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JAMES SCHUYLER

Dear Joe
for Joe Brainard

I can easily believe that I
am fifty-eight, but that you
are forty fills me with won-
der! I remember
how young you seemed (and were)
the first time I met you,
when Kenward invited a few
of the younger poets
(Ted, Tony) to meet me and
you came too. You didn't say
much (you said nothing) but
looked at books in that little
house in Cornelia Street, not
aware of what would come to pass
for you there: why you came
to live there! And you came
to visit me at 49 South Main
in Southampton, wearing worn-
out shoes. I gave you a hand-
me-down pair of --- sneakers?
moccasins? I
forget. My room here in the
Chelsea is bright with art
works by you ("A fake Fairfield
Porter" I especially
love), and though I don't
see you often I think about
you a lot:
for your birthday I would like
to send you a bunch of lilies-
of-the-valley, which mean,
in the language of flowers,
"I have loved you since long."

The Lilacs

Helena brought me
hang their heads
heavy with fragrance
---what other
is like it?---roses?
lilies-of-the-valley?
freesias? (not tube-
roses: they're
too much)---and
prove that fat
can be beautiful:
not on me, on them.
Each truss of seemingly
myriad, four-petalled
flowerets of that color
(lilac) Persia dreamed up:
would they could last
forever, were of porcelain
or silk: silk lilacs?
I
think not. I love them as
they are, seeming so
permanent, yet even
more transient than we!
Now I think I'll have
a sniff of lilac
then eat a wedge
of rhubarb pie:
rhubarb and lilacs:
could life hold more?
Perhaps:
there is, for instance,
Helena.

RUDY BURCKHARDT

On looking down

Wandering around New York with a camera in the so-called Forties which were my thirties I began to climb to the top of midtown buildings around twenty stories high. Not actually climb. I entered elevators - they were not automatic then - and asked for the highest floor with a firm voice, as if I had some business there.

Stepping out I'd see an EXIT sign if I was lucky, ascend another flight of stairs, push open a creaky metal door and emerge on a flat black tarred roof with brilliant, unexpected views on all sides: buildings of various styles, some higher some lower than my own station, with columns, crowns, ornaments, cornices, water towers, brick walls, smoke, distance. Down below in the shadow of canyons tiny cars, trucks, lampposts, people. It must have been my alpine heritage transplanted to New York.

Later Yvonne looked at my photos, still later began to look down from airplanes or the top of the World Trade Center with a more slow, sustained looking than mine, making drawings, pastels and large oil paintings in a deliberate, expansive manner.

By then I was older, somewhat bent over and looking down at the New York pavement from a height of 5 feet 7 inches, at manhole covers, crushed soda cans, bottle tops and beer can tabs and other unmentionable rubbish. At present however, straightened up somewhat by regular yoga exercises I look every which way for short, intense glimpses of details in New York and the woods of Maine, at people in the street, even the doomed creatures in the subway or the soaring new black structures uptown, while Yvonne continues her steady gazing in the dark and glitter of night.

And believe it or not, once in a while, in spite of daily pressures, from close-up, we still look at each other.

MICHAEL SCHOLNICK

Whisperings

Upland and fens
Mist-tufted, cogs

Sprinting soot clings
Enisled to stone

On Cam's edge steadfastly
Controlled punts roll

Happening market stamps apace
Serious intention is engaged

Clearing element leaves skies
And leaves circularly indoors

The slightly foolish beetle
Is in Mud and algae
Other than it behaves

One foot hedges
Dahlias provenance

Valentine's

Quick woman, voices
catch the air, roof's
smoke valve rises

Sunlight bathes, brilliant
in brick exposure of rectory--
Lavender church pressed adjacent--

Jerusalem is
a crucial place--
Disaster and insistence reign

The food vendor's at-
taching wheels on axle to
his scoured cart

I marvel
at translucent sky
How you contain beauty

Fun And Change

Fun is like an old friendship,
dualism apart.
The rebuilt porches on cosy streets.
A panoramic skyline
of many appointments.

*

Change, somehow
is redundant.
Change gets to you.
The miles are alike.

from a continuing collaboration

I have great wonder, be this light,
How I can live, for day nor night
I may not sleep
I sleep in a room in the snow
With the god of sleep in a cave of stone
Who sleeps with songs to make sleep less death
I have so many idle thoughts
That all things alike seem good to me,
Sorrow or joy or whatever it might be
Bewilders me and I fall down
All I have is this imagination
I dream in this ecstatic room we see
Heights of frescoes in Venetian villas
Full of sons and daughters
I would make a pathway in the disrepair
To the glories through the genius of the story
Our sleep is corrupted by scenes of snow
We are the double impostors you're warned of
Resting intransigence on poetry's head
Like a warm predicted storm of love of stories
I lean my arm on your knee like another
You can remember the raucous exchange
Between the snow, the book and the milk
The book is in with the food
To make death more like a story,
The man who knew none, the food's with the books
And though we can't sleep, revenge for change,
There's an immodest view we laugh at.

There see the landscape of the white
Jockey-shorts-clothed erection that's no one's
Pillowed and shadowed and alone
There, the funny view of the nude with a clock
Can a naked upright woman
On a red bed be immodest
Only telling the time as she does but
When does she sleep? Oh and I
Might as well be a painting
The impostor I am now won't
She soon sing and sing me real
And in sleep Love more truly join me
And those so far away now will in dreams
Talk laugh and wander with me
Isn't this sleep yet? Aren't you near?
At 4:30 I drink flat Kirin beer
And read A Fine Old Conflict
The birds in the park have snow damp feathers
I can't see them can you? They

Have sisters and babies and marriages
Every day they must marry the world---
The birds in the park and the girl in my book---
But sleep is a play an enchantment
Gods, send us grace to sleep and meet
In our sleep such certain dreams
That having wandered the universe
Dimensionless, we might awake
And remarry our small given world.

I read A Fine Old Conflict and Monkey Day too
And last I read that the birds in the park
Cannot love like monkeys or like we do
Because they aren't babies long enough
And grow too fast the soft down that covers
The surfaces of plants and animals to protect them
From the coldest winds, brightest snow in the bed
I dream my sister is a lion covered with fur
I wonder how I'll be able to live with her
In the state of physical evolution when
It's first possible for us to bear children,
14 years for boys, 12 for girls, a legal age,
Small, sensitive, covered and erectile,
It corresponds to the penis of the male
The effort it takes to dream this would be equal
To lending the preposterous cab driver who left me
Stranded the dignity of all my wandering alone
Like a painting of an impostor twin on a red Valentine
Let's take a cat and foster him well with milk
And tender flesh, and make his couch of silk
And let him see a mouse go by the wall,
Instantly he forgoes milk and flesh and all
And every delicacy that is in that house
Such appetite has he to eat a mouse
Let's both only dream that we sleep,
Only that dream will marry us best
We'll drink strong wine, red as blood
And view the most modest women on the reddest beds.

The thing about milk, I prefer wine to it
My pregnant sister's a milk factory
As large modest & beautiful as a Beethoven
Sonata. But whenever I dream of Antarctica
Its topography's secretly not quite milk-
White. Once when I dreamed I dreamed
In the dream I told X in an aside from the dream, "I'm
Having this recurring dream." And then he said,
"Who isn't?" Later Y said, "Alice needs
To know what to say about it."
I've done my Milk Time and still I dream
I nurse the baby and feel milk come down
In my left breast. Bernadette, do you think

It's possible to die of daily drinks, in
Modestly large amounts, of wine?
The modest woman gets her nourishment
From...fostering? I'm sleeping drinking and
Singing, having no peer but thee, as
Death has no peer. It's too beautiful!
I dream a woman lies in a crib, how compact
She is! I dream I write a lament and a
Lai and they nourish the very sun who makes
Day I dream I'm waiting I'm 12 and childless
And want no child nor nothing but trance
I dream I'm a hundred wanting nothing but
My trance, and all is always potential as the
Birds sing again the song we help write
In ink of wine as well as milk, while spellbound on the bed.

If it isn't spring yet like milk it's alot like spring
I guess we might die and all of practically nothing,
I don't know, I daily drink an awful lot of beer
We can't get wine up here, milk is more like whiskey
Fostering I think what we cherish like the dictionary does
Remember we'd nursed hopes we'd be speaking of Chaucer
His lines ripe as wine and full of hops, what's a Lai?
My grandfather used to rest his stein in a saucer
Like a jovial moon in the draft of the room, is that silly?
If we were together in Antarctica today or tonight
We might be in total darkness in a trance like he was
At a table in the milk-white night reminiscing for fear
Of the elements about our child-bearing years or something
With the order of confidences as milk for the night's sonata
Where you say you can feel the milk come down, & I still say "let"
Yet it's still immensely still as you said in your letter
There's a moon reported in The Times to which we're getting closer
It appears through densest radiation to have been a wetter body
Somebody even said it had looked alot like a pizza pie
When, less displayed, it was viewed at first more modestly
Now close up this moon is dry yet still red, maybe I
Will get to have the same trance as you to dream or sing in
I think beer is more like milk than wine is, wine is old
But beer's cold, I did dream I did all I was doing twice
Then I flew on a plane where the cocktail menu was hung
With all kinds of tiny whiskey bottles both to choose from
And to signify the memory of lactation in this flight
I saw everyone I ever knew while I flew to Chicago's loop at night.

Hey when I said wine I really meant beer
But when I said lai I didn't mean lay but
When I said death I meant death "SABRES
SLASH WOZZY ISLES." How much beer, and
How much did your grandfather too, do daily
You drink? You tell me and I'll tell you or

Do we nurse vice as number (how much how many) like other
Americans? Am I losing my sense
Of the beauty of tonight, but temporarily, I
Think, for white nights always have fluctuated
Moonlight river rush rapture pang sweetness sudden
Busyness again, Chaucer attending to the data
Of clothing or of dream, the which are many
Of the guise one is only the genial host to, do
You think? I wear a dark blue tee-shirt under a light
Blue pure silk shirt and what was bothering me was
The knight who can't come to know she's dead see
If I'm the knight and I am she, can't I sleep to awaken as I?
Perhaps that can't be--though perhaps I have
And often, but I feel like the knight's bewildered again
That's the meaning of this long night, full of
Lovely sleepers but devoid of sleep but shapely sweet
Here's a sort of a short sort of lai:

O earthly lady new lady--
In your service always with 2 kids
Plus my poverty my impatience
My vices my blind spots--heal me
A minute really it's time to.

NORMAN FISCHER

PROBABLY NOT

Harold Thompson was in love with Cindy Poor when he was 14 years old. It took more than 14 years to forget about her. But even then he didn't completely forget about her. When he loved her most it was necessary for him to pretend he didn't like her all that much, but to a few of his friends he intimated how strong his feeling was. Some understood but most didn't. Harold Thompson was an alert intense boy. He was uninterested in school, particularly in the social aspects of school but nevertheless moved among the best circles of the school because certain elite members of the student body appreciated him for his depth and seriousness. Of course he joked constantly and did outrageous things and was often expelled from school. He and Cindy Poor went together for over five years. He loved her and she loved him but not as seriously. Cindy was a bright and very social girl, from a prominent family in the town; Harold Thompson was not from a prominent family so Cindy Poor's family only tolerated him. In the end Cindy Poor believed more in her family than she did in the intensity of Harold Thompson, much more in her good family than in any person she might be, as Harold Thompson saw that person. Perhaps there was a moment, too subtle to speak of, in which, without realizing it, Cindy Poor chose to be the person her parents believed her to be and not the person Harold Thompson hoped she was. There was no question of the person Cindy Poor herself felt herself to be, since she did not feel herself to be any person other than the person other persons felt she was. So she went brightly off to college, Harold went into the Army, they tried to go on but of course they never do go on. Cindy was brightly in college; Harold Thompson was in the Army in foreign countries thinking a lot and trying to avoid the Wars. Fourteen years later (out of the Army, back in the town doing odd jobs) Harold Thompson was convinced that anyone who found anything of meaning in this life which is shit must be a fool. He didn't drink and become lost. He lived simply and steadily and kept his eyes open. Mostly he felt sorry for everyone.

Harold Thompson's best friend in high school was Martin Rizzo. Martin Rizzo was large and ugly. Girls could only be friends with him. Martin Rizzo's father was even uglier than Martin but Martin thought that he, the father, was handsome in a way, though he felt deeply that he, Martin, was ugly even though they were ugly in exactly the same way. Actually it was true that the father was handsome in a way. The way his face was pushed in made him look appealingly mean all the time. Martin Rizzo's father had made quite a lot of money in the cigar manufacturing business, working his way up from the bottom. Martin Rizzo and his parents lived in an expensive ranch-style house in the newest part of town. But girls found it impossible to relate to Martin Rizzo on anything other than a friendly basis. Once when he was 25 Martin Rizzo went to visit his Aunt and Uncle in New Jersey where he met a woman, who looked like his mother, who, this woman, didn't think he was ugly. Since she hadn't gone to the same high

school he did and hadn't lived in his town she didn't know any better she took him seriously; Martin fell violently in love with her; his soul was sliced thin with love and aching for this large sweet and dumb young woman who wanted only to marry and have children and they did that, two sons. Within two years of their marriage Martin became sick to death of the stupidity of his wife, who really wasn't as stupid as all that, of the small apartment and the children, of the necessity to work his way up so artificially and painfully in the cigar factory. All his deep hatred for himself easily came to his wife and children, father and mother. Being large he took to self-destructiveness in drinking and violence of bar fights and fast driving. By the time he was 28 his health was questionable his mood was steadily grotesquely violent he had a terrific alcohol habit was unemployable and divorced.

Martin Rizzo had a cousin in New Jersey named Mark, Mark Rizzo. Mark was very handsome with an athletic build and was indeed an athlete, a halfback on the football team, very dark and lithe and good with the girls in the school and notorious with them. Mark Rizzo and Martin Rizzo had very little to do with one another even though their fathers were brothers. One girl Mark slept with was Emily Moon. She was someone he spent only a night with, it was just a small part of a night actually, after a party. But it was enough because Emily was pregnant, a thin very sad dreamy girl she was, pregnant, she had such high regard for Mark Rizzo, who she considered to be so far above her there was really, and she knew it, no chance of him ever loving her, so, so as not to mess up his life, and why in the world would she ever think to want to mess up his life, he was really so full of vitality, he just seemed to go rolling on, like a force of nature, she didn't tell him she was pregnant, she just, as they sometimes did at that time, "went away" and had the baby. After that, having given up the baby, she became quite thin, and whatever bloom she might have had she didn't now, years went by, she had several jobs, waitress, secretary, drifted from one job to another, her health was never very good, she was noticeably round-shouldered. By now she was 28. Surprisingly, when she met Martin Rizzo in the park near his Aunt and Uncle's home in New Jersey that year, it was near the swings where a little boy and a little girl were swinging, on a drizzly day in November, it never came out that she had been impregnated by Martin's cousin, and it never came out afterward when she went back to Martin's home town to live with him in a trailer, those four months they were together, taking all their clothes off nearly every night after dinner and getting high and making love while listening to music, and talking about the world, it never came out, even now as I write this I do not know if Martin Rizzo is aware that Emily Moon was made pregnant by his cousin Mark Rizzo.

Mark Rizzo made out pretty well and married a beautiful Jewish girl and they have two children and he is a famous author. Perhaps you have heard of him. He writes thrillers, and one of them has been made into a film. Mark Rizzo worked on the script of the film in Hollywood and had an affair with the leading lady but his wife never found out. I think she guessed but she never did actually find out.

But unlike Mark, Martin Rizzo did not seem to have the knack for smooth happiness. He just always wanted to have everything go

smash all of the time. Emily Moon just wanted to be devoted to him. Not that in particular she loved him, but, after all, he was there. And she had a gift for loyalty. Somehow they had enough money to live on and the days went by. But after a few months Martin Rizzo began to realize that Emily Moon, although she was a great improvement, being small and slight and intelligent, whereas his wife was large and buxom and dumb, was not perfect because she was too easy. For one thing, she wasn't beautiful enough. For another thing she agreed with too many things he said he didn't believe. They began to fight.

At this time Martin Rizzo had recently met up again with Harold Thompson, his old high school friend. The two friends really had an appreciation for each other because everyone else they knew was either gone from the town or if they were still there were doing regular lives, married, kids, regular jobs, believing in all the things Martin Rizzo and Harold Thompson knew perfectly well and thoroughly were shit and only a fool didn't know this. So they recognized each other right away as comrades. They, with Emily Moon, spent a good deal of time together. There was at that time no regularity to their lives. Places seemed to shift then time went by, drinking and drugs, late nights and early mornings, people met intimately then disappearing, buzz of the events of the world passing by in the intensity of the searching passion of their lives. And Martin Rizzo would always say when Emily Moon left the room, "She likes you, you know. You ought to take her home. She's up for it. Go ahead. It doesn't matter to me. What the hell, you oughtta do it, just ask her, see what she says," and Harold Thompson was always tempted to see what she said, but then Martin Rizzo was very large and reckless, and Harold Thompson was quite a deal smaller and more careful, and Harold Thompson didn't believe in Martin Rizzo when he said this. But Martin Rizzo always said this. Sometimes he alluded to it when all three of them were present in the room. It made for quite an uncomfortable feeling for Harold Thompson and Emily Moon.

Harold Thompson's and Emily Moon's one evening finding themselves kissing on the couch in Martin Rizzo's trailer while Martin Rizzo was out getting some beer was one of the world's inevitable events. Equally for Martin to return and find them that way and to become enraged. Harold Thompson was soon out under the stars behind a pine tree listening to Martin Rizzo curse Emily Moon inside the trailer where things were being shattered and crashed. Harold Thompson waited out there feeling the coolness of the evening and the peaceful beauty of the brightly lit starry night and the tops of the pine trees against the blue-black sky. He knew completely Martin Rizzo would not harm Emily Moon, but probably only himself a little and the things in the trailer a great deal. He knew he had to unquestionably remain outside until what was between Martin and Emily to be released was. Finally Emily Moon came out of the trailer crying and heaving. Harold Thompson walked with her the long miles to his apartment in the town. They never said a word to one another during all the walk. Then after that they lived together quietly for some years. Finally they married.

After three years Harold Thompson told his wife he wanted to have children. But she didn't want to have children, she wasn't sure whether she wanted to have children, was it right for the world, being what it

now was, to open itself to children, could she do it, have children, she had had a child, and all the grief of that really came back on her. No. Not now. Maybe later.

Three more years went by. They bought a wreck of an old house in the town and began fixing it up.

Harold Thompson began to notice certain things about his wife. She was very tentative. She always seemed to be in a dream. She had difficulty making decisions. She slept a great deal. She was never terribly happy; she was never excessively sad. She never dressed up. She smiled often, but often inappropriately. She was a good wife, very loyal and steady. She was the only person he had ever met who understood him without him ever having to explain. He cared for her a great deal. He was happy to find he really could look out for her interests. He hoped some day they'd be able to have a child and that this would make her happy. Maybe they'd move away then, out West. Probably not, though.

TIM DLUGOS

DESIRE UNDER THE PINES

I like to wake up early by myself
and walk out to the forest which divides
the beach from bay side of the island, like
the line of hair that starts at breastbone, hides

the navel and descends into the thatch
beneath the tan line of a boy I saw
a picture of once, in a magazine.
He isn't in the woods this morning. Raw

desire al fresco isn't quite my speed
these months. I like to scout for vireos
and robins almost as much as for guys.
An ashtray from the Hotel Timeo

in Taormina, a signed lithograph
by the late Tony Smith, and a shelf packed
with great books of our time: the souvenirs
of my hosts' histories. I left mine back

along the trail, like interesting litter
thrown out of Conestogas on the long
trek west. The drivers knew that "We can use it
in Oregon" was a completely wrong

criterion. They had to get there first,
and lightening the load was the only way.
Beside the path, the wren that lights in brush
sounds like a footstep in the gathering day.

FROM JOURNAL

Picking up background material for a copy assignment at Sanky's, I pass a desk and there's Terry, S.'s former assistant, whom I haven't seen in years. Terry! It's been years! Tim! she exclaims, and we reminisce about our first meeting, my first New York employment interview, at Planned Parenthood for Sanky's old job. It must be ten years ago, Terry says, and when I correct her (five) she doesn't believe me, possibly because she thinks I look ten years older says my intrusive vanity. Terry doesn't look a day older. She's been out of the industry; she and her husband retired to their dream house in Front Royal, Virginia two years ago. What's she doing back in New York? Well, she falters, I lost my husband five months ago ... I'm sorry, and tell her so; tell her also about my father's death two weeks ago, my mother's loss similar to hers: husband unexpectedly passing too short a time after they'd reached their retirement destination, miles from friends and familiar landscapes. Terry's back in town scouting possible jobs and Staten Island apartments. She might share a place with her sister, but there's a snag: What'll I do with my furniture? It's all valuable antiques. She alternately glares and looks at me imploringly as she ticks off the pieces: a marble-topped coffee table! a beautiful mahogany dining room set! twin beds made extra-long especially (my husband was six feet two, eyes tearing up)! a combination bench and coat rack with the original mirror! the classic sideboard! She's starting to get worked up. Then the trouble of moving it all! The week they moved to Virginia, she broke her arm, her husband almost had a second heart attack, and the cat developed cancer. When they arrived in Front Royal, they had to locate an orthopedist, a cardiologist, and a vet. The husband and the cat died. They sold their house in Cobble Hill, occupied for twelve years by a couple of young men who called Terry "Ma" (she pauses to see if I get the idea), so she can't go back to Brooklyn. It's a dilemma, and she wants to know how my mother is facing what she perceives to be a similar crisis. By staying put for awhile, I say, and Terry agrees that the first months alone are the hardest, no time to make a big decision. She asks how my father died, and when I tell her (the sudden massive heart attack, the coma that looked as though it would last for months, and the quiet, equally unexpected death) she tells me, it's better than his being a vegetable. He had a vegetable garden, I want to say, but instead reply that I don't know how impaired he would have been, but he certainly would have lost some brain functions, and he was a grumpy patient even when he had a cold (she nods; men, she thinks), so a long serious illness would have been awful for him, thereby setting up an opposition between death and discomfort, choosing the former, though neither I nor more importantly my father believed in that sort of glibness, and it's his life we're discussing, six stories over Times Square this gorgeous afternoon.

SOLIDARITY
for Jane DeLynn

As a white male Republican
who grew up in a middle middle class
environment and went to private schools,
I cherish my impediments: Polish, college
dropout, queer, which make me individual
but don't make me a victim

I have cousins I don't even know
facing down the tanks (or so
I'd like to think) in Poland where the air's
as white with snow as here
I care about them not as individuals
but as victims of the things we've never faced
as individuals

maybe that's why you can say
that you don't give a fuck about the Polacks
that when the Jews your people were marched off
into the winter, it was Polacks
my people who held the bayonets
for centuries, so why
should you give a fuck

I don't know what it's like to be a Jew,
but I know what it's like not to be one:
in my Viking hat and foreskin, washing down
my mastodon steak with milk while outnumbered
humanists, scholars of God's word, huddle
in their island of civility every time I belch

that is an illusion another
is that my life or yours is normal
if these are normal times we should retire the word
for total action we are on an outlaw island

privileged to speak sincerely
and be loud about it, our necks
aren't on the block

a privilege purchased with the sweat
of other individuals, our forebears till the day
he died, my father called his childhood buddies Jewboys
they called him a Polack they'd grown up
in the Bottom, wooden houses
crammed between the river
and the railroad tracks in Middletown
Connecticut my father's sister's

sharpest memory of childhood's of her mother
looking out the attic window toward the river
where her sons and their friends
the Jewboys were stranded on a raft, halfway
to Portland, with stormclouds blowing down
the Connecticut, the dull reports
of thunder growing louder

there is no safety from the storm in huddling
with illusions that our privilege is anything
other than a raft
people facing tanks are victims
and the tanks are driven by average Joes
saving the world for normality

you're my kind of person and it's your individual
traits that provoke my fondness, even when you
piss me off but I feel responsible,
able to respond, when the cousins I don't even
know dodge the lightning I have cousins
I don't even like, like you do
it's easier to take them when they're part
of a whole, a people, but that's not what I mean
by Solidarity - I mean that I can feel
responsible even when they're not my cousins
but yours, and that it's a right I assume,
unpurchased by another individual's
sweat if we are to make
a history, we must be the source
not a cork that bobs on the ancestral stream
I choose solidarity with them and you
though I'm not a Jew, but a Polack

when the Ghetto Fighters rose up
in '44, Jew and Pole fought side by side
until they were mowed down by the tanks
that leveled the city they shared

when we share this city we are
friends, not victims history's an impediment
only when I can't shed tears when I see
red on the sidewalk I cannot recognize
whose blood it is from the color the normal
weather buries it where we are
it's snowing heavily

HIM AND OTHERS

Etienne de Silhouette, remember him?
How about Silenus? I think I'm
bound to be forgotten
by you and others just
like you--you and yours.
It's amazing how it all whisks
past. Really, what could've
been, blithe memories, cigarettes
the fastest planets have no
time for things that cling.
Thoughts. Silly. I'd rather
sink my teeth in your neck,
seriously, knock you down
on the floor--all for love.
You'll forget my lousy
poems but if I could just
mar you or something. Nothing
nice ever sticks but boy
a scar--if I could ever
really bruise you with
my feelings, them, so infinitely
forgettable & gone.

GREG MASTERS

part 2 of PEOPLE IN THE ROOM

I woke up when I heard someone shout in the stairway & smelt the stale tired work clothes I'd fallen asleep in pretty immediately on coming home from an old job that started up again. I don't want to go into details about it now but it involves getting up way earlier than I'm used to but being only two days a week is fine. My first waking thought is: she hasn't called, meaning, this my first free time in days when...so of course the phone rings & it's her, I'll think of a name to use later. Damn, it's so easy to spend the next few days after sleeping with a new lover totally obsessed with them & what could be & plot it out every way it can be plotted & stop yourself then go ahead in emotion spoiled thought routes which lead hopefully back to them. Especially when spring is just officially here & it's working, the sun's angle post vernal equinox making everyone, & when I say everyone I mean women, go oh it's so hot or something & taking off a layer of clothes, to be folded & draped over the forearm. And rather than expend all the energy & bouncing around desires which the view of shorn of winter clothes here-I-am-back-strolling-on-the-about-to-bud-surface-of-earth dictates, I can focus all my aspirations, I guess you'd call them, on this one new person & not drive myself & everyone around me crazy simply unfocused & lecherous to the horizon. I just looked up 'adore' in the dictionary to see if I could use it to verbalize what it seems to myself I've started to unwantingly do to this person. It's OK cause it eventually gave as definition "to be extremely fond of" which sounds better than the first two which had WORSHIP like that in big letters & reverence which has silly connotations so I can say adore this person, I need a person to adore daily, & not necessarily imply that I'm lifting her on a pedestal the way Charlie Chaplin always does, figuratively, in his movies which is the only thing which seems to spoil anything about him.

She came in a cab wearing a long plaid skirt (that had a cigarette burn he found later) and white stockings, which she said had a pink tone, carrying a bunch of lilacs in her hand wrapped in tin foil & under that a layer of paper towels wette^d for the short ride cross town. She smelled fresh she'd just taken a bath. Upstairs, later, she told him how the cab driver (who he thought a jerk for yelling out for him to come open the door for her) had said pulling up to him waiting there on the front stoop: he sure looks glad you're coming over, and they went on all night saying those kind things to each other, at one point he wanted to go find a copy of a Giorgione painting she reminded him of but she wouldn't let him out of the bed. There was a peaceful moment when he played a side of an Eric Dolphy album she pulled out with his crying child bass clarinet & they both just sat there & listened, her with her legs spread comfortably under her skirt & him crosslegged like an Indian comfortable too on the floor able to relax with some supper dishes pushed out of the way piled

but not yet ready to be moved. Where they were at first so cautious with each other talking of their other loves, he saw her loosening up being less careful over the last few times they'd been together & he had abandoned all sense before that ready to accept the consequences of his emotional foray. Without looking up from the manuscript of his she was reading sprawled on the floor while he was in the kitchen cleaning the dishes, not minding at all that she wasn't helping cause she was reading his work, she called out something about enjoying being together with him & he made her repeat that cause the running water has hidden some of the sentence tho he'd caught enough & he stood in the doorway looking over at her while she repeated it again not noticing him there & he stood a few extra moments waiting for her to look up, then realized he was probably just being dramatic & went back to the dishes.

They were in bed before dessert. Actually, once their clothes were off, his pants pulled off & when she couldn't get them over his heel desperate hurriedness like all good things, & she was wearing this full slip that drove him nuts immediately cause it was too big on her & hung limp under her Giorgione breasts which he bent over & started kissing - for some reason he couldn't explain, he found himself constantly aroused by the milky white color of her flesh (he thought it must have something to do with his appreciation of Greek statuary), she got out of bed & went over to the refrigerator & scooped them out portions of ice cream & brought them back into bed. It was this impetuosity that fascinated him tho he was beginning to see a pattern since the other night she'd gotten up at about the same time & gone & made herself a peanut butter sandwich, he couldn't believe it, as he lay sprawled nude on the bed on his stomach.

On Shakespeare's birthday, two days after that night, which ended with them saying I love you, he made her repeat it, "What'd you say?" cause she was kind of looking into his chest, he woke up without her, which wasn't that unusual but he thought that having said those words they'd be together again that next night but she was out when he called fifteen minutes into Shakespeare's 417th birthday & left a message on her answering machine, which he hated but laughed at her taped instructions every time in spite of himself cause of the flirty way she was on the tape. And when she called in the late morning, having just gotten the message, he didn't feel much like disguising his anger & hurt tho he was fully aware of her other boyfriend & her right to be doing anything she wanted to. He was glad to hear her voice & apologized for sounding cryptical, not wanting to come right out complaining showing what a possessive creep he was after all, he was trying hard to not be greedy, tho he did like being passionate & espousing everything to her. The novels of Raymond Radiguet & Henri-Pierre Roche, he'd just been reading, sort of encouraged him that way.

When he wasn't with her he was drawn home to be at the phone should she call. It was OK he thought, it made being in that blues bar, with a black band in there for a change, easier to leave since, he reasoned, tho there was a curiosity about four women in there he had singled out, he wasn't interested that much in spending any more time out tonight

than he already had. The two women in front of him seated as he stood with Amory & Michael between them & the bar, were obviously European since they were quiet besides their features which indicated Nordic or North European & then the cute blonde with hair like Pinocchio rolled a cigarette so that seemed conclusive. He was feeling so good that he almost leaned over, once he'd thought about it a few times, to simply ask: "What European country are you from?" even knowing that he was going to leave soon since he wanted to come home & write & keep up to date what was happening, last night was pretty eventful. I'll put on a Miles Davis album once I get home, he said encouragingly to himself, which is playing lovingly now.

Something drastic had to happen soon & he knew his walk crosstown in the pouring rain was only evening to what would become night. Paused under a construction site in front of the Second Avenue Methadone Clinic he watched for a moment the shimmering streams of drops grey dancing spot lights on the black macadam & the red street light neon blatant glow & the yellow cabs cleansed by the rain suffering in the headlight's progress. He had to pick up his umbrella & move a little closer to where some other people were waiting out the sudden downpour to get away from some OK seeming guy who seemed to be checking him out for some reason & tho annoyed didn't have the space in his thoughtprocess to include that guy for more than the time it took him to move. "I've submitted," he reasoned. His days & nights were built around her & he planned his time to the simple formula: if I'm not going to be with her then I do something else. But sometimes he'd look forward all day to calling her in the evening expecting she'd want to see him & she wouldn't be home & he might call every hour till he fell asleep & wake up next morning wondering whether it was worse going to sleep without her or waking up without her. And he wasn't so sure he enjoyed being in a situation which seemed to indicate to him a part-time passion on her part but he wasn't so clear if that were true or if he was being over demanding & unreasonable & was willing to let it ride now to see if things would become more stable & was sorry he felt the way he did about it only because it seemed to go against the way she wanted things but he wasn't sure anymore. Once she'd begun a few days ago saying the things to convince someone in their arms of their affection, he felt he had the right to demand this increase of attention BUT knew once he saw her or spoke to her, not even necessarily about this, things would all be OK & he'd find himself amidst the magic, he was convinced there was something like magic involved, he'd told her so too & she agreed. So, preliminary to seeing her one night, he walked the crosstown grid letting the signals of the traffic lights at the corners give him his direction, northwest - north if the west light said stop & vice versa, unsure of what he was exactly doing walking in the pouring rain barely protected by an old umbrella, but it gave him the isolation he wanted since there were few people on the sidewalks to share what he knew to be an actually very beautiful agreement of place & time.

He arrived a little too early she wasn't home yet so went down the block to the Erin Bar for a watery draft & decided to put up with

the two drunks next to him at the bar punching each other in some perverted expression of affection rather than stand in her doorway. With the second call she was home & he went over & they had a few drinks & then went out cause she hadn't had anything to eat for supper. The nearest place was a jazz bar, The Angry Squire, but two things stopped them from going in & the second of those reasons he just realized as he sat typing it out. First was the menu in the window they were looking at, no burgers, & everything else too expensive. Crossing Sixth Avenue she was telling him that one of the waitresses there was someone they had both worked with at The New School a month or two ago & he told her how he was aware that she was always wearing tight jumpsuits & was sure she had noticed him turning his head everytime she came into the room & Marilyn said yes, that upstairs she would overhear her talking about birth control so when he showed a stronger interest in going in there now Marilyn kind of said, nah let's go over to Harvey's, which had been Greg's first suggestion since she knew the bartenders in there & was assured buybacks.

Inside that place of polished wood & mirrors & waiters with white shirts & black bowties, they sat comfortable left alone enough at the end of the bar - the waiters standing nearby huddled waiting for their drinks or just hanging around together on slow nights like this one didn't disturb them, in fact it just added to the atmosphere making it all seem the more festive since it was a young staff, mostly gay, & they joked with each other rather than complain about how tired they were or how much they hated work, etc. And things were going fine as they'd both come to expect chatting away Greg helping her finish her fries after telling her he wasn't hungry & both into their second drinks when the jerk with the cowboy hat standing on the other side of Marilyn began talking to her & that was OK for awhile, Greg was disturbed at the interruption in their privacy which he cherished, but he wasn't about to get carried away with indignancy, but as their chat went on he began to get a little impatient & truth be told when Marilyn got around to introducing him Greg only feeble extended his left hand to make the minimum of sociability obviously telling the guy he wasn't interested & if he had any compassion he'd leave, but Marilyn & he continued in their soft voiced neighborhood talk leaving our hero stranded feeling neglected & tho he knew he was being a little foolish & could join in their conversation at any time he felt like it, tho the creep wasn't doing anything to include him, & Marilyn wasn't touching him reassuredly or even saying anything either to him, so he had to wonder whether she was testing him or if he was being foolish & could just be quiet for a while - but here was anger brewing inside him & he got up suddenly off his barstool tho he didn't need to go to the bathroom but needed to take a little walk so found the bathroom & stood inside there a moment hoping noone else would come in so he wouldn't have to pretend anything & tried to calm down but there was nothing to be done about it & returning to the bar resumed his same humiliating role on his barstool. Nothing changed & when the bartender came over & poured some more Stolichnaya into his glass he waved him off so the pour didn't reach the top & he thought that was sad & indicated something & when he couldn't take it anymore, not knowing what else to do, & not wanting

to do anything but, he got up put his coat on which had been lying next to him, said I'm sorry I'll see you later to Marilyn who had turned her head in the commotion & he stormed out & kept up that pace till he got home, knowing he'd had a little too much to think it through clearly, fascinated with these new emotions of suddenness & anger that were railroading around up there in his mind & unsure, as usual, the whole time as to whether he was doing the right thing but that was the point - it'd been weeks since he stopped caring about what was right or not, so mixed in there were regret already at possibly having just fucked everything up but he knew there had to be some sort of confrontation & he was willing to instigate it.

As soon as he was home he took his clothes off & climbed into bed glad to be there & the phone rang & he had already decided to accept the blame. "I've been home two minutes already what took you so long" & he explained & she listened & she apologized for her part & he did for his & back on the street wasn't that surprised to find so many cabs cruising at 2 A.M. taking one of them back to her, waiting on her front stairs with a glass of beer & a half-smoked cigarette.

A few days went by & he didn't see her or talk to her & he had to wonder what was going on. He felt he was putting too much attention into this relationship it was overwhelming both of them. Walking back crosstown after a lunch with her at the shop she had just started working at making puppets & stage stuff, he was thinking it through for a change & combined with the talk he'd had the other night with an old friend he'd run into, came to the realization that in some way he might be using her so that he didn't have to pay attention to any of the women on the street who he'd only notice if he told himself to now or any of the women in the club he had had that talk with the old friend in. For example, this old friend was totally lecherous commenting on the women all the usual wanting to take that one home stuff I myself was quite familiar with hated feeling. And so, reasoned, I'm faithful to her so that I don't have to let loose that barrage of desire & contain myself content knowing I'll be with her tonight or next day or eventually thereby keeping & maintaining some balance. How I was so used to & so hated spring without a girlfriend or any season for that matter. On the other hand, it was beginning to dawn on him that she wasn't the same way & that being the object of his singular devotion was kind of swamping her who was more willing to see other people & that seemed like the total good thing to him & sounded fine in theory but this month, at least, it wasn't the attitude that'd work for him. He was like a baby he argued with himself. When he wasn't getting enough attention he'd get upset & as much as he tried to be normal about it & be willing to share her attentions it all seemed conspiratorial if she wasn't looking his way. As much as he told himself to crush those possessive tendencies & knew how important controlling or abolishing jealousy was in maintaining this involvement, still, his romantic defenses would surface rationalizing the universe into his absorption. He was sick of the whole thing - ready to give up practically but he knew most of the blame lied not in her not answering to his needs

but in his being outrageous somewhat in what he felt like demanding so wouldn't call it off - left still wondering if he could improve himself. If she'd only show a little more enthusiasm. He figured she'd either read this over tonight or they'd talk about it & she would at least be that understanding to know he was a little infatuated & so off-balance & he'd told her before & even asked for her help but figured this will help put the upcoming weeks in order. He felt better already.

He woke up from a brief nap he allowed himself to be taken over by & looked over at the clock, 4:30, & realized even in sleep his thoughts were active & visible as syntax going by like the news in lights on the old Allied Chemical building. He had been reading not wanting to sit at his desk to put together the notes he'd taken on the topic of jealousy. What about the sweeter moments? I've been complaining too much. What about the time we were making dinner & a mussel she was testing to see whether was done or not, slipped & dropped right into the dog's bowl of water. And that evening had started with her showing up with watercress instead of the requested parsley. They laughed about that too & she had quickly made great watercress soup from what was a mistake with that added pot on a back burner coordinated beautifully with the other stuff cooking. And that spill that the basil took would have been OK except its second landing place, after the initial shock had taken its top off, was an ashtray so that was pretty hilarious too in the klutzy way things were going. Marilyn, tho not letting it change the mood they were both glad & relieved to be in, away from lots of problems that together they could ignore, was disturbed, exclaiming: my uncle Bill's basil, so Greg figured & asking got it confirmed that it came from her uncle's garden so was precious that way, especially since asking further found out that there'd not be any more basil crop since Uncle Bill had died recently, which Greg had suspected with the tone of her exclamation.

That he hadn't written yet about how when he kissed her or made love to her his mind was completely blank & how that had never happened before & now it was happening all the time & sometimes afterwards would for a moment be worried that he could go too far but then remembered one whispered word from her, "easy", had suddenly made him conscious.

He was laying in bed dealing with jealousy. What a stupid waste of time but he'd get caught again halfway through a paragraph & put the book down & fluff up the pillows & just lay there like a Russian with an estate before the revolution ready & waiting for the arguments & sentences running around freeway like in his brain to settle away or arrive at some assessment that could tell what to do. Mostly, you're being stupid was turning up.

She told him everything & some things he wasn't so sure he wanted to hear. Amory was looking at an object in Greg's kitchen, it was a

green plastic toy Marilyn had given him a few days ago. "Marilyn give you this?" "Yeah, how'd you know?" "At lunch the other day she told me she'd bought a toy & wanted to show me. I said I don't want to see it."

Two times during dinner with Amory I thought of the old Percy Sledge song's lines: "When a man loves a woman/He'll turn his back on his best friend if he put her down" & it wasn't quite at that point but the mined territory of their double involvement with this woman & Amory's anger over the way things turned out, cut me off from being able to discuss it with him & it was the first time they were unable to sit down or be walking along & sharing & just expressing every detail & question about someone they were involved with. I wanted to be able to tell him about what went on when me & her were together & how I'd been feeling tossed around (tho as the weeks went by was beginning at last to feel more stable & rational) (having worked things out somewhat gushing out first on the phone to her what's bothering me - not seeing her enough, not getting enough of her attention, etc. etc.) which event ended with my heading over there & dinner on her bed eventually at 2 A.M. with, miraculously like in heaven, a Yankee game on TV & see Reggie Jackson stroke a double to left field before it's enough & off. I had to tell other people these things & it was obvious there was a gap in the talks we'd been having the last weeks & in a bar had even chorused in looking straight at him an old Yardbird's quote that I knew he'd know: "I'm not talking/ That's what I got to say". I couldn't even tell him I wanted to go home in case Marilyn called, had to give bullshit about being exhausted & wanting to read or take a bath.

Family tragedy has me looking at you across a small bar table at lunch hour you've split your beer overfilled twice something you've never done before & the way I'm holding on to your arm regardless of what the table over there filled with straight white employees think so know how it's affecting me. This isn't any get a job and fight to keep it, there are no millionaires above us, simple tumor you've just found out on the phone from the doctor before your mother knows. I know I won't see you for a few days, it means. You're going back to Tottenville. My kitchen light is still broken as I unpack the lunch you had planned for us. I left the wild tiger lilies you picked in some field out there at work, let them have it. Wrapped are two forks & two cups & in plastic containers the remains of your Spanish dinner last night. Last time you were in that restaurant was when you were in high school down the road from it, you're telling me, and your Polish Spanish teacher marched the group of you, girls in their uniforms, over for a planned lunch & he had to yell up the stairs to alert the owner that you were there. She stuck her head out the window & all she was wearing was a slip with her big tits hanging out & she shouted hello be right down & went on to fix you all a big meal. Last night you went in again, this time with your mom while her husband is hospitalized. The leftover's containers now in my garbage. Across the alleyway now that the air is dark, the neighbor whose window faces mine refuses to, as I, close her drapes so we these last two nights in a row, see in each other's apartments kind of slyly checking each other

out in some impossible flirtation, her with 3 kids and a huge husband I haven't seen yet, just a distraction.

In a disappointingly brief phone conversation, he was getting the impression she was tiring of him, but then something would happen, she'd been enthusiastic again for a moment or as long as an evening & they'd polish off a good deal of wine comfortably, he'd reached a point where he didn't have to worry about staying sober in case they were to make love later - he could abandon that concern to the celebration of their releasing talks; she told him some of the things he'd said to her the night before, which, having been plastered, which he remembered admitting at the time, but still felt in control of what he was saying it was a little easier to be saying it & stimulated to a new boldness he let whatever he wanted to come out, feeling safe enough in his love for her that he couldn't have said anything damaging or hateful, the strength & beauty of their bond was their attempt to be honest & to keep away the deceptions as much as possible that let them continue, & what stood out from his attempted purge, the first thing she reported, was that he'd said that he wouldn't take care of her much longer. Now that was something he couldn't at all remember having said & was a little suprised his charm had allowed something like that to slip through. The line had been busy when he got in tonight & kept busy awhile so he figured rightly who it was. This experiment was floundering a little. He needed someone who was willing to devote themselves to him as much as he was willing to focus his energies on them. And all their talk about the need to be allowed to be involved with others was becoming more & more of a way of saying I don't want to wake up with you every morning.

He thought he'd had enough. Her not matching his enthusiasm when she got back from a trip to Florida, where she'd been flown by her other boyfriend, and which inevitability & even currently Greg had come to accept in what he'd learned to believe a new maturity, was the beginning of a new set of daily turmoils all brought on by his own obsessions & ruthless focusing in on dependence on her actions & whether she called so he spent an entire Sunday, lazy boring & vulnerable enough anyway, waiting, which position he always hated finding himself in, for her planned phone call, which he was hoping & assuming would be a summons. When it didn't come till hours after the reasonable point, Greg had done some summoning of his own - reaching the point of strength necessary to begin the mental preparations for pulling out. By the time he got over to see her a day later, interfered with by her call in between which had her asking him to come over, which he had the anger left, anyway, to refuse - his will had been weakened & the week's plans were being filled in. What a pleasure it was to be laying next to her in her bed, while she fell in & out of sleep, her body claiming its portion of activity away from the unsure pressures of her day & risk, loneliness & choice she'd been forcing herself through wanting new apartment, little money left, whoring for job interviews which she, & noone else, wants - with my legs blanketed against her soft body & down her legs, writing it down. Outside, coming through her windows 2 flights above West 25th Street, the sounds of a few guys talking & the slamming of car doors. Every

car going by could be rated by muffler. The Yankees had won a great game, Guidry going his usual 6 getting 8 strikeouts, no walks no runs. Pro mass Carlton Fisk unable to aid his team & Christopher Isherwood finding the apathetic routine of pre-war Berlin too pleasant, has returned to London & met Otto.

The summer was coming closer to being over & Greg wasn't at all sad about it - it'd been a series of indulgent days, sleeping too much, living on money made during a lucrative fall. He might wake up from an inevitable nap & the radio, which was constantly on, would announce its being 3 o'clock & he'd feel the remorse of the day being practically over without his having done anything productive, except reading which he couldn't help but feel was a sad replacement for doing anything better, which meant to him writing tho he was polishing off a good number of books which did give him the sense that he wasn't completely worthless, to himself anyway, the world wasn't suffering without his participation. He wore his seclusion kind of proudly tho it was partly to elicit sympathy that he bragged about it to his friends.

VINCENT KATZ

What slender youth now graces
your presence, entwined,
and fancies himself the lucky recipient
of your charms? For whom,

glancing in the mirror, do you tie
back your beautiful golden
hair, for whom do you smile, who
is treated to your blithe

intelligence? Soon, all too soon,
he will feel the hateful
reciprocals of the delights he now
revels in; how quickly

your beauty will haunt him, and how sharp
your scorpion intellect
when it reasons why you are falling
apart -- yes, these and

other agonies of your attraction will
make him hate as much
as now he loves, oh yes I'm glad to be free
of your cursed charms.

I walk upon the colorful sidewalk no longer
a prisoner of my own
indecision, free, but oh how I wish
you were mine again.

POEM

I'm crying today for all the lost Latin
and Greek works. It's so unfair! More so,
even, than a lost lover. You may say,
well, yes, these things are gone, but
there are more great, or at least
very good, works that do exist than
you will probably read in your lifetime.
And this is true, but it doesn't help
me, because I know I'll never, never
be able to read the missing books of
Varro. Just knowing they were present,
offering themselves to be my seduction
would release me from this torment.
But I haven't forgotten, all writers
who have gone before me, and whose
works have been lost. They've not
been forgotten by me. I know the debt
I owe to you, passed on to me by writers
whose works have survived. Someday
I will create a monument to you,
more lasting than marble, where future
generations may hear the trips
of your tongue, and laugh with your bitter
irony, smile at the pleasing taste
of your syllables. For now, at least
my anger at the fate of your works
has been quelled in the solace of this thought.

JOHN GODFREY

EVENING STAR

I whipped my standard about in the wind and kissed the ice that sheathed the sidewalk, I ran my hands through the sacrificial barbecue. A longawaited sucker, I stormed into the room where the panties are piled. No sooner had I put my gun on the table than a shot rang out at the street door. Half-cocked guy, Mars hidden in the lambskin comforter that warms major satellites. Moose, and one or two other associates on the irregular trail that is my past, had prepared me for such a turn, but of the potent cowardice of a woman they had shared not a word. The mountain woman for instance, who sleeps above a cloud of seashells. Delicacy crossing the border at night on the back of a mule, the Bikini Mule. Don't mind atoll. If she hula well, then should the first hand to move be in the king's style, animal. And if my tongue move gently and slow, my hands firm but not despoiling, she should recognize the difference of a tame moment from tameness. What she finds in the generous is the prolix, like a Floridian with her own sun. Oil on the palm trees, condo ritz enthusiasm, but to be here alone would be so much worse. This must be a dream, for the bedroom and bed are uncomfortably higher than the clouds, and the amount of laying-on-of-hands the atmosphere is disposed to do does not take into account my body's potential for expansion. But I who am vapor, who am purply layered, depress my piledriver to horizontal for my patroness, she of the thousand names.

A MIMETIC BIRD

You sign for the Samson pose licking a candy cane. It's a cross between inside linebacker and Pan Am steward, and considering the hour of the afternoon, you should be aware by now of what strength you may depend on until darkness secures your bulkhead and pulls your chain. To be instilled with weakness; and introspection is becoming to a god who never fucks carnally, the penance is oblivion or delusion, and with them the pretension to danger and the self-complacency that evil, provoked, impels. I get up in the morning and say something like "I'll never wash this gold out of my hair," like I said as a child about kisses. I wonder if it's a strength it takes to kiss, or is it power, that undemocratic scent that enters singly so that all eyes might adjust, and everyone come-to in the lace of the help. It takes so little to abolish mercy from the human mind, and the mouth opens wetly to the various persecutions of contiguity. We are bared because our skin steams a silver mist from its pleasures, and we hope to see on ourselves in the distance the immortal pelt. Like Tantalus, I see in the pelt that native madness alone exists in lasting priority. The dream fades with the graveyard shift, I birdwalk away. With neither strength nor power, my pride conjures itself, although it is comforting to be found dead in the public flower bed, as they marvel at my rare feathers.

APRES

I remember that the titans were not so smart. A world of smoke is simple, their decisiveness was not intellectual in aptitude, and disguised their esteem for delicacy. So I thought a lot about beauty -- the beauties to be truthful -- and not because I was clever. I entertain only personal attitudes of taste. But there it was, one of the beauties, and, as I often do when a neutral party during a bar brawl, I hastened to preserve this beauty. Better, I conserved it, because something always escaped, the particles washing, or turning into parts of the very air. The normal city atmosphere could do quite a job on a piece of beauty. Darkened areas, patches eaten altogether away. No question, it certainly was a beauty. But then, you never know, not whether the piece of stuff fits the word "beauty," but whether your, my, own mind is fitting the word "beauty" and not some other visionary quantity of a quite different necessity. If you think about it, you understand the burden I found it to be. In fact, it exaggerated the other pains and tolls toward which I had taken a heedless manner. If you have a lot of sensations, you can become sensitive, although the word I would really like to use has to suggest the sympathetic vibrations that one sense can cause in another. This is a headache all of my own making. At this time of year, however, I can always be soothed by the snow in which I find myself buried.

TRANS NEURO MISSION

In the Nerves of the Century Museum, I clutched a program and stared at each white doily of impulse preserved by its own imprudence, or command. Later, in the Planetarium, a bloody skyshow overhead changed in fissions and fusions designed to take one's attention away from the clawish hand that shot out occasionally from under one's seat to grab the crotch. It was dark and they were built-in hands. They were warm hands, in my experience.

So I learned that nerve doesn't rely on any lessons, and that component nerves don't always last. There is a universal conservation of nerve, but only provincialized cultivation of nerve. The nerve neither obeys nor occurs. So aren't we lucky.

No kind of nerve is a failure, and no nerves is a vegetable, or a contradiction. Nerve, and nerves, are not all that precise. Evaluation is up to the individual conscience, the nerveless part.

I have since returned to my life of noise outside and a little less noise inside, subject to change. I notice red intruding on other hues' domains in my vision, but I am unthreatened. In a brick-colored world I am the one-eyed man. Follow me if you would see the special subscription exits.

INDEFINITE SUSPENSION

Just another usual dog, the same birds singing in their glass cages as the gas slowly encroaches. A crust thrown across the kitchen, smut dining on the walls, here and there something like crud. You can read it in my trousers -- take the piss-away money out of my pockets, and there's the true me, dumpy. I've never gone slumming in my life. There's a lot of cheap space available immediately, I think because the equinox is within spitting distance. One out of ten birds sees spring, the sonsafinches. Point it out to me when it's time. Ooze a little for me, sapling of East 12th. The little men with jackhammers were right on my heels, reducing my world to salvageable pieces. To my great relief, I might add. They, after all, had given its tone, its compression in a thick black hose. So here I am again, wearing the armband of the Drearly Autonomous. I think I'll do something really smart, like take a distempered lover to a current French melodrama, crimes of passion and wondrous wardrobes. The kind in which every young French housewife dresses like a Briarcliff girl of twenty years ago. I don't squirm when the silk shift and the revolver bring their misery to a climax that strengthens our indigo straitjacket. Clothes mean a lot to the empty, like we are empty candy jars a dog gets its head stuck in. We are not a movie, which makes us truer, without comparisons, barefoot on tiles.

DEADAWAY CENTER

Pardon me for monopolizing your ruminations. I am a waitress from El Salvador transformed into a brown-eyed mountaineer. Now my mind clings to one feeling, that of a cat exploded in smoke filling the universe with its pelt. We all go through doors without opening them. We all live through what happens, unless we try not to, for money.

2

There is only one place for ice of its kind. It doesn't move. And the discomfort is ever increasing, until the cave-in, when I and everyone else possible issue forth from the whitened remains of the Acropolis, like the runoff from snowy crests. And it is to here we are once again washed. All of your suspicions, so correct in this neighborhood, are easily brought home. Getting beat and humility are inconsistent, the manner of redress becomes the threshold of style. "Vagrancy" is the composer's newest symphony.

3

The sun sets so beautifully if you look only at the sky. You must separate the inspiring from the serviceable. You must have the conscience of a Casanova to ride the midnight special, it will return you in time for opening day. You are always peeling away with your imagination, and you won't escape the rundown unless you look.

LATE SHOW

The problem is not that there is such dispute, it's that there is so much passion, and in a town designed for one not to be paid while he waits. There is a hostility toward waiting here, and with it there mount the passions of those who wait, without pay. One who waits is different from a lover, because a lover comes to love the way he must wait. But one who waits is similar to a lover, because the waiting of the lover becomes for him the perfect passion, perhaps more perfect than its reward. By this alone you'd have to call this a Three-Star town.

But not Four. The waiting of the lover, you see, causes him to anticipate surprises, because there is so much surprise in each encounter, because of the city. Of course he is always disappointed, and only after a period of waiting will passion return. Maybe he waits until the first gray, having resisted a dark empty bed. When he walks out for coffee he will pass through the waiting barrier, and the entire avenue will resound with inaudible perfection.

But wait, and diminish grief. Wait, but do not dream. Across the window-lighted sky, charcoal swirls of grit affect each waiting breath. Wait with your hair untended.

TERENCE WINCH/BERNARD WELT

STRATEGY

The buttons are the size of nickels
and black like your eyes. Your teeth
are the size of fingernails and white
as paint and the whites of your eyes.
The body is better than the clothes
that hold it. The box is better
than the music it plays. A man
is playing a gold saxophone in the rush
hour. His hands hold the gold saxophone.
His fingernails are the size of nickels.
The violins are hanging on the wall.
The barometer drops. A man is holding
a gold sax. He is naked. He won't go home.

MYSTERIES

All last night I kept speaking in this archaic language because I had been reading Poe and thinking about him. I read "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" which is supposedly the first detective story. Who dun it? I wondered. It turns out an orangutan was the murderer. It looks to me like the detective story genre got off to a pretty ridiculous start. I used to visit Poe's house in the Bronx. I used to think, God, Poe must have been a midget. Everything was so small. Poe died in Baltimore and I can see why. In Baltimore, all the people are very big and sincere. During dinner last night, I told Doug and Susan about "Murders in the Rue Morgue." I said I hadn't finished it yet, but it looked like the murderer was going to turn out to be an orangutan, unless the plot took a surprising new twist. Then Doug suggested that he and I collaborate on a series of detective stories in which the murderer is always an orangutan.

THE THEM DECADE

Hours and hours go by, traffic flows
smoothly through the arteries.
Buses discharge their passengers.

I stand in the middle of the bright day
posing next to the mailbox,
a glum expression on my face.
I wonder what Pete Rose is doing right now.

All I do is drink coffee and smoke.
I want to soak in a tub of ink
and become a masterpiece.
I am tired of the way cab drivers
whine in this city. I love the zone system.

The sun sets as the H-6 cruises
past the World Bank. I wonder
where Robert S. McNamara is right now.

At the Kennedy Center Fred Astaire
is honored. Ginger Rogers doesn't show up.
Mayor Barry's wife, Effi, is planning
to host a radio show.
Some people want a white chief of police,
some want a black one. Toby Thompson
flies through Cabin John becoming blonder,
sleeker, crazier. Bernard Welt is always
on the way to teach a class. Doug Lang
remains a mystery. I wonder where
Michael Denney is right now. Somewhere
in Baltimore telling a pointless story
with no end, but brilliant nonetheless.

Now it is dark. I watch the flags
fly on F Street. (Union Station
is beautiful at night.) I long
for something permanent.

THE ECONOMY

There were moments to be waited through, to be expected, long dull moments of humid darkening in the sky and then a night. They sat on the pier looking into the calm lake wondering in private moments how much longer they could withstand the mosquitoes before they'd be forced into the cottage. He was wondering about the whole thing, he felt guilty, about the cottage, about the vacation, about phrases in his poems like "our summer woods", he was used to his own guilt but had long figured that guilt wasn't useful to anyone. He figured if you got it, all you do is try to give it away or better yet make someone else pay for it. He realised as far back as high school that it was bullshit to think he could help the inner city kids. They taught him proper jive, street vibe, cool longings, which he eagerly collected and brought home to his safe sound suburban home. He was white, he knew it, so did the next person, and the next. Everyone knew everything that is the way it worked in his economy. On the darkening pier, he leaned across their silence, "You know it's funny people don't talk about the depression anymore, they just call it the economy."

When you are treading water in the economy nothing really matters except you must tread a little harder all the time and absorb more and more profiteering backwash. His brother-in-law had asked him what tax bracket he was in. The big O he replied. Hey there is that "o no" in the economy. How do he and his family survive on less than six thousand a year. The brother-in-law's mouth fell agape. He knew his sister's family had to struggle on that figure squared. He'd make more money and have more social advantages on Welfare, as it is he was hopelessly middle class. Just being white helps so much you know but coming from a well-heeled suburb and taking all those standardized tests must have helped too. Was it interesting to put every dollar earned into rent, food, bills, yet his baby could not enjoy the local federally funded pediatric program. Reason being he was middle-class. He was not bitter. This is to be expected but he wasn't guilty enough to be happy either. He knew a revolution would come. In it could he escape his death. Would he be killed for being white. Jewish. Petty bourgeoisie. Poet. Straight. Circumcised and male. Born under the presidency of Harry S. Truman. You were what you died for. No nukes no cars no additives, no nerve gas, no knock out low sound waves, no legal pesticide doses without legal dope. Survival just boils up the chimney he can't plan his or his family's. He wants his kid to shape things in the new millenium and he wants his kid to shape him up in the old millenium.

He grew up apparently, a-parently, neither with nor against, he was the third and the baby, the most sheltered. Born into the suburban house paid for in cash by his depression generation parents. Speaking of money, they would say that they should have gotten a mortgage and cleaned up in the market for the next decade but the big depression of the thirties taught them to abhor credit. Now how do you get it. Safe and sound grilled cheese, salad, Campbell's soup you bet, canned peas, dessert every night. He had one brother one sister

one mother one father. He was singular in his thoughts. He wandered the square blocks of houses and made up systems to capture and hold them. All of his fantasy was military. He even played Nazi with his friends, filling in to be persecuted for being a Jew too. He lay in bed on the summer sleeping porch and imagined his bed was a boat and being outfitted for combat in the secret night and the secret dark. The boat was lowered into the seas of his backyard. Silent running, skillful navigation, and gimmickry brought victory. His boat was small enough to get in close to the enemy ship (japanese). He only had two torpedoes but they hit with wonderful consistency; allowing him a safe return to congratulations and sleep. He could wet his bed. The blocks fit together and could be held. He knew the shortcuts, the bushes and where the holes in them were, where fences could be climbed. He knew the vacant lots with tall grasses to his chest and grasshoppers flying about his ears. He held it together with his planning and his effort. On the elevated, he stood at the front of the first car and pushed. It went. He made it go and he pulled back to slow or stop the el. He was very powerful. He needed his power.

This is his recurring dream. The family is being held captive by a fierce Indian warrior. Everybody is on his bed either tied up or simply restrained by fear. The warrior has a big knife. He is terrified but, being the youngest and the dreamer, is the one who slips off the bed and subjugates the threatening wild man. He was the savior of the entire family and it was just part of his power. It took a lot of power to conquer his fears; underwater machinery, the toilet flush. It was make, wash, flush up on his toes ready to bolt. He still stays clear of swimming pool drains and resists swimming in weeds. The fear he had no solution for, no power to protect himself with, no fantasy deep enough to mellow was in simple words Dad.

His father worked hard, ate fast, hot ready to swat, all that anxiety of surviving the depression and getting scholarships and becoming a professional to move to the suburbs to watch his kids fall flat on their faces problems problems. His father was a youngest child also. He could duck and weave. He had a broken field. He could run around his father. It's called the grandfather end run. He got smarter and his games got better and interestingly savage. Fathers in all their unknowing and moments of titanic befuddlement call the plays. He heard from his Mom that his Dad said he should write. Because of this message he knew it was not the right time to go into Mrs. Pink's writing class. Now he is a father and he casts no financial blanket and sends no smoke signals of security. He is more of a homebody like his father and his father is more of a work body like him. Work is home and home is work. This adds up. This is patriarchy.

Has he grown up to be a man. His mother was his home and the real boundaries of his actions. She was at home where she was. She was of an even midwestern protestant temper. She was like her neighbors, mothers with small children, P.T.A., Cub Scouts, League of Women Voters. She was the German teacher. There was more than one club of course that she could not join, he didn't know he was Jewish. She gave him grammar and love of the languages he could not spell in. Teacher and confidante, a tactile home, he worked with her,

she worked with him, a working relationship, not running. His broader middle class feeling is from his mother. There had been opportunity, her father build this cottage and got close to the big money. His grandfather provided the extended family all American. His mother evolved his ambitions. He just realized that the difference between men and women is about ten minutes.

All of a sudden Mrs. Newton knocked on the door and pulled on the handle. Margy and he gave each other mortified looks. Mrs. Newton said, "Open up." They scrambled out of the tub and frantically started to pull their clothes back on. He was squeezed between the toilet and the tub pulling up his underwear as Mrs. Newton finally got the door open. He and Margy had been playing Clean the House. When they got to the tub it seemed simplest to get in and clean it from the inside. There was economy in that. All affairs of the home are part of the economy.

He could relate to people. He almost could feel what they felt. He wanted to become a doctor like his father. He knew he couldn't handle politics because that came from an understanding of people, i.e., being a salesman. He did not feel he understood anything. No one understands the economy. His imagination was like a relay race. Either the baton was in his hand and he was running hard or he was poised ready to accept the baton. He could pass off the baton and curl off the track glancing back to watch his baton fly away. The race is always won outside of the imagination. He used the imagination to create a false understanding, one that would not fall on his head. Power was something he could not give himself: he had to invent it.

Babies are born with all the power. Parents classically go nuts, fall apart, lose sleep, lose hair. In the end, the parents get the power back. It is too late by then. The child has friends and is plugged into the new power source. Parents are helpless, frail, sponges. It only looks like they know what's happening when they take photographs. The parents regain the power, as the child allows, and very alone. He did feel this was true for him. He gave the power back but he became alone. He lost his friends. He lost his trim build. He realized he was shy. When he entered High School, he flunked gym.

The power came back, not in fantasy, for he had to go to it. His parents grew up there, his grandparents died there. He went back there. The city. Going backwards is always a powerful road. Even walking backwards through a room recharges muscles. He had to board a yellow school bus headed for the black ghetto to find out that alert divided by danger equals hip. He taught a first grade tutee reading skills. He learned whatever the young boy had to say. Perhaps twenty white kids ventured into the ghetto every Saturday. Even the white busdriver came in to help. What was he going to do, sit in the bus. As they left the neighborhood, they were ambushed by rocks and coke bottles. Conquering a dread fear is a way to rediscover baby power. Power can only be given. No one can take power. Baby power is the only power one can go back to and dig up. All the powers are negotiated for. In the city, the power struggles are clear. They are on the pavements and in the streetlights. In the suburb it is just all over; one struggle against the outer borders rather than an internal struggle. This is changing, can't help it.

The neighborhood he went back to to find his inner city was the same neighborhood his father had been a boy growing up in. Now the upwardly mobile are moving into the inner city and the poor people are being pushed into the suburbs. Invisible country.

Eight new nails and eight places to drive them. To build the table frame. He was surprised at himself. He was less clumsy than expected. He used the eight nails correctly and then used old rusty nails, which he pounded straight, to stabilize the joints, the whole job had cost nothing. The wood itself had once been the supports for a shed long ago toppled by neglect. He had stowed the good beams under the cottage porch. Of course the economy is built upon tables. Family affairs are tossed onto the open table somewhere between the peas and the butter. If he could survive a meal without getting beat on back of the head, it meant one of two things, or both. 1. Maggie the family mutt was silently at his knee eating up the parts of the meal that made him choke: fats, salmon patty, brussels sprouts, peas. 2. All the objectionable food was stuffed into his pants pockets and dumped behind a radiator in the hall after the meal. One day his mother found the garbage dump behind the radiator. There only remained Maggie or acceptance. He learned to eat fast. Eating fast was better than being beat. Eat eat eat. He gained fat cells and lost his self esteem. He became powerless until he plugged into the City. After the evening meal, his father would be sated. During a direct conversation, he would light up a cigar, turn on the ballgame and read a professional journal. Plenty of circuit breakers. A table is one common link, it is the source of manners, it is the only place a family functions. At all other points the family will survive for privacy but the table is the pool of sustenance the family swims out of.

He ate only a small amount of cow and very few chickens last year. It takes all that college education to live poor. Somewhere one learns to see through things. How many worlds, exactly. People are sold on being sold. When did this happen. It started forever ago.

There is a red button and he pushes it, it is called SELF STARTER and it is red. He pushes it to start on the old typewriter. He pushes the red button and gets his self started. It was a good idea one doesn't find on any new typewriters. He read his wife's letters; one said, "As I write this, Bent is typing..." He told her later that he did not like what he did called typing. It would sound like he had taken in typing. There is pride in one's work not to be tarnished. He derives all of his income because he is a poet yet he makes nothing from his poetry. How would he survive in a green place unable to find part-time poet work. Although what he does earn in the city is far less than government poverty standards, it is possible to live in the city without feeling poor. More money could not help them to eat better. However beyond nutrition his world was breaking down. The vacuum cleaner stopped, the typewriter broke, the television picture disappeared, then the refrigerator died. All in the hot summer months of no income. Just blame it on the economy. His apartment which a few years ago was expensive is now dirt cheap. The new landlord wants to force him out. The economy and the profit only creed follows; it is better to err and profit than to never have profited at all. Why who could blame monsanto for making all the PCBs in the world in less than a decade. It had harmful effects on their workers from the start. Now every mother gives her baby PCBs in breast milk. Who can

fault a big company for not wanting to lose an investment. Think of the economy. He used to be poor but viable now he is poor but threatened. The message of the economy is fear. The landlord screams, "I am going to put a wall up in your apartment and you will have to crawl through a hole." He looks at the green place and thinks about being poor there. He would have to become a better fisherman. It could be done but for society. The economy of words is the subject of friends. The economy of words is the object of friends. The city is a friend whose hand is rough and likely to toss one on the one hand. On two hands just the opposite is possible. The city is the bear hug of resources. Just a walk to the bookstore can relieve half the troubles of the world. Who is walking to the bookstore. That is the other thing he went to college to learn.

In nature the code word for economy is cycle and the reality is territory. The kingfisher reserves for itself a long line of lakeshore. Within the kingfisher area small minnows live in the weeds. Big fish sneak under the water to gulp up such small fry and ducks skim the surface of bugs and plant life. The kingfisher flies, surveys, and pivots to fall into the water for its fish. It hits the surface with a splash and immediately pulls out with or without its catch. It will fly the rest of the line and chatter a shrill call from each end. The nature economy is completion, destruction and renewal. The human economy is consumption, waste, and prayer. The city is a human eco-system constipated by its own breeziness. He could recycle his cans, papers, and glass by trudging across town one morning out of seven and then break the glass into barrels and flatten his cans with a metal pole. The sanitation department operates giant trucks which grind and crush. The city could recycle door to door; instead it is ceremoniously dumped into the ocean. Recycling avoids waste and violates the privilege of lifestyle. Someday somebody will make plenty of megabucks fishing out the garbage from the seas and it must cost dearly. It is better to err and profit. Science sez no element can be destroyed or reduced. No comfort for you molecules, got it.

His first job was in a drugstore. He handled the front counter newspapers, gum, candy, made deliveries in the green Corvair, and swept up. He enjoyed ringing the register. If only typewriters had cash drawers to pop out when a good line is rung. He was entering his society and learning the seedy and sordid parts of his pristine suburb. Deliveries to the whorehouse back door. The mother down the street bought airplane glue for her kids and their friends. The elderly women addicted to Elixir of Terpin Hydrate and Codeine. He met the so-called tough kids of his town. He learned what cigarettes they smoked, which kind of Tampax they used, which magazines they walked off with. One older boy also an employee would run in on his way to a poker game and grab a couple of fivers out of his cashdrawer saying "Work it off." He enjoyed working behind the back counter. He filled a fair percentage of the scripts that came in. Counting out Librium did not require four years of pharmaceutical school. Things soured for him at the drugstore after he wrapped the front end of the delivery car around a lamppost. His new nickname: Crash.

His parents were teenagers at the start of the Crash in 1929. It seemed to have made an impression. Yet the economy holds no lessons. What ruined one person one year will boost a luckier person the next

year. His parents have earned the same income for the last thirty years and it no longer is a great income though they have a house, car, securities, etc., they are older and poorer. This too is the new economy: grow old and feel poor. It is horrible not to want to grow old. Old age is not attractive to an economy build on higher turnovers, youth veneration, and ceaseless prolongation of the tissue. Those PCBs in breast milk make the point that people no longer feel old age is in the cards. One must gulp seriously before hoping any future for one's grandchildren. He muses all this on a wet dark day in a green place by a lake with the sounds of his three year old son merrily running and playing. His son will be a young adult in the start of the millenium. The world was built to withstand children but the economy was not. The major threat to american economic need, life-style, is the children on the globe. Multi-nationals push their formulas for infants into jungles and backroads of the world, reaping profits and puny corpses. The children around the globe will be one in the new millenium. The americo life-style is looking at its own death warrant. A parent sees his or her death and life in his or her children. In their presence children grow up and in their presence everything dies. The economy is a dead god worshipped from the arcane crypts of a bankrupt value system.

He carves a piece of bacon off his own behind and sizzles it on the range. He is thinking that he has to make more money. He would like his wife to make more money. He carves a bit off her behind and he wants his kid to make some dough too. Hey, C'mere Kid.

The inflation rate for the fiscal year will be between 12.5% and 15.5% it was predicted in some corners... Laurel School was so very precious. There were four classrooms. One for each grade kindergarten through the third grade. There was a boys' entrance and a girls' entrance. He like all the other boys would on occasion sneak down into the girls' entrance and corridor. It was dark and beige just like the boys' corridor but it carried a strong charge of sexuality. He like the other boys would flock under any girl who climbed the monkey bars just for that true glimpse of underwear. Now that chocolate brown door and dark yellow hallway is the bass note to his sexual passion. Before the school bell rang and the boys went in their door and the girls went in their door, every kid from all the grades played a single game of "scramble" (dodge ball). Every kid was white. One jew, two catholics, two democrats, he never heard a swearword on the playground until he transferred to fourth grade at the large central grade school. Laurel only encompassed a few blocks; it was a throwback to simplicity and cruelty. His kindergarten teacher was Miss Peck. She liked to wash out mouths with soap. When he and Jimmie Beigley got caught giggling in nap period, they got the ivory mouth douche. Laurel just ran on its own time. Even in the worst times of McCarthy hysteria, Laurel kids danced the Maypole every May Day.

When he left Laurel and went to the village wide school, it changed him. The children from different grades did not play together. Certain kids were bullies. He started to recede. He spent the recess following the long cracks that ran through the blacktop playground. Long trails of difficult passage for what was it, cars, covered wagons, no, it was boats, yes he sailed his boats

through grade school. The girls had organized themselves into a club called the Broncos. Ten of them would gang up on one boy. They would swirl up to the boy and yell, "Bronco," and then chase his butt all over the schoolyard. The prevailing mood of the boys was, "Glad it isn't me. This time." "Bronco." Then he made a mistake. He confided in his mother. Told her that he was picked last at sports and about the cracks in the blacktop. Well he really made a mistake talking about the cracks. It is one thing to be unhappy but to have an escape is quite another. He got sent to the child psychiatrist. Soon he discovered that he hated his father. He hated the psychiatrist too. Only once did he open himself up to the headshrinker. He told him about the blocks around his parents' home and how he coordinated their protection and defense. He had given away the State Secrets and that blockhead didn't seem interested. He only opened up that once and then decided to hold his bladder instead. He stopped wetting his bed and there were no more compelling reasons -- he could stop the therapy.

He could stop the train. It took twelve minutes to get to the pee wee headshrinker. He pushed the train there, he pushed the train back. He could not push his bowel movements without the bathroom train fantasy. The bathroom was a secret commando-train. Slide a tile back and controls appeared to regulate the special mirror viewers, the speed, the offensive weapons systems. The buzz of the Lumilux light was the subtle noise of the craft being converted to energy and light as the vehicle silently sped through dark tunnels. The artistry of the fantasy was the camouflage. Amazing detail work was required to make the toilet room look old and decrepit, anything but a supersonic attack machine. The details of building the new craft and then adding cracks to the woodwork, yellow to the paint, various dents and anomalies of age, to walls and floors, always succeeding in moving a painless bowel.

His father was the enemy of his fantasy although never the fantasy enemy of the fantasy. He was scornful of imagination. His father saw him playing with marbles on the lazy susan and told his son that that was what schizophrenics did all day long in the mental hospital. He took the marbles and the lazy susan up to his room. What if he didn't have a room to go to. Would he have a father who said such things. He raced the marbles on the spinning wooden tray. There were two catseyes of each color. Four marbles were placed on the tray, two teams, that is, two of each color comprising a team. The tray was set slowly spinning and each marble dropped into the middle. The force of the spinning would draw the marble to the edge where a slight bumper kept the marble from flying off. When all four marbles were lined up and slowly rolling the opposite direction of the tray's spinning he would suddenly reverse the direction of the tray's spin and accelerate the motion. At first the marbles would stop rolling and stick frozen to the bumper. As the speed of the spinning increased the marbles would break away from the bumper and spin madly against the motion of the tray. This is when the real match began. As the marbles rolled faster they traveled closer to the center of the tray. If a marble got bumped it would fall out to the outer orbit or stop rolling against the spin and instead just swing with it. If a marble stopped spinning it would spin with the tray. As this stationary spinner flew around

it might catch one of the rollers and knock that spinner off the tray. Sometimes the stationary spinner would get sent flying off instead. If the outside swing marble did bump a roller marble off it would be retarded back into rolling itself and join the other rollers on the inside track. It is not hard to imagine how teamwork was helpful. Often one marble of a color would have to be sacrificed to get the other color off. The winner of course was the color remaining on the track. If the match was not producing any strong action, he would suddenly reverse the direction of the spin. They would send each marble into a tailspin. Sometimes two or three of all the marbles would jump off the tray at those hairy moments. He tried not to favor one color over another but he could not help himself. There was a color preference order. Green was his favorite and somehow green always won these large matches. Occasionally red would win because one couldn't deny that reds were amazingly skilled players. Red was probably better than green but green had more heart. Blue was pretty damn good too and usually took an honest third. Yellow was sneaky and treacherous and a heavy competitor especially for blue. White was helpless and inept although white occasionally placed high in the standings as a kindness. There was also a pee-wee team of solid marbles much smaller than the normal catseye. These pee-wee marbles were not good at bumping the other players but they were phenomenal rollers and often could just outrun the best of the team players.

Is it ironic that he started to wake up while in the City Mental Hospital. He was an upperclassman in High School and spent each Saturday volunteering on the pre-adolescent ward. He woke up from his marbled fantasy surrounded by the dead end kids caught in the looney bin because there was just no where else to put them and then there were several genuine schizophrenics. A young social worker played on a funky upright piano. He was playing a great song and singing it horribly while sweet city kids danced and sang lustily, "Let's spend the night together, oh my my my." Tears were noted on his ears. He bought the Rolling Stones record and woke up to his generation.

THE BUSINESS REPORT. It starts raining from the sky. Leaves of grass duck. The light is pitiful. He earns approx. \$400 to \$450 a month by selling his private secretary service. He and Roxy share an additional \$60 weekly from coordinating a poetry/performance series at their Church. Occasional, odd, sundry income could be a mere grand for the year. Not much stretch in all that. When it starts raining it is raining. They started their accounts in 1973; it cost \$7.50 weekly for food. It has been raining register receipts since then, 1981 getting food on Grub Street for under \$55 weekly is a miracle. For all that more it is really less. No matter for food is not food. In fact money is not money. Rain collects. Sometimes clouds fall. Then he is treading water and a cloud falls that is the end.

Catholic girls lead to catholic tastes. There is an economy oh my. As he grew up his pure WASP neighborhood became much more catholic. The parochial school was just down the street. After being confined in their uniforms under the guidance of the Nuns for the entire day, the catholic kids would run wild hot for action. Catholic girls had the reputation of being "fast." Steve and he

were about to slowly enter High School. Several catholic girls lived across the street. Lucia and Steve were supposed to be lovers while he and Mary played second fiddles. His mother looked at him and said she was glad he could talk to girls, that made him wonder. Steve and he had been the best of friends throughout grade school. They were just learning about masturbation from a third friend (a musician). They would try it separately using prescribed recipes for best results -- now add four cups sifted sexy thoughts. Did they know a sexy thought. During these experimentations, they started up the relationship with Lucia and Mary. Lucia would complain to him that Steve was cold. It could get very intimate. He never tried to heat it up, he was an idiot and simply happy to be in her confidence. He was not one of the catholic boys -- they made out. The public school boys and the catholic girls went to the beach to play cut-the-cake. Mary wouldn't make him kiss her instead she ordered him to run up and down a hill five times. One afternoon Steve and he were ordered to wait in Lucia's backyard while she and Mary got a surprise together for them. Their dicks told them some sexual musk was in the hot muggy sunlight. Lucia and Mary came out to the yard sheepishly grinning. The boys looked at their sweaty white blouses and didn't get it. The girls casually strained to touch their elbows behind their backs and then the boys saw that Lucia and Mary had sprung out in the bust. The boys could see it and the girls could feel it, there was a lot of laughter as the girls turned their backs and yanked out wads of toilet paper. They could still play rough house games like red rover in which it is impossible not to rub each other the right way. Red rover red rover send Lucia over.

Steve and he went into public high school and never were close friends again. Lucia and Mary went to catholic high school and that summer was over forever. His mother must have been disappointed because he didn't go out with a girl again for over two years. When one is a kid one might say to a parent, "I want this because George has one." He or she would be told that he or she is not George. Now one might be told, "I don't understand why you don't have some dates, George has lots of dates." He holed himself up in his attic room more than ever. He hated high school. He hated the rich snobby kids who exercised their cool like walking the dog. There were some hip kids with political savvy but they were into drugs and dangerous rich people's games, all out of his league. He never took drugs in high school. The only way out of the fantasy of this other was the social service program. The fantasy of the suburb is so thick that he could not stand up in it. Those quick trips into the city to see life bolstered him and helped him to walk straighter under the fatuous weight of successful people. He also instituted a self exercise program to slim down his body and his high school tensions. Forty push-ups and sixty sit-ups every night before sleep got him out of adaptive gym. The exercise wound him up so he eased off it by getting on his latest greatest fantasy. Now he was into one on one hand combat. He was the champ and each night a new challenger would be sent up to meet him. The fight would use short wands as weapons. He would always subdue his opponent after a long and worthy struggle. He relished most the details of the struggle and the various merits to the challenger or demerits in style, courtesy, skill, etc. After he had the other

fellow down, there was the choice to kill or release. This decision was up to the opponent and his trainer. If the opponent was a simpleton and not likely to have much of a life after this defeat everyone would agree on the death option. A good player, bright and worthy, would be saved without much negative stigma. Could he masturbate after all that. He can't remember. Yes he supposes yes he did -- sleep. In his fight and subjugation before sex, he separated the vile desire to rape from that of making love.

INTERVIEW WITH AMIRI BARAKA in his home in Newark, New Jersey on March 10th, 1981, by Mark Hillringhouse.

M.H.: What do you think of these poetry workshops?

A.B.: To me that's a business. The question is creating poets; I don't think that's what they're really interested in, especially with this elitist attitude in these schools because they think poetry happens in some metaphysical way. I don't see anything wrong with these workshops, just that the majority of them are trying to push backward ideas. I'm pretty sure they're stressing form over content, tradition over reason, and similar absurdities.

M.H.: Well, you've taught poetry.

A.B.: But what I teach is what people have done. I try to put them in touch with writers whom I admire.

M.H.: By way of exposure?

A.B.: Yeah, making them read, then trying to get them in touch with themselves.

In any kind of writing/poetry course I teach that they have to abandon overreliance on things outside themselves; they have to be aware of the state of the art, but they have to abandon any kind of ready-mades or hiding their own emotions under artificial masks.

M.H.: It's as if today's poetry is being written without a heartbeat.

A.B.: Exactly. That's what they want, though. The official poetry of this state has to be dead, because if it were alive it would have to talk about this (gestures to what's outside)!

M.H.: There's a poem of yours in particular that addresses this feeling from The Dead Lecturer, entitled "A Poem For Speculative Hipsters."

He had got, finally,
to the forest
of motives. There were no
owls, or hunters. No Connie Chatterleys
resting beautifully
on their backs, having casually
brought socialism
to England.

Only ideas,
and their opposites.

Like
he was really
nowhere.

A.B.: Yeah, absolutely. Poetry is supposed to give you the world and if you're going to cut out all the interesting parts and deal with only what is theoretical and intellectual then it's better just to walk or take the bus, or sit on the porch and watch things.

M.H.: Your statement in the introduction to Hard Facts has a lot of the same feeling.

"Poetry is saying something about reality. It reflects the sayer's place...middle-class poetry which is most important to the American Academy is a reflection of American middle class life and

interests, petty bourgeois social and production relations."

But doesn't this obviate the possibility of there being a need for the academic poem?

A.B.: Well, I'm a Marxist communist, but I like all kinds of poetry. I don't just like communist poetry. There are all kinds of people who can tell you who they are and what they feel whatever their ideology is. What I dislike is poetry that is super formal and artificial.

M.H.: Are there any prime examples that come to mind?

A.B.: Well sure. Most of the poets who are celebrated by the American establishment.

M.H.: Like Ashbery?

A.B.: Ashbery is more interesting because at least his imagery is wild, although obviously I couldn't eat a lot of that. Ashbery is interesting to me because I admire the root which is O'Hara, but there is a whole school of much deader poetry. Now I think Ashbery has been given these awards really to soup-up American poetry. It's as if the judges are saying, "O.K., we're going to give this to John Ashbery to try to jack the rest of you up in order to establish a higher norm." Ashbery's imagery is wilder than the standard Theodore Roethke, John Crowe Ransom, the New Yorker Howard Moss shit.

What's happening finally is that you're being subjected to somebody's deadass life! And what the hell are they talking about, adjectives, nuances, some party in the East Hamptons, using twenty metaphors to describe a grape.

This country is so wild and crazy and brutal and corny and vulgar, that if you're not trying to deal with that you're missing. It's like you're not even in this world.

I think that the reality of our lives in our society is even more shocking than the headlines. You know what I'm saying. The problem with the headlines is that they tend to be shallow but the reality of this country is much more shocking. The question is can the writer penetrate that and raise it up to a level of serious concern. The challenges are fantastic because the average rock group raises up a level of serious concern higher than the average academic poet. John Lennon is much more interesting than Howard Moss.

M.H.: Lennon was a casualty of the craziness.

A.B.: Of the craziness sure.

The point is you have to be able to capture that otherwise you're not here. It's like a landscape painter: if you have to sit and be right next to this landscape and then paint us a picture of a closet! Hey, we didn't want a picture of a closet. What is this? Show me what this landscape is: what's happening in it, what do people feel in it, what does it look like, how do people talk, how do they sound, what do they do? Academic poetry cannot do that, its closet is its royal domain, because in that closet it is supreme. In the world it's just a little fat professor walking down the street who might get mugged.

M.H.: Definitely not the real world.

A.B.: It's not real. It won't reflect the folk tradition of White American not to mention all the other aspects of this culture, the Black and Latino, the Native American. It tends to be elite and right wing.

M.H.: Narcissistic?

A.B.: Yes, very narcissistic. That's Capitalism though.

M.H.: In advertising you can really feel it.

A.B.: Well you see it's an all pervading thing of which advertising is the most blatant. But you can go around to all these university campuses and the shit they're pumping those students full of is essentially the same thing.

I think the artist has to demand education in the real sense of how all the shit works.

Education in school is such a small particle of what this whole life is all about, and if that's all you're going to focus on then you really don't know anything. The motivation behind that trend of getting a job is understandable because the market is so competitive. Business only needs about 30 percent of the college graduates. The rest can go screw off and become artists.

This Reagan administration probably feels artists are nothing more than a bunch of accordion players. Well look, they're going to cut those grants in half, but art itself is going to get chopped because they're going to lay with the academics, the so called scholarship.

M.H.: It could be good in a way.

A.B.: I think that the only positive thing that's going to come out of it is people's increasing capacity to fight back. I think there'll be a big division too. There'll be a small group of people who'll actually show up on that other side, who'll become the Reagan's intellectual. But when do we fight back? Do we wait until we're in line with the soap and towel in our hand?

Not only are people afraid of losing what they have, they're afraid of losing what they don't have. The White middle class wishes it were on welfare and food stamps. They really need welfare. Socially it would be hard for them to come to that admission but that's the reality of their situation. This society is in total anxiety. The middle class is in anxiety constantly. The poor at least can say, "Fuck it I'm poor!" The middle class has to keep up the facade that they're not poor, that they're doing all right, when in actuality they're about two inches from being poor. For the middle class it's a question of credit cards and credit up the ass which hooks you up with your imaginary acquisitions.

M.H.: A lot of the war protest poetry from the 60's was good. It's as if you can replace the Nixon names with those of the Reagan administration.

A.B.: Oh yeah, it's real and it's obviously coming back, there's no doubt about it. The idea of Alexander Haig as the goddamn Secretary of State is in itself miraculous. What are their accomplishments except death? Well if that gets to be it, when people have to look up to skilled murderers. That shows you where it's at though.

Well, this will be a very interesting time to be living in but I think it's very definitely going to cause sharp polarization.

M.H.: Can art produce the changes necessary to improve some of the conditions of society as Richard Wright thought would happen?

A.B.: Well you see the question of art interested in change is that it's interested in reaching people and arming them, giving information, giving them the emotional commitment to go out and do things, or to resist, telling them the truth about the world and society, because one thing about any society like ours is that it has to be operated on

basic lies, has to be. The fundamental policy of any repressive government has to be the lie. When nothing else works lie! So anything that cuts through the lies and actually tries to sort it out can be a weapon: what actually did happen, what is the real history of this place, who are the people running things? I think there are a lot of people from diverse ideologies who are doing something like that. Ed Sanders when he talks about his investigative historical school of poetry is very positive. To me it's saying that somebody understands that history is a real thing and that it's not just buried in the past, but that the weight of history actually sets people in motion in whatever direction they're going. They're carrying the burden of history as they understand it. It might be total bullshit but then they're going off in a bullshit direction.

M.H.: History can be a lie too.

A.B.: I think there is a real history. There is a real life that has happened, but I think that a lot of times what we get are lies as history. Any writer who is interested in giving us the real world is very important.

M.H.: Lance Jeffers says that the future of Black poetry lies in continued rage and protest, and criticism and analysis of Black people.

A.B.: True, that's our tradition, that's a particular tradition. I think that has to be real because that's the real condition. You see, any Black poetry that doesn't begin there cannot really be Black poetry. Then it's outside of the people's experience because there is a real experience.

M.H.: Right, and it's so complex that it requires some analysis to figure it out. You just can't put it all in one group and call it "Black poetry."

A.B.: No, no, poets come from different ways, different ideologies, different methods and things like that.

M.H.: Robert Hayden is still a romantic for example.

A.B.: Hayden is much closer to that kind of American academic norm, but he still has life to him, this is my view. He still has a life to him based on some kind of relationship to real people in the real world involved with real struggles. This makes it more interesting to me than the Howard Mosses and the Robert Penn Warrens. I think the main tradition of Black poetry always is connected up with Black people, and as such has to be related to their struggle and has to reflect their condition, their life, their desires.

M.H.: But is there such a thing as racial poetry?

A.B.: In the sense of it being a precise reflection of a group, obviously. But I think it's only that. I don't think there's any kind of exclusive area.

M.H.: Is Russian poetry racial?

A.B.: In the sense that it reflects Russian life, Russian people, Russian history. I think all great poetry is so precise that it has to reflect place, history, culture, precisely. And I don't think of it as mystical, it's simply the precision. The poet is so precise that he has to reflect

the totality of that life that he is in. It's not just an isolated person in space.

M.H.: So in a way it's not that poetry has to be motivated or inspired or confined to racial utterance. Hayden says that it shouldn't have to be limited in any way.

A.B.: No, I don't think of it as limited, I just think of it as specific. The problem with most academic poetry is that it's abstract. Bourgeois poetry generally tends to be abstract and subjective, one person talking about the inner rulings of their own ego. But there is no person that I know who is not in this world, and it's the world that we share collectively. Obviously a person's subjective consciousness is the focus of what they see. It's their perception that we are confronted with in their poems, their rationalization, their rationalization of that perception, their use of that rationalization. To talk about your own inner bumbings without any connection with the world that we all share commonly is boring. So in terms of talking about Black poetry, Black poetry is simply about Black people, their lives and history. It might have a particular accent.

M.H.: You don't feel there's two schools or a gap between two forces?

A.B.: Oh yeah, but that's just a class distinction. People write from where they come. Just like in slavery you would have poetry written by house servants and poetry written by field servants. They would reflect their different place in society. So that today you still have that, you have house niggers, field niggers still.

M.H.: You mean from Hammon, Wheatley, and Dunbar on one side.

A.B.: Yeah, that's a house statement.

M.H.: And the tradition of Langston Hughes and McKay on the other.

A.B.: Sure. I think that the mainstream has to be the majority experience no matter how it comes out. The mainstream of Black letters is the majority's experience reflected in the brain of the poet.

M.H.: Who have been your influences?

A.B.: A lot of influences, I've had a lot of influences. I'll say that I've been influenced by poets. Back when I was in college I was influenced by Elizabethan poets and Eliot. Later on I was influenced by Allen Ginsberg and Charles Olson and Creeley, then people like Askia Toure.

M.H.: Did you know Owen Dodson?

A.B.: I knew him as a teacher at Howard.

M.H.: Sterling Brown?

A.B.: He was a teacher of mine at Howard. Sterling taught me, Owen never did. Owen Dodson ran the theatre company. I knew he was a teacher at Howard, but Sterling Brown actually had influenced me more intellectually. It was he who taught us Black music at Howard, unofficially because Howard never allowed that. After class in the dormitory he would come over and teach a group of us about the history of Black music, which was very important.

M.H.: That was quite a strong force having those two.

A.B.: He was one of the great professors. There were several great professors at Howard. Sterling Brown was one, Franklin Fraser was another, Elaine Locke was another, Owen Dodson still another.

M.H.: You've lived in other places.

A.B.: I've travelled a lot but I haven't really lived abroad very long. I travel a great deal. My main residence has been Newark and New York. I lived in other cities off and on, San Francisco for a few months, etc.

M.H.: And in the Air Force?

A.B.: I travelled around in the Air Force a lot sure. I've been to Africa, Europe and Japan and to other places. In terms of long residence I haven't really lived in many places outside of here. But I do think it important for other poets if they have the time, to learn other languages, because there are still very few translations. People think everything is automatically translated. In terms of Black poetry there is still a great need in the world for more and better translations.

M.H.: The translations that do exist are shabby.

A.B.: I guess they're shabby but there's still not a lot. I'm talking about Black literature world wide, Jesus Christ there's not a lot, and what there is quickly goes out of print. There still is a need for people to do independent publication. We still need a lot of poets and writers published.

M.H.: Why did you study German?

A.B.: I studied German because at the time I thought I was interested in German literature, culture, history and philosophy. Actually my interest first started as a pre-med student. I studied German because that was one of the requirements.

M.H.: And you liked the language?

A.B.: Yes, and I was reading some things like Heidegger, but basically it was a requirement for school. I went past that as my interest in Phenomenology developed in studying people like Husserl, etc. I became friendly with a fellow who was really into it, a Ph.D. in Phenomenology, and we became close friends, a guy by the name of Peter Schwarzberg from Munich. I liked German writers and was reading German poetry, that's how it started. That was a while ago.

M.H.: Your poetry has been informed by it?

A.B.: Obviously, sure.

M.H.: Your poem "Hegel" from the book Black Magic speaks to me, especially that line, "Give me someone to talk to."

A.B.: I think the poem is about finding yourself in an isolated position as far as what you're thinking about is going on in the world. Paraphrased it expresses, "So what everybody thinks I'm saying is off the wall, but what I really need is somebody to discuss these ideas with."

M.H.: Whites can read your poetry and get a lot out of it I think, in a reverse metaphor way of reading it.

A.B.: Sure, I don't see why not, especially that early poetry. I think that for most intellectuals it would be pretty clear. I don't see why it wouldn't. I even think the poetry I wrote when I was a Black Nationalist is pretty clear to whites.

M.H.: Well it even transfers over to me as a white and substantiates my own personal gripe that I have with the world.

A.B.: Yeah, I don't think it would be necessarily obscure, it's very obvious; you might not agree with it. I don't think my poetry is obscure except in the earlier stages of my work.

M.H.: Like that poem, "For Half White College Students"?

A.B.: Yeah, I think that's pretty clear.

M.H.: I guess there's no way a poet can get away from a more universal lament.

A.B.: No, that's real. If it's particularized enough it also is universal. You begin to see in that specific way that can become everyone's specific reality. Everyone's cry is that one cry.

M.H.: Do you feel that American poetry is ahead of other poetry being written around the world? It might be fair to judge against England for example because we share the same language.

A.B.: English poetry died out at the beginning of the 20th Century. Language became so full of shit, it became a mash more than a communication. It becomes a sham, a social instance more than a real message. It becomes a social sham in the sense that it tries to fake society out with gibberish and elegant facades, when in actuality the whole goddamn world is burning, the empire is crumbling and meanwhile they're talking about - dee dee doot, dee dee doot, dee dee doot, some iambic pentameter. The American thing is more real, and what I think continues to make American poetry strong is that it still continues to incorporate so many elements. American language is not English even though people still tend to talk about English departments. This is not England. Since the end of the 18th Century there has been an American tradition. The American tradition is fed by many streams - the Black stream, the Latino stream, the Native American stream. All of those things are bubbling in it all the time, are making it vital. When the Voice of America broadcasts, they don't try to reach the people of Eastern Europe with dull academic shit, they'll play Duke Ellington or Stevie Wonder or some salsa, or country music; the real living stuff and that's what keeps the American thing alive. If they just wanted to focus on the Anglo-Saxon Harvard-Yale tradition it would be as dead as England, the empire would be dead too.

M.H.: Do you like Williams and Olson for that reason?

A.B.: Oh yes, absolutely, because they're talking about real American speech. There's still a huge Anglo-Colonial mentality in so called high academics. They still push English and English literature.

M.H.: Is Black poetry even further along in that respect?

A.B.: They're much further removed from that Anglo tradition. When you read Williams you're already taking a step away from English. When you read someone as reactionary as Pound it's clear that 19th Century English could not serve poetry. He was certain of that. Williams becomes stronger because Williams actually connects with the real American tradition. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot went back to Europe. Williams stayed here and wrote about Paterson. He knew where the essence of this country was to be found, and he knew if he was going to reflect that in literature then he had to be in tune with this culture.

M.H.: I think he succeeded. He knew it was in the people around him, in the real people he encountered as a physician making house calls.

A.B.: Exactly. It steps away from dead English and deals with the living American idiom. Black poetry is even more rooted in that sense because Black people have even fewer illusions about Europe and England. That stuff is just way out there and away from them, and just doesn't exist.

The best American poetry from the last few generations has not connected with the old world but has been rooted here. That's why I liked Ginsberg's poetry when I came out of the Air Force back in '57.

He talked about America.

There are a lot of Black and Latino poets who are very interesting and who have been raised in this tradition, and the main element of their strength is their being rooted in real American life. They give us this society. I'm not opposed to tradition.

Tradition is supposed to drop us off in the present. What it is supposed to do is let us know from whence we came, but it's not supposed to make us addicted to it. When you take the A train you want to get off in Harlem, you don't want to ride the subway forever.

M.H.: Besides poets, what other artists do you identify with?

A.B.: I'm sensitive to all the arts and I always tell my students that even if they're writers they have to be in tune with the state of the arts, all the arts, because they might be able to see some dance that will shake a poem loose in them.

For me, music is the most important, especially Afro-American music, jazz, blues. It is my own heavy source of energy and inspiration and my own historical reference. I'm inspired as much by music as by other poets.

M.H.: How about painters?

A.B.: Painters yeah, and I love painting, but it is not as accessible. To check out paintings you either have to get books or reproductions.

M.H.: Getting back to poetry, in your poem "The Liar" for example, the opening of that poem reads like it could have been part of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird".

A.B.: Definitely could be. I used to like Wallace Stevens a lot. I read him during that period a lot and loved his imagery and so forth.

M.H.: How do you approach the poem? I want to get some insight into your creative process.

Ted Berrigan says he thinks of words and phrases at first, and Ginsberg says he connects words to a certain feeling that is being drawn out on a particular rhythm and cadence, and Bly seems to be writing mostly out of images.

A.B.: I think I'm probably closer to Allen in that respect. There's a definite kind of rhythmic impulse, but at the same time there's this desire to say something, to speak out about something. The rhythm is the way into it, the way to get it out. The rhythm is definitely like train tracks.

M.H.: Then you can start working in those images.

A.B.: Well, I think that the rhythm itself is the music of the poem, then you have to visualize the whole in order to articulate the content.

M.H.: You have to develop a strong ear.

A.B.: Yes. Poetry to me is a kind of music, and that is taking it back to its origins. It was either spoken, sung, or danced to.

M.H.: Have you ever thought of not writing anymore, of giving it up, abandoning the whole thing?

A.B.: Occasionally I guess, but I've never believed that.

M.H.: I'm always amazed by writers who quit writing, Rimbaud for example or J.D. Salinger perhaps.

A.B.: I don't understand that, though often you can be put in a bind

by society itself. For instance, I have about four unpublished books that publishers might want to commission. They want to titillate you.

M.H.: That must be more than 200 poems?

A.B.: Well, they're not books of poetry. I do have about two or three books of poetry unpublished. Those are different. One group of poems I never even tried to publish, early poems, my first book that I just keep around. Then there's some recent poetry that I will try to publish if anyone's interested. I have a book on John Coltrane that's half finished that the editor didn't like and refused to publish. I have an unpublished novel that I wrote under commission for Putnam several years ago. I have a jazz opera commissioned by the Paris Opera that they didn't want to produce.

M.H.: That adds up to a hell of a lot of frustration.

A.B.: Yeah, and that can actually put a damper on you. But in terms of poetry, no, poetry doesn't depend on that. That's my definite necessary form of expression. So that's not in any danger from editors or publishers. The other things can be tampered with because they do require a link with production. Not seeing my plays produced tends to dampen my spirits and has limited my production of drama. I used to write a great number of plays. I would continue to write a great many more if people would produce them, but once they stop then the desire to write them dissipates, but the poetry is safe. I know that I will be able to read those. They do conspire not to produce the plays though and it does dry you up to a certain degree, and I usually do write a play a year no matter, but the fact that they don't produce them does have a real effect. I do think I will be able to get around that eventually. The last three I produced myself.

M.H.: Is there anything harder to write than poetry?

A.B.: All of it is hard to write. Poetry is easier for me to write, but the rest of it is more difficult because it takes more discipline.

M.H.: A lot of people start off in poetry because it's smaller and they think it's easier and they do it more readily.

A.B.: Yeah, it has its own demands, and those demands are complex.

M.H.: Do you have habits of sitting down and writing every day?

A.B.: When I'm working on something, yes.

M.H.: Can you name a few poets writing today who hold your interest, keep you angry and informed, and make you want to keep on writing?

A.B.: Well, there are a lot of poets I like, a great many. I would say Askia Toure, Lorenzo Thomas, Jayne Cortez, would be the ones who turn me on.

M.H.: Do you like Gwendolyn Brooks at all?

A.B.: Yeah, Gwen's poetry is good, and I think she's certainly written some great poetry, but she is not the kind of writer who revs me up. Any new book of hers I'll buy, but any new book of Margaret Walker's, let's say, would be a great event.

There are a lot of other poets who really turn me on and who I would look for.

M.H.: Even outside this country?

A.B.: Sure. There are poets like Cesaire and Guillen.

M.H.: As I look more and more toward South America it appears as if there's a renaissance going on down there.

A.B.: There's always a lot happening down there. Neruda and Guillen are the Latin poets I like the most. There's a lot of third world poetry that I admire and which is very vital.

M.H.: Did you know Jay Wright while you were at Rutgers? I believe you and he are the same age.

A.B.: No. I knew Jay later when he was at Yale in '77. I believe he still teaches one semester there a year.

M.H.: Jay Wright says he has nothing to say and no statement to make about poetry.

A.B.: Is that what he says? But I think that's Jay's line. He tends to be that kind of person. He lives way up in the woods somewhere in Maine in a cabin with nothing but firewood.

M.H.: Could you picture yourself doing that?

A.B.: No, I'm an urban type. Newark is about as rural as I'm going to get. Up there in the woods of Maine would drive me crazy. Chopping wood, starting fires, I'm not interested in that. The more modern it is the better I like it. I'm better informed living here. I need the stimulus. I need privacy every once in a while, but I don't want to make a fetish out of it. No, this is my home, this is where I grew up.

ALICE NOTLEY/EILEEN MYLES

I GOT EASY

Easy River
a piece of cake
even
still some dough
In the shape of
every bathrobe you
loved
you walk around in a
messy room,
a Saturday morning in her thirties.

ALICE NOTLEY

POEM

It's terrific that "macho" means "to
fall in love" Then
Entered the labyrinth, have found no exit
---statement of place as idiot---
"You got to see where you are"
one sec at frozen waterfall
then, car starts

*

I forgot what...everything's
froze in me for good
reasons: Going on gives me
hysteria, & The heat's off
in our building.
I've always liked
going on; trying to do so right
seems of some concern lately---and
the fact I think to try to do so
right, is wrong, doesn't help---

& who would I love but you?
& what would I love but
going on? No one & nothing, I
can love no one & nothing
if I don't love you, I
can't even love going on if I
don't love you. But
I love you...so---but

& you're frail as flowers
we're frail as flowers

& I don't love anything else well unless
I also love you, first love you. You are
my grace to love others, things &
people & shouts & lights---

it's just scary, is all
to be dependent on 2 frailties (yours
& mine) & to love
all the frailties herein this world

is enough to make love frail---but
it's the one that isn't frail, they say
it outlives us, but
do we care? yes it's still the best of us

& I never got anywhere but at least
it stayed the same---

So Be My Valentine.

THE RAP ON HUNK

His name was Hunk Jordan.
He was in the Philippines when
the Japanese invaded it
Was on the Bataan Death March
Coming back to visit my
father---he was a fairly good-
sized guy---had
gotten down to 132 as a
prisoner---but six months later
in the Industrial Leagues
Hunk Jordan, 37, 38
years old, it showed a
picture of him, Hunk,
"How I Hit'em" Jordan. He'd
been some guy who also had a
crush on my mother. My
father said, "Good hitter, but
couldn't go to his right."

VIGNETTE REGRET

for Steve Carey

I was drunk, but
so was he, when he
wouldn't dance with
me to
"Devoted to you."

FUCK YOU, MAN: OR
ROSE TAKE ME BACK

I'm sorry I've
pissed you off for the
last fifteen years,
but I haven't.

A PERFECT SHORT POEM ABOUT
THE APPROACH OF OLD AGE

I wonder who's in the blue car?
It's the guy with white hair.

AGAIN, A FEW YEARS LATER

They come visit you in the night
in squares & rectangles. Horrors
from down the road. From the one who
gave you all those records. I try
to tell it to get down, but it is
huddled in the wind wife. Then,
...I have a casual day. It
was always great you know, &
it was always sad frantic, thyme
is just as popular with cooks
today. Look at this photo
of three people crossing the street
from a covered sidewalk of
building under construction, a
visual nothing. Look at that
photo of pretty much visual
nothing, I'd like to try her
sometime, but she's scary
like night visitors. Forgive
the easy connection (forgive
my asking your forgiveness) but
would the Magi assume
a form of terror? Easy
answer, Yes. I'm tired of pro-
nominal razamataz & aspects
of the self stuff, she said. (You're
so self-conscious, love, you
might have to make it be a
story. Anyway.) She is
made of tiny, tiny colorless
particles. No. The pressing from
the outside balances the press-
ing from the inside, & so
you get up & look out the
window: a mad night, a
bird's miraculous chair. Go to
the store. Come back.

City Life

Bandaged robots

welfare

tin cans

I came out of the house turned right and
walked quickly down the street of diamonds

jade and broken glass. I held blossoms
in the radiance of your small white hand.

Time crushes time, oceans walk under ladders,
the moon is an artichoke and all the girls
wild flowers, rigorous, appreciating the sweet
tendernesses of evening prayers. Parlors light
brutality's vulgar absence while I type.

GARY LENHART

HELP WANTED

1.

The harried receptionist,
Switchboard abuzz, between
Bites of a sandwich
Berates a mature black man
For spelling sorter S-O-T-E-R.

"Who will hire you to sort mail
If you can't spell?"
She yells across a room
Of candidates perched stiffly.

"It was an honest mistake,"
He explains, before directed out.

Showering chicken salad she spits,
"Mr. Harrison, you've been out of work 8 months!
Forget it, nobody will hire you!"

"That's why I'm out of work,"
He shyly offers.

"You should have been here
When you were out of work 3 months.
Good by."

2.

Although they owe no mortgage
And the truck is paid for,
They're far along to postpone
And find themselves pinched.

His nose bleeds when he anticipates
Routine disrupted.
To break in a new man
Is like starting from scratch.

That's a lot of chocolate cream pie
He bears, trudging up and down stairs.
Pain claims aged legs.
Once the bull could burn that pie
Toting refrigerators solo.

GOOD SIGHTING!

The solitary vireo,
Slurred liquid songed swamp sparrow,
And mimicking catbirds
Titillate the weekend house guest
From Dr. Scholl's insoles
To cowlick precarious
Above lily-pads.

Among

Pines, snaking streams, and ferns,
Blinders slide from eyes,
The unplugged hear,
And gods turn to trees.

REED BYE

HEART'S BESTIARY

Chimps swarm a trellis on a snazzy necktie
with purple cyclamen trumpets blaring.
Squirrels ripple over the college quad
getting their nuts together
between the lurches of otter-skinned pinschers.
Black raven flaps from a gravel pit
in grey, cold mountains.
Orangutans pick their prepuces
and sniff the smegma in their nails.
Standing donkey by saddlery shop's penis
nearly touches the ground.
Tessie cries as pliered fist yanks porcupine quills
from her gums.
Old tigress paces sideshow cage, roars enormous
wilderness and death.
Oil damaged cormorant paddles off
into tropical river mouth sunset.

These are animals I saw! They live!

Ratchety voiced kingfisher glides up creek's
cottonwood alley.
Bat slithers over moonlit coral,
darts at horrified human head.
Great yellow reflector eyes (owl)
beam from village boys' gunny sack.
Conch shells dot the desert landscape
under Long Island surf.
White sow in shed rolls over,
crushed piglets squeal.
Scolded skunk rears white triangle warning in night alley.
Young hummingbirds curl in cup
on branch of poisonwood limb.
Snapping turtle's shell embraced by claws
rocking on Sawhill pond.

I have seen these animals!

Albatross soar above Inger Skou's wake
and bob with her receding garbage.
Curious cows startle sleepers in sunny pick-up bed.
Bats hang like black bags in dead eucalyptus top.
Egrets, pure white, shuffle below in green part
snaky with vines. A wing torn off hangs in the tangle.
I reach knee deep in brackish water
to pull up a dusty prehistoric fish.

They are adamant!

Eels only are pulled straight from Tiber's muddy bed.
Violet-green swallows bank in air drafts
off Bear Peak's rocky ledge.
White-crowned sparrow kicks back the pine needles
under a snow crowned bush.
Starlings and pigeons bed down in cornice recessions
above the mall.
Old spaniel lumbers from crumbled garage
turns right up Denver sidewalk.
Ghostly pale blowfish face stares out from watery cavemouth.
In a dusky meadow a three legged stag
does a beautiful bending dance.
One summer a Japanese beetle hid in every rose.

CATCHY

All the irony of a 'circular file'
descends in a swoop from the blue
south of here, from the lips
of an old man with bright eyes
and redder than rosy complexion

And catching it in big
catcher's mitt ears
is another aging hombre in the north
with a different air of youth:
eyes more modest, disapproving
skin less padded on the cheekbones

The 'circular file' is picked up
and used again, its teeth restored to gleaming
but instead of gusting away in a wry
trajectory, it sticks in my craw
with the resonant plang
of a perfectly thrown harpoon.

HOMESPUN

Laughter is the death of time
and time is the laughter of death yet
death is not a time of laughter--
does this disprove some Hegelian suppositions perhaps
the very planks of our modern stage?
I rest my case, with one foot on top
waiting for a train
and hear its whistle foreshorten
to higher and higher registers as it nears.
Aha! I think
it would never fall to me
to find pitch a function of frequency and motion
though voices do get shrill
when they're talking at you--
I turn up my collar
and head out of town. I had hopes too once
but they were snuffed in coffee and sinkers
somewhere south of tri-cities. I was going to change things
too, I know, that's a laugh, hah! That's a good one.
Hah! hah! Very funny.
But I'm not sad. You see
time changes them anyway, what's passed is past
and though my heart sometimes feels
like it's tacked on the rigging
drying in the salt air, well
inside there's still some rain now and then.
You see that light up yonder ?
There's a kind of a joke.
It's here and then it's gone
but it'll never go out. You ask old Ted,
he's here to tell you.

TONY TOWLE

Social Poem

It's six o'clock, do you know
where you are? I am with my sanity
among the bells
telling me it is six o'clock,
which is more than I need to know.

I seem to want to talk about something,
but it is missing,
which makes it a personal remark
which I stop to hear
as if the bells had stopped ringing
but I were persisting
as if the walls were further away
than just on the other side,
flooding the interior
with the gloom of the typewriter,
memorializing the pond
stirred by fish through ugly shadows
I have to make use of. Actually
I am upset
with my tone of voice,
as if I had climbed the walls
but did not get far enough away,
though in the first place
I don't know where that would be
and in the second
I know everything else,
which leads to too much news. Maybe
the walls aren't even there anymore,
since I don't seem to have anything anymore,
as if the present were an elaborated ambush,
the finale instead of the usual ambience
until a later hour, in so many words.
And I haven't even gotten to sociability yet,
grasping at its details
and freeing them like peasants
to a thimbleful of history.
Why a thimble? My jacket
needs a button,
but that isn't what I mean by travelling,
I mean that one should be somebody else
and actually go,
although I am somebody else
and have stayed; still living and walking
near Spring Street,
though when I observed it first
there wasn't its bar

accomodating the many people who came from the distance
and got used to me, filtered from the past
which doubles as much of the day.
And I still cross Houston Street
in the path of the many drivers from New Jersey
who I am sure are all nice people
when they get back; but in the meantime
they are after me,
since I don't mind being paranoid,
it is like being Polish
and riding off into a joke
that of course I would not understand,
lost in generalizations;
and filtered through metaphysical situation
onto geographical surface,
where I am thinking about Jackson Pollock
for some reason,
the rumors and rectangles
from the Cedar Bar to the Metropolitan, the legend
half of me would like the other half to be,
though if I could say which half were which
I wouldn't get any further;
but the real joke is I don't have a horse,
so that crossing Houston Street is truly pedestrian,
which is good for the paranoia
but not for the legend
I'll be nearer to the next time I stop
at the next place I'll be.

STEVE LEVINE/CHRIS KRAUS

THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN

(Writers, I Believe, Should Establish A Firm Home Base,
Get To Know Themselves and Their Neighbors, Govern Themselves
By The Rules Of Their Community While Rejecting Its
Provincialities And Prejudices, And, In General, Try To
Live Down The Byronic-Bohemian Tradition)

An American Tragedy.

Two bicycles, one female model, one male model, face each other, front wheel to front wheel. The bikes together form a V-shape, the angle of which faces the audience. Otherwise the stage is empty, bathed in total darkness.

VOICES: (One female and one male voice, in unison, from offstage)

"THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN"!

(Red and blue spotlights come up on the bicycles. For the duration of the play, white light comes up very slowly - so that it takes the entire script for the white light to be fully lit.)

FEMALE: Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha

MALE: Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha

UNISON: Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha

MALE &
FEMALE: (Spoken in round style, twice)

I just couldn't stand
that hysteric sound
coming down on me-
I was no big talker
Seemingly rather
Withdrawn, I wasn't
Married and had no
Children, I believed
Something, it was
Worrying me all the time,
When I am not writing
I'm drinking, smoking,
Taking, and vice versa...

FEMALE: Can you say Omaha?

MALE: Omawah.

UNISON: Omaha; THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN, An American Tragedy.

MALE: Big stars are snapping
Outside, Omaha, their
Interiors limitless
As my great emptiness.

FEMALE: Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha
THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN...

MALE: Ten minutes before
Time began, ten minutes
Was maybe an hour...

UNISON: Omaha!

FEMALE: (Snapping fingers) Who dies?

MALE: (snapping fingers) Who doesn't?

FEMALE: Can you say Omawah?

MALE: Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha

THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN, An American Tragedy.

FEMALE: A writer, I believe, should establish a firm home
Base, get to know herself and her neighbors, govern
Herself by the rules of her community while rejecting
Its provincialities and prejudices, and, in general, try
To live down the Byronic-Bohemian Tradition.

MALE: A writer, I believe, should establish a firm home
Base, get to know himself and his neighbors, govern
Himself by the rules of his community while rejecting
Its provincialities and prejudices, and, in general, try
To live down the Byronic-Bohemian Tradition.

UNISON: Omawah Omawah Omawah
Omawah Omawah Omawah
Omawah

FEMALE: What we have here
Is a pocket of autonomy
Statues toppled
In the rapture of greenery...

MALE: Big stars are snapping outside
Their interiors limitless
As my vast emptiness...

FEMALE: Spring's sudden flush
The annual contractions
of a nerve-
Lined, thin-rimmed flower!

UNISON: THE CYCLES OF HEAVEN!

Writers, we believe, should establish a firm home
Base, get to know themselves and their neighbors, govern
Themselves by the rules of their community, while rejecting
Its provincialities and prejudices, and, in general, try
To live down the Byronic-Bohemian Tradition...

Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha Omaha Omaha
Omaha

MALE: I just can't stand
That hysteric sound
Coming down on me!
I hate prettiness
I hate the signs
Of the Zodiac!
I am no big talker
I am not married
And have no children
I believe something
It is worrying me
When I am not writing
I'm drinking, smoking
Taking and vice versa...

FEMALE: Omaha, can you say Omaha?

MALE: Omawah.

THE END

EILEEN MYLES/TOM CAREY

OUR TOWN, PARTS I, II & III

CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| STAGE MANAGER | David Rattray |
| EMILY WEBB/GIBBS | Eileen Myles |
| GEORGE GIBBS | Tom Carey |
| MRS. SOAMES | Helena Hughes |
| MRS. WEBB/GIBBS | Barbara Barg |
| MR. WEBB/GIBBS | Joel Chassler |
| BABYLONIANS | Steven Abbott |
| | Zach Chassler |
| | Anselm Berrigan |
| | Edmund Berrigan |
| HOWIE NEWSOME/ SIMON STIMSON | Daniel Krakauer |

It is said that the entire play takes place in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire.

The first performance of this play took place at CHARAS, Ear of the Dog Festival, New York City, on May 21, 22 and 23. It was serialized, one "Part" playing each evening.

STAGE MANAGER: I guess you all know who I am. Or maybe you don't. You're not the most intelligent looking crowd I've ever seen. Make your own conclusions then about who I am. Your education begins here. I had to find out the hard way. Now...the question of "where" we are is a lot simpler to deal with. We are in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. Do you have any problem with that? Great... Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, no problem.

(He mops his brow nervously and then unveils the large placard which says DEATH.)

So let's start with DEATH. We have fucked with the original quite a bit to the point where if a character like me (points to self, chuckles softly) gets to know the life-secrets of an entire town...Our Town should open with death, the after-life of Emily Gibbs, a woman born to be dead so she dies on the eve of her wedding--which was supposed to "ease" the marriage, there being no Emily, thus to simplify her relationship as wife to George Gibbs. So let's get going--nice meeting you charming people--and remember, experimentation is the name of the game. (wags finger at audience as he says this)

EMILY GIBBS: Wow, well, you mean I'm really dead? Well, wow, uh, what do we do around here, steal each other's Art? (laughs at her own joke, claps hands delightedly)

MRS. SOAMES: Oh shut up Emily! You were a nasty child and now you'll just be a nasty dead person. I've heard enough. (Mrs. Soames turns abruptly around, leaving her back toward Emily)

EMILY: Wow, you mean no one will pay any attention to me when I'm dead, is it like this forever? Um, will I have to get a job?

MRS. SOAMES: (Delivered as if she were speaking to herself, back still turned to Emily but delivered with much pleasure especially on the word "re-viving" at which she even turns her head a bit) Oh, it's terribly re-viving, but it's awfully slow. You know...the pillow can't talk back anymore and so on.

EMILY: (seeming to step out of her Emily character, moving towards an identity slightly more informed, "authorial") --well, anyway at this point I'll apparently be driven wild with a desire to return... like any of you (she is speaking to the audience now) were any good, ever, at all, in any way...(Turns, grasping her hands together, talking to herself)...so I'll just pick a day and I'll go back...(turns, stops center stage, seems shocked by where she stands, starts violently pointing at the floor, speaking to the audience) ...well, this is that day. get it?! (she seems to be hoping the audience gets it)

STAGE MANAGER: Oh Dear me, now she's really getting confused. But if you can imagine a dead person having hallucinations...? It must be extraordinary.

(George enters and the two begin fake walking across stage)

EMILY: George, let's go get a beer.

GEORGE: Only if you pay, Emily! (The two laugh merrily and skip off to a bar - two stools and large bar sign - face audience)...so let's get married and have kids. I think it would be such fun.

EMILY: (Puts hand on George's) This is where I get confused. Would it be possible for me to get married and have kids, more so from the position of being a dead world, I mean, woman--I'm sure that's really the position of being alone in the world. You'd have to live on roller-skates just for the purpose of getting around. Everyone could just push you places. OK, George, (puts hand on George's shoulder) let's get that marriage. I love beer. Can we have a lot of beer, George?

GEORGE: (Hand on chin, has not been listening, turns head) OK, hon, whatever you say. I'm gonna take a couple of lemons every night and really just sort of goof off. So you can do anything you want. OK Hon? (George has the demeanor of one who is always watching a television somewhere)

EMILY: Oh, George, you're really the best. It's just the way you put things. (She makes small finger gesture at the word 'put')

GEORGE: Oh, Em, there's just one thing I want to ask you about. Emily I like guys.

EMILY: (Her eye light up wide) Guys, yeah I really like guys too. I mean, not up the butt but I do like them. Forgiveness is important but first you really think, you should really wonder what it's like to be them, be those people. Yeccch...I only think stuff like that when I'm stoned and really willing to follow these questions through. Yeah, incredible, trapped inside another's body. Whew, pretty lush, huh?

GEORGE: (chagrined but still watching that teevee "out there") Yeah, "Lost in another's body", really fucked up--let's see what's on the other station--(he stoops and turns an imaginary dial on the invisible teevee) It's a Long Story (his voice booms). Good, I've always liked this one. It's filled with alligators. (He makes crazy, threatening gestures with his fingers at Emily) Gosh, we could have lived an eternity together already, right?

(Emily smiles at George)

STAGE MANAGER: So you see, even in DEATH, it's still JUST LIVING. (He whips out the placard behind DEATH and it says JUST LIVING. He laughs)

The author's mouth is hanging open, thinking about a beer, then a cup of coffee, perfect hang-over pace. Which sex do you prefer? I'm talking about you (the audience) now. Get ready for JUST LIVING. (Ambitiously) (Winks) Mull that one until tomorrow night when JUST LIVING in our town has officially begun.

Part II - "JUST LIVING"

EMILY: So let's go get that beer, George.

GEORGE: Emily, do we have to go this one again?

EMILY: We sure do. Complete constant repetition for the rest of our lives is what JUST LIVING is all about. Listen! (She cups her ear) Can't you hear the wheels slowing down. I love the sound of it, it gives me this slow, good kind of feeling like being a kid again.

GEORGE: Let me ask you something. Are you dead?

EMILY: I certainly am, George, and I can tell you I feel like a new woman...you know, all sort of firm but smokier than ever, you know, beyond control--I like it.

GEORGE: I'm glad you feel so mellow about it, Em. And it was great of you to come (He makes quotes signs with his fingers) "back" under my terms so that I could have a dead wife.

EMILY: (Dreamily) Yeah...but whose idea was it anyhow?

GEORGE: (Emphatically) Dad.

EMILY: "Dad"? George, do you realize what you are saying? You're saying that your father, Doc Gibbs would actually suggest that I die before we wed.

GEORGE: (Laughing into cuff) Yeah, isn't it a gas?

EMILY: Well, I think it's pretty fucking sexist, of course, but still your dad does have great style. The "Doc". (Laughs to herself)

GEORGE: I should show you (reaches into bin of imaginary memory tapes) ...here, yeah, this is The Conversation. Dad was so inspiring. Oh Sorry, do you mind--I hope I'm not being over-bearing, but this tape is really special.

EMILY: No, I think it's great---and really cute the way you have your whole life on file, hmmm what's this one?

GEORGE: "JERKING OFF." (sheepishly) --incredible, it's already 15 volumes of tug, tug. I'm starting to throw away everything but the best. But still, "Best?" Best "Jerking Off?" C'mon. (waves his hand

dismissing the issue)

EMILY: (admiringly) God, you're so sensitive. Let's go meet Dad.

GEORGE: (Puts hand on Emily's knee) Great! I'm sure you'll really love this. (shakes tape indicatively)

(George then sits back, seems to be eating imaginary taco chips. Emily looks at him like he's weird.)

THE TAPE

DOC GIBBS: (Lighting a joint) I was remembering my wedding morning, Julia.

MS. GIBBS: Now don't start that, Frank! (and she places big plate in front of him)

DOC GIBBS: Why, Julia Hersey--French Toast!

MS. GIBBS: 'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something.

DOC GIBBS: How'd you sleep last night, Julia?

MS. GIBBS: Weren't you they-uh?

DOC GIBBS: (He leaps as if jolted) I get a shock each time I think of George setting out to be a family man--that great ganglia--I tell you Julia, there's nothing so terrifying in the world--the relation of father and...(Doc waves his hands as if puzzled as to what "George" is.)

MS. GIBBS: Well, mother and daughter's no picnic, let me tell you.

DOC GIBBS: They'll have a lot of troubles, George and Emily, but that's none of our business. Everyone has a right to their own troubles.

MS. GIBBS: Yep...people are meant to go through life two by two. Tain't natural to be lonesome.

(Doc Gibbs starts laughing hysterically, finally calms down)
(Babylonians walk through)

DOC GIBBS: Who's that, Julia?

MS. GIBBS: Babylonians, Frank. This is a play about "culture" and Babylonians is the oldest culture we know.

DOC GIBBS: Oh. Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you.

MS. GIBBS: Oh, go along with you!

DOC GIBBS: I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversations for more'n a few weeks.

MS. GIBBS: Vagina Dentata.

DOC GIBBS: Vagina Dentata?

MS. GIBBS: Vagina Dentata-ta.

DOC GIBBS: Ho-Ho. See! This is why it's never grown boring. Julia, I never know what you're talking about. (Smiles broadly at her and puts his napkin on the table, wipes crumbs from his lap)

(George enters)

GEORGE: Good morning everybody. Only five more hours to live. (Makes gesture of cutting his throat, and a loud "k-k-k," starts to exit)

MS. GIBBS: George Gibbs, where are you going?

GEORGE: Just stepping across the grass to see my girl. (George is always barefoot) Be back in a minute.

(George waves and then skips across the way to other family table--by now Mr. & Mrs. Gibbs have also scooted with table & chairs across the way and are now Mr. & Mrs. Webb)

GEORGE: (Bows & peeks) Good morning, Spider Webb!

MRS. WEBB: Goodness! You frightened me!--I'd like to ask you in out of the wet (George looks around him, puzzled) but you know I can't.

GEORGE: And why is that? (In a Southern accent)

MRS. WEBB: Laws of Culture, Honey. Groom cain't see Broad on his weddin day, not till he sees her in church.

GEORGE: Aw, that's just Bull Doody, Spider. (By now George is talking totally in a Southern or rural dialect--any) Hello, Bubba Webb.

(Mr. Webb is just entering)

MR. WEBB: Good Mornin' George.

GEORGE: Bubba Webb, you don't believe in that bull doody, do ye?

MR. WEBB: There's a lot of common sense in some bull doody, Georgie.

(Bubba sits)

MRS. WEBB: Millions have folla'd it, Georgie, and ye don't wanna be the first ta fly in de face a custom, do ye, Georgie?

(George is as usual not listening. He suddenly lurches and asks the Webbs hysterically...)

GEORGE: Who is Emily?

(Mr. Webb shrugs and smiles sweetly)

MRS. WEBB: She huzzn't waked up yet. I huvn't heard a sound outta her.

GEORGE: (By now it's clear that George is clairvoyant. He's having a vision) Emily's dead!

MRS. WEBB: No wonder! We were up to all hours, sewing and packing. Now I'll tell you what I'll do; you set down here a minute with Editor Bubba Webb and drink this cup of coffee. (Gets up and starts to head upstairs, stops, turns) There's some bacon, too.

(Emily enters and she talks to George from stage right)

EMILY: George, I don't see where your father got the idea for you to marry me, a dead woman. I don't see it at all.

GEORGE: Huh? Oh, I guess I showed you the wrong tape. You can all get lost.

(Spider and Bubba Webb depart fearfully, like phantoms who have been vanquished)

EMILY: And also, how come your parents look like my parents?

GEORGE: Because it was simpler in terms of casting, Emily. And besides, there was more to it than that. There's something really funny about "Our Town". (To Stage Manager) You tell 'em.

STAGE MANAGER: You know, awhile ago some scientists down in Boston did some experiments. They put a lot of rats together in the same spot; and pretty soon they got so over-populated that they developed all sorts of psychological diseases: They started seeing things that weren't there; a lot of them turned queer and started jumping on each other; they started moving in on families for their own devious reasons; some turned to murder and cannibalism. Well, that's what happened in our little burg. Still, what the Hell, life goes on.... Y'know a very great man once said that some people rob you with a fountain pen.....I don't know what that means. But you'll see it all...tomorrow night. The "End" of Our Town.

Part III

STAGE MANAGER: Thing is, This is Our Town. On Friday night we had Part I, that is, "DEATH". Yestiddy was "JUST LIVING". Tonight is "THE END OF OUR TOWN", but some of you folks never even saw the beginnin. We want to tell you who haven't been in our town what it was like there. Now that it's over. There's old Emily Gibbs over there wanderin' around confused, but that's another story and we'll get to that. Here comes old Howie Newsome the town-drunk and also Simon Stimson the milk-man. No reason why they can't be the same guy, right? Mornin' Howie.

HOWIE/SIMON: Mornin' Stage Manager.

(George walks by)

GEORGE: Hornin' Mowie

(Emily enters)

EMILY: Hi, Simon.

HOWIE/SIMON: H'wo.

MRS. SOAMES: Well, old Howie Stimson Newsome you disgusting drunken milkman, what do you think this weather is up to?

HOWIE/SIMON: I think it will clear up for good.

MRS. SOAMES: You mean no more weather?

(Howie nods authoritatively. Looks at audience a moment and then staggers off stage)

(George and Doc Gibbs enter carrying table, chairs, sit down)

DOC GIBBS: Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard a nice sound...and what do you think it was? It was your mother chopping wood.

GEORGE: (sentimentally) Awwwwwww.

DOC GIBBS: There you see your mother--getting up early; cooking meals all day long; washing and ironing;--and still she has to go out in the backyard and chop wood. I suppose she just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and decided it was easier to do it herself. And we eat her, and I put on her clothes and you run off and be a baseball,--like she's some tired girl we keep around the house but that we like very much. Well, I knew all I had to do was call your attention to it. Not because your mother chops wood, because that's a present we give her. Understand?

GEORGE: Yessir.

(George and Doc Gibbs begin removing table and chairs)

STAGE MANAGER: The play begins in the awful significance of the race...

GEORGE and EMILY in unison: That's not true!

GEORGE: Now wait a minute---let me explain how we met!

(George & Emily set up chairs so they can lie on them like beds--or benches?)

GEORGE: Emily lived over there. Emily Webb. And I lived here. George Gibbs. Son of Doc 'n Julia. We started talking in this way since our bedrooms faced one another. And we were approximately the same age.

HOWIE/SIMON: Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure.--Softer! Softer! Music come into the world to give pleasure.--Softer! Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors!

GEORGE: Hsst! Emily!

EMILY: I can't work at all. The moonlight's so terrible.

GEORGE: What are you working on?

EMILY: Guess.

GEORGE: Oh, shit, I know.

EMILY: Yep, the third problem.

GEORGE: The third?

EMILY: Yes, and it's the easiest of them all.

GEORGE: I don't see it. Can you give me a hint?

EMILY: I'll tell you one thing, I have a picture in my mind. Of something really perfect. And I want it so much I know I'll never get there. Love it, really. So I go along being dragged towards that inevitable picture, fucking up along the way. And when I get there I'll know what it was, all the while dispelling the danger by ruining everything I can...I'll really know that beauty totally because I have held it in my heart as I moved towards it with my dreadful sense of sabotage.

GEORGE: (in radio voice) Nineteen thirty-three was dark all over the world: Japan was already in Manchuria, and the League of Nations was dying in Geneva. In Germany, the Reichstag fire was history--so was

the Weimar Republic. In rich fertile America, fear and uncertainty lay heavy upon the land. Franklin Delano Roosevelt stood with Chief Justice Hughes on that raw morning of March 4th, and a nation with fifteen million unemployed, listened: (in Roosevelt voice) "Our greatest primary task is to put people to work!" Finally, a scant eight years later in a bombed out shelter in a bombed out city, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose say goodnight to the children of England: (in English schoolgirl voice) "We are going to say goodnight to you. Come on Margaret, Goodnight children, Good night and good luck to you all."

(George holds head, shudders, and collapses)

STAGE MANAGER: Well, we certainly went down the river with that culture, didn't we. At this point what you really need to hear is the big boom, you know, the end of all culture. Think of history with a big bang and a big boom like two ears with a big dream inside. This was that dream, Our Town. Ironically, Emily, being dead, gets to keep on because she came back.

EMILY: Oh, fuck.

STAGE MANAGER: But we're not going to let you hear that boom. Boom! Would you like that? Everyone seems to think only part of the culture would die--the rest would be all sores and disease and displeasure. I guess they think it would continue to be just living.

(At this point all cast members wander on stage and move aimlessly about stopping where they like)

The gossip, the drunk, history, functional illiterates, dead girl, just like everything else. Going on, going on. Make your choice, kids, we'll give you the benefit of the doubt--Well, to tell the truth, this is not what Grover's Corners was like. This is not what any town was ever like. I'm sorry, no town was ever like that and that man that first wrote this play--Our Town by Thornton Wilder produced at the Henry Miller Theater, February 4, 1938 here in New York City (just before another fucking war to end all wars) was fucking you over. We're not fucking you over--we're just liars. Thank you and Good Night!

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