RED CEDAR REVIEW

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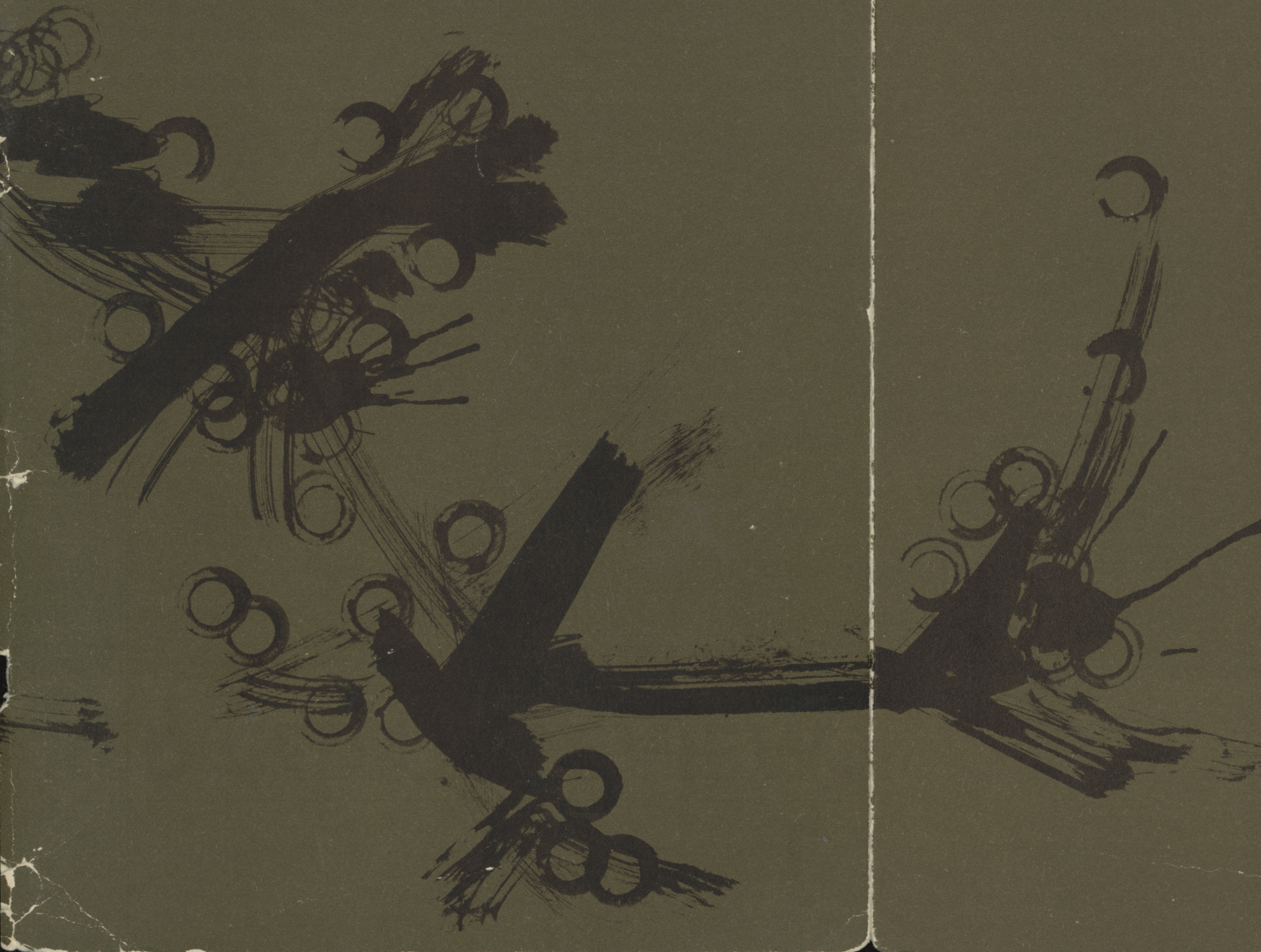
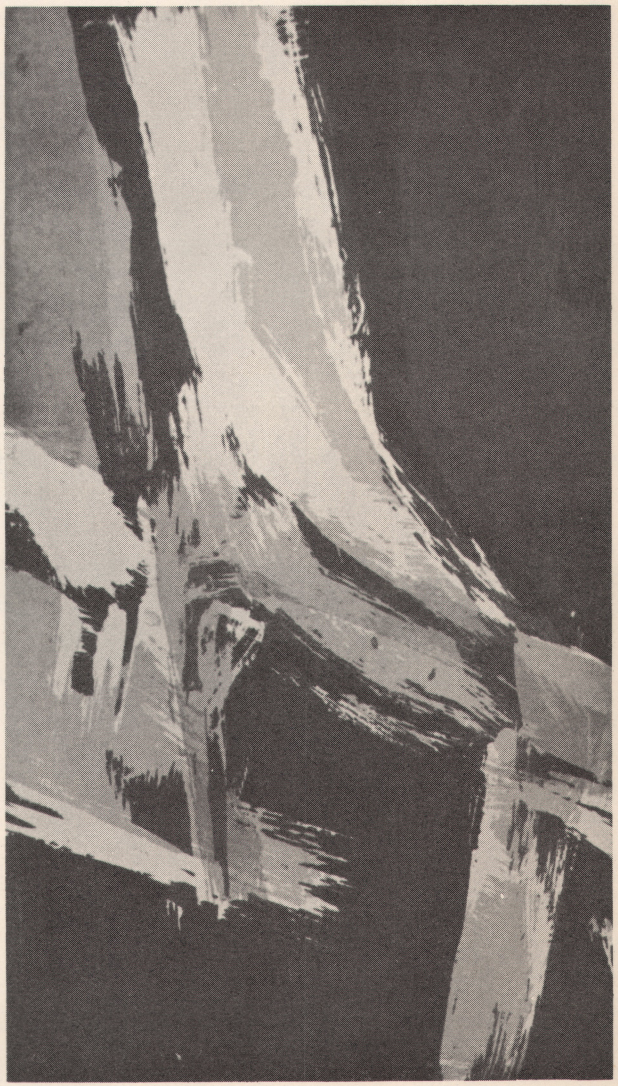




John sent home
A gram of dust
He'd scraped from off
The Sphinx for me
I mixed it
In a glass of wine
And drank
To immortality.

RED CEDAR REVIEW



BETTY BELL MIDNIGHT MAZE SERIGRAPH

Preceding Page: **SANDYWINE** / Poem By JAMES HARKNESS

RCR-1

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CONTENTS / VOLUME ONE : NUMBER ONE / Spring 1963

RCR / FICTION	5	The Lie / THEODORE SJOGREN
	19	Apocalypse / HORACE ALBAUGH
	33	Halloween's Children / WALTER LOCKWOOD
	48	Three Sketches / RICHARD SLATER The Day Before Something To Do On Saturday The Spillway
	52	No Road To Damascus / MARINUS SWETS
RCR / ESSAYS	28	Improvisation, Haiku, Jazz / PETE NYE
	63	Voices From Underground / MELVYN BUCHOLTZ
RCR / POETRY	1	Sandywine / JAMES HARKNESS
	15	Four Poems / RICHARD OGAR An Afternoon With The Seer Insects Twentieth-Century Theology Final Separation
	25	Two Poems / GERALD BRAY Not All Dreams Die With Awakening Sometimes
	31	The Lizard / PHILIP HEALD
	31	Death Room / JAMES HARKNESS
	47	Two Poems / RON GERVAIS Writer's Wife As A Light Sinks
	59	Once Upon A Once-Time Night / PEGGY CASE
	60	Three Poems / MELVYN BUCHOLTZ Unknowns December 6 Grindle



JOHN MCCORMICK UNTITLED SERIOGRAPH MONOPRINT

theodore sjogren

THE LIE

In the evening of the second day he heard her coming up the stairs to the top floor of the old wooden house. Outside it was dusk and the room was gray with the dim light from the one window falling across the bed. He lay still, and out in the hall he heard the old woman come along the corridor and stop before his door. After a moment of silence, she knocked on it.

"Mr. Simons," she called. "Are you there, Mr. Simons?"

In the room, Mr. Simons turned over in the bed, onto his stomach, and breathed heavily into the pillow. He knew the woman understood he was there; there was nowhere else he could be, and she always knew when one of her boarders went out.

He lay quiet with his head in the pillow and did not bother to answer.

"Mr. Simons," she said again. "I do wish you would answer. I've been worried about you. We all have."

And he could imagine that: the small concern that fed dead lives: but he tried not to. He lay still in bed and made an effort to control the way of his thinking.

When he got home from work — yesterday, he thought, or was it the day before, or maybe last week when it was raining — when he came in, they were all sitting at the table and he paused on the stairs, saying he would not be down to eat.

"I prepared for you," she said. "Chicken and sweet potatoes and peas. It's all ready."

"Well," he said, "Mr Wimple can have mine. I'm not hungry."

He looked at them all, and felt a wave of disgust pass through him, for himself as much as any of them, and as he went up the stairs he imagined the landlady shaking her head, waiting for his door to close so she could start talking about those men, how they never knew how to care for themselves and after a certain age were less than savage without a woman; Mr. Wimple not hearing and already eating the extra dinner; at the other end of the table Mr. O'Neil watching his chance to talk of his duties at the church and the two old sisters, who lived at the rear of the house, sitting icily after their brief meal and waiting their chance to leave, neither having said a word. He closed the door to his room and locked it. That was it; he had enough.

Now, he lay quietly in his bed, waiting for the woman, the landlady, to go away and leave him alone. He didn't know if this was his first, second, or third straight day in bed. He closed his eyes tightly and listened to the heavy sound of his breathing in the soft pillow.

"Mr. Simons," the woman said, and he could tell she had her mouth to the door crack, "you haven't eaten in two days. And today your office called. Are you sick, Mr. Simons?"

Lying on his stomach, his eyes closed tight, he pressed his face harder into the pillow and felt the dryness of the pillowcase on his tongue. He opened his mouth and bit on it. It tasted sour.

"I told them you were sick," she said. "I didn't know what else to say. You wouldn't answer when I called," she said firmly.

Mr. Simons rolled over onto his back. Still his eyes were closed and he brought his knees up close to his stomach and turned partly on one side. If he said it was just the stomach flu and he wanted to rest she might go away. But now he didn't want to open his mouth and he was even a little afraid to hear his voice. It might not even sound like him.

"Can I get you something to eat?" she said; and then she seemed to realize that, for all purposes, she could have been talking to no one. "Really, Mr. Simons," she said, "you should at least answer."

But he knew now that she would go away. There were several moments of quiet, and then she said, "All right. All right, Mr. Simons," and he heard her going away down the corridor, down the stairs and at the bottom her door open and shut.

After she was gone he lay very still and kept his eyes closed until he felt the muscles of his eyelids begin to ache. Although the room was warm, he lay under a sheet and two blankets. Outside he heard the cars going by on the street and then one of the city buses, stopping at the corner, and after a long while a police car went by with its siren on. He waited for another long time

to see if it would come back. But it didn't and all at once he opened his eyes.

Now the room was completely dark. He looked up at the ceiling and moved his toes around against the heavy pressure of the sheet and blankets. He wondered if he would get up in the morning and go to work. At the office they at first would show concern, then anger for his not calling when he knew he was sick. He lay and wondered how long he had been sick without really knowing it.

Always, at the office, he told himself how all the people of the world worked because they had to eat and how it was not important that work give you anything outside of that. There were supposed to be people for whom it was not like that. But he would not let himself believe it and was not convinced that, even if they liked their work, they would do it if they did not eat by it.

About a year ago, one night after work, he went to a theater instead of going straight to the boarding house. Before the feature they showed a movie of an African tribe that greatly impressed him. The tribe lived in some part of the country which was quite barren and all the days were spent in constant search of food. It showed how they chased a giraffe for five days and, when at last they killed it, how they ate even the skin because it was too tough and thick to make into clothing.

The movie stirred something deep inside him, and he got up and left without seeing the feature. For hours that night he walked aimlessly, through the heart of the city, down through the factory district, out into the residential area and back. All through his body a desire for the struggle and the constant involvement of the hunt flared vivid and drove him on as if with actual hunger. Looking around him, at the paved streets and the tall buildings of the city, he felt some basic life had been lost to him. His mind and body felt cramped and dry. He needed to breathe, and around him there was no air. He needed life, needed his heart to open. But he was drowning in milk and honey.

By dawn he arrived back at the boarding house, threw himself on the bed, and with a quick swing of his arm sent the alarm clock in pieces across the room. He felt he was saved. Tomorrow he would quit his job. His life had found an answer, had heard the voice of reason, and soundly he slept.

By noon the sun was shining in brightly. He got up, sat in a chair by the window looking out at the street and tried to figure how to begin a life with survival directly involved and every act thus meaningful. But now something was wrong. The voice of reason had changed. In the day the world looked different and facts were clear and harsh and hard to avoid in the new light. Not knowing what to do he sat by the window and felt the fire die slowly within him. In his experience the life he dreamed of did not exist. At last he rose, got dressed, and went down to the office. He could barely talk to give a reason for his absence in the morning. And he promised it would not happen again.

Down the hall now he heard Mr. Wimple open and close his door and go

down the stairs and out into the street. His evening walk, he thought to himself. Once around the block and back. If he would just cross the street—but he won't, he thought; he's forgotten how.

Then, lying in bed, he discovered he hated Mr. Wimple. Or maybe not hate because it was not that positive; it was more like nausea, the way you view food when you yourself are sick. Well, he thought, maybe. But what day is it? He tried to remember if the landlady had said. He realized he was a little mixed up, slightly out of context, and his stomach was not so good. He put his hand down under the covers and wondered if it would get worse progressively. The world gets worse progressively, he thought. Progressively progressing. And while he was feeling his stomach he heard the landlady climbing the stairs again. His stomach muscles were tight and he held his knees up as far as they would go to his chest.

Outside the door he heard the landlady set something down on the floor.

"I have food for you," she said. "I've thought it over, and if you don't open the door I'll use my key and come in."

He lay still, and he looked up at the ceiling in the darkness.

"Well," she said, "I'm coming in."

Then he said, "No," and was surprised that anything came out at all. His voice sounded right and now it seemed crazy that he had worried about it all that time. "You better not," he said.

"What did you say?"

"I said no." He took a deep breath and talked loudly, too loud he thought. "You better not. I don't know why. Please go away."

"Don't worry, Mr. Simons," she said. "I have food. It will do you good."

He heard the key in the door, and he said, "No. Go away. Please," but she came in, and he worried that perhaps she could not hear him or even that he was not really talking, that his voice was somehow not being heard and he was trapped within this thing called Simons, unable to get a message out.

When she came in, he saw her outlined in the door, the faint light of the hall behind her and falling yellow into the room, and he watched as she went across to the desk and put the tray down. At the window the night was solid black and she pulled the shade and opened the window a crack at the bottom. As she passed the lamp in the corner, she turned it on, and Mr. Simons closed his eyes.

"You should let fresh air in," she said. "This place is too stuffy. It's not healthy, not a little bit."

He heard her moving around in the room, moving the night table over to put the tray on it, putting the phone on the floor with a faint ring and a groan as she knelt down, and then she got up and turned the quilt back.

"Don't do that," said Simons. "Don't touch me!"

He heard her step back from the bed. He knew he had scared her, and he

felt angry and then foolish. "I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean anything. I'm not well."

"I thought you were too warm," she said.

"No," he said. "I'm all right."

"Can I get a doctor? There's a man down the street we always call when one of our roomers gets sick."

"No," he said. "It's kind of a thing I've had before. A doctor won't help."

"I brought some soup and crackers and a sandwich."

"The one thing I can't do is eat," he said. "I know that. If I can go long enough without eating maybe I can kill it."

"Kill what?" she asked.

"You wouldn't understand," he said.

He realized with the talking it was getting a slight bit better. Inside he began to ease up a little.

"I might," she said. "I've had roomers a long time now. Before we had a farm and lived with a family come from the South and I've had a lot of experience taking care of sick ones. Rooming like this you meet a lot of people."

"I'll bet," he said.

He lay on his back under the warm, coarse texture of the sheet and fixed his eyes steadily on the smudged white plaster ceiling. Secretly, without showing it, he was glad the woman came and now, for the first time, he relaxed the grip he had on himself and felt with relief the taut muscles of his stomach slacken.

"Listen," he said, "sit down, won't you?" and he felt some more of the pressure go. She stood with her apron on, her arms folded on her heavy breasts, and he looked over at her now.

"What was your husband like?" he asked. "Talk about your husband."

"Well," she said, "he liked it on the farm. We came to the city after we couldn't make any money at it. We were lucky to get this place. We were here five years before we got it."

"I'll bet he wanted to go back," said Simons. "He wanted to go back. Didn't he?"

"Yes," she said. "Once he retired he wanted to. He wished he had it to live on again. He liked the place all right."

"Ah," he said; he nodded his head and let it fall back into the pillow.

"Don't you think you better eat something?" she said.

"No," he said.

"When my man was sick I always gave him plenty of hot soup and tea. I'll get you some tea later."

"No tea," he said. But he wanted her to go on. He wanted to listen hard to her words and make them seem real. "How did he die?"

"My husband?"

"Yes."

"Well," she moved in the chair a little. Simons watched her while something seemed to come back to him. It was like a dirty idea he could not get out of his head; he could not shake it. "He was retired two or three years, around the house and all. And then one night he died, sitting up by the window he died. He was older than me. He married late and I was only seventeen."

Simons closed his eyes, and put his hand on his stomach and felt it coming back. For a moment he was very much afraid of it.

"I think you better go," he said.

"Are you all right? Can I do something?"

"No," he said. "You go now. I'm all right. You go and come back later."

When she left, he brought his knees up again and did not hear her descending the stairs or the door close to her apartment. It was dark again, and he turned over so his face was buried deep in the pillow, his breath moist and hot on the cloth and on his cheeks, and he started to laugh, letting his breath out evenly at first and then laughing harder and harder. It was a release for the thing in his stomach and he did not try to stop it, having his face in the pillow so it was not too loud anyway, and when it was over he lay very quiet under the covers and remembered how once, when he was a boy, he had fallen in what he thought was love with a girl and, one day after school, saw her with another boy under the bleachers by the football field.

They did not see him and he ran the long way home without stopping. First he felt only relief that they had not heard him outside the fence that surrounded the bleachers. Had they known he didn't know what he would have done. It seemed absurd, terribly unreal, and running home he felt his mind deny it, and his running seemed as if in a dream.

That night at supper the food had made him nauseous, but in the company of his parents he had to hold on tight to himself and pretend that nothing was wrong, because if it were said aloud, if he thought about her kissing the boy, he felt he would fly into a thousand pieces. Then in bed he thought about her, and began to cry, putting his head under the covers so his parents would not hear; he cried hard until it all seemed to disappear, until he cried it all out and there was nothing left inside him at all and, being empty like that, he felt quiet and peaceful.

But now he couldn't do that and he felt there was nothing he could honestly get rid of, no way to empty himself. There's nothing worth it anyway, he thought, nothing worth the effort, and no meaning. Now he lay still, the laughing over, and as he expected it hadn't helped. Already he felt it coming back to his stomach; his private demon, driving him farther and farther into his own absurdity. In the beginning he called it loneliness because he didn't know what it was. He remembered the first time it had made him do something foolish, walking in another city, through a park, and how the trees were all dark and quiet in the summer night. There was a river and a place where they rented canoes with

the lights of the city beyond it. On this side of the river a woman was sitting on a bench under the light of a lamp, and there were moths flying around the light so that it flickered faintly on the ground and in the trees. At that time there were mostly couples walking, and when there were none very close, he went over and sat down on the bench beside the woman. He did not really look at her, but he felt her stiffen.

"Don't get up. Please," he said. "I just want to talk."

But he felt her harden and a wall go up so thick he heard clearly the despair in his own voice. All he said came out in a kind of breathless panic, and he could not calm himself.

"I don't mean anything. I haven't been here long. I just thought we could talk and I don't mean to insult you by it."

"If you don't get up this minute, I'll scream," she said.

"Please," he said. "We can talk. Then I'll go away."

"You see if I don't scream. I can tell about you pimps. You see if I don't."

"It's the night," he went on blindly, because he couldn't stop now. "There's a wonderful feeling about it. But it's wrong to see it alone."

Then she started to yell, a high-pitched insistent scream, and he got up and ran as fast as he could, the woman's voice dying away behind him and the park flashing by until he was out on the street, and he went quickly to the hotel and got into bed. He hated the woman. She had made him feel dirty and perverse. He only wanted to talk but now he felt like all the things the woman had imagined were a part of him, had become true because of his action which had implied them, and it was early morning before he was able to sleep.

He felt all women were as that one. Because of their own fears and distrust you couldn't communicate with them. He hated himself for trying, for needing to try. And he hated the waste.

One morning while shaving, he looked at himself and saw that, from then on, each day was one step in the wrong direction. Everything he was and would be seemed quite absurd and he could not shake a growing feeling of loss. In the city, in the office where he worked and out walking on the streets, he saw the young ladies a man looked for and knew that in his life he would never have one of them. And those he knew he could have he had no feeling about. The others, the good-looking ones and the charming ones, he could only look at, and if once he went out with one, the second time she was busy.

Gradually he saw himself as the kind of ordinary guy who while being able to enter the race would never win it. Again, like that time when he was a boy, everything became unreal and he wanted badly to run.

At night in his bed at the boarding house, he got in the habit of remembering the look of various women he saw during the day, and, for a short time, he made serious love to them in his imagination. All his hopes and needs rose within him and were for that brief time fulfilled. For moments before sleep he found peace

and pleasure until one night he had an orgasm while thinking of a particular woman.

Immediately after that he felt ashamed and perverse, and he resolved never to do it again.

But at the end of each day he wanted that woman, whom he thought he loved, and because he knew he could not have her ultimately he didn't want even to speak to her. By night he couldn't help thinking about her while in bed, and when she changed jobs there was soon another one, and after that another, so that there was always some one he wanted but could not have except in his thoughts.

But each night when it was over he couldn't help feeling soiled and dirty. Soon this shame became mixed with the desire and it was with him all the time, rising up when he saw certain women, and the shame undermined each moment of pleasure. It began to eat him hollow.

Now he lay sweating under the covers and felt that still he could hear his own laughing in the room. He felt afraid and turned over on his back and looked at the wall and the ceiling and at the darker shadow that was the door. Outside the traffic was lighter, he could hear that, and he thought the sky looked brighter too. Maybe it will be morning soon, he thought, and then he lay quietly and didn't think of anything for a long time.

When the light went on he thought that he must have been asleep. At first he could not see, and he heard the landlady say, "You see. He hasn't touched the food." When his eyes adjusted he saw that Mr. O'Neil, from down the hall, was with her. He closed his eyes quickly.

"Well, Mrs. Fink," said Mr. O'Neil, "I'll just stay here for a time. Why don't you go fix some tea?"

He heard the door close and Mr. O'Neil move a chair over by the bed. He did not open his eyes, and he lay very still.

At last he couldn't stand the silence nor the presence of Mr. O'Neil. What did he want, anyway, he thought, and who the hell asked him? He lay still a little longer. If only he could sleep and never see another person. They were all absurd and he did not believe in them or want to commit himself to their illusion. But what was he doing, sitting there quietly, waiting? "Listen," he said, "what do you want?"

"Mrs. Fink told me you're pretty sick," said O'Neil.

"I'm all right," he said. Still he kept his eyes closed. "I kind of wish you would go."

But Mr. O'Neil did not answer. Nor did he get up to go.

"I don't want to seem rude," he said. "I'm all right; but I don't feel like seeing any one."

Perhaps Mr. O'Neil nodded. "I know," he said. "With some of us it is like that during the crisis. Then others need to talk. In time I can be of help."

"What crisis?" he asked.

O'Neil leaned forward in the chair, a little over the bed, and Simons opened his eyes and looked at him. "The re-apportionment," said Mr. O'Neil; "the inner crisis that arises sooner or later in all of us."

He closed his eyes and turned over in bed to face the wall. He pulled the sheet up over his head and held one hand to his eyes until he saw orange amoebas swimming in a purple pond. Softly he began to laugh.

"All sickness is a crisis," said Mr. O'Neil. "It is a sign from Him that all is not right within us. It is a time when we must choose the right way and heal the festering in our hearts."

After a while, he thought he had better stop laughing. He did not want to lose control: he wanted it to stay funny. He turned over to look at O'Neil. "I'll bet you know all about demons," he said. "Don't you? You know all the signs."

"Yes," said O'Neil. "No man is free. Each has his own demon."

"We are all free," he said seriously. He turned and look at O'Neil; inside he felt slimy and sick now; it was not funny. "We have absolute freedom, absolute choice, and nothing is above us," he said.

"Ah!" yelled O'Neil, and he stood up so fast he knocked the chair over. He started to pace up and down the room. "Fredom is your demon," he said. "Fredom!" He went over and slammed his fist on the desk, and then he stared steadily at Simons, who sat up and threw the sheet off himself.

"Yes," he said. "It's freedom. It's nothing. It's everything I am and am not. But you can't touch it," he said. "Nothing can touch it." Then he sat back against the wall. What was he doing? What did it matter? Why should he argue about nothing? He had to shut up and hold on, let it all slide off, not let any of it touch him.

"Give me your hand," said O'Neil. He came over to the bed and stuck out his hand.

"No," he said. "Get out. Leave me alone."

"Let your heart pass through me to the knowledge of God," insisted O'Neil.

"Get away from me," he said. He tried to lie down. O'Neil was in the way, with his one knee on the bed.

"Kneel beside the bed and pray with me. Pour out your soul and drive the poison from your heart. Purge, cleanse yourself, drive out this demon at last!"

"Get away," he said. Inside he was tense and ready to fly apart. O'Neil came forward and put his hands on his shoulders and tried to make him kneel. "No," he said, "damn it," and he struck out and knocked Mr. O'Neil to the floor.

He fell back speechless against the headboard of the bed. What had he done? He looked at O'Neil on the floor. He grew numb, his head seeming to spin off away from him. The room and the bed and the four walls began to whirl away into the dark and he felt himself crying haltingly into the sheet. "Why?" he said. "Why did you come? I didn't ask you. I didn't want your fear too."

He put his head down and cried himself into a void, pushing himself back into a numbness, without the noise or pain of sense. When he felt O'Neil's hand grasp his shoulder he did not resist. Through the blur he saw O'Neil's rumpled hair, his smashed upper lip and the bright blood under his nose. He got out of bed and stood up in front of O'Neil.

"Now kneel."

He got down beside O'Neil, his arms out on the bed, and he put his head down obediently.

"Say Our Father," said O'Neil.

"Our Father," he cried.

"Who art in Heaven"

"Who art in Heaven"

"Hallowed be Thy name"

"Hallowed be Thy name"

When Mr. O'Neil left, Simons got back into bed and lay quietly on his back without any of the covers pulled over him. For a long time he lay in the dark, with his eyes open looking at the ceiling, and when the night began slowly to thin he got out of bed and stood for a while by the window. There was a fringe of gray rising above the buildings; the street was empty, and he saw steam rising from a sewage drain in the cold morning air.

Once he thought he was going to laugh again; but it was only a reflex, and he knew the laughing was over: there was no need for it now and nothing to gain. He was not worried about himself. He had no feeling at all. There was no tragedy when you yourself were not real, and there was no pain. He enjoyed the lack of sensation. His stomach was relaxed. He did not mind thinking; in fact there was nothing to think about. All was clear and a mild warmth of knowledge filled his head. He looked out of the window and it was pleasant now that all reality was gone from it.

He stood for a while and then went into the bathroom; in the sink he let the water run, and he looked toward the window.

Morning was beginning to dawn. The gray was rising above the buildings, and a few lights were on in the buildings across the street. The night was over. It had been a long night. "Yes," he thought, and he spoke the words aloud, hearing them as from a great distance, "but after all. It was only a lie." And he turned from the window, let the water run over his hand, and then quickly he slashed his razor down three times across his wrist, holding his arm carefully over the sink to make it clean, letting it all go honestly down the drain.

AN AFTERNOON WITH THE SEER

Madam Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,
Had a bad cold. . . .
—THE WASTE LAND

Someone's plucked the current
From the seeing-glass
And forgotten to shuffle the deck,

She said in a torrent
Of plum-colored rage. Alas,
This place is always a wreck . . .

Where in the world is Albert?
(The spirit behind the scenes,
She added as a joke.)

Well, you know the future's a flirt . . .
You don't win her with chocolate cremes . . .
Would you care for a smoke?

If I hadn't forgotten palmistry
We could pierce the mirror that way . . .
Ah! these deplorable mental lags . . .

Tea! . . . Won't you have a cup of tea?
Then we'll see where the Trade Winds play . . .
O . . . hell . . . where has Albert hidden the bags?

INSECTS

Vacant shuttles
Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
An old man in a draughty house
Under a windy knob.

—T. S. Eliot

I sit alone in this over-stuffed room
Watching my shadows crawl across the walls
Like spiders, or their ghosts;
Black clouds of smirking thunder shadowing
The faded gods on their Olympus
Of yellow paper peeling
Mock Pan fiddling with his pipes.

Perhaps I should explain:
A steady rain began with my birth,
The night sky bellowed unflashed
And the stars strode by, oblivious.
Two-faced rain,
Floating the flowers and rotting their roots.

Above my head a bare bulb rocks,
Haloed with a haze of bugs, like
Frenzied memories, flocking to a light.
(The insects here are brown and brittle,
Bark-fragments of a blasted tree.
Squeezed between the fingers,
They show no blood.)

What are these memories but dreams
Turned inside-out?
I should write them down,
Pluck their wings
To walk on doddering feet,
But I cannot remember which are true,
Which false . . . .

What matter,
After the bulb has burst,
The wire snapped with too much heat?
I will write them down.
Once through the mind
Both dream and memory are past:
This is enough for me.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEOLOGY

The fall (bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!) of a once wallstrait oldparr is retaled early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy.

—Finnegans Wake

In the garden of Adam
    The ticker-tape typed
The Word (Paradise, down 4, apples, up 3):
    The slither-snake laughed to see such sport
And the sun ran around with the moon.

Had the Tree mooned them mad,
    Or had they a legitimate gripe?
(I'm bored as hell, said she:
    No comment, the Creator's retort.
Said he, Who needs a *fille* when the world is *jeune*?)

Whatever the reason they had,
    They've left us alone with the snipe
(The Crash must be considered quietly,
    Said the Presidential Committee's report)
While the lark runs around with the loon.

FINAL SEPARATION

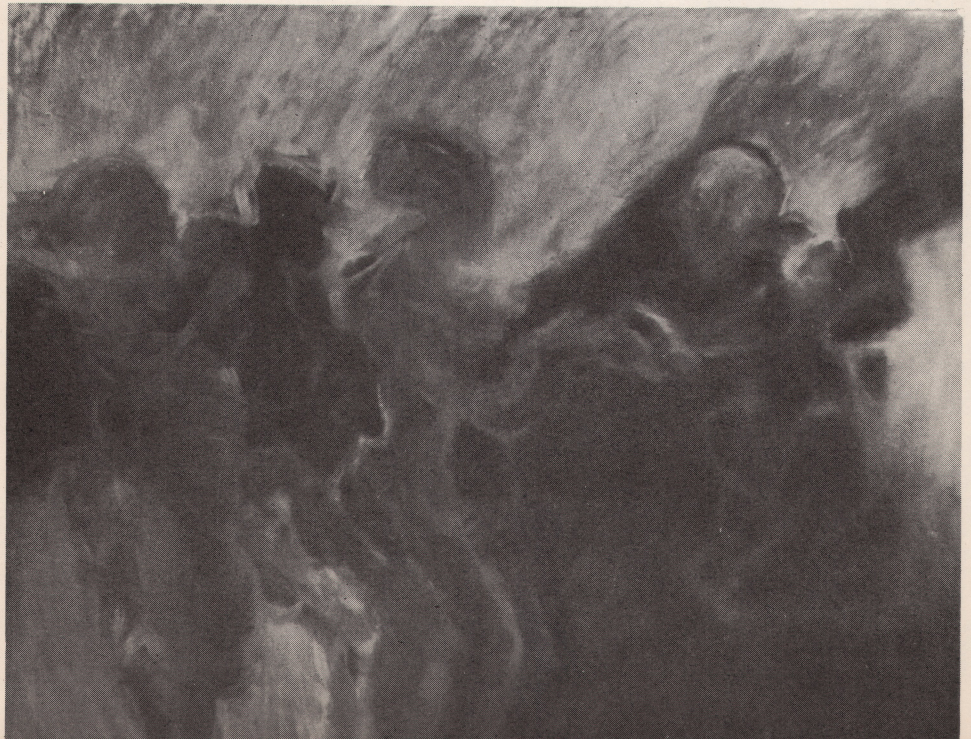
Corpses are slabbed
In the sea's cold room
Amidst the praying of ferns
And the uncertainty of darkness.
These dead are their own monuments:
Within them is sufficient stone.
Their six feet of water
Is bitter only briefly—
Until the philtre of the moon,
In filtering motes of glow,
Conjoins claw with claw,
Ball with string,
Swelling the rustling womb.
The young flow forth like blood
From the virgin's loins.
The wheel turns smoothly,
The axle is well-ground.
No creaks.
But we cannot return to the sea,
Filled with apologies:
We have left gills
And swimming with tails
Behind with the afterbirth.
Ships only gloss the surface:
The creases fill.
Our occasional offerings do not float,
But lay heavy in the sand,
Crushing the weeds.
The drowned ones never know each other
And, in the darkness,
Never see the moon.
Poor rusted wheels.

CAROL HILLMAN FIGURE NO.I OIL ON CANVAS

APOCALYPSE

HORACE ALBAUGH

Mother, white skinned and white haired and furrowed: like the snow beginning to melt on a hillside, with the black earth muddy underneath and breaking through where the skin is melted thin so that the mud runs down the snow furrows. He knew it wouldn't be long before all the snow skin was gone and the hair falling too through the cold hair gone, and she would finally be naked after all in the spring because the sun is too strong now in the coming spring and has burned away all but the end of winter. He was on the ninth step of the attic staircase, and winter was over him, falling under the spring, rocking white and thin in the chair in the great fireplace. The ninth stair: hollow, there were only two long, tarnished nails holding it down, enough, now, anyway,



Mother was careful on the stairs, funny as a frog is funny when he tied its leg to a coil of the electric range and turned the knob on simmer, funny that way when she came down the stairs or went up, not touching the ninth step, stretching her flaking skinny legs over it and holding onto the banister, funnier if he tied her leg to the stair, and more, if he drew out one of the thin long nails and put it through her foot on the step and down into the board. When the spring was well set in, when it laid winter away, after the apotheosis, when everything was ended anyway, but not now, not before the apotheosis, now when she wrapped her crusted snowing fingers around the arms of the rocker only, then, maybe, her foot on the ninth stair. He giggled, spilled some of the tea over the rim of the cup he carried so that it ran onto his hand and soon it burned him and reminded him and he touched the top of his head, the bald area on top that winter had shaved there so she could let the candle drip wax on it and when the place was covered with soft wax and wax ran into the hair that surrounded the bald place, she set the candle there. It was burned about half way down and he had remembered anyway.

He opened the door.

Good: it was very good to remember without having to be reminded by winter's candle: when the candle burns all the way down, then bring my tea, you mustn't forget and let the flame blow out or then if the flame goes out time won't go on and there will be no tea, you will forget, so keep it aflame and when it burns down and you feel the flame come down and touch, then bring my tea.

The attic was filled with winter, but black, as if he were under snow breathing snow, so far under snow that no light came through.

"Ach-" said winter spitting snow from her mouth and the candle light flickered running into her eyes and she caught it with the ach and clamped her cold gums together and the candle light began spinning around in her eyes, and the ach! and the lights in her eyes spinning faster and brighter in her eyes, winter so hot, the fever of the flame in her eyes and the ach! as her bony fingers curled and a memory grapsed him hot between the legs and he spilled the tea the candle went out.

"Ach!"

"I'm sorry, Mother, I'll get another cup," but he couldn't see her in the black and the fireplace was blacker yet, only the sound of her rocking and the snow falling in the fireplace.

"Ne me parles pas! Froid, froid, ach," so he turned taking the candle off his head, getting the wax under his nails.

"Sabocles?" It was Bea, at the bottom of the stairs, calling up to him, Bea, small and soft and calling, "Wo bist du?"

Roughly, coming down in the dark now that the light was out, "Ich bin hier, naturlich, mit Mutter."

"Pourquoi? Sabocles?"

More words from her, more questions, ever words and Bea interrupting asking wondering but she wouldn't come up to the attic in the dark so at least it was only her words that touched him.

Again, "Pourquoi?" her questioning, ever asking, bringing sun to winter, bringing sun ever since the death of Father, Father who once sat high in the oak chair and told, told in the silver flow of his thoughts, Tu es meus filius, speaking now only in the memory of degeneration, because he grew old: Father, thin and sick grinning lying in the bed, and Mother sitting beside him, her face split in a half-cry while she endured the delirious obscenities:

"Mentula venit-"

Her wet globe of an eye melting down her red cheek, and Bea the Madchen at the other side of Father, so young was she, unbloomed:

"Ich breche dich-"

And he had turned away no been thrown away thrown flat against flat marble by the slash of the axe: Father's finger trembling pointing to the center of the bed, his hard little eyes staring into him sick, Pour te, Sabocles, pointing to the center of the bed:

Pater conturbaverat.

And later, with the split of her face open quivering, winter had said, Warte. Er ist alt, Sabocles. . .

He looked down at Bea silhouetted in the doorway.

"Virgo vulsa!" he called, watching his words bounce step by step down to her, and the edges of the steps chiseled them and sharpened them but they weren't sharp enough when they struck to go in. She only winced, so harder, "Vulsa!" and he glanced up, toward winter, and whispered, "Sanctus" to the fireplace in the falling snow, falling so fast that soon only the mud would remain, he would have to hurry, "Venio-"

"Be quiet, Sabocles." She turned away from the staircase.

"Stercus—"

"Shut up!" from around the doorway from her, and he ran down the stairs, stepping hard on the ninth stair, and into the hallway, the sudden light.

"Tea, tea, I spilled her tea, give me another cup."

"Go to bed, Sabocles," and her words were very gentle, it was hard to be angry and he said, "Please, Bea, tea."

She smiled. "Very well," she said, going into the kitchen, "I'll get you another cup. But then you must let her be."

"Danke, Bea, danke," and he reached into his pocket, wanting to show her now how he loved her for the tea, "Eine Zigarette?" he offered.

"Nein." She flipped on the kitchen light and turning to the sink filled the tea kettle. The water came out with a splash of foam and liquid, melted, the snow was melting above the ninth stair and there wasn't much time left. She went to the stove, stopped, and he saw her eyes slowly widen, the tremble came

to her lips, and turning he remembered, as her scream ragged untwisted from her mouth and thrashed its length about the kitchen, twisted close around the body of the frog, then lay still. He moved in front of the stove, to hide it, and he saw her face red, felt its heat, and she reached out, to hurry from the kitchen, but as her hands reached out, her fingers spread and straightened, her stomach caught her, her mouth opened, she grabbed the edge of the sink, and he heard it fall wet and thick against the enamel.

And the snow is about all fallen!

She turned to him, her mouth wet, two small trickles at its corners, her eyes closed, "Nochmal," she said, "Sabocles, it's begun again," and she turned from the kitchen.

The telephone. He caught her halfway through the dining room, around the waist, squeezing her around the stomach to stop the cry, and she fell, he hung to her waist, falling with her, on her.

"Don't cry, bitte, nein, amo te," pressing his hand over her mouth, wanting to press her eyes closed too because the cry was louder in them, her arm was out, toward the telephone, her breasts were rising, collapsing, and her throat, "non, Bea, non, mon Dieu, mon Dieu," pressing more against her throat, crying, feeling the tears in his throat as he felt the pressure of the blood in her neck until she seemed to heave once, sighing, and fell away quiet.

He got up. The snow is about all gone. I must be there, and the winter was rocking above in the great cold fireplace, and shut, shut to him, but it would be warm again, the apotheosis, once more, before spring, with fire in the eyes of winter, amo te, venio, white and snowing all away, encore, encore, I must, not since the shutting up of the ninth stair when she found out what he had done and shut him off, but it was for you, winter, fur meine Mutter, ma mere, ma mere, and he pulled the phone until the cord came loose.

The stairway to winter, to winter falling before the coming of spring and spring would take her before he, he stopped, the ninth stair, the mistake, his great mistake, warum? warum? why did I, my God? Hot, hot and wet, and I mustn't touch winter now, too hot, melt away all the winter, he felt his neck wet, the tiny quick pulses of his throat, can't get by the ninth stair, but winter is up there and fire will come in her eyes amidst the snow. He shut his eyes, hard, until a little white flame burst under his lids. I was beautiful to her, she loved me then, winter and all the earth in the bed, winter and rapture, Deus and Dea, Dei in the rapture, and then the shutting up of the ninth stair, sic gloria transit, everything transit with his mistake. The white burst was dispersing, diffusing through his eyes and mind, calm, calm, come to me, and he leaned against the banister and held tight to it. It was so easy now, lift my foot over the ninth stair, slowly, so up, up to winter and the consummation of snow, apotheosis before the spring, before the rape of winter by the spring, non, le printemps, non, it must not be yet, but give to me, encore, ma mere, ma mere, ma belle, ma deessee.

"Hast du mein— Nein? Warum kommst du denn?"

"Ich—" and what am I to say, ma mere, there is no tea, I have no tea for you, "aber, ich bin hier, ich, meine Mutter," foolish, I am saying it all wrong, foolish.

"Und?" and her voice was impatient, he had no tea for her.

He pulled a match from his pocket and struck it against the sole of his shoe.

"Rauchst du?" and again the impatience cold with the ice of her breath.

"Nein, ich rauche nicht," what am I to say?

"Then go away, I don't understand, why do you light the match?"

The fires were beginning to flame in her eyes, and he struck another match. He stepped closer. She was so white, so white in the wavering circle of light, crouched in the great fireplace, in the rocker, her fingers curled on the arms of the rocker, her hair breaking away white from her furrowed head in long tufts, and the eyes, black and sunk, but carrying the two tiny fires of the match, spring fires spinning around and around, whirling within her irises. My God, ma mere—

"Get out," scratching like chipped ice cold across his thighs, "get out, Sabocles," and it must be now, before the spring, give me just a while, for it would soon be too late, hadn't the doctor said, perhaps a month, perhaps through the winter, sic gloria transit, but the winter at best, at most, yet give me the apotheosis, once, encore, ma mere.

"Must I call Bea to take you away?" scratching his thighs and how she bent forward over her lap, her shoulder blades jutting out long and white like the naked wings of a plucked chicken, but whiter, snowing. "Once," raking his groin and passing up, through the stack of the chimney above her, "once no one would have dared to speak English in this house."

The flame of the match burned down to his finger and thumb, he dropped it, everything fell away black in the snow, the tiny fires racing in her eyes gone, only the cold, another match, wo ist ein Streichholz, light for her eyes.

"Now it is all fallen away," in the snow everything falling, "his decrees are rotted, you don't remember, I don't remember, Bea has forgotten. Were he here, by God were he here! But you, Sabocles, you, filth of my womb, you— Ach. Get away. Let me alone to die. It isn't long. The years of retribution are almost done, almost finished in this hole of your atrocity, this ashy hole. Go away."

He heard her sigh, icy mist falling from her gums in the snow. She is dying, I cannot be robbed, the fires, a match, apotheosis.

"Bea!" icy as he touched her, cold spit spattered from her mouth, "Bea!" as he pulled her from the rocker in the fireplace, God, the bed, my father's bed, across the floor, icy in his arms, clawing chilling at his arms, "Nein, Sabocles, ach, nein, bitte, bitte," to the staircase, covering her mouth, her cold gums munching at his hand, he slipped, she broke her mouth away, "Not the ninth stair, Sabocles, don't let me touch it," and he, "Touch it, touch it, *I'm* alive, ma mere."

"Ach, Sabocles, it's he, it's *he*!"

Her mind, her hate and loathing, running through his blood, can you be so

cruel, can you say it, leaning against the banister, the words, no longer icy, stinging now in their heat, " minor, tu minor es in his shadow," laughing coals.

He held her arm tight and with his free hand drew the hammer from his hip pocket, the ninth step was under his foot, I knew, all these years I've known, but it's taken her words to know it real, there is no more hurt for me, ma mere, the words are all the hurt, and none is left.

"Sabocles?" he could feel her long red neck staring in the darkness, "Sabocles, was ist das—" and so now there is only the ultimate repayment, the assertion of my pain, and he stepped down a stair, holding her arm, and stooped and felt for one of the long nails of the ninth stair.

Dort! and he slipped the claws of the hammer under its head, it groaned pulling from the wood.

"Nein! Sabocles, ach, nein—" as he pulled her burning foot onto the ninth board and held it there placing the tooth of the nail over it and pressing down until his fingers cried out as she was crying, until the head of the nail seemed almost to cut the palm of his hand, until he felt the nail break through the skin and sink, and strike the bone and then he grasped the hammer and brought it down and raised it in her scream and brought it down, felt the nail go through and strike the wood and drove it deeper, further into the ninth board.

"Sabocles?" and it was Bea at the door, the door opened, light fell through, showed him blood upon his hand, Bea leaning in the doorway, beginning her scream, and ma mere, ma mere, tearing at her boiling hair.

Bea's scream. He dropped the hammer, it was all done. Slowly, exhausted, leaning on the banister, he went down to Bea, she was curling on the floor, on her knees bent, losing her head and her scream in her scarlet arms, "Bea, Bea, it's all over, das ist alles, no more," and ma mere, all snowed away, raging on her pin melting behind him.

He bent over Bea, to make her look at him, to see it was all right and over.

"Sabocles?" In short quick flames, "Sabocles, my son?"

He turned. She was standing rigid, a thin red line melting from the corner of her mouth, rigid standing on the ninth stair, she smiled, the line broadened as the skin split more at the edge of her mouth, and she took hold of the banister and raised her foot and the board of the ninth stair came up with her foot and the ninth stair was opened after all the years, and smiling she opened her dress, pulled it up and away, bared her burnt thighs and scorched corolla and she bent down and reached inside the ninth stair and scooped up the ashes in both hands and carried them to her scorched corolla and pressed them up between her legs inside of her, "Minor, inferior es, eras, eris, minerus in imo!" and her eyes caught the light from the hallway for an instant and blazed, and he fell under the weight of the ashes the final assertion and felt his skull push in against his soft convulsing brain until the burst, the brilliant glistening burst into silence.

Two Poems/GERALD BRAY

NOT ALL DREAMS DIE WITH AWAKENING

two tickets to chicago please
and shuffled his feet
sir
Goin North, Boy?
to the wrinkled old man
well sir we got relatives up there and im goin to help —
They aint gonna understand you up there you know that, Boy?
well its just me and my son and we —
You know your boy is gonna be goin to school with white folks?
my boy knows his place
He might even sit next to a white girl in his class.
my boy knows whats right
Suppose he start playing with the white kids white girls and boys?
he gonna play with his own kind
Suppose he started thinking he was equal?
ibroughtmyboyupright heknowshisplace he —
An suppose he wanted to marry a —
MY BOY AINT GONNA —
Dont go interrupting me boy, now dont take your son up there so he got to mix with Radicals and Communist and Atheist now do you?
no sir not no more i suppose

But black dreams after a thousand backdoors
And uncountable seats in the rear
Often evaporate in the heat of the day
Leaving only a stain pointing the way
On the road called progress

SOMETIMES

— Sometimes I feel like a motherless chile —
wonder how we gonna get through the week
wonder how we gonna sleep
we got a floor
got no ceiling

Sometimes I feel like it ain't worthwhile
come in reelin
wife down kneelin
kids out stealin
gotta stay drunk
can't go on
not for long
gotta stop drinkin
try a little thinkin

Sometimes I feel like I ain't God's chile
devil's son
that's me
black me
blacker inside than out
had five dollars
buy bread milk heat meat?
you wrong
bought 80 proof poison
for ole black me

Sometimes I feel like gettin a job
we got the black quota full
we'll call you . . .
in a little while
sorry don't need no thick arms and strong backs
black backs
well what did I want with four years in school

Sometimes I feel like I shoulda stayed in school
Son! look at yo paw
I ain't got no schoolin i get along
What's good enough fo yo pa is . . .
What-you-wanna-go-taschool-fo-nigger
can't get no place
got nough educated nigs down here
get you a good job
like a good black boy

Sometimes I know that you gotta go on
I gonna put down the bottle
(said that last time)
gonna save my pay
(that's old)
gonna love my kids and treat'em right
(ha)
gonna hold my wife
(you ain't gonna do a goddamn thing)
know somethin buddy?
you goddamn right

IM PRO VI SA TION, HAIKU, JAZZ

In the western world, successful art has come to mean, among other things, that which gives pleasure through the realization of the painstaking perfection of the work itself. Thus we have had an abundance of symphonies, lyric poetry, complex paintings, and other works of art, finished, complete, consummate. Our frame of reference is acclimated to the carefully polished gem, and attributes less value to that which is beautiful in simplicity, and, more important, to that which is created through instantaneous inspiration — in short, to that which we term "improvised." The theory of improvisation is not so simple as it may seem; the word itself, as applied to art, is indeed often misunderstood. To explain it further, let us turn to a Japanese form of poetry, the **haiku**, and to an American form of music, jazz.

Haiku poetry is ideally, the outstanding example of the art of poetic improvisation. The traditional foundation of haiku is an ability to achieve an almost mystical kind of insight. The creation of a haiku is the result of an instant of such insight, termed a "haiku moment." It is difficult for a westerner to understand the training that permits the haiku moment to occur. Were we to understand, we should have to become familiar with the whole vocabulary of the haiku art. This includes the whole substance of expression, that is to say not only the meanings of symbols and the form of the work, but the philosophy of the art of haiku — in essence what we must know to appreciate the beauty of haiku poetry. This is indeed difficult, for to understand it fully, we must understand its roots in the

oriental philosophy of Zen, and the belief in placidity and mysticism through meditation.

The writing of a haiku is an act of improvisation, but this does not mean that such a poem is created without preparation, that the haiku is the result of some sort of artistic magic. The poet can only write a haiku after he is spiritually prepared to experience and understand the physical occurrence or object that inspires the poem. In addition the poet must be familiar, to the point of habit, with the actual structure of the haiku, with its three lines of five, seven, and five syllables — no more, no less, in perfect alignment — so that the poem comes almost simultaneously with the experience of inspiration. By insisting on this temporal limitation, the beauty of a haiku comes from its immediacy of communication, not from juggling words, ideas and meters. The training for writing good haiku is not through learning to polish work to perfection, but first to develop the ability to recognize "haiku moments"; and then, through experience and increasing mastery of the idiom, to improve the technical and spiritual beauty of the "moment" without losing the freshness of instantaneous creation and communication. This is the true essence of the art of improvisation.

The American jazzman, whether he realizes it or not, is bound by the same restrictions, trained in the same manner, and judged by the same standards as a writer of Japanese haiku. For jazz, like haiku, is a planned and controlled, but specifically and instantly accidental, art. As the haiku



writer must learn to use words and sounds, so must the jazzman learn to make his instrument respond to what sounds he wants produced. As a haiku writer must be familiar with the nature and the idioms of haiku, so the jazz musician must be familiar with the vocabulary of music — chords, cadences, tempos, sonorities. The writer of haiku writes within a tradition, as does the jazzman, for both strive to create spontaneously something finer than, yet still a derivative of, what has already been done.

Finally, to be fully successful, both jazz and haiku artists must be able to recognize honesty of emotion in order to communicate complex feelings on what is necessarily a fleeting canvas. The jazzman is not trained to polish his work, note by note, to fineness; for like the haiku poet, his inspiration and interpretation must be almost simultaneous. The only training possible is (as it must be with the Japanese poet) a willingness to exist on the hazy and mystical edge of instant inspiration; and a familarity with the idiom, developed almost as second nature, necessary to articulate, organize and put into context a fleeting insight of beauty.

With these skills under his fingers, either artist can express, by the use of a few simple images or notes, a feeling we may only sense but not be able to name. What makes good haiku and good jazz is the capturing of the unexpected, the sudden expansion of the mind prompted by a statement of a fleeting, yet complex nature. We are awed, in fact, that any man could conceive such an idea in any amount of time, much less in the scant instant between inspiration, execution, and communication.

PHILIP HEALD

THE LIZARD

The desert's sifting sands 'neath blazing sky
Give rise to liquid heat in waving wands;
Far in the distance nature shows a lie
Where vacant fish inhabit topless ponds.

A tall spiked cross in green defiance leans
Alone; its quivering shadow blocks the heat
From Heaven, and a lizard slowly gleans
Replacements for its rubber wrinkled meat.

The constant sun climbs upward to its crest
And pulls the cross' shadow towards the East;
But still the lizard stays, content to rest;
Oblivious, it gleans its meager feast.

Against the blue a craven vulture flies;
For when the shadow's gone, the lizard dies.

JAMES HARKNESS

DEATH ROOM

Near the oaken door
From
Narrow wooden shoulders
A dark
Familiar bathrobe
Hung heavily
To the floor.

Preceding Page: WILLAM ARSCOTT BUTTERFLY PAINTING COLLAGE



HALLOWEEN'S CHILDREN

walter lockwood

DANNY THRALL walks briskly down the River Boulevard, which, at three o'clock in the afternoon, is burnt with the deep umber of sun and fallen leaves. As he nears Brown Street curving towards the river, he skips three or four times and shrugs his thin shoulders as a tingling wave of warmth passes up his back. He wears a red and brown plaid hunting jacket and jeans. He is warm, and walking has made his armpits slightly damp. On both sides of Brown street, piles of brittle leaves twirl and shift, and grotesque pumpkin faces stare out at him from cushioned window seats. Behind one of the pumpkins he sees an old sheet being fit for eye holes. It is the afternoon of Halloween.

It has been a long day already for a Saturday. From nine to twelve in the morning he quarterbacked the Burton ninth-grade team to a slaughter against Remley Jr. High. The score was 31-0. Then he and Jimmy Conkle and Buck DeVries stood around the park for an hour afterwards talking about the Halloween Sock Hop that night, making jokes about going trick-or-treating. Last year they all went—as brown-faced minstrels, arm-in-arm. But this year it's the dance instead.

As he looks up from a straw-sheave and pumpkin decoration on the porch of Jimmy's neighbor, he catches blurrily the outline of a brown pigskin bearing down on him. But his hands are tight in the pockets of his jeans and Wham!. he takes one on the shoulder.

"Hey, whatta you trying to do, wise guy?" he yells. "You want a punch in the mouth?"

Jimmy Conkle rocks cockily back on his heels and laughs. His shoulder and chest bulge in his brown wool crew-neck, and a navy blue knit stocking cap envelopes his skull.

"What's the matter, Danny babes? Did I hurt you?"

"Shutup and go out for a pass."

Danny picks up the football and Jimmy takes off across the lawn. Danny watches, feeling for the rubber strings. The ball is cold and hard. Jimmy gets three lawns down, and Danny brings the ball close behind his ear. He leans back on his right foot, raising his left, then his cocked arm snaps free like a willow branch and whips upward in an arc, the ball spiralling from his stretched fingertips—spiralling up beautifully and high-soaring against a pale blue sky. Jimmy digs hard over the fourth lawn, expectant, puffing; the ball turns down from its apex, seems intent on reaching the basketing arms. Then Danny groans. The ball falls lifelessly to the earth followed by a clutter of dead leaves and branches. Jimmy throws down his arms and brakes to a stop.

"Nice shot," he yells down the length of the lawns.

"It was there," Danny yells back.

They both scamper for the ball, reach it at the same time, and fall to wrestling for it. Jimmy has it for a moment, but Danny pops it from his hands with a fist, rolls quickly over and springs triumphantly to his feet with the ball, leaves and dirt clinging precariously to his wool plaid jacket and his fine blonde hair. He looks at Jimmy, his great bulk sprawled on the ground, and laughs.

"Hey, clumsy," he says. "You're really going to that dance tonight, huh."

"Yeah. So is Buck. Marianne's going to be there, babes." Jimmy pushes himself up on his elbow.

"You going to dance with her?"

"Guess so. Why, do you want to?"

"No. No, I don't like to dance." Danny flips the ball up in the air and catches it one-handed. His face is cold, the soft white fuzziness of his cheeks stained blotchy red. He thinks, the things come up too fast, the dancing . . . everything. Last year it was football every night. You practice and practice and finally can count on it and then it's something else. You can't win. You really can't.

"So whatta you going to do?" Jimmy asks, pushing himself to his feet. He wrinkles up his flat, meaty nose and crosses his arms.

"Oh, I don't know. Go I guess. Unless I think of something better."

"Like what—" but Jimmy is interrupted by the skidding screech of a bike. A tall, gangly, emaciated boy with a pimpled face tries to make a grand entrance, but loses his balance during a side-ways skid and falls perilously beneath pedals and sprokets. He slides for a number of feet before coming to rest, a tangled mess of spokes and legs in front them. They laugh uproariously. Buck DeVries cautiously unties himself, surprised that everything is still intact.

"Yeah. Go ahead and laugh. It's real funny. You guys have got a great sense of humor."

Danny goes over and picks the bike up.

"Gee," he says, smiling at Jimmy. "I didn't know giraffes could ride bikes."

"They can't," Jimmy says, giggling.

Buck struggles to his feet. He has a large grass stain on the hip of his khakis which he vainly tries to brush off.

"Goddamit. My ma'll can me for this."

Danny twists the football up and spins it on one finger. "You shouldn't be so clumsy."

"Hell, I can't help it if I'm not as beautiful and graceful as you are, All-American!"

"Hey, can it, you guys," Jimmy says. "Let's go down to Moran's and get a coke."

But Danny doesn't quit. "You're jealous," he says, crinkling up his nose.

Buck snears but says nothing. So they walk together, Danny in the middle with a hand on each of their shoulders. Jimmy flips the ball up, and Buck keeps his hands poked in his pockets. Danny knows he has no better friends than these, and as the autumn wind flips the long wool collar-tips of his jacket up flat against his cheeks and smoke from gutters of burning leaves envelopes them at moments then whispers away, he wishes he could hug them both hard to his face and say that he loves them more than anybody, more than God even; that they should never leave the autumn Saturdays or Halloween but stay together forever. . . . He suddenly leaps ahead and glances back over his shoulder.

"Hey! Hit me with a long one!" Beneath him his feet begin to fly.

Moran's soda bar is hot and filled with heavy wool coats: pompoms green with interlaced white above milk white sweaters and short pleated skirts—baby-cheeked cheerleaders. Danny shivers, their faces turning to him and fusing with iced cherry cokes and a forest of yellow straws. He raises his hand, begins scratching the back of his head. Buck and Jimmy grin and walk to the bar. Danny stumbles after them, keeping behind.

"Hey, some game, huh." Jimmy grabs a pompom and jiggles it in Margaret Hughes' face. Marianne Scott turns and looks at Danny. One of her blue-grey eyes is partially covered by the soft swing of her long black hair. Her face is flushed white, like sun on snow.

"Sure was," she says shyly. "You really played good, Danny."

Danny grins a little, and continues to scratch the back of his head. He wishes he had carried the ball now, but Jimmy has lost it to Margaret Hughes, who cuddles it gently like a teddy bear on her tummy.

"Yeah, he's our hero," Buck says, embracing him with a long bony arm. "How about a speech, hero."

The girls giggle, and Marianne spins around on her stool. Danny looks at her and blushes. All he can muster is "Aw . . ." and a sharp elbow in Buck's side. Buck grunts and quickly drops his arm, moving back to the girls.

Fifteen minutes pass. There is much talk of the dance. Danny sits on the very

end stool sucking coke slowly through a crushed straw. Then Margaret Hughes has to do her hair, and the cheerleaders file out, chattering. Danny throws his straw on the counter and swills the coke.

"Hey, you guys," he says. "Whatta you say we do something crazy tonight. You know. Leave the dance a little early or something."

"Leave early," Jimmy says. "You nuts? All those girls are coming."

"All those girls? Yeah. But what's so hot about them?"

Buck slaps his forehead. "Jeez, are you nuts? Did you see that Marianne—God!"

"Aw. She's not that great. Besides, I don't mean leave right away. You know—after a while."

"What'll we do?" Jimmy asks, screwing up one side of his face.

"Something crazy. Put shoe polish on our faces like last year and go out somewhere."

"Where?" Buck asks.

"Jeez, who cares. Anywhere."

Buck frowns and looks at Jimmy. Jimmy bounces the football on the counter. Old Mr. Moran tells him to stop. "I don't know," he says. "Let's talk about it at the dance. If you can think of something good, I'll go. Okay?"

Buck gets up from the counter. "Me too. Now let's get out of here. My ma's having dinner at six."

"Terrific!" Danny says. "Listen, I'll think of something. Just wait. I'll think of something *great!*"

Danny's house is at the end of Black Street, ten blocks from the river. There are beautiful new homes on the banks of the river: the Mayor's, the president of Blackstone Pump Company's, Marianne Scott's; but his is not new or beautiful. It is a big house, three stories high, with thin board siding that is hard to paint. His mother had him do it in dark grey the summer before—she saw it on the Mayor's house. It turned out dismally, but she won't change it.

He hates the outside of the house except for the huge vine arbor which ends just below his bedroom window on the third floor, and it is only pretty in the summer, covered over with the heart-shaped green leaves like it is so the wooden frame doesn't even show, but in the fall and winter is like a skeleton stuck against the wall.

He looks away from it coming up the walk. The sun is nearly gone, and beneath the trees it is dark. He thinks, the house is scary sometimes, not like a home really—but at least different on the inside. The baby is there and his mother. His father, too, but his mother—yes, her most. As he turns into the driveway, he sees a light and pumpkin glow from the side window. He smiles and sprints to the back door. When he is inside, the screen bangs behind him.

"Danny, is that you?" his mother yells from the kitchen.

"Yeah, mom." He throws his jacket on a chair in the hallway and slips off

his shoes without untying them.

"Danny," she says as he appears at the kitchen door. "Where have you been dear? I haven't seen you all day and it's nearly dark."

He goes to the refrigerator and automatically looks in. The apples are spotted and withered.

"Danny. Honey, did you hear me?"

He slams the door shut and squeezes his hands into his pockets. "Jeez, mom. It's only 6:15. Anyway, I was home to change after the game. You were gone."

"Don't be sharp with me, darling." She frowns babyishly, her full lips turning in a half pout. He smiles a little. She is very pretty and young for a mother. He is proud of how she looks. Buck's and Jimmy's mothers are older and lumpy. Mrs. Conkle is nice, though, really more like a mother than his. But his *is* very pretty.

"Aw, mom," he says. "Let's eat. Okay? I've hardly had anything all day."

"You haven't! Well, mommy will fix that fast. *Gerald! Have you found a sitter yet?*"

"Hell no!" his father yells from the living-room. "Every damned one of them is gone tonight!"

Danny seats himself at the vinolite kitchen table, and stuffs a carrot slice into his mouth. "Where are you going?"

His mother tsks and turns to him. "Honey, don't talk with your mouth full. We're going to a masquerade party at the Mayor's house. Didn't I tell you? Wait a sec and I'll show you my costume!" She runs quickly through the living-room and into her bedroom. His father swears again, slamming down the receiver of the phone. She scampers back and yells at Danny to close his eyes. When he opens them, she has on a black pullover rubber mask, a hideous black witch warted and festered with a long twisted nose from which tufts of grey hair protrude. He stares, and it feels bad to him like when she feeds the baby in front of him in the living-room with the blinds open pulling out her big white one for the baby without blinking once from the television. He tries to smile but is embarrassed.

"Isn't it a scream!" she says. She pulls it off, contorting her face as the rubber tugs against her hair-line. "I found it at that novelty store downtown. The mayor will get a kick out of it, I'll bet."

Her face is white and good again to him. He sits back and devours more carrot sticks, wanting to tell her to throw it away, to go as a princess or something. Then his father stomps red-faced into the kitchen and sits down.

"You might as well put that mask away," he bellows. "We can't go anywhere tonight, Goddammit all."

"Stop swearing, dear. It doesn't do any good. We'll find a sitter. I wouldn't miss *this* party for the world. Why, we're the only ones in this whole neighborhood invited." She slumps pensively into the corner of the cupboards and folds her arms. "Oh, I wish we could move to the river—but—well, I know we don't

have the money, dear. I'll try that Catholic sitter agency. Maybe they'll have something."

"They're too expensive," his father says, rubbing his forehead. "Besides, they have a bunch of crazy old women who take the jobs to feed Catholic propaganda to little kids. Listen—Danny, why can't you watch Todd and let your mother and I go to this party. You aren't doing anything special tonight, are you?"

Danny chokes on a mouthful of fried potatoes and can't answer immediately. But his mother rescues him.

"Sam," she says in a scolding voice. "This is Halloween."

"So what," he snaps back. "Danny isn't a kid any more."

"Why, Sam. He's only fourteen. Besides, there's a sock hop at school tonight. Remember, fourteen isn't very old for a boy — " her almost wimpering tones make Danny feel hurt and very sorry for himself.

"Okay, okay. Forget it. I'll go call the agency." His father bends over his plate and takes a long slug of coffee.

After dinner Danny walks up the two flights of creaking, bare wood stairs to his room. It is a little attic room with slanted ceilings on both sides. It is warm and gay with red flannel Indian blankets and many football pennants in browns and greens and reds and blues on the walls. His closet is open with shoulder pads and a red helmet hanging from the top edge of the door, and in the center of the room on the floor is an electric football game. Little metal men lie scattered around the green metal field, and he sits down beside it and sets them up with the ends split out wide but the line closed tight in front of the quarterback, with the defensive team the same way. He has marked the quarterback, the fastest one, with a pencilled X and can manipulate the blades on his feet to make him run in any direction. He bends the blades slightly right and sets him directly behind the right guard. He flips the switch on, the green field begins vibrating, and the offensive line moves forward: the right guard moves strongest ahead turning slightly right with the quarterback untouched behind him. A huge gap is opened in the line, through which they zip neatly. The linebackers move in but are quickly redirected by the guard. The only remaining backfield man turns toward the opposite sideline, and the quarterback breaks out into the open. His rightward movement is only slight and will carry him easily into the end zone without going out of bounds. He leaves the right guard behind, crosses the 50 with no one near him and speeds down confidently for the goal line. Danny claps his hands, and gives a whoop. Then a tiny bit of blackening tomato seed stuck on the field from a sandwich catches the quarterback's front blade, spins him madly around for a moment, and throws him off onto his side. Danny bangs the floor with his fist. He pulls the plug out violently, and walks over and flops on his bed. He thinks, why do they have to do something great? Why think something up? It's better to just go out and find something. Jeez, why'd they leave it up to him? He turns

over, rolling the pillow around his head. The warts of his mother's mask poke at his mind, and he wonders how long he and the baby will have to be alone in the house with the sitter tonight. Then suddenly he smiles and sits up.

"Yeah," he says, and slaps the bed. "Yeah. Great!" He bounds out of bed and digs in his closet for his shoeshine kit. He finds what he wants — a can of black polish — flips it in the air and catches it one-handed. Then he runs to his dresser and takes an old bent bugle from the top drawer. Pressing it to his lips, he blows a long laugh through it, twirls around, and falls backwards onto his bed. "Great!" he says. "Great!"

At eight o'clock the front door opens, and Danny hears his father introducing the baby sitter. He fastens his clip bow tie to his collar and pulls a V-necked red sweater over his head, then graps his coat and runs down the stairs. At the bottom he stops abruptly, face to face with a bulging-eyed old woman. He backs up one stair, stunned, but she looks away and pulls off an old grey wool coat which she hangs in the hall closet. She carries a black wool shawl under one arm and wears a black cotton dress which falls loose and faded from her bent shoulders. He works his way around her and slips into the living-room where he stares aghast at his parents. His father is irritated and looks away from him; his mother returns a worried glance and retires to the kitchen.

"Danny. This is Mrs. Raven," his father says as she enters the room.

"How do you do, Danny," she says, offering her hand. Her voice is old and cracked, but kind. She has warts on her hand, with also a large one on the side of her nose, and Danny drops the hand gingerly and rubs his palm on the leg of his trousers. Mrs. Raven walks to the davenport and seats herself slowly, leaning on the arm for support. She wraps the shawl around her shoulders, then looks up at him.

"Where's your costume, Danny?" she says. "Don't you know tonight is Halloween?"

Danny glances at his father, then back at her. "Sure, I know it," he says, rather proudly. "But I'm going to a dance."

"Ah, a dance," she says. Her eyes bulge like toadstools from her head. "What a fine big fellow you are. So brave, too. Why, I didn't *dare* go without a costume on Halloween till I was seventeen or eighteen. Such evil things out there." She glances swiftly at the front window. "Children eaters! You have to dress up like them to fool them, you know. Otherwise, they'll *gitcha!* Only eat children, though. Think you're big enough, boy? Huh?"

Danny can only stare at her with his jaw a little open. Suddenly she winks at him, and his father bursts out laughing.

"Careful, Mrs. Raven," he says. "You'll scare the big fellow to death."

There is only a quarter moon in the dark sky as Danny walks down Black Street on his way to the school. Ahead of him two sheeted ghosts and a cowboy lug big shopping bags and giggle. Dark trees with grotesque arms writh in

the wind, and across the street a black witch and a skeleton soap car windows. Every porch light shines, and Danny shivers in his human clothes. He walks faster, wishing that Buck and Jimmy were with him. At Hoyt Street he turns — at once a group of gulping monsters surrounds him in the dark and he pushes through, knocking a shopping bag to the ground. Someone starts crying — a yell blasts the back of his neck, and he breaks into a run, a hard run into the street. A moment, and an apple smashes beside him and slides into a gutter. He jumps the curb onto the sidewalk, just grazing a stop-sign. There are footsteps and laughter behind him, doorbells too ringing, buzzing — the lights of the school explode into the sky three blocks up, and he runs, not stopping till he sees the ties and sweaters and pleated skirts at the bright door of the gym. Then he breathes, tucking in his shirt, tucking back his heart.

White wool socks. Wool socks frizzied with orange and brown yarn faces moving madly together as he stands in a hallway of empty shoes. Removing his, he steps onto the ceaseless creaking rhythm of the floorboards. A corner empties, and he rapidly fills it. A blinking juke box blurts song after song, and each receives its thorough trampling. Danny feels strange; he is trembling. Suddenly, a familiar yell yanks his heart onto the gym floor, and he recognizes his classmates; they have been there dancing all the time. He sees Jimmy waving to him. He smiles, breathing deeply, and walks across the floor.

"Hey, babes," Jimmy says. "Whatta ye say? How come you took so long?"

Danny jumps up and seats himself on the top of the folded bleachers. "I got held up figuring out a plan for tonight. Boy, have I got something great!"

Jimmy folds his arms and leans up against the wall. "Hey, Danny, you're not serious, are you?"

"Yeah I'm serious. You don't want to sit around a dance all night, do you?"

"Jeez, well. God, Danny, look at Marianne out there." He motions with his hand to the center of the floor where Buck, in a dirt-balled pink sweater, is dancing a two-step with Marianne. "Jeez, she even makes that clod look good. How can I leave something like that."

"Come on, Jimmy. You promised you would."

"Yeah, but hell, Danny."

"Hey, Danny!" Buck yells over Marianne's head. "You wanna dance?"

Danny reddens but can't shake his head because she is looking at him. She and Buck start walking toward them, and Danny turns, panicked, to Jimmy.

"Come on, you rats. You promised me." His lips tighten. At the last second Jimmy reluctantly nods.

"Hi, Danny," Marianne says, smiling. A bath-powder smell surrounds her; faint lipstick pink against her soft white face matches a fuzzy pink sweater and skirt. "You want to dance?"

"I guess so," he says, glaring at Buck. He jumps to the floor. She offers her hand — he reaches and is amazed at its tiny softness, then amazed that he



WILLIAM ROYCE PHOTOGRAPH

is holding it. He hunches his shoulders with his free hand stuffed deep in his pocket and leads her to a dark side of the floor. He can't believe he's joined like this to her — her body warmth fuses new with his a moment through their hands. It's strange to feel; he hadn't expected it. He is here on the floor with a girl to dance when he has never held a girl's hand before let alone danced, so he remembers he doesn't know how.

He says, "I don't know how very well."

"I'll show you," she says. She pulls his right arm around the soft small of her back, and lifts his left out to the side. He holds her, unbelievably; up her hand goes lightly on his shoulder, his feet moving stiffly as she guides him back and forth over six boards with her cotton candy smell an opaque bubble around them. Moments pass, then a thump on his shoulder and it's over. He gives up her arms and moves self-consciously off the floor. He thinks she looked unhappy when he left.

"Hey champ," Buck says, laughing. "You looked great out there."

"Yeah? Better than you did, stupid." At that whatever was there is gone. The floor is a blank behind him, rolled up. He hits Buck playfully in the shoulder and smiles. "Hey. Ten o'clock's the time. Everything's set."

Buck grunts and searches out over Danny's shoulder for a girl.

Danny's house is dimly-lit and sad looking as he runs across the yard and

into the driveway. The house reminds him of Mrs. Raven. Through the back door and kitchen he goes. In the living-room Mrs. Raven rocks the baby — Danny startles her, throws her only a quick hello, and hastens upstairs three steps at a time. On the first landing he checks the linen closet for old sheets but finds none. Quickly he mounts to his room. He tears the blankets off his bed, removes the top sheet and spreads it out flat on his floor. In the center of the sheet he cuts a foot-long slit with a jacknife. Then, whistling, he applies black shoe polish to his face and neck. Finally, he pulls the sheet over his head, slips his old bugle under the sheet, and runs downstairs. He passes swiftly through the hallway to the front door, but Mrs. Raven sees him.

"Danny," she says. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, just out." He opens the door.

"Come here, son."

He hesitates, then shuts the door and moves into the living-room. "What," he says.

"I see you're dressed now." She lifts herself slightly and pulls her skirt down over her fleshy grey knees.

"Yeah. I'm just going out for a little while with a couple of friends of mine."

"Did you believe what I told you earlier?"

"Well. I don't think so."

"That's a good boy." One egg-like eye winks at him slyly. "It's just an old tale, son. Things like that don't *really* happen. God is all you have to fear. Just God, Danny."

She reaches out her hand to him, but he backs toward the door. She moves her hand to the baby's cradle and rocks it slowly. Her black shawl hangs lifelessly over her arm.

"Have a nice time," she says. "And don't forget what I told you now. Goodby, Danny."

"Goodby," he says, moving slowly to the door. He turns the knob, feeling somehow guilty for leaving the baby — but then he bursts out the door and into the street.

In the alley behind Jim Dark's Barber Shop it is very black except for a thin stick of light that filters from the streetlight in front down the crack between the shop and the next building. Danny enters the alley puffing and sees that Buck and Jimmy have already arrived, costumed exactly as he is.

"Hey, great you guys!" he says, coming up between them. "You bring the stuff?"

Jimmy hauls out a large brass cowbell and a miniature American flag on a stick. He holds it reverently at his breast, saluting with the cowbell. Buck and Danny buckle up with muffled laughter. Then Buck displays his army surplus air-raid siren. He twists the handle slightly and a Donald Duck-like noise blurts out. Danny blows a sour note on his bugle, and they all laugh together.

Danny feels the old warmth again, and as they trot together down River Boulevard there is nothing in the world that can frighten him. The trees are trees above him, sack-dragging monsters are only little kids. Mrs. Raven is just an old lady, too. He links his arms in theirs, and they head swiftly for the Mayor's house.

Secret Street Bridge crosses the river a block from the Mayor's. In late fall the river is very low, and under the bridge is a small dried mud beach wide enough to walk on. A cement river wall runs the full length of the property behind the new houses and rises four feet above the mud strip. Danny scampers first down the grass bank to the river wall and without hesitating jumps onto the dried mud. Buck and Jimmy follow him quickly, Buck over-jumping and soaking his shoes.

"Good jump," Danny whispers, giggling.

"Go to hell," Buck says loudly.

"Hey, shutup," Jimmy says, hunching down below the wall.

Danny leads them under the bridge where they stop and huddle together. Light from the Mayor's house blazes through a large set of French doors down across a stone terrace and sloping back yard to the dark river rippling softly in a shimmering gown of thin yellow leaves. Danny shivers, turning to the two black faces behind him.

"Those are the doors," he whispers.

Buck and Jimmy nod uncertainly.

"There's another set exactly opposite those at the front of the house. When we get up next to that terrace, we lie down, see, and when the coast is clear, we take off through the doors and scare the pants off 'em. That's all there is to it."

"That's all there is to it," Buck says mockingly. "Well, what if the other doors are locked and we can't get out, huh?"

"Don't sweat it. Why would they have the doors locked at a party?"

"For wise-guys like us," Jimmy whispers.

"Hey, you guys aren't chickening out are you?"

Buck glances at Jimmy. "Chickening out? Not me."

"Me either, Danny babes." Jimmy rubs his hands quickly on his sides.

They move quietly crouched against the cement wall. Buck comes last, holding the tail of Jimmy's sheet, Jimmy the tail of Danny's. Danny leads—he thinks: Jungle Jim leading a great safari through the murky swamps of deepest Africa, gripping his elephant gun-bugle tightly beneath his sheet. Monster crocodiles everywhere. Pythons and hairy black widows that suck the brains from your head. A muskrat scampers into the water ahead of him and his heart shrivels. Buck yells and slips sideways in the mud, soaking his shoe again.

"Jeez," Jimmy whispers. "What was that?"

Danny takes in a deep breath. His heart beats madly. "Oh. Nothing but a muskrat. Why? Did it scare you guys?" He laughs weakly.

"Hell no," Buck says loudly.

"Sh-h-h." Jimmy turns and whacks him on the shoulder.

"Hey, cut it out!"

"Sh-h-h!"

"Okay, okay."

They move slowly onward, crouching lower now. When they reach the edge of the light filtering downward from the French doors, Danny stops and turns around, squating on his haunches.

"Listen now, you guys," he whispers. "We run up to the terrace one at a time, see. When we get there, we get down on our stomachs fast. Okay?"

"Okay," Buck says. "Who's first?"

"You are," Danny says. "Go ahead."

"Not me dammit. This is your idea. You go first."

"Yeah, Danny babes," Jimmy whispers. "You go first."

Danny looks at both of them, then up at the terrace. "We'll go together."

They nod reluctantly. Danny peeks again at the terrace. There are people moving around inside but none are near the doors.

"Let's go!" he says. They scamper up over the wall and toward the house. Beneath them the grass cracks. Each step-beat pounds loudly in Danny's ears —then a noisy swoosh of grass as he slides belly-first up under the terrace. Two more swooshes follow; they wait, listening. Latin music blares unceasingly from inside with laughter crashing now and then but always the constant hum of undisturbed talk underneath. They lie, hardly breathing, on their stomachs. A rhythmic clapping starts along with shouts. The music is turned up. Bongo drums. Shouting grows louder, whistles. Buck is first to his knees, peeking cautiously over the edge of the terrace.

"God," he says.

Jimmy quickly rises. "Jeez, what's she doing!" He glares at Buck with white eyes.

"What's the matter with you guys?" Danny asks. "Huh? What's going on."

"Jeez, look at that, Danny babes. Gol, I don't believe it."

"Well, what is it? Get down for cripes sakes. They'll see you."

"Sh-h-h. It's a woman, babes. Without hardly *any clothes* on!"

Danny gets a strange feeling in his stomach, that he has never seen a woman bare-naked before except his mother's white one which was different, only being for the baby. He sees another curtain before him today, rising, first the hands and holding the softness of a pink girl dancing, and now here, now. Things he waited for piling up in one night if he just looks up. Just look up. The music is wilder. Shouting caves in over it. He rises to his knees. There she is

back to him life-size in black pants and thin-strapped bra twisting her hips madly hands out. A semi-circle of gaping masks stand at the front of her. She is young and very white. He lies quickly down again, guilty, like he was at the Boy Scout paper drive when he found dirty books but couldn't concentrate with Buck and Jimmy over his shoulder. They still watch, though, their white eyes gleaming.

"Hey, Danny-babes," Jimmy whispers. "Quick, she's turning this way!"

Buck puts his hand to his forehead. "God, look at that. Jeez!"

Danny rises quickly, catching the last motion of her arm as it flings the black bra to the floor. For an instant there is a hot, burning place in his stomach, a flash only—then suddenly his heart and guts turn cold freezing, up he stands paralyzed with cracked eyes staring at the black warted rubber witch-face shaking hideously at him.

"Hey, sit down!" Jimmy whispers loudly.

Buck grabs the bottom of his sheet and yanks him to the ground. He kneels, bending forward. Saliva rapidly fills under his tongue.

"Let's get out of here. Come on you guys!" He tugs at Jimmy's sheet, but Jimmy knocks his hand away.

"Are you nuts? Just shutup and watch, babes."

"Yeah. Jeez, look at that." Buck's mouth is open.

Danny grabs them both by the arms and pulls them over backwards. "Come on you guys," he says. "Come on! Please!"

"What the hell are you doing? Leave if you want to. I'm not." Buck twists his arm free, gets back on his knees.

"Whatsa matter, babes?" Jimmy asks. "Huh? You scared?"

"Hell no," he says. "Hell no you rats." He leaps to his feet, dashing frantically towards the wall, ready to jump. Flying tennies, then suddenly the edge, water splattering filling his shoes up his legs until finally he can balance and wade back. He sprints, heels hitting heavily on the mud strip and wind singing on his ears. His feet slog and pucker in his shoes, under the bridge in thirty seconds, up over the grass bank. The hard cement of Secret Street makes running easy. Soaring. Up, up he goes. Secret Street left to River Boulevard and over a cliff to the shivering moon. Grabbing black trees, crooked evil arms with warty hands plucking the back of his collar. Where can he hide? Blackness is over his shoulder reaching: Run!

The old house is dark and staring in the silent street, empty now of Halloween's children. His stomach aches. He pounds it with his fist, but it won't unknot. He stands looking at the skeleton arbor clinging desperately to the side of the house. He thinks of it sucking. A black widow. Sucking the insides out. Tears burn his eyes, scorch white furrows down his cheeks. He leaps to the front porch, slips through the door past Mrs. Raven and the baby without looking, up the stairs three flights to his room. He slams his door, reaches for

the bottom of the sheet tearing it up around his scrawny ears, but it won't come off. He drops sobbing onto his bed, the sheet falling about him. Downstairs the baby cries in an endless drone.

For many minutes he lies there. His eyes get sticky. He turns over on his back, leaning up on his elbows. The house is quiet. He gets to his feet. There is only silence: it pounds his ears. He listens for the baby, but nothing comes. Heat rises in the back of his neck. He goes to his door, slipping quickly out and down the stairs, shoeless. The second landing down he stops, gets to his knees, crawls to where he can see the living-room through the bars of the bannister. There is the baby, a still stone in its crib—eyes shut, mouth shut—pale. Beside the crib Mrs. Raven sits wrapped in her black, hanging shawl. Her head is bent; incoherent gutteral noises belch from her throat. On her wide lap is coiled a long string of black beads which she fingers slowly, her eyes closed.

The blood drains from Danny's face. He kneels frozen, clutching the frayed neck of his wrinkled sheet. His red eyes bulge from his blackened face. "The witch," he wimpers. "No, no. Not the baby, too." He glances at the front door, then back at Mrs. Raven. He thinks: she'd get him, too. Only twelve steps away, but she'd hear and get him like the others. He backs slowly up the stairs. A thousand wooden squeaking noises pound his head — he feels the blackness close in again, reaching dumbly out for him with blind man's fingers. There is no way, he thrashes in the trap. Nowhere to hide, to run, to scream his brains out. Up! That's all! Up he goes on all fours flying, fingernails gouging wood for speed, the thing behind grabbing at his spine. Through his door fast shut, locked. No time! The window sticks, groans—a graveyard wind sweeps in, moaning. The moon is there before him, small, liquid in the black sponge sky. Behind him he thinks he hears the doorknob jiggle. Feet-first out he goes; but the arbor is not there, he hangs horrified from the window ledge, his legs flailing. He hears the door open inside. His foot finds a wooden rib of the arbor; down he drops to a lower one, his arms stretched tight from the ledge. Footfalls thump slowly across the room, nearer, louder; his fingers twitch, loosen—down he drops feet catching first, then hands grabbing, gripping the ornamented arbor top. Suddenly, a crack rips the darkness. Nails pop; the arbor teeters. Slowly the skeleton with its petrified nails ripping huge rotten chunks from the house, tips backwards, down. . . . Danny yells, reaching desperately for the ledge. His fingers touch but can't hold. He screams. Within the dark frame of the window he thinks he sees a face—a black warted rubber face, floating, smiling. Then the sky and dark treetops roll quickly by him. A bomb explodes in the back of his head.

Once he opens his eyes. Mrs. Raven and the man from next door stand horrified over him. Between them a tiny white princess drops her star-tipped wand and grips her daddy's leg, screaming. Then there is only darkness.

WRITER'S WIFE

A word, a look — "Conception", he says.
Days of nothing — "Enceinte", he says.
Then, like rain on the tight earth —
"Typing out a child", he says.

And I am an Indian summer moth
Plunging into the flame of him;
Cursing all my moth gods
If I only singe a hairy eye.

AS A LIGHT SINKS

Enormously
past old grapes left by sparrows
sinks a light as we
in earnest tones as children whine
at broken toys speak
of the beauty
we will create as old men lean
into the wind we speak
of the truth
we will seek as puppies sniff
around the bush we speak
of the deaths
we will not fear
as a light sinks
Enormously

THREE SKETCHES

by richard slater

THE DAY BEFORE

Pa didn't get old until one October day when I was seventeen. We went for birds back of a farm on Baldwin road, with the guns on the back seat, driving slow on the dust. Pa said "Well, we'll try this place ahead there." I was watching an oak leaf caught on the windshield wiper, thinking it would fall off when we turned into the driveway. I said "Oh, you know the guy that owns this place? I didn't know you knew him."

"Why, old Carl Hammond lives here," Pa said. "Used to fire for me on the Grand Trunk. Known him thirty years." The leaf didn't fall when we turned in. I pulled it out from under the wiper after we got out of the car. Pa checked the chamber empty on his twelve-gauge automatic, stooped under the strand of barked wire at the edge of the corn, and stood up. "They're in the corn. Let the dog work it," he said. "We'll get up at the other end." The sun had a little way to go before the sky got cold. Pa was watching the corn; dropped down on his right knee and said, "Get down. More, more." I saw dead grass stems close to my eyes, and waited for the hard whirr and the gun. Pa fired and the gun jumped to the grass. He held his right shoulder and cried a little. "Jesus," he said. "That goddam arthritis. Should have let you do it, boy." I looked at the sun and said "Well, you didn't miss him by much."

SOMETHING TO DO ON SATURDAY

The Hekman kid was already in the county jail when Dick Deverell and me heard about the murder. A big bunch of people, maybe fifteen or twenty, were blocking the sidewalk on the shady side of Nepessing street in front of the County Press office. Most of them was people we knew in town, but some I'd never seen before. Some were big farmers with old dusty shoes, except where their overall pants legs made the brown leather shine above the dusty part. There was little bits of straw sticking out yellow-gray from under their shoe soles, and houseflies moved and lit again when the feet moved a little, as the men looked in the window and read the special paper.

"Well, he sure got 'em good," somebody said. Me and Dick got up by the window and scrubbed along the brick wall below the glass. The cement sill felt stone-cool. While we looked at the pictures at the top of the special paper, I blew on some green moss in a crack of the sill and thought how lucky the Hekman kid was. I said, "What'd he do it for?" Dick raised his head and said something, but a hot, dirty breath behind me said, loud, "Got the last one at a hunnert yards. In the head, too." The breath made me dizzy. I didn't even want to turn around, because I knew it was old Squano. He never did anything, just hung around town with a drop on the end of his nose. In the winter, the drop was an icicle, and none of us kids liked him. I saw the picture Squano meant, the middle one of a girl about eleven. She could have been my big sister, only I didn't have one, and she never would be now, because she was lying in a dry sawgrass swamp in some weeds that looked like the golden-rod that grows on the edges of swales. Just some hair, black on the shoulders of a white dress that was pulled up above her middle. The paper told how John Frederick Hekman, believed to be mentally retarded, had shot to death his five playmates with a .22 caliber rifle yesterday afternoon at about 4 P.M. After we got tired of looking at the pictures and stuff, me and Dick went over around the jail to try and look through the bars. We got a drink at the courthouse fountain on the way.

THE SPILLWAY

I was twelve the spring I broke my dog's leg at the waterworks dam. The dam was made of two-by-twelve oak planks trapped against the cement footbridge. When the ice thawed, water slid tight and brown into the spillway, like it was mad at the boards for trying to hold it, and you knew if you fell in there you'd get sucked under and they'd find you below the falls and put it in the paper. Us kids put boards in the spillway to make the water back up until it was going around both ends of the bridge, cutting us off from land like people in a flood. I was carrying a plank across the bridge when that fool fox terrior Bud got between my legs, making me let go to grab the railing. The board dropped on him, and he let out a yip, biting at the wood. His left hind leg bone stuck out yellow, with a liver-colored center. I touched him, thinking he'd bite me, but he didn't. Another kid held Bud and talked to him while I broke two splints from a red willow. I tied them lengthwise on the leg after pulling it straight, using strips from the inside of my coat pocket. I carried Bud home in my coat, making up a story so I wouldn't get a licking.



RICHARD KLINE OIL ON CANVAS

marinus swets

NO ROAD TO DAMASCUS

He didn't walk fast. He just walked on, past the house that had been converted into a funeral parlor that shouldn't exist, yet did. He could not remember ever having seen any funeral parade ever led by any hearse with the name Rauson's on it. He wondered why Blake had called it a marriage hearse, or whether Blake had a hearse in mind at all. Had had, he meant.

—How do they stay in business. Impossible. Yet here it is, still. Something like old balogna. Should be baloney. Never throw it out. That man had shouted from that door when I shook that sign twenty years ago. Walking home then. Never got there. Home from church. Different church, though. How do I redeem a bald spot? Wear rolled trousers?

—Always afraid of some authority. Afraid of God too. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Gets you



REIN VANDERHILL
COLLAGE

in the end. What comes first, fear of God and then fear of authority, or fear of authority and then fear of God? Have to look it up in the culture and personality text. Toilet training, I suppose. Not afraid of the devil, however. Ma didn't make the bogeyman strong enough. Strong bogeyman, weak ma; weak bogeyman, strong God. Never wet my pants, though.

—Make the commitment and no more fear of authority. Is this why I promise to do it? Who gets the promise, God? Or the man? Or does God somehow make the promise?

He didn't walk fast. To walk fast would have been to betray what he did not want to betray: that he was drawn to it. And hadn't he always denied that he always was drawn to it? —any real commitment that there might be a grain of possibility of truth in the event and in the act.

As he reluctantly walked on, he noticed that the squares in the sidewalk were not always whole. Where man had intended that the frost-thaw pressure should alleviate the pain crosswise, nature found more virtue in breaking through lengthwise and crosswise and anglewise. Cracks ran all over. Free floating anxiety, he thought, forty desert years of it.

—God disposes. Look for the pillar of fire.

He couldn't find any good reason to go on execpt that he had decided to go on. He had thought about it earlier in the evening.

—And by evening I mean life. I wake and feel the fell of rain, not dust. This time I will. Tonight I make an altar call.

Somehow, going through with it would make up for all the other betrayals of promises that he had made: the promise to smoke no more, the promise to drink less beer, the promise to drink less, *period,* the promise to not mortify the flesh, the promise to just be nice. He hadn't kept any of them. Well, there was a thing he could do and then all the other promises would fall into place. After forty years of promises, he would enter the promised land?

—Just like dominoes. Touch one and you're a goner. Something like sex. That first kiss. Need a life preserver for that man in the boat.

He saw the crowd at the sidewalk in front of the soda bar.

—That ice-cream palace. Open on Sunday. They all go there after the service. They all go, the good and the bad. Go there before too.

It was on his mind. How could such looseness come out of such a tight promise? Serve God and visit the ice-cream palace. Bob your hair and serve booze out of a cut glass bowl. When the ice melts, you go too.

—Good and bad. Have to remember that. Just making the promise doesn't make you good. But then they don't say that it does. You're as bad as ever. Just the act, somehow, lets someone else be good for you. That's how they say it. Say it and be good in the name of another. Easy enough. Do it and be done. Still, ice-cream and a cigarette after the Sunday evening sermon, boys and girls alike. Be playing stinky games in a few months. Wonder if they really know.

Maybe that's the joy of it. Sin, and be forgiven in the act. Be as dumb as ever but blessed all the same. Maybe that's why birth is a blessed event. Dumb brutes. Funny, those cracks. Ought to plug them up.

He didn't know why he should think of it—that fly contest. His daughter had proposed it. "If there were a fly contest [she had proposed it after seeing some pigs] and there was a prize awarded for the person with the most flies—say, 20 flies for the children and 100 flies for the adults—and you won, Dad, what would you do with the $200?"

He didn't know where she had got the $200. He didn't know where she had got the fly contest. Yet he had said, he remembered, that he would buy light bulbs with the $200. Not that there was so much darkness but that there was not enough light. Something like Rome and Caesar, he thought. Not love one more but other less. But why light bulbs? Why not candles? Out. The old ones had no frosted glass and the new were gourd shaped. Killed ostriches. Estriches, Shakespeare had it. But he mustn't think of that. Really no relation or structure that he could find, at least not in a vegetable way.

—Buy light bulbs to light the way. "I am the way and the truth and the life . . ." Strange father.

He came to the place. Funny, he thought, that they take an old school and reface it with yellow brick to make it into a new church. Rotton all over inside; nice shiny new heavenly outside. Promise silver for tithes. At least to a degree. To high degrees for some. All they sang was "when I walk the golden streets" or diamond, or silver or ruby, or some jeweled structure.

—Strange, that a spiritual quest ended in pearly gates. "By the sea of crystal . . ." That's how they sang it. All ashore. Topside, mates. Fanny first?

On he went, up the steps and into the place. He was greeted heartily by three at once.

—Welcome, brother. An elder in four-in-hand tie approached him.

—Hullo. He affected fierceness.

—Praise the Lord for another beautiful day, eh. The leader's follower.

—Heh? Oh, yeh. The fierce look faded. He entered the sanctuary.

He walked down the aisle and looked for a seat near the rear near the aisle. He avoided a seat in front of a woman in a housedress.

—Sit here and get an earfull of "amens". Can't sit here. Monotoned virgin. Johnny one-note. Puts God in a sty with her anthem.

He remembered her well. He was seven and walked to school. She had taunted him one day with cries of "greasy, greasy, Mephibosheth."

—What a Bible lesson. Learn about a cripple and call a seven-year old a name David himself couldn't pronounce. There she sits intoning simple 3-6-2-5-1 harmony in a booby's voice. No painted woman she. More of a shirt-sleeved man. Deviate? Salt of the earth.

He didn't sit in front of the tone deaf virgin. He sat farther down and near the

aisle. His legs were long and if he sat behind the hymnal rack he was cramped. He wondered whether anyone would sit next to him and whether he would smell. Some smells weren't so bad. Others. Old armpits and dirty hair. Bad breath. He wondered whether he would give any money when "tithes and offerings" were collected. They never called it what it was. Always "gifts" or "presents". Never money.

—They ought to make it "shall". Now we shall present our tithes and offerings. Makes it compulsory. But that would be obstreperous. Wrong word. Meant obfuscating. Like those ob- words. Obscure, oblong, obviate, obnoxious, obese. Grease is obese. And now we shall obfuscate thy obese and obnoxious offerings. The oblong ushers will obviate down the obscenity and ovulate. You will pay for heaven. Praise him.

—Who is your master? "Thou shalt have no other gods before me!" Wouldn't pay to worship money. Church does, though. Collect all kinds of it. Show your love of God by giving Him money. Trade in your old bills for a reserved seat at the judgment day. He loves you if you give Him money. Take time out to beg. No chamber of commerce card required. All solicitors go to the front door.

—If someone else sits here, I won't give any money. No one will notice. Can't make you. Sermon isn't worth it. Charge admission for a poor sermon. Won't pay. Yet the collectors watch. All "Matthews". His vocation, but not his avocation. Follow you.

As the preacher waltzed to the platform to what sounded faintly like *Old Black Joe* played on the transistor organ, he watched the swaying organist and pondered his decision to make the decision. Does one make up his mind to get saved, he wondered. He noticed that the preacher's waltz changed to a nervous hand-wringing as he waited for the proper time to elapse before coming out of his prayer. He saw the hornblende hair combed back, unruly above the ears.

—Not unlike Dagwood. But Dagwood looks like a dog. The idea, God spelled backwards. Looks like a furnace tender, he does. Can see him with a long clinker rake. Throw the coal on the bottom. Down draft furnace there. Smoke goes down and out. Never see it again. Must go down the sewers.

As he sat waiting through the rituals of hymns and readings and announcements and the sermon, he didn't think it strange that he didn't wonder about God. God was as real as a broken fingernail. But He didn't relieve the itch, perfect as He was. Auden's neural itch, he thought. "Liar's quinsy" came to him.

He hadn't had quinsy when the formally attired fat dominie had asked him why he didn't still attend his, the dominie's church where the "true religion" was preached—"not like that easy road where you go." "God hates me," he had replied. "What you preach is that God hates me. That's what I learned for twenty years."

—And now I decide that he loves me. *Just as I am.*

As the preacher with the light voice and the black hair continued the ritual, he wondered whether there wasn't some form of seduction involved. One couldn't put on such an act completely oblivious of the "amens" and the "yes, brothers". Some assent there.

—I propose and you accept in the name of the Lord. Behold the bridegroom.

The choir rose. The choir, directed by William Willson, native, white, effete, sarcocarp, embroidered with Vitalis.

—Ratifies the choir's oil with flak from the fingertips. No cracked nails he. His goosegrass hair a real ochone for an ad. Strokes it. Choir responds *How Great Thou Art.* Like the idea. How great is *Thou* if He permits this kind of dishonor to be given His name. Real show biz. Feature attraction at Christmas a ten-foot candle that explodes and the magic letters C-H-R-I-S-T form in a million stars all over the ceiling of the Sunday School classroom. Be sure to bring the kids. "There's a wonderful time here for you at Golgatha." It said so in the ad on the religious page every Saturday night in *The Times.*

And he heard himself sitting asleep in that fat preacher's church removed from here, where he lost God in the descant of a demandant tenor whose song was always in a Lydian manner. And he heard the voices of the participants of that church. They seemed to come through the broken pane in the clerestory. One clear ray of evening sun of November flirted with the cobweb silk there. Between the noise of the sun and the light voice of silence of the black-maned preacher before him he heard his thoughts, and echoes of thoughts, coming through black frocks of aged virgins with lamps untrimmed who smelled of *4711 Eau de Cologne.* The voices spoke:

Old white-haired elder: Ja, maar Heere, U heeft het belooft.

—But to whom was the promise given?

Reprobate: Is er nog plaats voor mij?

—Oh no, no place for a sinner. Have to be holy and known as such.

Answer from the fat dominine: Och, man, ga terug naar je plaats. U heeft heir geen recht van sprechen.

It confused him. Christ ate with sinners, yet here only the pious ones were allowed at the communion table.

Old lady: And she always dressed so vroom too yet.

White-haired elder: We moeten neits worden.

—And when we become as nothing, pride will bloom out of our mortified flesh.

Reprobate: Ja, Mrs. Fretz, The Lord knows me and I feel like the thief on the cross.

—He didn't say which thief. Wonder how the Demolen sisters feel. I'll bet they still smell like they look. No *4711* ever cured that much old silk. Look like oatmeal. Comes out of their pores. Like Mariam DeMolen. She always smelled like oatmeal.

He remembered the duet he had to sing in third grade with Miriam DeMolen.

The refrain had been something about the little "Negro boy is no worse than I."

—Now they don't sing that because it says Negro. Nothing wrong with "Negro". More wrong with "Colored" if you said that Colored smell like oatmeal. Can say that Miriam does but don't say Negroes do, even if they did and they don't. Smell different though. Smell like old plastic. Must be the soap they use. Collect it at rummage sales. Three for a penny. Donated by old virgins of no faith. New way to get there. Scrub Negroes clean. Give them soap. Better than blood. Scarlet sins whitewashed in blood. Never saw white blood. Hymnology dysfunctional. Trade term.

The coalman in the pulpit came through the sunbeam. "And if you think you can escape the wrath of God you are pledging yourself to a life of eternal search for escape—and death is the realization of that direction. For though Paul says 'Death, where is thy sting,' he was not saying it as some atheist or some cigarette-smoking housewife who neglects her children, but as one confirmed in the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Oh, that blessed name of Christ! 'Come to me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Yeah, upon the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. . . ."

He heard a chorus of "amens."

And the noise of the sunbeam and the coyness of the cobweb dinned in his ears as he studied his broken fingernail with the crack running diagonally. He took his keycase with all the keys and the fingernail trimmer and started clipping. The snips were not loud, but he stopped before he got to the broken fingernail for the noise he imagined. He smelled his index finger. It smelled like garlic. He thought of the chuck roast he had prepared before church.

—Smells like garlic. I rubbed it all over with garlic.

He thought about Molly Bloom.

—Are they all that way? "Yes," she said. How about greasy Mephibosheth? Probably rhythmless too. David did. Made a bastard king, too. Solomon went to pot, though. Like a chuck roast. God's sanction, too. More like a devil's.

He cut the split nail. It looked like a cabbage leaf edge. All frills and no flower.

—Sterile nail. Exhibitionist. Like a cheer leader.

And the voices came through the hair oil perfume of the choir's second number.

Old white-haired elder: Ontzag voor den Heere is voor mij de grootste troost der zaligheid. We moeten bekeerd worden.

Old lady: Did you hear about Miriam Demolen? She had a baby and it choked on oatmeal.

Reprobate: Rod, don't grow up like your father. Now, when you get out of prison . . .

Then the choir was finished and the voices faded. The high-pitched preacher came through with the apostle Paul who finds that nothing can separate him from the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord amen.

He saw the black ram step off the pulpit down to the carpet in front of the pulpit. He felt tense. He knew it would come now, the altar call. So here I am, he thought. This is why I came.

He listened. The sunbeam from the last hours of November was lost in cobweb, it too lost in shadows of the lofty nave. Impending doom.

Preacher: Everyone bow his head.

—Correct grammar yet.

Preacher still: Every eye closed. Dear Lord: In the gift of Thy precious son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray Thee to deliver us from the sin of omission and pray that Thy spirit will descend upon us to call and urge anyone who feels deep in his heart the call of Christ to shed his sins unto Thee and come into a communion with Thee; nay, we call upon Thee to create that urge. . . .

He looked up. He saw the embers of blue glisten off the Valentino. Except the ears were extended into the horns of stray strands that needed palms. And the preacher sweated as though he were keeping a tally of converts, needing a few to get in the running. And he heard voices:

One preacher: At Hawthorne, I got twenty-two the first night, sixteen the second, and fifty over the weekend.

Another preacher: But Graham got three thousand in St. Paul last year.

Still the plea went on up front as the organist swayed to the hymn *Just As I Am.*

Preacher: O who will drink of the blood of the Lamb and be forever purified? Come, come, just as you are. If there is anyone here who feels the need in his heart, who cannot go on alone, you need Christ. He died for you. Walk up here and He will walk with you forever. He will be your succor. . . .

—Sounds like a lollipop.

. . . Every head bowed, every eye closed. Is there anyone here? If you feel the need of Christ, just raise your hand and say, quietly to yourself, "Preacher, I need him." Just raise your hand.

He saw several hands reluctantly hinged, elbows close to the chest as though longing to come down, but raised all the same. He saw the inevitable army of elders deploying in strategic spots through the aisles to capture those surrendering. Like prisoner's base, he thought.

The black ram was pacing about the congregational ewe, it seemed. His hooves glistened in the altar light, his white eyes shining before the nares.

—Where is the Sybil?

The preacher: Come ye. . . .

The organ piped heard melodies. *Just As I Am.*

He bowed his head. He heard the white-haired elder: "Yes, but Lord, You have promised." He heard the reprobate: "Is there still a place for me?" He heard the fat dominie: "Say, man, go back to your *place;* you have no right to speak here." He heard the elder: "We must become as nothing. We must become converted." He felt like the thief on the cross. He raised his hand.

The warmth of a body roused him. The breath of a watcher touched him. An outstretched hand came towards him. "Welcome, Brother," awoke him.
He arose to go to the ceremony of acceptance and rejoicing. And then the goat of Babylon shone in the darkness, horns extending to the cobweb; and with a cry refusing him admittance to the King's table until he ate his oatmeal, he fled. He fled up the aisle past the albino handshakers, past the red-buttoned missionary board, through the doors and past the Sunday School crowd, past *Rauson's* to the safety of traffic and cracked sidewalks, the image of Satan and his angels dissipated in the dust of barricades and a road repair sign.

PEGGY CASE

ONCE UPON A ONCE-TIME NIGHT

I
Sweet silver sound sing soft, sing soft;
Cat licked fur, we're lost, we're lost;
Heat hungry people run fast, run fast;
Snow swing down and last, and last.

II
Tongue-sharp wasp of petal softness
I weave with you a dirge.
Drink softly love, leap blue and red
Before eyes already dead to live you.
I drink the branches enclosing me,
Warm curse to magic-mountain moving.
Steeple chase to dagger doom — and arrive.

III
We hunger hard with our moon-shaped mouths;
Whisper once through echo-chamber yesterday;
Send the love dove out in the streets to beg;
And know not what the lost man has to say.

We paused between our differences
Looking head-on with stares
Anxiously inquisitive, that collided
Momentarily into another life;
Someplace we dared to be —
Evanescent bliss in our separate finds
That transcended now, fusing individual
Times into one that wasn't,
Before.

UNKNOWNS

Silhouette on the street where I walked
During early night, came up
Short at my figure, paused
Looked again momentarily
Frightened with delight.
Drawing closer in that moment
We looked searching each other,
Was she the woman I came for?
Was I her unasked for lover?
Then she felt that I knew
Marks on her face were worse than my not knowing
At all, and shaded her face in
The already dark night; sadly crying away
Her smile, moving away down the street . . .
I stood listening to her feet; then sharply
As if rudely provoked turned
Quickly to call — remained silent,
Maybe it was better than my not knowing
At all.
But thinking back in that moment,
That clean rush of delight, I know
How much she had something to say that night —
But I was too young in my first sight,
Changing silent gladness to
Sadness, and fright.

DECEMBER 6

Finally catching itself in Time
Last night
The season came in one silent hush
Opening this morning — white,
No sounds of birds or growing things
But only solemn late burial and
Without bells.

It has taken over waiting lakes
And undecided people have immediately
Come to conclusions they can hardly believe —
Its being so sudden,
About what and with whom they will make
The present into memories.

Late in early morning
I couldn't see changing,
I struck a match burning the letter
From a distant lover,
Waking later to find out my reason why.

And today I am wearing a new shirt;
It has taken me twice as long to think
My way clear before leaving my room —
But we'll see each other today,
And if she is slow greeting me with
Her new eyes, I'll know it took her
Twice as long to think her way clear
Before leaving her place this morning.

GRINDLE

Cat sitting like sandfolds
On the carmel floor,
Thinking long-legged thoughts
In a fallen windows reflection
Sun's shadowed door; rose
Stumbling into the motion
Of the tan afternoon room
    staring back,
Then licked down
Her warm shouldered wound.

We looked at each other a minute
    or so,
What stood between instincts?
Neither could know but Time —
Caught in the slow-winced opening
    of sliced, black almond eyes,
Grinning at this man who thought
Himself sly,
Laughing silently at my fear-gripped
    world,
And I was her slave as she nudged
Head, then her body
Into the master hand's hold.

VOICES FROM UNDERGROUND

M. Bucholtz

"Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history."

—ALBERT CAMUS

In the ancient scriptures of man's first attempts to order the chaos of the different societies in which he found himself, there is the documentation of the biographies of cultures — the desires of men to be realized; to be more of what it is man is. So the Bible tells of journeys of peoples, of conduct to one another as they walked or slept near friends or enemies, of the feelings of men's primal passions to exist, if need be, by the destruction of others. It is the story of humility, of opening the gate to the forest of man's mind of reason; entrance to the abyss of the mystery of man's meaning.

In Arles, Van Gogh walked across the fields, through the rows of workers as winds blew their faces tan with season, stopping for moments, catching sight of the awesome breadth of fields; transcending himself, groping to understand his fusion with the workers, the wild driving growth of seeds of season. His hands tensely pushed charcoal across the paper, catching the sweep of the bent shoulder, the pain of stress across youth's face; the violent pushing through land of man into the growth of plants, onto the voice of season's wind, to fade like a trace in those winds and return below the roots of plants. His people were a language of motion, of appearing and disappearing through the splashes of yellow grain in the fire-white of afternoon sun, of the total abstraction of nature, the dizziness of black crows flying wig-wag, violently like his own spirit over the fields into the sun he could never reach; up to the heart of God he died to paint. His letters to his brother, Theo, told of these walks, these

seizures when he became at one with a larger spiritual feeling that drove him into the field of people; into the absurdity of the colored world where he drowned and suffocated his final human efforts to exist in himself. They told briefly of his search, of day by day coming onto some new thread of that fibre of earth they were all bound to eat from and finally feed with the last salts of themselves.

Dostoevsky walked in the shadow of men hunting themselves for their wrongs, in their most private moments of self incrimination, guilt and finally destruction. In the corners of the mind new eyes were looking at the soul of a human being who had committed an injustice. They were the persistent voice of that soul reminding that in the brightest place he would be haunted and forced back into a pitch black corner to huddle in cold, white fear — the catastrophe of a man to realize his alienation from the phenomenon that had borne him to achieve his separate moment of mistake.

That tempest storm that brews within the wells of man's nature rose again like an awesome omen, summoning the fear of men into the fervor of wide-eyed hate, like serenity that subtly in the half-sleep of men's vigil turned the wide ocean into a storm of animal fighting himself to destory that which he must revere — the God torn from his place and cast into the realm of man's earthly effort; the soul and strength of Melville's *Moby Dick,* that each man alone must hunt within his soul to find and face and declare his existence before. What was it for men to face the God rising at them from the province of earth below, leaping out of the sea and smashing them into the oblivion of the uncovered sea of their souls?

More than the craft of each of these men separately is their united bind to the roots of explaining in their way, the human dilemma. Who are these people and why their anxious searchings; how shall we know of their deepest admissions — their prophesies, our destinies?

In the emotional lace, transposing subtle imaginings becoming the fabric of each man's existence, plays the Orpheus, lamenting his frustrated efforts . . . translating to the chords of his instrument words of that nonsymboled language of blind man's heart and mind. Each is a man in the vein of epitome, caught in amber, preserving and recalling the past, dated to cant the classical odes of man's existence in the language of his generation; striving to express the voice of tomorrow that arrives as he reaches it; yet before he can dodge the inevitable summoning his search has merited, he is dashed on the rocks beneath the chorus of Sirens, buried in the waters of dateless time, of irresistable becoming, wherein all mortal things, devoid of their distinct places in time, merge and foster the seeds of that new Orpheus who rises like a Phoenix in a new time, an unexplained place, and travels until he too achieves his death in one human passionate lunge trying to conquer the impermanence of man's greed to own his becoming tomorrow.

Ingmar Bergman is obsessed with walking among the shadows of people's nature, trying to bring across in one moment the fear of self-guilt the violent reaching of man to understand the dizziness of wig-wagging black crows in the fire white afternoon sun, the wrath of lone hunting after the God that rises from the earth of their lowest depths, smashing them into an oblivion of the dark sea of their own souls. His work is like the labors of Sysiphus straining to achieve the tomorrow of consciousness and always arriving at the defeat that waits at that dark place at the height of each man's highest hill. Actors in the Bergman world are shown not as individuals controlling the environment or situations in which they become enmeshed, but rather as beings trying to either escape their mistakes among other men, or deny their existence as objects involved on the same stage as any living thing struggling to maintain its simple life.

Tennessee Williams mentioned as a pretext to one of his readings: "I have tricks in my pocket, I have things up my sleeves; but I am the opposite of the stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth, I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion." Bergman works in this same way. He expresses his feeling like this: "When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect, we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly on our feelings." It is well that we keep in mind that the creation of truth for Bergman exists in introducing into the mind of the watcher that frame of reference which includes some mention of a larger world of forces which are almost never physically shown within the films.

I will discuss three screenplays which I believe deal directly with the larger problem of man realizing himself and his talents to the point where he has become alienated from the world of other human beings. I will first deal with reflection and sudden sorrow, secondly with the problem of the classic statement that "the meek shall inherit the earth", only here seeing the forceful hand of the warrior turned compassionate, turned crusader for the meek at the sake of his own existence. Last of all I will deal with Bergman's presentation of that part of man's life when he questions the validity of his entire past existence, when the years of his becoming what he presently is force him to ask whether somewhere in his life his youthful longings have vanished, and if so, why and to where have they gone.

In dealing with the arousal of a man's selfish and finally narrowed soul, Bergman shows us a novelist during the time of holiday with his family. Having recently returned from Switzerland the writer joins his family on an island where they have a home. The remnants of his family are his son, daughter, and her husband. It is a time when the children want their father with them, to be someone to them alone, to leave his work and recognize them; for over the years he has become more obsessed with the completion of his separate writings

than with those people who love him not as a writer, but as that man he is to them.

His wife died years before from an organic brain disease which progressively drove her to greater stages of inability to live with others. His daughter has inherited this disease but her slipping into trances has incorporated a weird prayer ritual during which she believes God will come through one of the panels of the house and will receive her obedience. There is easily more than one reference to the fact that the God that is constantly waited for is her father. For example, while the girl is in one of her trances, praying toward the wall, we are shown her father's shadow falling against this wall as he stands in the doorway. He is perhaps the first to know that something is lacking that these other people are demanding from his presence, but the last to understand how to act.

It is bitter to realize that the situation of which one is the master can become decayed and warped with neglect and yet on the return of the master, still demand his love and guidance. So we see his son caught between the violent rituals of his sister, who has asked him to be her confident, and his own desire to be recognized before God; to be directed in his time of inability by that master's word. But here God enters into his own kingdom with a blindfold to the feeling of those whom he has created, those who revere him. His son is trusting, naively believing always in the coming of God; his daughter has waited for God and now seeks to destroy Him for denying her vigil, her stretched out, shaking hand of feeble love. She becomes more infused with the world of nature aside from man, her sickness begins to mount in volume and intensity, and she is frustrated in her efforts to reach the God that never comes, the God that lurks near but denies. In one violent moment she strikes at the Master's heart — violating the purity of her brother's naive searching. Like the fever of the growing storm that finally reaches its highest pitch and then cracks the sky, so she in one mad rage forces her brother down on top of her and splits that soul of man, breaking pride into a calm of fearful self-guilt. Suddenly it became clear that the Master must recognize the world of people he has split. The treasure of his infinite depths was revealed to his eyes as one piece of itself devouring the other, the spreading of a disease of loneliness and frustration and denial; the sickness of mortals bound to the task of expressing their efforts on behalf of the general nature of mistake in mankind. Thus did God discover incest in his home when he returned from the sea; and himself the reason why. After seeing the screenplay, I wrote a note to a friend which summed my feelings about what Bergman was saying:

When God remains aloof
From the kingdom real,
Gleaming love from that

Lesser life;
And seeks in one final,
Passionful act the enoblement
Of his blind virtues
Then God comes down
To find blind virtues
Stript and raped,
His ownself violated
By that warped
Lesser life who merely
Sought to kiss
His hand.

Bergman achieved an even stronger foothold in levels of man's blind flight for existence when he brought forth a tale dealing with the face of God as Death. The play includes the actual figure of Death in combat with the exponent of man's efforts to realize and fortify the strength of a generous and and peaceable Lord; a warrior back to his homeland after his struggles in the Crusades. It begins strangely in that this is a man who has returned from years of battle under the guise of God's cause and now, after the effort, he encounters the wrath of a God he respects apart from his armed legion, separate from his weapon and shield, one whose power and domain are not questioned — who must be met and dealt with alone, by each man. But we have more here than the forces of mortality resisting Death's haunting presence. The author has decided to unveil the conscience of Death itself in pursuit of man, his anger, the passion of his mission, and his failure to conquer all men.

Throughout the play we are taken on a journey led by the Knight and his Squire. The Knight achieves one after another stay of execution from Death's mission by engaging him in a game of chess, the Knight bargaining for his life be rule of the tournament's outcome. The Knight learns that here is the real crusade and the battle is not with his fellow man but with those larger forces which move eternally through the domain of man, taking out their wrath when they feel prompted to do so. He knows that above all he is a simple man whose substance is for the engagement between forces, that he must be the champion of one side — that life for him is not to live but to be fought for. In his journey, and between moves with Death, he stops through a town and enters a Church, seeking consolation on suddenly realizing his mission and thinking of the efforts of his life thus far. It must be remembered that he is a man who, though not knowing the reason why, maintains that the God created to be honored for peaceable and noble reasons is now being contested by the virtues of the real God, Death, yet he is puzzled by his own desire to believe in the goodness of a compassionate Lord in light of what he sees.

"Knight: (in the confession booth) Why can't I kill God within me? Why does he live on in this painful and humiliating way even though I curse Him and want to tear Him out of my heart? Why, in spite of everything, is He a baffling reality that I can't shake off? Do you hear me?

Death: (behind the grill) Yes, I hear you.

Knight: I want knowledge, not faith, not suppositions but knowledge. I want God to stretch out his hand toward me, reveal himself and speak to me.

Death: But he remains silent.

Knight: I call out to him in the dark but no one seems to be there.

Death: Perhaps no one is there.

Knight: Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.

Death: Most people never reflect about either death or the futility of life.

Knight: But one day they will have to stand at that last moment of life and look toward the darkness.

Death: When that day comes . . ."

As the Knight proceeds toward the higher country and his castle he gathers a few people who travel with him. He gathers people, who themselves are living life, and he realizes that he can Be, as long as he has people who are alive to defend. A couple and their son, a girl, a smith and his wife, all travel with the Knight into the last phase of their journey. As they embark Bergman tells of their passage as one recites a benediction describing the innocence of those in a blessing before departure.

At the castle of the Knight all are finally seated at the dinner table, the Knight tired, having lost the last move with Death. The inevitable enters, pays respects to all, and they in return to him. Each announces profession and title, their last plea, except for the simple juggler and his wife who are the only ones to live after Death has rented the company of the others. Bergman is telling that, as the Knight said to Death, God the peaceable and compassionate is within each man, is within the man who does not try to identify it anywhere but in the life of things around him and the simplicity of each thing's existence; and further that it is in a man whose wife can see in his simplicity this profound depth. The play closes with Mia saying to her husband, as he describes the vision of the others dancing across into the distant horizon; as he is full of the meaning of their gone lives: "Mia (smiling): You with your visions and dreams."

The heart of the aged continues sounding within, even in the sleep, methodically like the sound of a precise mechanism faintly audible beneath the carefully wrapped threads that have aged it, have muffled its long-ago

voice, have silenced its wild beating. When it stops beneath, we say a life has been lived.

Ingmar Bergman made an attempt which he cannot in any way claim to have accomplished yet. In telling the story of a man who talks of his sudden coming onto the question of what his entire life has been worth, the author combines that sense of searching which the naive child uses — making symbols so awesome that, though they resemble the person making them, one is unable to divorce them from his presence; and the realization of a deep-seated guilt that this man has not been at one with that world he was involved in and had alienated himself into the world of nature from which he now cannot make that urgently needed, that desperately demanded leap back into the world of living things called men.

We are to understand that this is a man who discovers that his dissatisfaction with mankind has been his blind pursuit of his aloneness and that when he achieved it, it was a hollow, lonesome, un-manlike victory. We must remember that he is destined to be alone, that it is not unusual if he is seen alone in his own memories even in nature, for he is realizing that his persistent searching must find and rejuvenate his death which was sometime back; before he dies this final time, so that he may be worth dying — so that a man can know that when the muffled sound stops, truly a life has been lived.

The play is in the vein of what Wordsworth said about the poem, that it is written in reflection; so we find the poem of each man's life written in that separate time alloted to all, through memory; the haze of recollection of gone-years, of reflection.

"At the age of seventy-six, I feel I'm much too old to lie to myself. But of course I can't be too sure. My complacent attitude toward my own truthfulness could be dishonesty in disguise." So we meet Professor Isak Borg, the silent, the nationally decorated, a mark in his field, a hollow man awed near death with the search after his fast slipping memories of the youth only begun but never lived. The dilemma of his existence comes sharply into focus in much the same way as that of the God who has denied the realm he returns to. While talking to his daughter-in-law about his son, his past dispassion on their behalf forces her not to accept his new sense of searching and sharing.

> "Marianne: You are an old egoist, Father. You are completely inconsiderate and you have never listened to any one but yourself. All this is well hidden behind your mask of old-fashioned charm and friendliness. But you are hard as nails, even though everyone depicts you as a great humanitarian. We who have seen you at close range, we know what you really are. You can't fool us. For instance, do you remember when I came a month ago (to her father-in-law's house)? I had some idiotic idea that you would help Evald (his son) and me. So I asked to stay

with you for a few weeks. Do you remember what you said?
Isak: I told you that you were most cordially welcome.
Marianne: This is what you said, word for word; I have no respect for suffering of the soul, so don't come to me and complain. But if you need spiritual masturbation I can make an appointment for you with some good quack, or perhaps with a minister, its so popular these days.
Isak: Did I say that?
Marianne: You have rather inflexible opinions Father. It would be terrible to have to depend on you in any way.
Isak: Is that so. Now if I am honest, I must say I've enjoyed having you around the house.
Marianne: Like a cat.
Isak: Like a cat or a human being, it's the same thing. You are a fine young woman and I'm sorry that you dislike me.
Marianne: I don't dislike you.
Isak: Oh.
Marianne: I feel sorry for you."

The man has been startled by the reputation he let form about himself, hearing the inhuman things he said — shocked that it was his voice, frightened that it may be too late to reverse this and come to know these people he's simply walked through. Bergman shows that almost numb searching that the aged Isak feels as he begins his discovery of the past, a youth seen through yearning eyes that only remember the smell of wild strawberries.

"(Isak) I sat down next to an old apple tree that stood alone and ate the berries, one by one. I may very well have become a little sentimental. Perhaps I was a little tired or melancholy. It's not unlikely that I began to think about one thing or another that was associated with my childhood haunts.

I had a strange feeling of solemnity, as if this were a day of decision. The quietness of the summer morning. The calm bay. The birds' brilliant concert in the foliage. The old sleeping house. The aromatic apple tree which leaned slightly, supporting my back. The wild strawberries."

"I don't know how it happened, but the day's clear reality flowed into dreamlike images. I don't even know if it was dream, or memories which arose with the force of real events. I don't know how it began either, but I think it was when I heard the playing of the piano."

Thus does Isak visit the cemetery of his life, looking into his unfilled but readied grave. His eyes cannot believe the visions that come before him, of his family, the country, warm winds, and even the romance that Isak had failed

such a long time ago. He had forgotten this life and it had forgotten him. His sight is like Dickens' Scrooge, awed by what had gone on around him before, just realizing it. As Isak and Marianne travel to his son's home they pick up a trio of hitch-hikers and the man sees in them the unpredictable, jubilant, free-spirit of youth he too once almost knew.

Professor Isak Borg rested quietly in bed, after the trip to his son's home, and he has finally been recognized, privately, by his daughter-in-law, whom he too now sees. And Isak can rest.

> "Whenever I am restless or sad, I usually try to recall memories from my childhood, to calm down. This is the way it was that night too, and I wandered back to the summerhouse and the wild-strawberry patch and everything I had dreamed or remembered or experienced during this long day."
>
> "I dreamed that I stood by the water and shouted toward the bay, but the warm summer breeze carried away my cries and they did not reach their destination. Yet I wasn't sorry about that; I felt, on the contrary, rather lighthearted."

I have discussed herein, *Through a Glass Darkly, The Seventh Seal,* and *Wild Strawberries,* in that order.

When what has been mentioned needs to be said no more, when our ears have become full with the wisdom we have led ourselves in search of, we shall have one word to say — and saying it shall begin our separate journey filling other ears and touching heart's reason till we cannot anymore.



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