

Her harsh voice sounded in his ears, pierced his brain. He tried to smile, to speak calmly, with irony.

—I am quite all right.

—And if you die, darling?

She pronounced each syllable, stressed each word. He was looking at the window, peering into the night.

A face, another face, a thousand black faces, and a few words he had almost forgotten—a poem.

—And if you die? she repeated.

He managed to smile.

—Don't be sorry about me.

The doctor was stout, slow-moving. He looked rather stupid with his bald head. He came almost every day of the following week, but Paul refused to go to his office to have an X-ray taken. On Saturday, he had fever again and stayed in bed. When the doctor left the bedroom, Simone followed him into the drawing room and left the door half open. Paul heard his wife speaking in a voice which was hardly lower than usual.

—Is it very serious, doctor? she was asking.—I am strong, I would like to know exactly what his condition is.

There was a silence.

—No, no (it was Simone's voice again), he cannot hear us.

Paul pressed himself against the pillow, trying not to listen, not to fall into the trap. But he was listening in spite of everything, and his heart was beating violently. She had arranged all that, she knew what she was doing when she left the door half open.

—I cannot tell, said the doctor hesitantly.—We should have an X-ray . . .

—He does not want it. But you certainly know . . .

Again a silence. Paul threw aside the bedclothes and got up noiselessly. The floor was cold; he advanced over the rug toward the door, holding his breath.

—I want to know exactly, he heard Simone saying in a more insistent tone.—Is there any hope?

He leaned against the wall, ceased breathing.

—I do not think so, said the physician somewhat regretfully.

—He has never taken care of himself. He is not taking care of himself now. . . . He is at the end of his strength.

Silence. He heard Simone pacing the drawing room.

—I am sorry, said the doctor.

—One must face things, said Simone.

—Of course. You are very brave to stay with him.

—He is my husband.

Simone stopped pacing. He felt cold.

—Is it really . . . the end? she said in a voice that trembled a little.

—One never knows.

—You should know, you have examined him.

—A year, maybe, said the doctor.—Maybe a little longer. But don't lose your self-control.

—I won't. One year, you said?

She wanted him to repeat it. Perhaps Paul had not heard, lying as he was in his bed, as if he were dead already. He breathed hard, still leaning against the wall. It did not hurt, it was so simple. He almost wanted to laugh at it.

—Yes, the doctor went on.—One year, I believe, that's all. But you could consult another doctor. Maybe your husband would let himself be treated. He should enter a sanatorium . . .

He stopped.

—Is he curable? asked Simone.

—No, not any more.

Paul went back to his bed, and Simone moved toward the entrance door. The doctor's steps followed heavily.

—Thank you, she was saying.—Please come to see him soon.

—I will.

The door was being opened, they must be shaking hands.

—You are a courageous woman, said the physician after a long silence.—You are very brave. But perhaps it would be better if you went away for a while.

—I could never leave him. I could not.

There were tears in her voice. She played the scene quite tactfully. Paul lay down, listening again as he pulled up the blankets.

—You should go away, the doctor was saying.—You should. Otherwise . . .

A silence.

—Otherwise? she repeated.

—You will share his grave, said the doctor, in his solemn, slow voice.

He returned to Araches.

It was late February, very cold. The woods around the chalet were not so thick as before, so it seemed to him, the trees were bare, black and upright beneath the sky. From one of the windows he could see the village below, from another the road and the mountainside. These were the only sights he enjoyed, for he did not go out. Lying on his bed, he perceived a stretch of smoky sky. The smoke was not lifting from the roofs. He spent hours at the windows, observed the road, and felt nervous at each car or bus that rolled down toward the village. But the noise of motors and wheels was pleasant to hear.

An old woman, Clara, came twice a day to the chalet to cook the meals, do the housework and make sure that all was well. She was not talkative. But Paul found each evening another excuse to keep her a little longer: the fireplace was not drawing properly, the floors were not clean, the shirts should be ironed.

He did not see any doctor. The one who had treated Simone lived not far away, but he too was not talkative. Paul chose solitude rather than a doctor's melancholy and too short visits.

For his illness he needed no physician. His health was deteriorating steadily; he was wasting away, and he knew it. His cough was bothering him now more than before, he had to lie down in order not to suffocate. Fits of coughing were more frequent since his last quarrel with his wife. They had become a torture and lasted longer. Too tired to go out, or too afraid of fainting on the road, he shut himself up in the few rooms of the chalet, waiting all day for night to come, and falling uneasily asleep in the darkness.

He hoped in vain for news of Simone. So many years, so many years, he said to himself—the sea, the sky and the silence. One goes from the one to the other, one grips a hand and one hopes desperately to keep hold of it forever. Then, one evening, the years are gone, the days, the hours, and nothing is left. There has never been anything, anyhow. Love, hate, indifference—the same means of expression used and misused—and one night, eyes open in the dark, one hears the last hours striking on a soundless clock, one discovers oneself as in the past, with one's own disgust and one's own silence. And one's very heart has forgotten the dark prayers, the words one whispers to oneself in order not to be alone.

At the end of March, after a month of this unbearable silence, he felt suddenly weaker and more tired. In the daytime he no longer left his armchair by the window, and in the evenings Clara had to help him to his bed. She called in a doctor, a complete stranger, who took his temperature, examined him,

shook his head, went away and never came back. He did not say much, but Paul knew everything he could possibly have told him.

When it got warmer, he went out a little, in the afternoons, down the footpath to the road. There he sat down, at the same spot as before, looking gloomily at the highway, watching the cars swish past him, and thinking always of her, of her—silent and remote, who lived her own life and gradually forgot what might have been for a moment a true love. What was she doing now? He thought of her at a concert, in her old, faded dress and the hat which she did not wear any more. But he could not visualize her. He could not recapture the expression on her face, the hatred that distorted her lips, the closely set eyes which used to spy on the sick man. He was losing even the memory of her features. Sometimes it would be the nose, sometimes the chin, or the hair: one detail or another would always escape him, leaving an incomplete face, an absurd picture which he brushed aside, then tried in vain to recreate.

They had parted on the platform of a railway station. She had not spoken, nor moved when he boarded the train, nor when the train started. She stood still, pale and thin, watching him go away. He could not help looking through the window and lifting his hand. And he himself had smiled at his own gesture. She remained on the platform in the same attitude, and he had watched her grow smaller and smaller, still upright in her dark coat, with her tense face turned toward him, perhaps whispering a word of farewell.

But it could not be a farewell. He was lifted again on the slow swell of hatred which he had felt for his mother and which was now engulfing Simone. Now he hoped all the time that a car, a bus running on this road, would bring her back one night.

She had hated him, tortured him too much, those last days, to forget her grudge, to strike him out of her life, to start the adventure again without him. She too would ask herself a thousand unanswerable questions, and waste her strength in stifling loneliness, feeling him out of reach. She could not let him die without having a part in his death, could not escape the need of watching his last moments; she would come back to enjoy his pain and her own, day after day, hour after hour.

He feared her return. It would be so easy to fade away all alone. But as the end neared, as his strength ebbed, he had to struggle harder and harder against a daily growing resentment, against memories that were grievously incomplete.

What was she doing, dear God? Was she going out in the evenings, quiet and composed? Did she see people, and hope for some kind of happiness? What if she married again? If another took the place which he was vacating for the grave?

Each word, each gesture of another man would remind her

of too many things, would never allow her to forget, or even try to forget.

When he thought of her, as he sat near the road, tears of rage came to his eyes. That evening when her face had come so close, her stupid face, bitter with hatred, and when she had dared to ask: —And if you die? . . . Had she really believed that she could go on living? He still heard her steps, felt her breath upon him; one by one, all the words she had said came back to him, the pitiable words carrying all the distress and resentment of mankind, the words which his mother had known, and he had learned, and she after him. But perhaps Simone did not feel their full weight? Perhaps she was smiling as she remembered them?

—We are not abandoning our home, he had said, in going down this footpath.

But she would not come back, she would let him rot. Her return would mean her own death, she knew that.

—Otherwise? she had said.

—You will share his grave . . .

This sentence would keep her away until the end. Her will to live would be stronger than her hatred. He should stop hoping, stop waiting in vain. That too was dead. It was better to go back to the chalet, withdraw into one's own shell, stop one's ears and let oneself fade away in suffocation.

He thought of writing to her. But what for? He had learned the power of silence, and had nothing to say that she did not already know. Could he tell her that he loved and hated her by turns? That through the endless hopelessness of night he was speaking aloud in the silence, stirring up memories until he could not recognize them any more?

Could he tell her that he was still lingering on, thinking of her all the time, every hour and minute, hoping that she would follow him to the grave? She must have been tormented by the same anguish, the same madness, dreamed the same dreams and died each night the same death.

He did not write, but came to believe finally in that incredible return.

Talking to himself, he imagined Simone coming up the footpath. He was waiting for her at the entrance of the house, standing upright and calm, and when she came near him, her face was like the one he had known in Chamonix, in a little dark restaurant; she spoke the same words, and he kept silent, and opened his arms.

He tortured himself with this impossible feeling. But he could not keep from re-enacting the scene again and again, imagining every detail, pronouncing each phrase.

At other times he merely remembered, and falsified his memories. She had not got the best of him, she would never



get the best of him. She was crawling at his feet—my God, how ugly she was!

But the road became empty, dusk was slowly descending upon his dreams. He had to carry them back to his room, keep watch over them through the night without finding sleep.

He was quite thin now, and could hardly walk. He moved hesitantly through the empty rooms, pursuing his dialogue with the shadow, Singapore, the islands, the reefs—that was all such a long time ago that he could think of it, believe in it once more. The child, the lost child was back in the empty rooms, feeling the weight of a hand, the weight of watchful eyes.

But if all this were untrue, if she were to come back again?

She came back on a mild evening in springtime, wearing her tight dark coat, stooping, along the footpath lined with flowers.

He had received her telegram that morning.

"Cannot stand it," she had written. "Will come tonight."

Having read it, he remained motionless for a long while, as if stunned. Then he had to sit down, to still his heart and his mind. She was coming back, that was it. She was coming home, to find him again, to die with him. He waited all day long, sitting at the door of the chalet, his head empty, his heart overflowing with a sweetness as unbearable as pain. He waited all day long without moving, his head on his arm, until night spread across the hills—unable to go up to his room and rest on his bed.

When it was dark, a dreadful thought stirred his mind: what if she had sent this telegram only to make him wait in vain, and deal him a final blow? No, that could not be. He had hoped and suffered too much, she could not be so cruel.

He remained for a while longer on the doorstep, his eyes on the road. Then he felt cold. He got up slowly, regretfully, and went inside to put on a jacket. While he was putting it on, he heard the bus rumbling down the road and stopping by the footpath. He ran to the door, saw the headlights in the night, tried to discern Simone's figure. It was too dark. The bus started on toward the village. Only part of the footpath was visible through the shadows, and he listened intently till he heard the noise of steps on the gravel, quiet steps that came nearer and nearer.

She emerged suddenly from the dark, only a few paces away, carrying a heavy suitcase, while he watched her, leaning back against the wall. She was looking up, trying to see him, and he stepped forward into the light. Another few steps and she was quite close, her face taut but calm, unsmiling. She put her suitcase down at the door, and for a long time they considered each other without a word. She looked very tired,

and older too. Her eyes had lost their luster. He waited for her to speak; his throat was dry. But she said nothing.

—You are back?

A low voice, a mere breath.

—I am back, she answered, almost inaudibly.

—Why?

She shrugged her shoulders wearily and looked away.

—I don't know. I tried to explain it in the telegram.

—Yes, he said, yes . . .

He would have liked to come closer, to take her hand; but he did not dare, he would not dare any more.

—May I come in? she asked, lifting her head.

—Of course.

He let her go past him, with her suitcase, and followed her into the house. She put her things on a table and turned to him. He was standing in a corner of the room, near the window, looking at her. She smiled, shook her head, and started unpacking.

—You are surprised? she said.

She was speaking again in that ironical voice he knew so well. But he had no desire to fight.

—No, he replied.—I did nothing but wait for you.

She stood still.

—Do you feel better? she asked.

—No. Perhaps you should not have come back.

She looked at him, smiled again.

—Why?

He stepped back, turning his eyes to the window.

—The doctor's words . . .

—Go ahead! . . . she said in a lower voice.

—I don't know, he replied, I don't know at all.

She closed the empty suitcase and put it on the floor. She was not coming closer, she would never come close again.

—I don't care, she uttered.—Better the grave.

He looked at her: she was standing erect in front of him, with an evil smile on her face. He felt angry, angry at himself, and could not stir. He tried to smile, to speak mockingly.

—Aren't you afraid? One coughs and coughs, and then one is dead, that's the way it happens.

—I know, she replied.

—It will happen to you, too . . .

She interrupted him, still smiling:

—Don't worry about me.

She stood there a moment longer, looking at him steadily. Then she took off her coat and started to carry her clothes to her room. He saw her in the light of a lamp, pale and thin, with her unattractive features, a smile still on her lips—but he did not dare to stop her.

He heard her moving in the next room, and suddenly he wanted to go after her and take her in his arms as before. But

it was no longer possible. Not an hour, not a minute was left, and nothing could be undone. He pressed his forehead against the window, and did not turn when she came back.

He was looking at the lights that moved on the road and swept the trees. Still motionless, still lonely and miserable, he tried to listen to the hum of the motors in the night, so as to forget for an instant that the years were lost, that spring had died. But it was a futile attempt.

With slow steps, he entered his room, closed the door and threw himself on his bed. He felt foolish. Turning away from a ray of moonlight and burying his face in the pillows, he started to whisper meaningless words—to escape the uproar of silence, to still the crying of his heart.

## THE THEME OF SPIRITUAL ISOLATION IN CARSON McCULLERS

AS THE NOVELS of Carson McCullers made their separate appearances, the casual reader may have been more impressed by their differences than by their similarities. Even to some professional critics it seemed almost inconceivable that the same consciousness which created *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (Mrs. McCullers' first novel, written when she was twenty-two) should have produced four years later a book as apparently dissimilar as *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. It was evident to them from the beginning that they were dealing with a writer of unusual honesty and imagination, one who, moreover, in spite of her youth and professional inexperience, was somehow the possessor of an enor-

### Oliver Evans

*Oliver Evans* was born in New Orleans, went to Louisiana State University, then to Italy as an exchange student. He taught for a year at Athens College in Greece, then returned to this country to get his M.A. from the University of Tennessee, and for further study and teaching. He has published poetry, fiction and criticism in *Sewanee Review*, *Partisan Review* and elsewhere. His first book of poems, *YOUNG MAN WITH A SCREW-DRIVER*, was published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1950. He has been working in New York for the past year on a book of criticism.

mous technical skill—in short, that they were dealing with a first-rate literary talent. But they looked in vain for a subsisting pattern, for a characteristic philosophical attitude or point of view.

Such a pattern does exist, however. Once it has been discovered, all the major works of this remarkable writer, still in her early thirties, will be seen to exhibit it. Indeed, the homogeneity of her work, viewed as the projection of a particular attitude to life, is really extraordinary—which is not to say that Mrs. McCullers has merely repeated herself, for the theme, as I shall attempt to show, is one which permits of infinite variations.

The essential loneliness of the individual in a world full of other individuals as lonely as himself is a paradox with which Carson McCullers has been intrigued from the first and is now apparently becoming obsessed—though the obsession, judging from *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, is a fortunate one. From this paradox, which was first set forth in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (a title suggested by the publishers in the hope that it would furnish a clue to the book's meaning), the author has developed an entire philosophy. It is in this sense the seed of all her later work: her concept of the nature and function of love, which receives magnificent treatment in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, derives directly from it; and it accounts also for her preference for situations leading inevitably to frustration, for her interest in adolescent characters and in characters deformed both physically and psychologically, and for the curious blend of compassion and irony which is her predominant attitude toward these characters.

## 2

Mrs. McCullers has herself used the phrase moral isolation to describe this universal condition of mankind (*Theatre Arts Monthly*, April 1950). Spiritual isolation, however, is probably a better term, as the moral implications of the condition are by no means the only ones. Every individual, she believes, is imprisoned in the cell of his own being, and any practical attempt at communication, such as speech, is doomed to failure. (Speech, indeed, only leads to further confusion, frustration, and loneliness: it is not for nothing that the two most articulate characters in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Doctor Copeland and Jake Blount, are also the most miserable; and that Singer, the central character and the only happy one in the book, is a *deaf-mute*.)

The only force which does not make for spiritual isolation is love, or ideal communication. Love is the machinery by which men strive to escape from their cells, but their escape is seldom entirely or permanently successful, since love, powerful though it is, is subject to time and diminishes with the

death of the love-object, besides which no love is ever a completely mutual experience. Even Singer's happiness is short-lived, and when the half-witted Antonapoulos of whom he is incongruously enamored dies, he commits suicide.

It is ironical that Singer, who is loved by almost everyone in the community, should choose as the object of his own love the depraved and demented Antonapoulos; but the irony is multiplied when we realize that the reason Singer is so beloved is that no one really *knows* him—a point the author drives home repeatedly. It is exactly because he cannot make himself fully known to them (being mute) that they love him, for then each of them is free to imagine he is what they would like him to be. And, still further irony, it is perhaps because they cannot make themselves fully known to him (since he is also deaf) that he has achieved with them such a happy relationship. The situation is thus not so much a comment on the futility of communication as it is on the undesirability of it.

In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, love is either unreturned, unrecognized, or mistaken for its opposite. What we have in this novel is a number of persons each pursuing, but never attaining, the object of his love: Singer writes letters which he never mails to Antonapoulos in the mental institution, and when he talks with him he does not even know whether Antonapoulos understands him or not; Mick adores Singer, who is unaware that he is the object of her adolescent yearnings; Mick does not know that the middle-aged widower, Biff Brannon, whom she despises, loves her with a wistful affection which is part paternal, part maternal; the Negro Doctor Copeland loves his people, who do not understand him; Lucile loves Leroy, who has deserted her. Each of these lovers is alone in the sense that he never attains the love-object, though perhaps he is less alone merely because he strives for it. Singer, after all, is happy (for awhile) even though his love is not returned. There is the suggestion here of an idea which later receives more emphatic statement in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*: that it is not necessary for love to be a reciprocal experience in order for it to benefit the lover. Its chief value is to the lover, in helping to release him from his cell. Singer's letters are a case in point, but there was a limit even to Singer's love, which, though it could survive Antonapoulos' indifference, could not survive his death; and he could not achieve complete release except in suicide.

I do not think it has been sufficiently realized what a rich and thoughtful book *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* really is. That all these meanings should be contained and objectified so expertly by a woman of twenty-two is, of course, little short of miraculous; but it is the meanings, after all, which are important, and many critics have overlooked the book's profundity in praising its precocity. There is no denying that

these meanings are melancholy in the extreme, but the pessimism which informs them is a mature pessimism. If Mrs. McCullers reveals herself as a pessimist in this first novel, it is because she cannot accept an easy optimism. The predicament of Mick, who had dreams of becoming a concert pianist but who on reaching womanhood is obliged to work at Woolworth's and cannot even save enough to buy a piano, is really the predicament of all frustrated humanity, and the very desperation with which she still clings to her impossible ambition is the measure of her conviction that it is all in vain:

But maybe it would be true about the piano and turn out O.K. Maybe she would get a chance soon. Else what the hell good had it all been—the way she felt about music and the plans she had made in the inside room? It had to be some good if anything made sense. And it was too and it was too and it was too and it was too. It was some good.

All right!

O.K.!

Some good.

Obviously more than a piano is involved here. Mick is trying, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, to persuade herself that life has some meaning, that it "makes sense." But she is by no means certain that it does.

### 3

Mrs. McCullers' second book, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, was a disappointment to many, who saw in it a mere *grotesquerie*, a collection of artfully interwoven case histories out of Krafft-Ebing—impressive technically, but lacking the depth and emotional impact of her first novel, with which it appeared to have no connection. Alarm was expressed over what was taken to be the author's excessive preoccupation with abnormality both mental and physical. There was a strong hint of this preoccupation in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (Singer and Antonapoulos are both deaf-mutes, besides which Singer is homosexual and Antonapoulos a half-wit), but there it was subordinated to the total intention and did not seem out of proportion. Captain Penderton, in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, is not only homosexual: he is also a sadist, a kleptomaniac, and a drug addict. Of the other six characters, all but two of them, Major Langdon and Leonora—who is his mistress and the Captain's wife—are abnormal in some way, and we are told that Leonora herself is "a little feeble-minded." (Someone once observed that in this novel not even the horse, Firebird, who plays an important part in the story, is normal.)

This book earned for its author a reputation for sensationalism which unfortunately still survives—unfortunately, since it is not justified. I have said that Mrs. McCullers' basic theme is the spiritual isolation of the individual. Now it should be obvious that any kind of deviation, whether physical or psychological, naturally tends to increase this sense of isolation. On a merely realistic level, it is certainly difficult to accept this novel, with its bizarre situations and twisted characters, as a truthful statement about life, but then the book is not intended to be read on a merely realistic level. These characters are all *symbols*, just as the homosexual deaf-mute is a symbol—symbols of spiritual isolation and loneliness. As in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, all of them strive for release through love, but with each of them love takes a different form, the form determined by the nature of the lover. And this novel too ends in frustration for all concerned, frustration and tragedy. Captain Penderton's slaying of the soldier, whom he loves, in a situation involving the Captain's wife, whom he does not love, comes as an appropriately ironical conclusion to the terrible fable. Though *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is a slighter work than *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, its theme is exactly the same, only it is presented much more obliquely, after the manner of a fable or parable. Mr. Tennessee Williams, in his introduction to the New Directions reprint of this book, rightly calls attention to its technical excellencies and to its affinities with Greek tragedy in the simplicity of its design, the economy of its presentation, and the swiftness and inevitability of its action.

## 4

The author's third novel, *The Member of the Wedding*, is a more overt treatment of the isolation theme. The novel is simple in its design, and the classical unities are observed with a scrupulosity rare in modern writers. There are only three main characters: the adolescent Frankie Adams, her little cousin John Henry, and a Negro cook named Berenice. There is very little action; the book consists largely of a series of dialogues among the three characters. The language of these dialogues is remarkable. It is authentically Southern, giving the book a folk quality, and it is characterized also by strategic repetitions which suggest refrains in music. The total effect is reminiscent of the chanting in Greek tragedies—or, more accurately, the group-singing of certain folk ballads in the South.

Frankie is an unforgettable character, reminding us of that other marvelous adolescent, Mick, in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. The phenomenon of adolescence has a peculiar fascination for Mrs. McCullers (she has also explored it in the

short story "Wunderkind"), and this too has its explanation, for at that age the sense of individual isolation is stronger than at any other. Adolescence sets one apart just as effectively as does a physical or mental aberration: one is no longer a child, nor yet an adult. Even one's sexual identity is ambiguous. (In *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* Biff Brannon muses about Mick as follows: "She was at the age when she looked as much like an overgrown boy as a girl. And on that subject why was it that the smartest people mostly missed that point? By nature all people are of both sexes. So that marriage and the bed is not all by any means. The proof? Real youth and old age. Because often old men's voices grow high and reedy and they take on a mincing walk. And old women sometimes grow fat and their voices get rough and deep and they grow dark little mustaches.") Adolescents do not *belong* anywhere, and thus constitute excellent symbols of spiritual loneliness. Frankie and Mick are symbols just as are Singer, Antonapoulos, and Captain Penderton.

Frankie, we are told, is an "unjoined person who hangs around in doorways." Doorways: that is, always on the threshold of things but never, because of the isolation which is a product of the condition of adolescence, really inside them. She suffers acute loneliness because she is not a *member* of anything. Her mother is dead, her father is too busy to spend much of his time with her, she belongs to no club. The action springs from her desire to identify herself with something outside herself. In the approaching marriage of her older brother, a soldier, she sees her opportunity. Marriage is a big thing, a glamorous thing, and a thing which *ties people together* (there is symbolism here, too); so she decides that she will be a member of the wedding, thus identifying herself with it and with them (bride and groom). After the ceremony, she hopes, they will invite her to live with them so that the identification shall be permanent.

In terms of Freudian analysis, Frankie is unconsciously, though with all the awkward intensity of her age, seeking a love-object, but it is not to a particular person, or even to a particular object, that she wishes to be joined: it is to something not only outside herself but also *bigger* than herself and more inclusive. She does not wish to be joined to a person but to *that which joins all people*—to the *we* of people, as she puts it:

The trouble with me is that for a long time I have been just an "I" person. When Berenice says "we" she means her lodge and church and colored people. Soldiers can say "we" and mean the army. All people belong to a "we" except me . . . I know that the bride and my brother are the "we" of me . . . So I am going with them and joining the wedding and after that to whatever place



they will ever go. I love them so much because they are the "we" of me.

What Frankie is seeking is nothing less than the common denominator of all humanity. Elsewhere she says: "All these people and you don't know what joins them up. There's bound to be some sort of reason or connection. Yet somehow I don't know." And Berenice answers her: "If you did you would be God. Didn't you know that?"

Berenice and John Henry, almost as lonely as Frankie herself—though for different reasons—are the only people she sees much of. She clings to them out of necessity, in a kind of desperate compromise, but they bore her almost as much as she bores herself. (The kind of world she would like to move in can be inferred from the name she has given to herself in her daydreams: F. Jasmine Adams.) And although she is sick to death of the "ugly old kitchen" which is the scene of their curious dialogues, she is somehow powerless to leave it for very long since it is inhabited by the only two companions she has in the world. Again, more is meant here than meets the eye. Frankie's situation of dependence on companions who bore her, who for one reason or another are unequipped to give her the release she desires, is actually the situation of most men, forced into an unhappy compromise between the ideal romantic relationships for which they long and those humdrum and unsatisfactory substitutes which are available to them. And for *kitchen* read *world*—a monotonous and sordid world from which there is no escape for most of us: "They sat together in the kitchen, and the kitchen was a sad and ugly room. . . . And now the old kitchen made Frankie sick. The name for what had happened to her Frankie did not know, but she could feel her squeezed heart beating against the table edge. 'The world is certainly a small place,' she said." Berenice asks her. "What makes you say that?" and she is unable to explain. But it is clear that Frankie here has connected the kitchen with the world: both are small places, and both are "sad and ugly." And from both of them there is no escape. It should be observed that there is a certain superficial resemblance between the situation in this novel and that in Sartre's play, *No Exit*, where three characters are condemned to bore one another throughout eternity in a single comfortably furnished room—an unorthodox, but oddly convincing concept of Hell.

Frankie's brother and his bride do not, of course, invite her to stay with them on their honeymoon, and this story too ends in frustration. It is a frustration from which, with the elasticity of her age, Frankie quickly recovers, and the experience has helped to mature her: in the last four or five pages we meet a new Frankie, a young lady who says "braids" for pigtaails, who is "just mad about Michelangelo," and who

has a friend at last, Mary Littlejohn, with whom she is planning to travel around the world some day. It has been thought that, because Frankie's disappointment is so short-lived, *The Member of the Wedding* ends on a more "positive" note and is less pessimistic in its implications than the earlier novels. Perhaps this is true, but a thoughtful reader cannot escape the suspicion that at the end of the story Frankie is merely replacing one impossible ambition with another one, and that her desire to travel around the world (which reminds one a bit of Mick's ambition to be a concert pianist) will never see fulfillment. When that dream collapses, another will take its place, and so on. On the whole, it is easier to view the book as yet another parable dealing with the essential loneliness of man and the eternal futility of escape.

## 5

Eloquent as are these variations on the same fundamental theme, Mrs. McCullers has given it its most impressive statement in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. This extraordinary novella contains in a bare sixty pages all the philosophy of her early novels, together with a fully developed theory of the nature of love—a theory which, consciously or unconsciously, she has slowly but steadily evolved from her chosen theme and which is naturally consistent with it.

It will be helpful to summarize the story, which is laid in the author's favorite setting, a Southern mill town. "The town itself is dreary," begins the first sentence. "If you walk along the main street on an August afternoon there is nothing whatsoever to do. . . . These August afternoons when your shift is finished—there is absolutely nothing else to do; you might as well go down to the Forks Falls Road and listen to the chain gang." The tone of boredom and loneliness is established from the very first sentence, and the chain gang (to which she returns in a kind of epilogue) is important in a way which I shall presently show. We are introduced to a Miss Amelia Evans, a woman who lives all alone in a large house of which all the windows but one have been boarded up, a woman with a face "like the terrible dim faces known in dreams—sexless and white, with two gray crossed eyes which are turned inward so sharply that they seem to be exchanging with each other one long and secret gaze of grief."

But the house has not always been thus silent: it had originally been a kind of general store, run with an iron hand by Miss Amelia herself, a grim, masculine giantess with a habit of fingering her powerful biceps absent-mindedly. The town's richest woman, she was once married to Marvin Macy, a handsome ne'er-do-well whose love for her had had, in the beginning, a reforming influence upon his character. But Miss Amelia's motive in marrying had apparently been merely a

desire for companionship, for when Marvin attempted to make love to her on their wedding night she repulsed him furiously and thereafter, during the brief ten days he stayed with her, hit him "whenever he came within arm's reach of her and whenever he was drunk." She finally turned him off the premises altogether. After putting under her door a letter threatening revenge, Marvin then left town, returned to his old wild habits, became a hardened criminal and at last was sent to the penitentiary.

In the meantime Miss Amelia receives a visit from a hunch-backed dwarf, Cousin Lymon, whom she has never seen but who claims to be a distant relation. The hunchback is tubercular and inverted sexually, but Miss Amelia falls in love with him from the very first. She closes her shop the day following his arrival, giving rise to rumors among the townspeople (who were certain that she would show the door to Cousin Lymon) that she has murdered him for something he was carrying in his suitcase. Actually Miss Amelia has given herself a holiday to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in her life, and a delegation of mill workers, who come to investigate Cousin Lymon's "death," find him decked out in a lime-green shawl, "the fringes of which almost touched the floor," and very much alive. Cheered by some of Miss Amelia's best liquor and amused by the antics of the dwarf, who is sociable in the extreme, the delegation stays on; and the session is so convivial that Miss Amelia decides to start a café on the premises.

For six years all goes well. Miss Amelia showers favors upon Cousin Lymon; he has the best room upstairs and nothing is too good for him. Though it is apparently unreturned, her love causes a general transformation of character in Miss Amelia: she loses much of her old grimness and becomes in every way more amiable. Then Marvin Macy, released from the penitentiary, returns. Cousin Lymon is fascinated by him: though Marvin treats him with contempt, he dogs his footsteps, hangs upon his every word, plies him with Miss Amelia's liquor. In short, he falls in love with Marvin, thus becoming the instrument of the latter's revenge upon Miss Amelia. Night after night Cousin Lymon treats Marvin at the café, and even invites him to live with him upstairs, while Miss Amelia moves to a cot on the first floor. Miss Amelia endures all this because her love for the dwarf is large enough to include his love for Marvin, even though the latter is her deadly enemy. If she drives Marvin away she knows Cousin Lymon will leave too, and she cannot bear the thought of that: "Once you have lived with another it is a great torture to have to live alone . . . it is better to take in your mortal enemy than face the terror of living alone."

Cousin Lymon, realizing her dependence upon him, exploits it to the utmost: he even mocks her publicly by imitat-

ing her walk, while Marvin looks on and laughs. But this only causes Miss Amelia to hate Marvin the more. The mutual hatred of these two one day explodes in a scene which is as ludicrous as it is terrible: a slugging match between them which is witnessed by the whole town (who have sensed that it was imminent) and which Miss Amelia wins. But at the precise moment that she pins Marvin to the ground and is presumably about to throttle him, the hunchback alights on her back and claws at her throat, forcing her to let Marvin go. After that Cousin Lymon and Marvin disappear together, but not before they have destroyed Miss Amelia's still, wrecked her café, and stolen her private belongings (she has locked herself and her grief in her study). They even try to poison her, leaving on the café counter a plate of her favorite food "seasoned with enough poison to kill off the county." Thereafter Miss Amelia's hair turns gray and her eyes become increasingly crossed. For three long years she waits in vain for the hunchback to return; then, a broken woman, she hires a carpenter to board up the premises and becomes a recluse. The story closes on the same note of loneliness and boredom with which it began, and there is the same ballad-like use of repetition which we noted in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and which is here even more effective: "Yes, the town is dreary. On August afternoons the road is empty, white with dust, and the sky above is bright as glass. . . . There is absolutely nothing to do in the town. . . . The soul rots with boredom. You might as well go down to the Forks Falls highway and listen to the chain gang."

## 6

Near the beginning of *The Ballad of the Sad Café* there is a passage in which Mrs. McCullers, momentarily abandoning the narrative for the expository vein, discourses briefly on the nature of love. The effect is that of a text at the beginning of a sermon, which is precisely the author's intention, though the sermon itself is presented in the form of the story—or parable—which follows. (Indeed, all of Mrs. McCullers' books are parables in this sense.) She writes: "There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. . . . Let it be added here that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring—this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth. Now the beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. . . . The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be

treacherous, greasy-headed and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. . . . The value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.”

She concludes: “It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep and secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved *fears and hates* the lover [italics mine], and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain.”

There is seen here still another reason for Mrs. McCullers' choice of “outlandish people”: not only do they serve as symbols of isolation, but they prove her thesis that “the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.” The more outlandish the characters and the more incongruous the matches which they make (one remembers Singer's love for Antonapoulos), the more eloquently they illustrate this truth. Cousin Lymon is outlandish enough for anyone's taste: he is a dwarf, he is hunchbacked, he is tubercular, and he is homosexual. His relationship with the man-like Amelia constitutes one of the saddest and most grotesque situations in fiction. (Observe the initial care with which the author has selected these two personalities whose association can only end in frustration: indeed, a physical union between them—as she is careful to make clear—is out of the question, which, of course, only adds to the poignancy of the situation.)

Love need not be reciprocal to benefit the lover: so much we learned from *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. And now this concept has been developed even further: the beloved actually fears and hates the lover. Cousin Lymon despises Miss Amelia, and we are shocked by his treatment of her; it is not, however, in spite of her love for him that he despises her (as it somehow seems more congenial for us to imagine), but *because* of it. There is dreadful justice in the fact that in the past she has herself treated Marvin Macy in the same way and for the same reason. One can trace the beginning of this idea as far back as *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, where Mick hated Biff Brannon, but with the important difference that she was not aware of his love for her. There it was merely suggested, and perhaps unconsciously; here it is the very center of the story, the melancholy burden of the ballad itself.

*The Ballad of the Sad Café* must be among the saddest stories in any language—not merely on the surface level of narrative, the level of “realism,” but also, and far more importantly (because it makes a generalization about mankind), on the level of parable. Love, it will be remembered, is the only means by which man can hope to escape his loneliness. In the

early novels escape was still *possible*, even though their outcome showed how difficult it was of achievement. Escape was possible in theory, if not in actual practice, so long as the only obstacles were time and imperfect reciprocity (for *relatively* reciprocal relationships were, after all, still available). But now the difficulty is not merely that in any relationship one person must always love more than the other, nor is it even that one of the persons may exhibit the indifference of an Antonapoulos. Now the obstacle is much more serious, so serious as to be insurmountable: the beloved *hates* the lover. This, according to Mrs. McCullers in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*, is the terrible law of nature that has sentenced man to a life of perpetual solitary confinement. There is no longer even a possibility of escape.

But although escape is impossible, there is still some advantage in making the attempt. The impulse to love is a good impulse, even though it is doomed to end in frustration. Singer's one-sided love for Antonapoulos sustains him so perfectly that the whole town is impressed by his air of poise and wisdom; Marvin Macy's early love for Miss Amelia has a brief refining influence upon his character; Miss Amelia's love for Cousin Lymon transforms her whole personality. It is true that these changes are temporary, but they are valuable while they endure. Some joy exists even in the midst of pain, though it is adulterated by the knowledge that it cannot last. (One is reminded of Keats's "Ode on Melancholy": "Aye, in the very temple of Delight / Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine.") The lover realizes this intuitively, with the result that even such temporary escape as he contrives for himself must be imperfect: "And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing." Love paroles man, and the tragedy is that he must return to his cell through no defection of his own.

In Miss Amelia's love for Cousin Lymon there is a strong element of pity. This is especially obvious in the scene of their first meeting, where the circumstances are such as to arouse it most successfully, and it characterizes her attitude to the dwarf throughout. Part of the terrible effectiveness of the story lies in the fact that Cousin Lymon returns the goodness of pity as well as the goodness of love with the evil of spite and hatred. Miss Amelia is able to pity the dwarf because her own abnormality affords her special insight into his predicament: he too is a deviate and suffers isolation. The same mixture of love and pity characterizes other grotesque relationships in Mrs. McCullers' fiction: Singer and Antonapoulos in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, Anacleto and Mrs. Langdon in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and Martin Meadows and Emily in the short story "A Domestic Dilemma."

It is perhaps significant that the townspeople mistake Miss Amelia's intentions toward Cousin Lymon at the beginning.

They are certain she has murdered him, when she has instead fallen in love with him. Love, as has been noted, is frequently misunderstood and even mistaken for its opposite in Mrs. McCullers' work: one will remember Mick's attitude toward Biff Brannon in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. In this connection it should be noted that the author has been at some pains to give these suspicious neighbors the identity of a group:

All at once, as though moved by one will, they walked into the store. At that moment the eight men looked very much alike—all wearing blue overalls, most of them with whitish hair, all pale of face and all with a set, dreaming look in the eye. . . . Except for Reverend Wilkin, they are all alike in many ways as has been said . . . all having taken pleasure from something or other, all having wept or suffered in some way. Each of them worked in the mill, and lived with others in a two or three room house for which the rent was ten dollars or twelve dollars a month. All had been paid that afternoon, for it was Sunday. So, for the present, think of them as a group.

These men are an abstraction: they are suspicion itself. But they are also surprisingly human for an abstraction, and Mrs. McCullers has been careful to emphasize the normality, the *averageness* of them at the same time that she has used them as a symbol of suspicion. The inference is clear and characteristically melancholy. Most men *are* suspicious, quick to supply others with evil motives and slow to credit them with good ones, unable to recognize love when they see it. And this, of course, constitutes yet another obstacle to their escape.

The epilogue, simply and significantly entitled "The Twelve Mortal Men," describes a chain gang at their back-breaking task of repairing a highway. The meaning here is richly symbolic. The work of the "twelve mortal men" is hard work, and there is no escape from it as they are chained at the ankle. But while they work they sing: "One dark voice will start a phrase, half-sung, and like a question. And after a moment another voice will join in; soon the whole gang will be singing. The voices are dark in the golden glare, the music intricately blended, both somber and joyful. The music will swell until at last it seems that it does not come from the twelve men on the gang, but from the earth itself, or the wide sky. It is music that causes the heart to broaden and the listener to grow cold with ecstasy and fright. . . . And what kind of gang is this that can make such music? Just twelve mortal men, seven of them black and five of them white boys from this county. Just twelve mortal men who are together."

The twelve mortal men, of course, represent all mankind, and they are prisoners because they cannot escape the universal fate of spiritual isolation. There is paradox and irony in

the fact that *what joins them together is exactly what keeps them apart*: that is, the predicament of their loneliness. They escape temporarily through their singing (love), which it is significant that they do *together* in an attempt to resolve, or rather dissolve, their individual identities; but their music is "both somber and joyful" (love, that is, mixed with despair). The effect of this music of chained humanity upon the casual listener is also paradoxical, a mixture of "ecstasy and fright."

There is other symbolism in the work. Perhaps the most striking example is the fact that after the hunchback's departure, Miss Amelia's eyes become increasingly crossed "as though they sought each other out to exchange a little glance of grief and lonely recognition." The physical defect becomes more pronounced as the isolation which it symbolizes increases.

## 7

It should be clear by now that the same fundamental pattern exists in all Mrs. McCullers' major prose works. The pattern is more elaborate in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* than elsewhere, but the beginnings of it are recognizable in her first novel and its evolution has occupied the whole of her literary career. It is a closed pattern, and one which many readers will view with a reluctance which is the measure of their suspicion that it is, after all, authentic—like Mick, the would-be pianist in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. But it is a pattern with a strange beauty and justice. Few artists have woven it half so well, and it is doubtful whether any artist has been concerned with it so exclusively. There is a terrible finality about the vision of life which Carson McCullers has attained in *The Ballad of the Sad Café*: an eternal flaw exists in the machinery of love, which alone has the power to liberate man from his fate of spiritual isolation. There is no escape, and no hope of escape. You might as well go and listen to the chain gang.



## Arabel J. Porter

# LITERARY HOSPITALITY

**T**HE encouragement of creative talent by publication of a new writer's work is one of the most important of a publisher's responsibilities. Most young writers, working as they do in solitude, are unaccustomed, in the early stages of their careers, to literary hospitality—that is, to a publisher's interest in their work. They are not aware of how important it is to the publishers themselves to encourage the young writer who speaks imaginatively and with his own voice.

Although in publishing circles there has been of late a special concern about the future of fiction, the wiser and more seasoned editors are still advising the younger ones not to think only of the fast dollar, the best seller, but rather to be sensitive to fresh and risky talent, to seek it out. The new writer today occasionally finds his warmest welcome in the great, traditional publishing houses. In America, Harcourt, Brace and Scribner's, to name but two of these, have for generations discovered and published important new talent. A younger house, New Directions, makes a unique contribution by presenting the experimental and *avant garde*, and by rediscovering neglected writers of the immediate past. The university presses perform a particularly valuable service by publishing criticism and *belles lettres* of special interest, works that help form that climate of opinion in which original imaginations can develop.

As a reprinter of good books, The New American Library has learned that there are more readers who welcome good writing than anyone would have believed possible a few years ago. The editors of New American Library have already worked with most standard publishers to make available to a wider audience those authors whose work would not otherwise reach, through the usual book channels, all those capable of appreciating it. We will continue to do this. And it is as important to a reprint editor as it is to the original publisher that the quality of these books remains high, that the emerging talents of today find the hospitality that will encourage them

*Arabel J. Porter* has been on the editorial staff of The New American Library since 1945, and in 1950 became executive editor. Previously she was associated with J. B. Lippincott Co. and E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

to go on. A reprint house necessarily draws upon the original publishers for the books it publishes; where these publishers frequently go to find new talent is to the literary and the little magazines.

While *Harper's* and *The Atlantic Monthly* have for years published good new fiction and poetry, both magazines are perhaps more distinguished today for their critical examination of the contemporary scene. Mary Louise Aswell, until recently the fiction editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, has encouraged and sustained an extraordinary number of new talents who are among our best writers today. *The New Yorker* has presented, and been important to, not only writers who appear for the first time in its pages, but those whose testing ground has been elsewhere. *Mademoiselle* is another American magazine that for years has been hospitable to new writing. *Commentary*, "a journal of thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues," has opened its pages to fiction and poetry of high quality.

But it is probably the editors of the little magazines whose taste, insight and devotion have done most to encourage new writing. Eager to accept and applaud what is new, individual, and sometimes difficult, they have given most to the writer, to the standard publishers, to the reprint houses, to the readers.

The directory we offer here is by no means complete. It is a partial listing of those American book publishers and those magazines which, in the years since the war, have been most conspicuously hospitable, most receptive to new writing. The addresses are listed for the convenience of readers and writers alike, especially for overseas readers of *New World Writing* who do not have immediate access to the usual directories, or catalogues, of American publishers.

## BOOK PUBLISHERS

*Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.*, 35 W. 32nd St., New York 1, N. Y.

*The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.*, 730 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis 7, Ind. New York office: 468 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

*Crown Publishers, Inc.*, 419 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

*Dial Press*, 461 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

*Dodd, Mead & Company*, 432 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y.

*Doubleday & Company, Inc.*, 575 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

- E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc.*, 300 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.
- Farrar, Straus & Young, Inc.*, 101 Fifth Ave., New York 3, N. Y.
- Harcourt, Brace & Company*, 383 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.
- Harper & Brothers*, 49 E. 33rd St., New York 16, N. Y.
- Houghton Mifflin Company*, 2 Park St., Boston 7, Mass. New York office: 432 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y.
- Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.*, 501 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.
- Little, Brown & Company*, 34 Beacon St., Boston 6, Mass. New York office: 60 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.
- The Macmillan Company*, 60 Fifth Ave., New York 11, N. Y.
- New Directions*, 333 Sixth Ave., New York 14, N. Y.
- W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.*, 101 Fifth Ave., New York 3, N. Y.
- Pellegrini & Cudahy*, 41 E. 50th St., New York 22, N. Y.
- Prentice-Hall, Inc.*, 70 Fifth Ave., New York 11, N. Y.
- G. P. Putnam's Sons*, 210 Madison Ave., New York 16, N. Y.
- Random House*, 457 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.
- Rinehart & Company, Inc.*, 232 Madison Ave., New York 16, N. Y.
- Charles Scribner's Sons*, 597 Fifth Ave., New York 17, N. Y.
- William Sloane Associates*, 119 W. 57th St., New York 19, N. Y.
- Vanguard Press*, 424 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.
- The Viking Press*, 18 E. 48th St., New York 17, N. Y.
- The World Publishing Company*, 2231 W. 110th St., Cleveland 2, Ohio. New York office: 107 W. 43rd St., New York 18, N. Y.

## LITTLE MAGAZINES

*Accent*, Box 102, University Station, Urbana, Ill. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editors: Kerker Quinn, Charles Shattuck and others.

- The American Scholar*, 415 First Ave., New York 10, N. Y. Quarterly. Poetry, criticism, general articles, reviews. Editor: Hiram Haydn.
- The Antioch Review*, Yellow Springs, O. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, general articles, reviews. Chairman of Editorial Board: Paul Bixler.
- The Arizona Quarterly*, University of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, regional material, reviews. Editor: Desmond Powell.
- Botteghe Oscure*, via delle Botteghe Oscure, 32, Rome, Italy. Bi-annual. Fiction, poetry, criticism, *belles lettres* in French, English and Italian. Chief Editor: Marguerite Caetani.
- Epoch*, 252 Goldwin Smith Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism. Editors: Baxter Hathaway, James Hall, Morris Bishop, Harvey Shapiro and others.
- Furioso*, Carleton College, Northfield, Minn. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editors: Reed Whittemore, Arthur Mizener, and others.
- The Hopkins Review*, Box 1227, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore 18, Md. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
- The Hudson Review*, 439 West St., New York 14, N. Y. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editors: Joseph Bennett, Frederick Morgan, William Arrowsmith.
- The Kenyon Review*, Gambier, O. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: John Crowe Ransom.
- New Directions Annual*, 333 Sixth Ave., New York 14, N. Y. Annual. Fiction, poetry, criticism, *belles lettres*. Editor: James Laughlin.
- New Mexico Quarterly*, University of New Mexico, Box 85, Albuquerque, N. M. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, regional material including bibliographical guide to literature of the Southwest, reviews. Editor: George Arms. Poetry Editor: Edwin Honig.
- New-Story*, 6, Boulevard Poissonnière, Paris 9e, France. Monthly. Fiction. Editors: Jean-François Bergery, David Burnett and others.

- Partisan Review*, 30 W. 12th St., New York 11, N. Y. Bi-monthly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, general articles, reviews. Editors: William Phillips, Philip Rahv.
- Poetry*, 232 E. Erie St., Chicago 11, Ill. Monthly. Poetry and criticism of poetry. Editor: Karl Shapiro.
- Quarterly Review of Literature*, Bard College, Box 287, Annandale-on-Hudson, N. Y. Fiction, poetry, plays, criticism. Editors: T. Weiss, Renée Weiss.
- The Sewanee Review*, University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: J. E. Palmer.
- Southwest Review*, Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas, Tex. Quarterly. Economic, political and sociological articles and reviews; Summer issue devoted annually to fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: Allen Maxwell.
- The University of Kansas City Review*, 5100 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: Clarence R. Decker.
- The Virginia Quarterly Review*, The University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, general articles, reviews. Editor: Charlotte Kohler.
- The Western Review*, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, Ia. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, reviews. Editor: Ray B. West, Jr.
- The Yale Review*, Drawer 1729, New Haven 7, Conn. Quarterly. Fiction, poetry, criticism, general articles, reviews. Editorial Board: William Clyde DeVane, Edgar S. Furniss, David M. Potter, Arnold Wolfers.

## OTHER MAGAZINES

- The Atlantic Monthly*, 8 Arlington St., Boston 16, Mass. Monthly.
- Commentary*, 34 W. 33rd St., New York 1, N. Y. Monthly.
- Harper's Bazaar*, 572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Monthly.
- Harper's Magazine*, 49 E. 33rd St., New York 16, N. Y. Monthly.
- Mademoiselle*, 575 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Monthly.
- The New Yorker*, 25 W. 43rd St., New York 18, N. Y. Weekly.

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