

ERA





ERA

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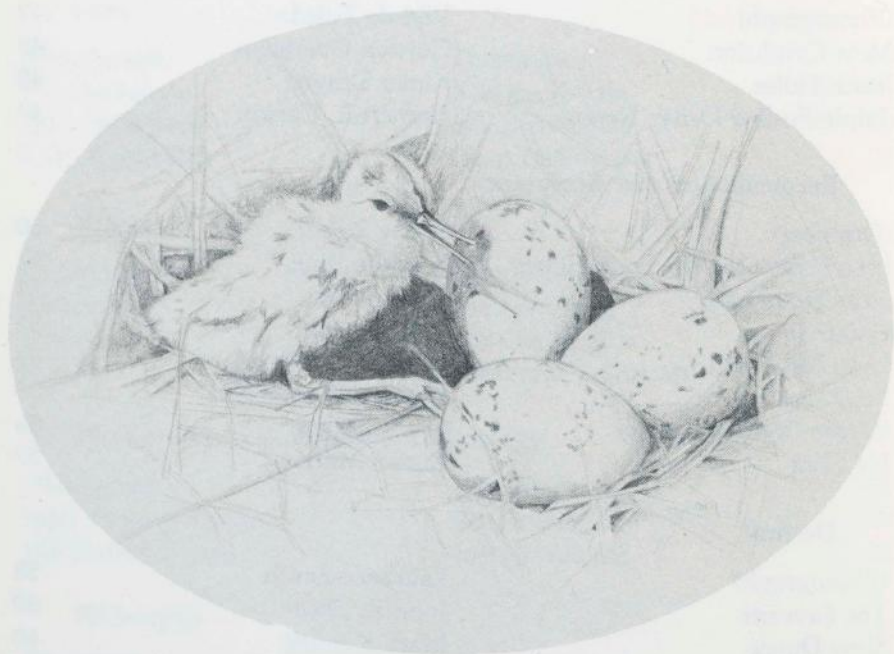
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A Poem for Professor _____

A cool and acid passion
For the Latins and their style,
A cynic's sour disdain
Of us, the fools.

A weary resignation
Masked by strenuous precision:
The Stoic's best defense
Against the world.

Beneath this heat-protective crust
The magma flows
And seeks release
In smiles, in sudden warmth of ideas.

I've learned from you how Romans live,
Formal and
Pragmatic men.
Now I come to class to look for you.

And what strange speaking may take place
When what I write can dance for you
And there are none to see and disapprove?

Greg Varallo

We stand at the edge
Searching for our reflections
In a cloudy sky.

in Arkansas the smell of pine drifted past us winding through
dusty red dirt roads around the hills, treacherous
to automobiles as we climbed a mountain in a '62 Chrysler
(got caught in the foot-deep ditch goddamit had to be
rescued by a nine-year-old boy driving a tractor
plowing his daddy's fields) and the creek-rock houses went by
with a swing on every porch, so did the trailers
cropping up like weeds on a vacant lot.

Gramma in the kitchen, cooking on a wood stove
(never touched the gas range out of fear
"That gawdam thang'll blow up on me") makes jowl meat,
sorghum biscuits, and blackeyed peas, clucking as she shuffles,
heavy and fat. She is old and childish, she smiles
a mass a wrinkles as she counts her sixteen great-grandchildren.
patting a wisp of thin white hair out of her eyes,
she waddles across the creaking, warped floorboards.

in Arkansas the older folks go to visit
turn off the TV and sit fanning themselves
talk about the weather, old times, ailments, relations,
they show pictures; the house smells of chewing tobacco,
sometimes snuff. The young ones look at catalogues
and dream of the city, of overalls worn for fun,
of store-bought clothes and fancy shoes.

Stripping

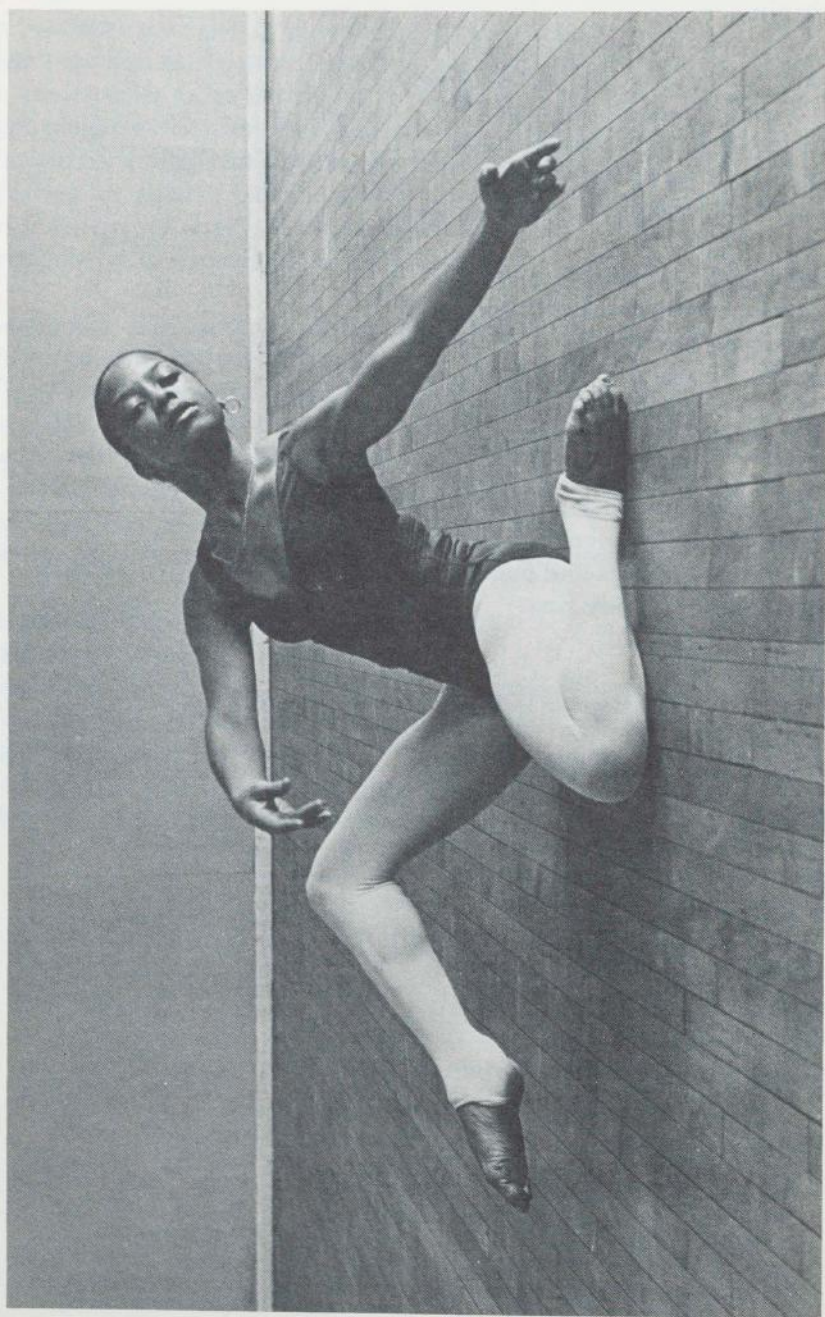
Sliding through the city's darker streets
Down bar encrusted alleyways
The evening's lovely tawdry dawn
Rosy fingered neon deities
Embrace my passage

Above a burlesque theater's door
A window peers into a mirrored room
And I taking shelter
Underneath a black umbrella
Lightly drizzled, slightly sotted
Watch along

A naked matron woman stands
Between the drapes, above the sash
Her cushioned breasts and padded seat
A fully furnished body hers
Invites my eyes
R.S.V.P.
She smiles upon her single faithful fan

The show begins with gentle tease
The gloves have slowly covered arms
The halter holds and hides the breasts
A g-string glides between the thighs
And then a cape has covered all the rest

I blow a kiss, she bows with grace
And turns to seek a lesser stage
While I naked in the rain
Remain until the rolled up curtain falls



DuWayne

The Bachelor

All the women left behind
were photos, records, bibelots, books.
They thereby filled the cozy nooks
of his apartment and of his mind.

The trophies, memorabilia, lined
the walls, like shrunken heads on hooks.
All the women left behind
were photos, records, bibelots, books.

As years passed, he felt flattered to find
his guests giving long looks
at the collections; he took
to saying all were so kind,
all the women left behind.

Song for Lynne

Lynne, the rain moves east,
soon to be snow.
Come—November's beast
crawls near, my ancient foe.

Madly, October grips my soul;
I need to dance, and not alone.
Take me, this unrepentant troll
who'll seize with cold and turn to stone.

Cast your blood hot bones
on winds hot with charms.
Come with fluid warmth
to flow among my arms.

Lady I need your company,
the moon and I turn hard with cold.
Together fire our sorcery
and watch the worlds unfold.

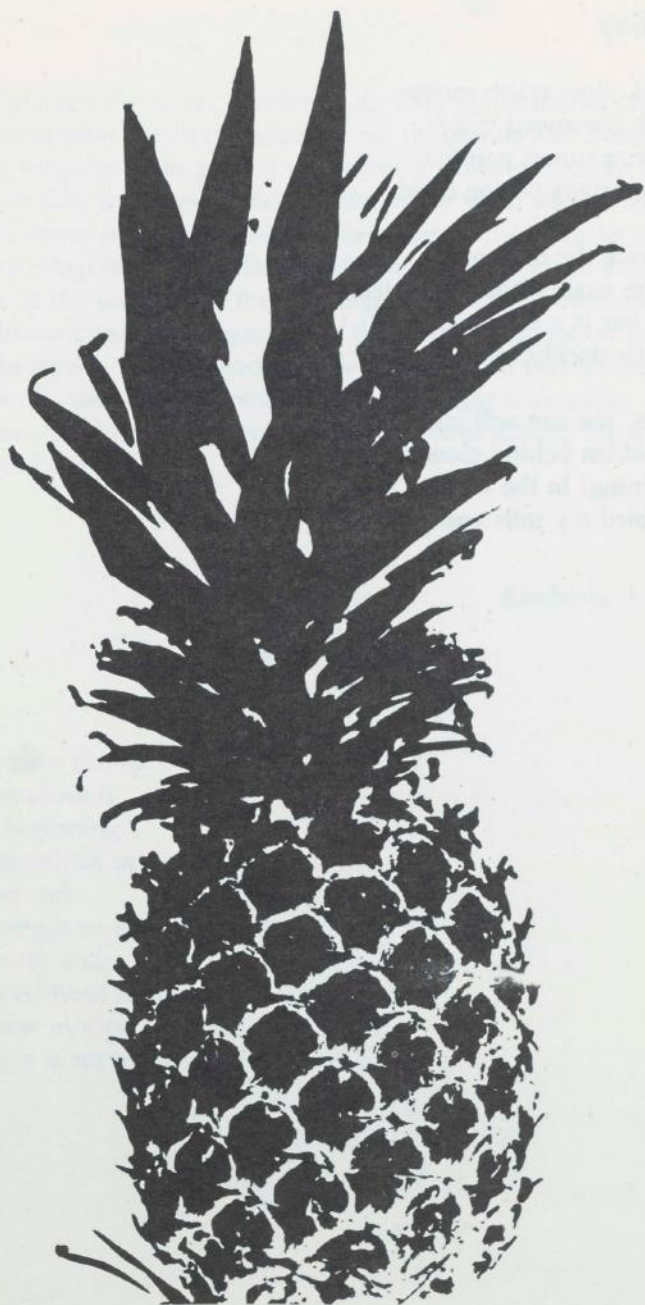
Leon Czikowsky

Lady Armadillo

The aardvark dressed in penguin clothes
Stool pigeoned friends became his foes
Fished for a few parting words
For they would not let him marry
The Lady Armadillo.

Dogged parents knew the better
Sheepishly said in their letter
Set-off as they began their crab
That they would not let him marry
The Lady Armadillo

The lion and the lamb had found love
Had cast the thorns and kissed the dove
Yet both fought against all the news:
An aardvark should never marry
The Lady Armadillo.



Mecox Bay

Over sand, slow water moves,
Alive with borrowed color:
Pink, from a sunset painted
By some master's daring hand.

Hérons prick the horizon,
Dark white against the bay's gleam.
The sand bar is a pale gold.
Reeds rustle darkly, darkly.

In minutes, the sun will pass
And lie hidden behind clouds
Until morning. In the wind
One last bird cry sails and dies.

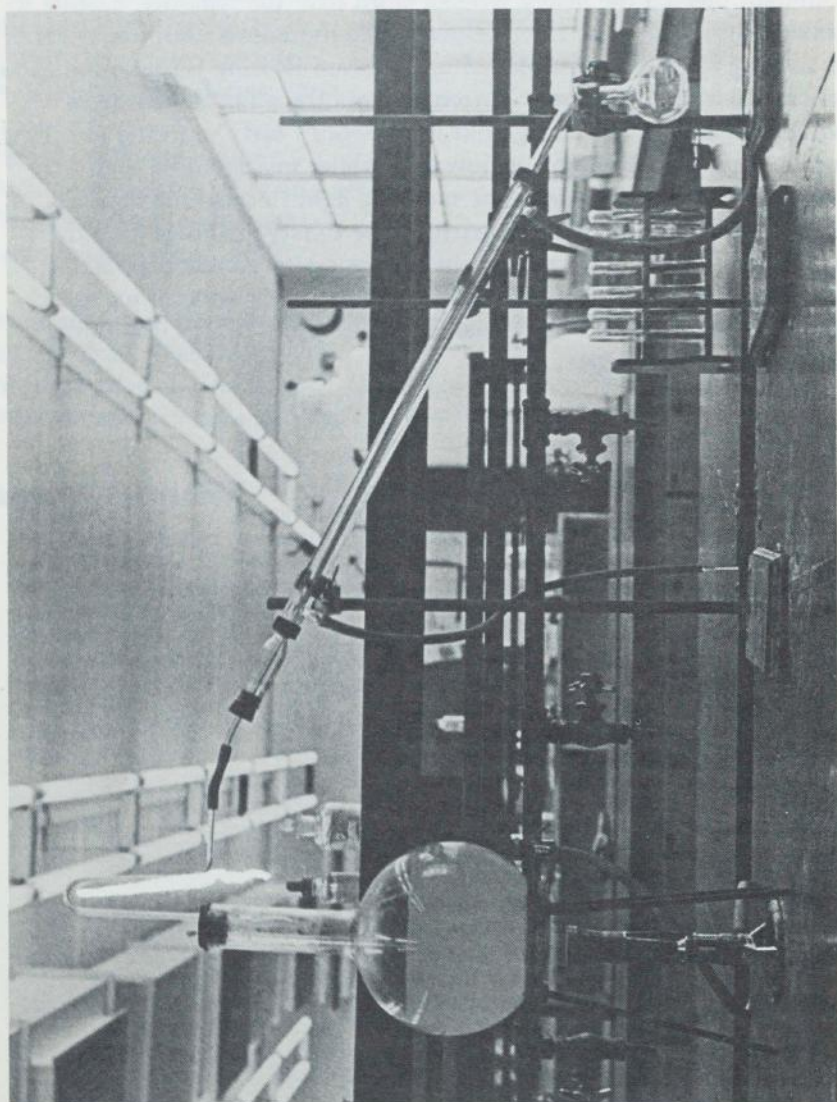
Aubade

Sunlight pierced the heavy woolen cloth over the window, casting its varied patterns onto the floor below, while thousands and thousands of bits of long forgotten dust played in the beam flowing through the glass, deriving their life, their very existence, from the vital, golden light flooding the room with its age-old yet newborn early morning joy. First somber; rich, then brilliant, yellow and white, multicolored and transparent at the same time, the morning light flooded the dark and barren night-watched room, quenching the thirsty shadows with the nectar of the dawn. As it peered into every corner, it transformed, it uplifted; slowly the shadows receded with the night which they could call their own, and, as it happened a million times before, the miracle unfolded; and day began.

Kimberly A. Yulsman

Ripples

With the power similar
to a small explosion
One small beginning
Encouraging others in its
image to expand
Gaining strength as each old one
loses its power and
slowly dies without motion
Allowing new motion to push
on until there is no more



John Eichman

High Tension Towers—New Mexico

The Old Religion
Is driven to the sky
Other kachinas
Stride the plains
When the sorry gods
Strike with light
Their protest
Will man
Ever raise a steel arm
Strike back?

The collier comes,
Bearing black coal,
From the heart of the cave.

Smoke escapes, waste
Hovers above,
Belched from the orifice.

All aboard fill the intestines
Of ship with powdered grit, lift sails,
Take hold the rails, turn the rudder, add direction
To the vessel's vacillations
While stoking engines, spawning smoke
Aiming the hollow artifact for the ever light.

Inside, miners drive windtunnels
Pick the innards of the cliff apart
Carve veins; men who never see the light of day
Run their underground colony
Luminate the abysmal brood.
Fearful murkiness consumed by the common light.

The cliff is fixed
In firmament
Lofty peaks, press the eternal light.
Little men exhume energy
From crevices and cavities,
Scour the substance thoroughly, squeeze from the stone,
Widening the ulcer. Filled collier
Sails blustering bold their prowess,
They leave the vacant hulk to save the granite face.

The skeleton splits.
The bluff's blanched rocks
Tumble death to the sea.

Smoke, waste escapes
And windblown hovers
Above, like a white flag.



Anne Kraus

A Note on the Meaning of Nature and the Question of Natural Justice

The guiding question of political philosophy is the question of natural justice or natural right. This question arises from the authoritative issue of politics, the issue of the common good or 'quality' of life. Among the ways to examine this problem we choose here to discuss briefly the meaning of nature as it has emerged in the quest for natural right. But the problem of nature is not limited to the question of justice. For what is the meaning of the nature of the 'natural' laws of science; and what is the meaning of the nature of the 'natural' sciences as distinguished from the social sciences and the humanities?

To begin with, the natural is distinguished from the artificial. Most obviously, the artificial can be found in the products of the arts, the shoe of the shoemaker and the poem of the poet. These products appear to be the product of human making: the natural is opposed to human artifice. But human artifice does not capture the full range of the artificial. In particular, poetry does not seem to be the fully conscious creation of the poets. It is inspired by the gods, as some Greeks said, or grounded in genius or the unconscious as some of us still say today. This suggests that the artificial includes divine production as well as human production, and that the natural is opposed to artifice in general.

This distinction between the natural and the artificial is connected to the distinction between the natural and the conventional. What happens conventionally happens through agreement or decision, and the conventional things are the results of such decisions. In this sense, many laws, for example, traffic laws, and many customs, for example, rules of etiquette, are conventional. (The precise connection and division between the meaning and substance of the artificial and the conventional, whether artifice is rooted in decision or decision in a greater artifice is beyond our scope here.) As opposed to artificially or conventionally, then, 'naturally' means freely or spontaneously: things as they happen naturally happen of their own accord, independent of artifice, and as they are allowed to happen without violence, interference or force.

This meaning of nature is suggested in the common sense connection of the natural with the spontaneous. But what are often thought to be spontaneous happenings, the arbitrary, the unconventional, the capricious, appear upon examination to be products of willful decision, of violence, or of an extreme artifice. The full meaning of the natural understood as that which happens of its own accord would be or include full independence or self sufficiency. The fully natural things would be

the independent and self sufficient things; other things are natural to the extent to which they reflect, imitate, participate in or are caused by the self sufficient things. Political philosophers may and do disagree about whether anything is natural in this sense, and, if so, what it is; they may also disagree concerning the precise manner in which independent things are independent. These questions are particularly difficult when we attempt to consider whether there is a natural justice. This is because the law, the ordinary center of justice, appears to be preeminently conventional and artificial. For this reason, the phrase 'natural law', which has become the traditional name for what is by nature just, is hardly ever found in the earliest complete discussions of natural right, those of Plato and Aristotle.

But the term natural law is more likely when we consider the second meaning of nature and the natural. Here, the natural is distinguished from the unique. Most obviously, the unique can be found in the proper names of individuals, for example, in the particular political communities and human beings. But what is also unique, even most unique of all, is what appears as the extraordinary, for example, the mysterious or miraculous activity of a god. As opposed to the unique, the natural means the regular, the ordinary, indeed, the customary. And what is natural about something is what is ordinary, regular and usual about it, consequently, what it shares with others.

But the full meaning of regularity is not yet clear, because what is regular and ordinary is in its own way unique and even extraordinary. Customs and traditions vary from place to place and time to time. The full meaning of the regular and the ordinary is the timeless or permanent and the universal. The natural things are the permanent and universal things; others are natural to the extent to which they reflect, imitate, participate in or are caused by these things. Political philosophers may and do disagree about whether anything is natural in this sense and, if so, what it is. On the face of it, there is nothing especially opaque about the possibility of a natural justice in this sense of natural because law is in itself both regular and ordinary. But the variability of laws, or systems of laws, and their related customs and traditions makes it doubtful that any justice could be permanent and universal. In particular, if law is a matter of human artifice and human convention, it is difficult to see how there can be a permanent and universal justice. And even if justice can be traced to divine artifice or decision its permanence and universality are in doubt.

The problem of understanding how justice can be permanent and universal points to another ground for disagreement. Beyond the questions of the substance of the permanent and the universal is the question of how what is universal is connected to its particular instances. For the ancient thinkers, the fully natural things are not primarily

understood to cover all the participants in the nature equally. The nature of justice is not equally present in all communities; the nature of man is not equally present in all men. Not only do their various natures distinguish the various types of things from each other, but any single nature distinguishes or ranks its members. If there is a natural justice, some communities are more just than others; if there is a human nature, to have reason, for example, some have it more fully than others. Needless to say, the precise manner in which a nature at once orders and distinguishes is difficult to specify, but it is related to the elementary distinctions made by common sense: it is analogous to the manner in which almost anyone can distinguish a man, an image of a man, a chicken, and an image of a chicken.

In contrast to this, we find the possibility that what is permanent and universal does not distinguish the members of the natural class from each other. It is this sense that some modern political philosophers consider men to possess natural rights. But it is not even necessary that what is natural about a group of things distinguish it from other groups. What is natural in man, for example, could be considered to be nothing more than his obedience to the same "laws of nature" which govern other moving bodies. In these cases, both the status of the differences seen by common sense and the manner in which the differences can be connected with what is natural are fundamentally in question.

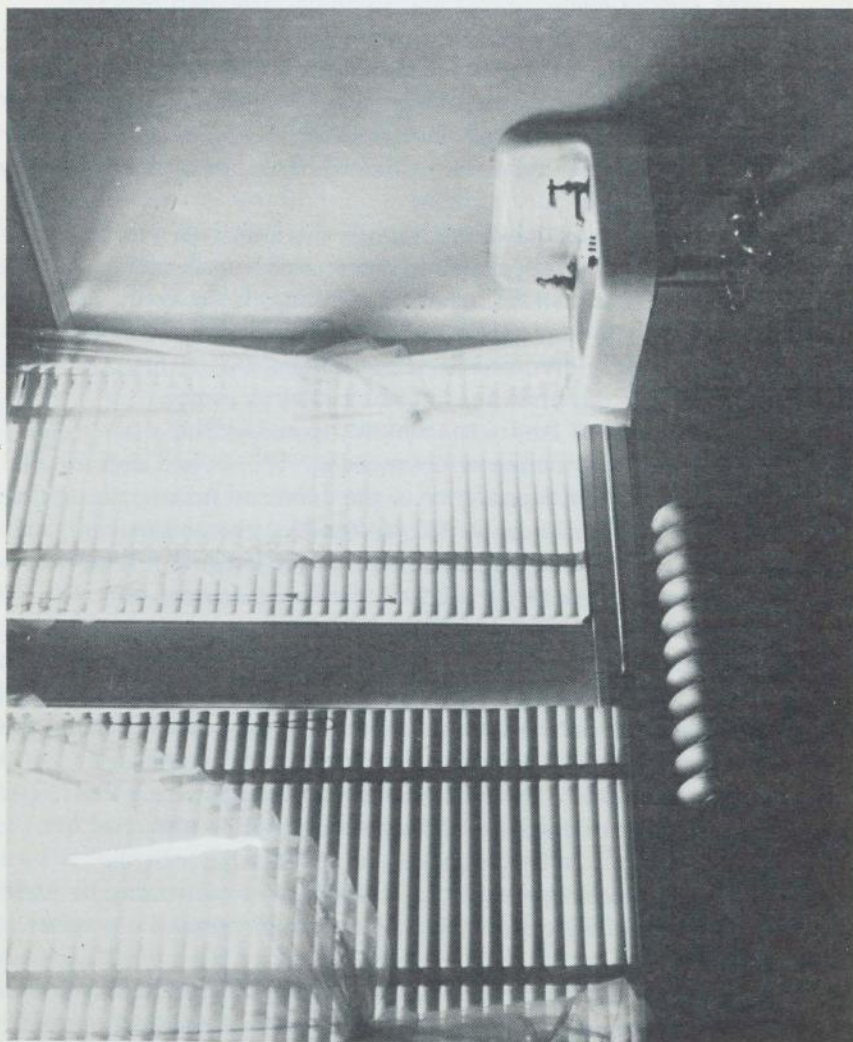
Once we recognize the complexity of the questions of the substance of the natural and the manner of its universality and independence, we can understand the possibility of a series of possible disagreements concerning the *relations* among the things considered to be natural, the manner of the universality and independence of the natural and the two different meanings of nature itself. Indeed, these possibilities come to govern thought after the teaching of natural rights has reached its peak. For political philosophy the heart of these questions is the status of reason and of the justice which is in accord with reason. Where reason is not totally absorbed into the scientific or animalistic world of nature, it comes to be opposed to nature in one variety or another: to that very scientific or animalistic world of nature, to the permanence which gives nature its meaning, to the unforced independence which gives it its meaning. Man comes to be understood as having no nature, or no nature which could allow the existence of natural right. These are the developments we may associate, in varying ways, with thinkers such as Rousseau, Hegel and Nietzsche.

The differences which exist among political philosophers concerning the substance and precise structure of what is natural also permit the possible split between what is natural in one sense and what is natural in the other. First, it is not necessary that those same entities judged to be

the universal and permanent characteristics of something are also what is judged to be self sufficient or spontaneous about it. For example, the natural laws governing man as well as all other bodies may appear to be precisely contrary to the freedom of human actions. Indeed, this understanding is the ground of the prevalent distinction between nature or the world of nature and man, or the human spirit, or the moral consciousness. Nevertheless, in this understanding, the natural laws themselves are still 'natural' laws because they are in some sense universal and self sufficient. But is it possible to argue that those beings which are universal and permanent with regard to particular things are *not* also independent or completely lacking in artifice? Can there be, for example, a permanent and universal justice which is not at the same time self sufficient?

The first division of this question concerns the multiplicity of natures. If there is a universal and independent justice, a universal and independent courage, and so on, what, if anything, is the connection among them? Can they be properly independent if they are connected, i.e., if they are not fully divorced from each other? But if they are unconnected, on what grounds do they share their common characteristics as natures? And what makes it possible that a particular just action can also be moderate or courageous? The second division of this question concerns the dependence of the universal on something that is not itself uniform. What is universal, and indeed even permanent, may be thought to lack independence or self sufficiency because it requires artifice or convention in order to be itself. One might argue, for example, that there are natural laws governing political behavior, but that they obtain their fully appropriate result or effect only with the aid of human artifice. Needless to say, the precise difference between such arguments, particularly in the extreme forms they have taken in the past 100 years, and the simple denial that there is anything universal or permanent, is not simple to discover. Finally, one might argue that whatever is spontaneous and self sufficient could not be universal or permanent because only in its uniqueness as something particular, a people in its peculiar fate or destiny for example, can something be itself and nothing but itself. Here too, clarification would demand a precise understanding.

To elucidate the question of justice or right as it is connected to these possibilities concerning nature is the traditional task of political philosophy. Not least among the branches of this task is the exploration of the following questions: To what extent can the meanings of nature as we have discussed them be made genuinely intelligible apart from the substantive discussion of what is natural? To what extent are such questions themselves natural, or appropriate in a just political order?



Josh Marwell/Philip Meese

The Voice of a Duck

A Short Story in Four Acts

I. Leon used to lie motionless on his bed in the dark watching the shadows cast by passing cars move along his wall. He was writing his novel those times, silently, deftly in his head. The words moved across his mind like the words in a typewriter. They followed the shadows across the room and as each line reached its destination a new one started. He did not move at all when he lay like this. Sometimes he imagined he could not move. He would tell himself, "I am incapable of lifting my limbs right now," and of course he could not do so until he returned to himself that power. His novel was coming along much better now. It had been developing for years, but finally everything was beginning to fit together. Any day he was sure to be putting it down on paper. This afternoon he had bought a notebook, a spiral one with hundreds of empty pages. He had thought to himself, as he waited in the exhausting bookstore line, how lucky was this notebook, so randomly selected, to be the recipient of his brilliant words. How lucky was this notebook to be grabbed from its peers who would soon fall into the hands of dreary medical students and be tortured with boring notes on the alimentary canal and other nonsense. This notebook was destined to be studied by scholars, searched through for clues to the intricacies of his mind. Leon was very sympathetic to the causes of scholars and planned to drop all sorts of notes and references to his personal life in its margins.

It bothered Leon that while he worked so constantly on his novel he had nothing to show for it. He became nervous when people asked if he had begun to write yet and if they might read a few chapters. It became especially uncomfortable when Alfred inquired as to the status of his work because Alfred was now receiving some very lucrative offers from the publishing houses. Last Monday the local newspaper critic had even devoted an entire column to Alfred's brand of "the new realism." Leon thought it strange that Tourquin, usually a man of healthy conservative tastes, had reacted as favorably to Alfred's poetry. It was not that Alfred was a bad poet but rather that what he wrote was so poor. His style was wild and gimmicky. He wrote to please a large, easily bored populace. He wrote fast and he wrote a lot. He had no trouble churning the stuff out and didn't bother to stop and think because he knew his readers would not, either. Alfred's poetry was based on the fashionable liberal causes of the moment, many of which were poorly thought through and with which Alfred did not agree anyway. He would pick a theme and fill

it with cheap, vivid images, doing the reader's imaginative work for him. He would be sure to include some obscenity every twelfth line or so, to catch the reader's attention if it were dwindling. Alfred knew his work was shoddy, but as he explained to Leon, "It keeps me eating and it's easy. I just watch what people think reality is and place it on the paper for them. They certainly seem to appreciate me for it."

Alfred had been known as an excellent writer in his student days when idealism was rampant and no artist prostituted his talents for the sake of his appetite. He had once spoken to Leon of returning to his original intellectual seriousness, but now that he was making money he never seemed to have the extra time. He was already included in half a dozen anthologies of modern poetry and had received an offer to print a paperback collection of his own work. "Hell," he told Leon, "it's a living."

Leon bought the notebook along with some erasable paper on which to type the manuscript. On the bus ride home he decided to begin his note-taking, but he discovered he had no pencil. He thought of asking some schoolboys in the seat next to him if he might borrow one, but they were bigger than he and pretending to be very tough. Besides, the ride was too bumpy for writing. The walk from the bus stop to his apartment was unpleasant because it had been made of use by so many neighborhood dogs. Just as he reached the steps to his building he slipped and fell against the railing. The paper bag containing his new possessions landed in a smelly mess. He picked the bag up and stomped inside, ignoring the angry demands of his landlady that he wipe his feet. Luckily, he discovered entering his apartment, none of the paper had been harmed. Only the cover of his notebook was a little dirty, and since it was brown no one would notice. He smiled, thinking of his naive biographers. After he had fixed himself a chocolate milk, the only thing left in his kitchen except for the awful casserole his mother had brought him last week, he settled down to begin page one.

Leon's mother is a widow, his father having died when he was still in college. He had once had an older sister who succumbed to polio at fourteen, so Leon is all his mother has left. She would like very much for him to come home and live with her because she is very lonely and she knows he does not eat well. She would like to see him settle down at whatever he does and begin to make some money. She does not mind that he wants to be a writer, but she would like him to be a wealthy one, perhaps like his friend Alfred is becoming. She would also like him to marry Caroline, who is a nice girl and seems to have a promising career in the music business.

Leon found himself having problems with the first sentence. Since this was only a notebook and not the actual novel he decided to be very straightforward and not worry about attack.

"This is the journal for my first novel. I have not decided on a name yet, but I guess names are unimportant. I have been thinking about this work for years, since I left college three yrs. ago, to be exact. I really don't know where to begin. My head is full of far too many thoughts that I can possibly write at one time. My inability to write more than one thing at a time will surely be my downfall because I shall someday explode. In any event, I have decided that my first novel need not necessarily be my best—indeed it may only be a start, and therefore, I do not have to say right away every thing that is now unsaid. I have the privilege to choose what interests me the most (although I am not always sure what that might be . . .)"

Leon stopped and read what he had just written. He had wasted a paragraph and said nothing. "That is not what I meant," he mused. "That is not it at all."

He leaned back and gnawed his pen. He had to somehow organize his thoughts.

"Plot: no plot. This is a static novel, a novel of ideas. The plot has no importance. What am I talking about? There is so a plot. Well. Theme: inconsistency of reality? creation and invention? I'm not really sure. This sounds like a high school book report."

The phone rang. It was Caroline inviting him to dinner. Leon was glad to accept because he was hungry and had no money left for MacDonalds. Before he left he tried writing some more.

"The problem with the writing profession is that there are no predetermined laws of discipline for us to follow. Other kinds of artists must work within a strict regime but we have little by which to judge ourselves and must construct our own standards. Musicians, painters, dancers have such an easy time with all their practice and sweat. We must mold our own forms."

II. While the spaghetti cooked Caroline played for him the final movement from the sonata on which she had worked all day. It was Beethoven, their favorite. Leon recognized the melody, but not the piece. It was in G. He sat at her feet as she played, admiring her tone which was rich even in the miserable acoustics of her damp apartment. He tried breathing in time to the meter and found himself gasping. He wanted to hum the theme with her as she played, but was afraid to be a distraction. When it was done, she stopped for a moment, breathless, then put her instrument back in the case and went to see about the spaghetti. She pushed back her hair as she stood in front of the steaming pot and Leon noted the redness of the little scar she carried on her neck, the proud wound of every violinist.

Caroline was special. During her conservatory days her student recitals had been packed with admirers (and some jealous violinists). She had gone off to study in Paris and London and come home a humbler, but better musician. She met Leon in a ticket line at the Academy. Isaac

Stern was playing with the orchestra and Caroline had hopes of studying under him. The box office had misplaced both of their reserved tickets, so they had to be content with some inferior seats in the amphitheater. She did not get to meet Isaac Stern that night but she and Leon became friends and afterwards went back to her apartment for coffee.

Now they were having coffee again. Dinner was finished, the dishes were stacked in the sink, and they were lying in her bed drinking bitter black coffee. Caroline was explaining her plans for a March recital.

"It's a very little hall, but I think the idea of intimacy is very appropriate. It wouldn't have to be full length, but I think it would be good to include the Vivaldi and of course, the Beethoven. The school says I can have the hall for nothing provided I give them ten percent of the profit, if there is any. I'm not sure if that's a good deal or not. I should get a manager. What do you think?" But Leon was not listening.

"Um, yes. What?"

"Leon, are you all right? You seem so distant today."

"Um, no. Listen, I've started to write my novel."

"Started? I thought you've been working on it all along."

"No. Yes. Well, I begun to put it on paper. Before I was just organizing it. I was working on it right when you called."

"Leon, what do you do all day? You have a stupid part-time job and all that free time. I was sure by now you'd be about finished the book. And why are you so elusive about it? You could at least tell me what it's about."

"You don't understand. You think just because your work is handed to you on a platter that it's the same for everyone else. Well it's not." Caroline saw that she had upset him. He was usually not this cranky after he'd eaten.

"I'm sorry." She kissed his shoulder. "Tell me about it."

Leon was afraid, partly because he had written so little and partly because telling her would form some kind of commitment . . . what if he wished to change the whole thrust of the book after he'd told her?

"Go on." Her music stand was beside the bed. He hung his empty mug on its frame. The Beethoven fluttered to the floor.

"Well, it concerns the subject of selective reality." ("Most novels do" thought Caroline.) "It will be a book within a book. The hero will be a writer who is writing a novel about a writer who is writing a novel about a writer who is writing a novel and so on. My hero wonders if reality is made by the man and not what makes him. That sort of thing. It will be very musical. He will have a girlfriend who is a flautist."

"Flutist. 'Flautist' sounds so stuffy."

"He will have a girlfriend who is a flutist. She will represent true reality—no, truth—because he sees music as the purist art, its organization and beauty are so perfectly fused. Since he believes truth is

perfect like music, then music is truth. Does that make sense?"

"No, but go on."

"He will have a best friend who writes pulp novels and becomes very rich."

"Have I heard this song before?"

"Well, I've changed things around. Anyway, the friend, who I will call 'Norman'—*Nor-mal man*, get it?—represents lies, all false things. My hero stands for illusion because all writing is an illusion of reality."

"That's what the arts are for."

"Except music. Music is perfect and therefore real . . ."

"I love you for being so illogical, but sometimes I wonder how you got through college. What's your hero's name?"

"Alexandar."

"Come on, that's your middle name."

"No, I've changed the spelling. Anyway, the flau—flutist leaves the hero and runs off with the pulp novel writer."

"Good god."

"I haven't decided how to resolve it. It's all very Spencerian."

"I've noticed. And thanks a lot."

"I have to manipulate things for the sake of the story. Do you think I should change the hero's name to George?"

"I think you should decide how to end this thing. You say you've been thinking about this for three years?"

"The plot has changed considerably since I started. It was originally to be an epic poem about rabbits, but rabbits have since been used in the form of a best seller."

"Maybe you should get a full-time job." Caroline closed her eyes and yawned, signalling the end of the conversation. Leon was annoyed by her attitude but also aware of how ridiculous he sounded. He could hardly blame her. He wished he could have explained himself better.

"That is not what I meant at all. That is not it at all."

"What?"

"Nothing. Maybe I should go back to school."

III. When Leon woke Caroline had already left for a lesson. There was a note for him on the table:

"Oran. Juice in the refrig."

The coffee pot was still plugged in and she had left him a little red vitamin next to his napkin. Caroline was a fanatic about the taking of vitamins. She had a tackle box full of every sort available on the market. When Leon first met her he had thought she might be a junkie. Caroline could not convince Leon to take hundreds of vitamins daily and had to be content with his consuming one little red one. He drank his orange juice and swallowed his vitamin. Caroline had taken his mug from the music stand and washed it. He poured some coffee and sat down to

wonder if he'd made a fool of himself last night. He decided he had and resolved not to discuss his novel again until it was at least halfway written. Then the phone rang. It was Alfred, "Hi, there was no answer at your place so I figured you'd be here. I'll be in your neck of the woods at one. How about lunch at MacDonalds?"

"Fine. What time is it now? I don't see any clocks here, just a few dozen metronomes."

"It's noon. See you in an hour." Alfred hung up before Leon could answer.

Alfred came to MacDonalds prepared to pay. Everyone who eats with Leon knows they will end up paying for him. Leon is almost always broke and when he isn't he is saving to pay his rent. Leon had arrived first and was sitting at a little table near the door. Albert bought hamburgers and milkshakes, his favorite food, and they settled down to talk.

"I spent yesterday signing contracts with my publisher. He thinks this will be the best selling anthology since *Spoon River*. I'll be happy if it pays for my Toyota. I'm going to call the book *Park Here Free* in honor of my car and sit back and watch the critics find some deep symbolic meaning in the title. Then when I get interviewed by Johnny Carson I can repeat what the reviewers said and pretend this garbage really means something."

"Why do you do it, Alfred? Why make an ass out of yourself just for money?"

"Oh, I'm not the principle ass in this deal. My readers, the ones who pretend I'm really saying something, are the real asses. Besides, better to be asinine and contented than a starving idealist. The way I see it there are two types of writers: those who observe what other people would like to think is reality and write it all down in bad verse, and those who don't observe anything or like to change things, who capture their own versions of reality and write it all down into good poetry. These are the malcontents and very often they lose their wrestle and never get their thoughts on to paper, or else the asses make them tear it up."

"So nobody sees things as they really are: no one writes the truth. That's pretty depressing."

"Well, of course there is a third class of writer, but they are so rare that I often forget to mention them. They're the ones who see life as it really is and don't have to steal other people's reality or invent their own. They're the ones who can laugh at all the horrible twists of the world because they understand it so well. We definitely do not have enough of them. They seem to die very quickly because they don't mind what happens to them. They find things interesting and amusing, especially inevitable things such as death."

"You mean Tommy, don't you?"

"Yes. Tommy was one of them. He would have been alive today if he hadn't been so fascinated with the underground trolley system. He loved to look for those trolls of his, under the pretext of taking the subway home, so much that he went even at night with a terrible hangover."

"I remember something you said that night before Tommy died. Remember, it was right after the graduation we were celebrating with a bottle of bourbon . . ."

"You were celebrating, friend. I never touch the stuff."

"Right, well I don't remember too clearly because I was pretty drunk, but you said something to Tommy about his being so different because he could see the trolls and laugh at them as well. I didn't know what you were talking about. Is that what you meant?"

"The trolls, the trolls. Tommy and his trolls. Yes, that's what I meant. You see, at the time I was considered to be the most gifted of the three of us. My writing hit closer to home than yours or Tommy's. I'm sure our old professors are cringing to read the muck I'm putting out today, but what they won't understand is that I was just as bad a writer when I appealed to intellectuals. I did the same thing I'm doing now. I saw what they wanted to read and then wrote it all down for them. You were different. You walked around with your shoelaces untied, you ignored everything that didn't appeal to you. You wrote about things as you thought they should happen and then you convinced yourself that what you'd written was true. I've always admired your ability to change things around you that you didn't like, but somehow everything seems to catch up with you. You tell yourself that your shoelaces are tied even if they're not and then you trip down the steps."

"Tommy had the amazing ability to see things just the way they were. That is why life did not upset him. That is why he talked about the subway trolls. He knew they were there and was not afraid to say so. He was not afraid to die because he knew death was coming anyway. He was going to die eventually, so why not in the subway? He did want to look closely at those trolls. I don't imagine he minded being killed so much. It was an interestingly dramatic sort of death and I think it probably amused him. His writing was not so popular when we were in school, because it was difficult to accept. It gave people the same feeling that the morning sun does when it shines through the dust on your window and all over the dirt in your room that the night had covered so well. The sun is a joyous thing, but it shows people things they don't like to see."

"So you think Tommy had the most potential of all of us."

"Not exactly potential. I'm a terrible writer and that has nothing to do with my style. I am a traitor. I write to please people, I write lies. You write to please yourself, and therefore you often don't even bother to put things on paper. You are selfish and you do not like to share your ideas."

Tommy was different. He wrote to write. He loved people and wrote to them not condescendingly, but helpfully. If he had lived a little longer and they had listened to him, he could have shown them how to laugh at trolls. But things as they are, they probably wouldn't have listened to him anyway."

"Do you really think I'm selfish? I'm not selfish. Just last night I tried to explain the plot of my novel to Caroline, but I think I did not convey the spirit of it too well. I am very bad at expressing things orally."

"That's because you can't change reality as easily when talking to another person. They are always trying to get you to say logical things."

"Yes, that's exactly it. Caroline is always requiring that it be logical. Her biggest complaint is that I've been working on my book for three years and I haven't thought of an ending yet. She says I should get a job."

"A marvelous girl. Your mother wants you to marry her."

"Who told you that?"

"Your mother. I met her in the store last week. She asked me to try to influence you."

"Just like Mom. You and she and Caroline would get along just fine."

"Do you think you might marry Caroline?"

"I would ask her, but I think she would turn me down."

"I doubt that you could stand living with her anyway. All that noise! And her E-string's almost always flat."

"It is not. Caroline always plays in key. Since when do you have a good ear?"

"I don't. I just wanted to make you feel better."

"Speaking of critics, I saw Pierre Tourquin's column on your poems. How did you ever get him to do it? He knows enough to recognize bad poetry."

"Very simple. I winked at him at a party last month and had the rumor spread by a few of his copy editors that I'm gay."

"You what? How could you do something like that? Wait a minute— I didn't know that he was gay."

"Yes, I heard from a very reliable source."

"I can't believe you would do that. Don't you have any pride? What happens when this rumor gets around?"

"Oh, I can pass it off as a rumor. My close friends know I'm straight and that's all that counts to me anyway. As for Tourquin, he doesn't matter. He's written his review and I'm finished with him."

"Incredible."

"But it worked."

Leon finished his milkshake with a long slurp. He was glad to have gotten a free lunch. Otherwise he would have had to eat his mother's casserole. Maybe he could go to Caroline's again for dinner. He would

first go home and write out an orderly outline for his novel. Alfred was saying something boring about his publisher. He was discussing fees.

"I'm getting three thousand to start and then royalties. That's enough to pay for most of the car. Do you think this is a good deal? I should get a manager."

"You manage pretty well on your own." It was beginning to rain. Alfred drove Leon home in his Toyota so he would not have to walk the few blocks in the rain. Alfred looked at the building with disgust.

"You really should move into something nicer. I bet the roof leaks."

"I don't mind. I pretend it's a palace with built-in water fountains."

IV. Leon ran from the car to the foyer, getting very wet. His landlady screamed for him to wipe his feet.

Once in his apartment he tore off his wet clothes and put on his old bathrobe. He draped his clothes all over the bathroom to dry. Then he lay on his bed to think . . . and fell asleep. He dreamed of trolls, ugly creatures with pierced noses and great tufts of green hair on their heads. They looked much like the horrible little dolls his sister used to have. His sister was dead now, but she came back to him with her trolls. They were in a winding grey tunnel and the trolls were wailing. Leon wanted to speak to his sister but she could not hear him over the troll noise. Soon she faded away and things grew silent. He was awake. Leon sat up in bed. The sun was going down and he was very confused. He did not like to sleep in the daytime. He wondered what time it was but could not remember where he'd put his watch. He would have called for the time but he was too disoriented to find the telephone. It was too hot in his apartment, as it often was in the wintertime. He tried to open the window but the rain came pouring in. The darkness of the rainclouds, he noted, made the hour seem later than it really was. He sat down on his bed to think. It would be nice to see Caroline tonight. She hadn't mentioned about going anywhere so she was sure to be home. He hadn't been invited but he would pretend that his visit was a carefully planned surprise. It would be rude of him not to bring anything with him and since he was broke he decided on the bottle of rose he'd been saving since last Christmas. He could also bring his mother's casserole, but that would mean that they would have to eat it. No, the rose would be sufficient.

He had just enough time to shower, shave and briefly outline the plot of his novel. After dinner he could explain it to her more clearly than he had last night.

Whistling, he went into the bathroom to start the shower. His wet clothes were still draped everywhere and he did not know what to do with them. He put them in the refrigerator for lack of a better idea.

In the shower he sang parts of arias from *Fidelio*. When he could not

remember any more of the lyrics he sang Coke commercials. His landlady was downstairs banging on the pipes for him to be quiet, so he sang louder.

After his shower he gathered his shaving equipment and carried it into his room. His bathroom had no mirror. He brought a little basin of water and placed it on his dresser. He spread shaving cream over his face, thinking how he had a nicely formed facial structure. As he panned the length of the room through the mirror, he saw a man sitting on his bed.

"Tommy!" The razor nicked his cheek. Tommy was smiling at him and scratching behind his ear. He had always scratched behind his ear before beginning to speak.

"You never could shave your whiskers without cutting your face up." Blood was trickling down the cream and onto Leon's t-shirt.

"You scared me. I'm so surprised to see you."

"Oh, that's perfectly understandable. Don't let me interrupt you. We can talk while you shave."

"So, uh, how have things been? I haven't talked to you for three years. That sounds ridiculous."

"Don't apologize. Most people in your position would sound pretty silly. I've been just fine. It's fascinating in the world of the mind."

"Alfred and I were just talking about you this afternoon."

"I know. I heard you. Fred is a funny guy. He always thinks he's understood more about a situation than he really has. It doesn't harm him, though. He's going to be a very rich man."

"Rich, but unfulfilled."

"Unfulfilled? No. Fred has always been full of it. Actually, he will be very happy because he really doesn't respect people enough to be bothered that he doesn't give them anything worthwhile. The ironic thing, of course, is that they are perfectly content with his garbage. You, on the other hand, will not be happy. If you are ever able to write your novel, and I wish you luck, it will not be accepted. People are generally uninterested in good novels that present things in an odd perspective. You should have been a musician. Too bad you can't carry a tune."

"That's what I always say. My mother once wanted me to be a doctor."

"Mine, too. All mothers want their sons to be doctors or priests. Medicine, unfortunately, is extremely dull. Its purpose is to prolong something that must inevitably end. The priesthood speaks for itself. Funny thing, though, my sister is in medical school right now."

"Maybe my sister would have gone to medical school if she had lived."

"Is this the one who liked trolls?"

"Yes."

"Bless her. It seems like a rather unfair thing to make women become

doctors. They go to all the trouble of creating life, so we really should not expect them to have to prolong it as well. They are so much more clever than men to begin with that we should not waste their talents. They understand just as much, maybe more, about life as men, but they pretend to be so innocent. That gives them lots of room to play marvelous tricks on us poor unsuspecting critters."

"I agree. Just last night I was explaining the plot of my novel to Caroline and she pretended not to understand what I meant or why I hadn't decided how to end it, but I'm pretty sure . . ."

"That's one of the reasons I came here tonight. I wanted to tell you not to visit Caroline."

"But I was going to surprise her with this nice bottle of rosé. I hoped we could discuss my novel in greater depth. I was going to prepare some notes on it after I'd shaved . . ."

"I would advise you to stay home because Caroline will not be alone tonight. She would resent your intrusion." Tommy examined the bottle. "Lancer's '74? Terrible."

"Intrusion? I don't intrude . . . what do you mean she's not alone?"

"In one hour she will be with Pierre Tourquin. You know him, the local arts critic."

"Tourquin? No, you are absolutely wrong. I am sure of it."

"I heard her invite him myself, this morning in Rittenhouse Square."

"Rittenhouse Square? Caroline has a class at Curtis . . ."

"And Pierre lives in the Barclay. I see them meet in the park often when I visit the pigeons. This morning about eleven he walked her to the bus. They were holding hands. Before she got on she said to him, 'Come to my place around six. We're having leftover spaghetti.' Like that. You were still asleep at the time. It would be a bad idea for you to go over there now."

"But this isn't possible. Tourquin is gay."

"Gay? Oh, Alfred is usually half wrong about most of what he says. He heard a rumor that Pierre had circulated himself because he has his eyes on the editorship of an arts magazine that Time-Life is planning to subsidize. Pierre had heard that the guy in charge of selecting the editor is gay. He's not either. He just said that because he's been fooling around with the wife of some mafiosi character and would like to remain alive until he can get rid of her. She's become very attached to him, I hear. It's all very funny."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes, it's all true. Life can be even better than a novel. I suggest you change the plot of yours. It's more interesting if taken from life."

"If this is true, then why did Tourquin give Alfred such a good review?"

"Caroline told him to, of course. Caroline does love you and she

wishes the best for your friends although she may not like them. Too bad you don't fit into her plans. She could take good care of you."

"Plans! That little bitch! Just like Alfred and my mother."

"No, not at all like them. Your mother is inactive and Fred is clumsy. Caroline never makes a bad move. Her career will be spectacular and she won't have to sacrifice any of her integrity—artistic integrity, that is."

"What some people will do for a good review."

"I thought it would be good to tell you. You're not mad, are you? I thought you could handle it better if you found out all at once instead of in pieces. The whole situation should add another dimension to your novel. You know, I've always thought it would be nice if you could sort of carry on for me since I can't write any more. But, of course, don't feel obligated to change your plot for me."

"Tell me something, have you ever—uh, visited—Alfred?"

"No, I don't think he could benefit from a visit. I watch him a lot, though. He doesn't do interesting things like put his clothes in the refrigerator. Just once when he was sleepy he put toothpaste in his hair, but that's pretty cliché."

"I feel really bad about Caroline."

"I expect you'll get over her pretty soon. Maybe you should look for an oboist this time. The oboe is the voice of humanity unless played badly. Then it becomes the voice of a duck."

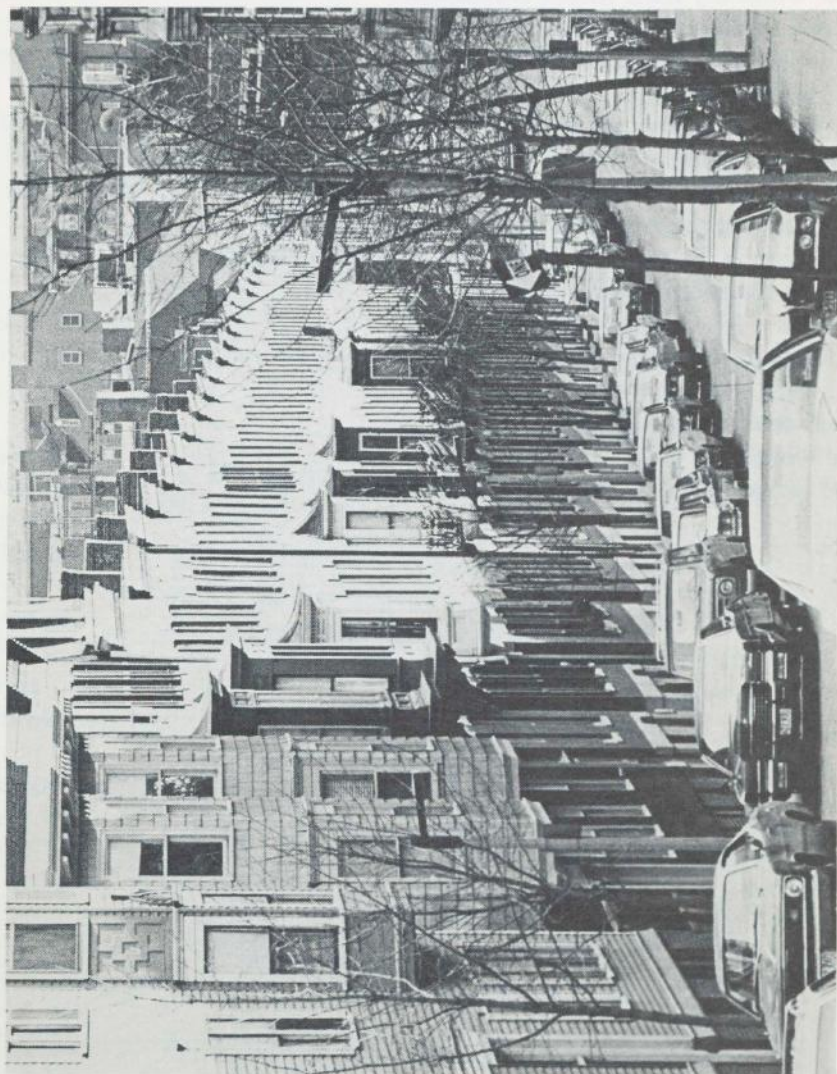
"*The Voice of a Duck*. That sounds like a good title for my novel. Maybe I'll make my hero's girlfriend an oboist instead of a flautist. The voice of the flute is too pure to suit real music."

"Now you're thinking. I shall leave you here with your notebook and typewriter. I suggest that you try some of your mother's casserole. It will taste a lot better than your wet socks. Oh, and change that t-shirt. You look like you've been murdered and you can only be murdered once."

"Tommy, before they got you in the subway station, did you see any trolls?"

Tommy laughed. "You'll have to figure that out yourself." Then he stood up and did something that Leon had seen often in the cartoons as a child. He walked through the wall. Leon jumped up after him and ran his hands along the wall. It was solid. For a moment he stood there not knowing what to do. He wanted to tell someone, anyone. He thought he might burst. He found his telephone under a stack of papers. Who could he call? Not Caroline. Not Alfred. He would tell him later but not tonight. Not his mother. He wished for a moment that his sister were alive. He could have talked to her. She understood trolls . . .

Leon grabbed his notebook. No, longhand was not fast enough. He tore open the package of erasable bond and shoved the first piece in the typewriter. He began as furiously as his two-finger method would permit.



Justin Schechter

Batwoman at the Cocktail Party
for Sue Kaufman

Like wings my dark wishes enfold me.
I hang here upside down, unobtrusive,
unnoticed, contained as a package.
But what if I were to unfurl
my black crepey wings and flit
about the room, swooping, dipping,
unsteady as the inebriate guest.
Who among the women would cover her hair;
who among the men would assume protective poses?
Across the room stand my old
lover and his new mistress
whom I have been watching all evening.
If I were to circle them, kissing
them death cold with my wings,
she would say only, "How droll,"
and he would say nothing at all.

Four-headed Coign

the man
with the cane
inciting the roses'
rebellion

is asked
to leave by the guards
of the pavilion.

the sun

wears the rain
like a mask
with a veil—

the clouds
wear the sun
like a gem
in the navel;

the man
with the cane
leaves
unbroken.

the flowers
cheer him
away.

A Near Miss of a Day

If it was nice weather outside,
I would walk.
Yet, as it stands,
I'm sitting in the rain.
But, it's no comfort to know,
that I'm not the only one;
It's almost a tendency
today.

Some feel that there's nothing
a spread-full of peanut butter
from Spain can't cure.
Others don't.

I feel that fresh bean sprouts are so good,
that even when the cream-cheese tastes oniony,
they're at least
a near miss.

Mark Kamine

Like an Ant

All of a sudden he can walk like an ant. He wets the tips of his fingers then wipes them across the soles of his feet. He tells his friends, "in twenty minutes, outside the door."

His friends wait outside the door. The door opens up and the man who can walk like an ant appears. His friends divide and he walks into the midst of their division.

He turns and faces the door, licking his fingertips. He wipes his wet fingertips across the soles of his feet and walks toward the door. He walks right up to the door then continues to walk. He is walking up the front of the door like an ant.

His friends are convinced. They run to the door to walk up it before they fall along the ground.

The Flim-Flam Man

You have come
here
to sell your fantasies
but who will buy?
The young girls
giggling into their hands
as they handle your trinkets?
The old men who keep
their eyes fixed on you
even though they turn their heads
to spit out their tobacco?

They are, all of them,
suspicious of you.
And you,
you have only come
to sell your fantasies
but no one desires the comfort
of your gilt edged clouds.
These peasant people
look to the sky for rain
and to the soil for realized dreams;
and you,
you look to your fantasies,
the pyramid stacked bottles
of dreams.

Can it be that your sincerity
will pierce their calloused skin?
Will they buy your illusive
imagination?
Will they buy
your fantasies?

Each night you see the stars
without looking upwards,
and you tell yourself,
"If not this town,
certainly in the next.

There is always someone
in need of a dream."
and you,
you dream with your eyes open
of selling your bottled fantasies.
Who will buy?

Mandy Uhry

In Gamble with the Sport

The odds at racetracks. The
sweat of horses pursing lips and
draining jangling coins of wasted men
in wasted lines
of tiny, darkened booths of promises
and gleam.

The riders of the beasts exchange
unspoken words; the circles of evasive
blurbs without illusion
without the damning sound.

Meshed within the muscles of
men and horses is terror and the
chance of rain. And then, there
are the crowds. (In blizzards,
thaw, they fetch and
they receive.)

At once,
the hooves that hurt the ears
that stretch and swell each frantic artery
sing each fragment of a narrow track
leading only into itself. (These beasts,
called dumb, can't see to leave the circle
or feel the gravel's incredible sting.)

Below this rhythm; the winnings,
the hollow crackles of the cash
two dusty mice, crushed and filthy

scream and scream.

Turnbull Depressed

Prone outside The Tavern
at noon on a bright day,
Turnbull's eyes angrily follow
a darkening path of depression leading
from the sun and under
the blue sky, over some buildings,
across the intersection, and through
the door
to a bar stool where he sits
and drinks, staring at what lies beyond
the endpoint he's on, staring
at the world of pure drink
whose citizens are bottles on a shelf.

Enjoying things more with the fourth drink,

Turnbull's fit for battle;
he turns around, glowers
outside, and strides out to freeze
the sun with mug-cooled
hands and break the blue walls, raving

discreetly, stumbling, cursing
quietly at people who watch and keep distance.
Turnbull, sweating—today the walls
don't break—looks down, defeated,
but wishes for a storm and knows

the night will cover
what is criticizing him
and be a pillow
which whispers to his ear
comforting words of justification.

Drunk Turnbull sighs, lowers his head,
and wipes it on his way back inside, smiling.

Novacaine

Mostly, he remembered being cold.

He had other, more vivid impressions of childhood as it had been; certain familial lacerations of a particularly striking character, but mostly he remembered being yelled at and shoved whenever he came too close to a source of warmth.

Away from the oven!
Away from the heating vent!
Away from the furnace!

Shoved away, twenty times a day, but always he kept circumnavigating his chilled universe hoping for five minutes of uninterrupted communion. Five minutes huddled over vent, its hot, steamy breath misting through his clothes to embrace the frail body; or oven's fiery caress as he lay back upon; or if stealthily he crept beside Father's straining back, greedily taking as the gaping mouth exposed the huge, dry, blistering kiss; then and only then did he feel the warm, enveloping tendrils slide down his body.

Mostly, he remembered being cold.

Then the witch tied up in the room down the hall shrieked, and the threads of memory, severed by the sudden, vocal slice hung limp and useless. She shrieked again, which meant that the imp had somehow gotten into her today, and that she was being punished. So he went to his special corner in the dayroom, the place that felt safest, the space between the couch and the bookcase, and hoped that the imp would overlook him. For sometimes it happened that the imp came to visit only one or two favorites and then passed on.

The witch was one of his favorites. And so was the little boy, the one they yelled those terrible names at whenever they beat him. But he wasn't a favorite . . . not he. Oh, the imp visited him sometimes, and then he felt the same way the witch and the little boy felt, but that wasn't very often.

Most times he just felt empty, like a barrel full of air, or a sack of promises. And flat. And listless. And he was glad he felt this way. It was better to feel nothing, than to feel the way he had felt before. As if a stinging wasp had been loosed in his brain. But now the wasp had been put to sleep.

So he snuggled into his hidden burrow, wide eyed with apprehension, and gradually, as the witch's shrieks subsided, he slept. And he dreamt.

When he woke, it was with a sense of exaltation, as if somehow all the troubles that had plagued and bothered him were over. All his worries and distractions had been calmed while he slept. The witch was still. There were no sounds from the little boy.

Slowly he crawled out of his hiding space and stood erect in the center of the dayroom, his bare feet cool against the tile floor, as his toes gripped slickness. The sun slipped in through barricaded windows; grilled metal bands threw a shadowed pattern that leaped across the floor to pounce upon his pale form with visible gladness. Unfeeling, he suffered this reckless embrace that tattooed him with rhomboid emblem.

This was a good place.

That was not his thought, for since coming here he had not bothered to consider whether the place was good or bad, better or worse, than the last place. He was simply here. In a place. And every place had rules to be learned. Duties to be done. Dangers to fear. To him it was simply a place.

It was the day after he dreamt that he remembered he knew how to write. He did not remember exactly when he had learned, or who had taught him the trick, but he remembered he knew how.

So he stole an eyebrow pencil from the head nurse and paper from the bathroom and started to tell himself a story.

It begins in the early morning, just after dawn. A man leans out of a window to have a look at the street below and in so doing casts his shadow out over the uninspiring view. He turns away in disgust and goes back to bed, but his shadow remains on the grey pavement. Since it has nothing better to do it wanders about the town, occasionally attaching itself to passing strangers when it tires of moving under its own power.

Passing the barred gate of a courtyard it notices a crowd of the curious and stops to see what has attracted their attention. It slips from body to body, gradually making its way to a position where it can see through the barred gate.

Then it sees that an execution is about to take place. On the left a row of armed soldiers stand with their commanding officer. On the right, tied to a post, a young woman in a flowing dress and dark red shoes waits for death. She seems out of place in this drab courtyard among these coarse soldiers. Her dress, her bearing, her firm courage contrast sharply with the crowd peering in through the gate. It is obvious she is about to be killed by those inferior to her for some crime that the shadow can not hope to guess.

Just as the firing squad is about to perform its duty, the woman shuts her eyes, murmurs inaudibly to herself, and begins to click the toes of her shoes together furiously. The shot rings out, the bullets strike, and

the body slumps. The crowd cheers desultorily, then disperses. The shadow stands transfixed, for only it, for some unknown reason, has understood what the woman murmured to herself, under her breath, as her red shoes furiously clicked away.

Slowly, the shadow turns from the scene and moves away, repeating over and over to itself; in a voice like the breeze blowing through vacant space, her final whisper; "There's no place like home, there's no place like home."

All day the shadow wanders, alone and forlorn. Everywhere it goes it sees only the signs of misery and despair. The people, as always, lead meaningless lives, and are hounded by exploiters from the cradle to the grave. They mouth platitudes to explain their plight and wallow in self pity. No one thinks to try and improve conditions, for that would be dangerous overreaching.

In the evening the shadow follows the crowd to the theater, where they buy popcorn. Also rotten fruit and vegetables. The popcorn for themselves. The rest for the actors.

The play begins. The shadow sits impassively while the audience grows more and more enraged by what they see. They hurl the garbage and verbal abuse at the actors; not because of any profound antipathy or hatred for the play, but simply because it is a theatrical convention.

As the play ends, a figure enters from the wings; it is the man who cast the shadow at the beginning of the story. He stands amid the debris, waiting for silence, and when he has the audience's full attention he makes this announcement:

"Will everyone please leave the theater: there has been a death in the family. Return to your homes."

The house lights come up, and the audience in a panic leaves hurriedly, until only the shadow in its seat and the shadow's double on stage remain. In the glare of the lights they see each other plainly. Rising, the shadow begins to applaud wildly. Its double accepts the applause with a modest bow.

And the story ends.

The thing he liked best about this story when he read it to himself afterward, was that he did not understand a single word of it. It had not come from his mind, but from some alien being that he had not suspected existed before now. In fact, it was so much a part of some other self, or some otherworldly view that he could not believe he had written it.

Much later, when he chanced to come upon it again, he would look at the scrawled words and wonder who had created them. But for now, there was no need to wonder. Only to remember.



Mint Condition

I once was special
like a brand new coin
Admired and touched
But the hands that caressed me
Have also tarnished me
So dull and smooth
No hard edges
They might as well melt me down

Karen Drayne

Black Holes

Black holes
are burnt-out stars
Instead of facing a cold retirement
in the spare rooms of space
they choose another way,
collapse like folding chairs,
condense to infinity
The dog-stars chase their tails and finally
catching, swallow
till there is nothing there at all

Some questions
are so unanswerable
even a shaft of sight
is captured in them
and no echo or record
can return to the brain

I want to suck in
a mouthful of the universe
and spit out
one
perfect
star

Triple-Bodied Deity, Nereus
(*Painted Limestone, c. 560 B.C.*)

Twining snakes writhe,
triple-bodied Nereus
rises in amaranthine splendor,
his plaited scales shining wetly,
his three heads wreathed
in archaic smiles.

He bears gifts from the sea:
streaming water, warming flames,
a gentle dove rescued from the waves,
symbols of seasons perennially changing
in the ceaseless splendor of ancient myths.

Bearded benevolence, archaic memory
of a time when triple-bodied deities
smiled, and man could embrace as inspiring friend
the dank scales of a writhing monster.



Let's Have One for Longfellow

An old man sits within a firelit room,
And quietly takes up a notebook there,
While ghosts of medieval legends zoom
Up from shadows flickering by his chair.
He smiles, and as he does, the room grows bright,
He writes, and from a page where was no sound
There comes a melody such as once might
A young man, thinking of a maid, have found—
 In murmuring pines, or an ocean's roar,
 In anvils ringing, or a minstrel song,
 In patter of rain, or of children's feet,
 Hard galloping hoof-beats, clanging of chains,
 And the sudden hush of a darkling night.
His music lingers like the simple prayers
Of children who go laughing off to bed,
His verses cling like memories one shares
With old friends at a table, breaking bread.
Yet nothing in his songs rings truer than
The gentle friendliness of this good man.

Fifty Years Later

Grandma left Poland
Twenty years before the War.

Brothers and sisters—dead,
(Bullets in their skulls,

Heaped upon each other in
A trench near Cracow.)

If she'd never left she'd be
Buried with her family

Grandma mourns her life
Before she mourns her dead.

Greg Varallo

Trees bend in a wind
Bowing to the unseen force
Yielding to survive.

Lines for Kevin

If recollected pleasure
Were the equal of or brother to
A now occurring joy
Sadness would not trace these lines
 But since a recreation
 Of that third night's celebration
 Is only pallid imitation
DESPAIR is all that moves this pen
And yet the need to know is great
Of all the things revealed and lost
Or missed by chance
The path not taken
May indeed a difference make
A friend has said
"Experience is but the grape
From which the wine of memory is crushed"
UNTRUE—the wine consumed that night
Was TRANSCENDENTAL to the taste
It never had an earthly form
So, reluctant and dissatisfied
With little hope for slight success
I strive to make again

The day began with ancient ships
Ocean born perfection
Children of a bearded father's
Love for speed and grace
The mist above Manhattan
Parts with thunderclaps
And driving rain and sandstorms
Blown off Sandy Hook
The clouds dissolve
The sun revealed
The clipper ships come gliding
Down the river's eye
An old misshapen sailor
Sitting near me on the ferry
Takes time to lecture on the ships
Their qualities and characters

An one time mate of Melville
Returning for this moment
Disappears at voyage end
Then train to Philadelphia
In time to see a ballet
Based upon the work of Ives
Based upon the art of Eakins
Conception on conception of conception
Overwhelming generations
Moving then to pagan pleasures
Sitting joyous at the terrace
Mrs. Bloom the lovely dancer
Having brought the bottle chosen
By Pasquale sure the subtlest
Kindest merchant of the vintages
And artist of the old Erard
Miss Flame the perfect hostess
Alma mater of the senses
Mister Star is playing Schubert
With encouragement from Goldsmith
With celestial jewels they cut
We leave for other quarters
So that Isaac may instruct us
In God's ways
Patriarch and father
Suffering has led you to this grace
The party ends but Mrs. Bloom
Takes time to teach me simple dance
Her undulant white skin sheds light
Upon the graves beneath the church
And in the ruined garden: *Pas de Deux*

Kevin
These are the moments lost to you
Who introduced us all
You formed us but to leave us
Just before this last fruition
Perhaps your finest work
An evening objectified
Through failure to participate
That night your *objet d'art*
MAKER of our party
Take these words in place of pleasure
We are the characters upon YOUR urn

Pour Joel

Un verre rempli de douceur
sur la table
et je choisis de ne pas la boire.
N'y a-t-il pas de reflet dans la tasse
qui tremble lorsque tu pleures?
N'y a-t-il pas un petit étang
que nous avons goûté tout à l'heure,
Qui a laissé une amertume sur les lèvres?

On recommence.
On lave la tache avec les jours qui passent
Comme l'eau qui disparaît après la pluie.
Et notre tempête, est-elle finie?
On recommence.
On prend les heures comme on laisse pousser l'herbe;
sans le vouloir, ni le pouvoir.
L'orage est en nous et les nuages se parlent.
Ils ont conquis le soleil.
N'y a-t-il même pas un arc-en-ciel?
On meurt et on fabrique une religion.

Sous l'arbre on se repose et on s'échappe.
Quelqu'un a oublié son chapeau.
Il se couvre la tête avec les mains et se met à courir.
Il commence à faire noir.

Nous avons oublié d'être pieux.
L'amour est abandonné à l'hiver.
Sa froideur tombe comme la pluie, et
Nos paroles comme une neige de chagrin.

Whose Choices Change

I might wear a color
as pious as navy blue.
The neatest of seams
would be at my shoulders
and throughout my closet.

I once wanted to wear
only the most violent purple
all the time.
I was a waterfall in its natural course,
hurtling, shattering,
crying into its new space.
The landscape, the dimensions,
the heavenly noises—all
over-the-edge energy to be sapped,
engineered to
empower whole cities
and tough, mountain regions.

At the end of this spirited dream
the first sounds I hear,
the first difficult lament
is accompanied by preludes.
Where the water ribbons sprayed,
I saw a rare indigo mixed
with a sad, sad, slate blue.
These colors wavered
between each other's claims.

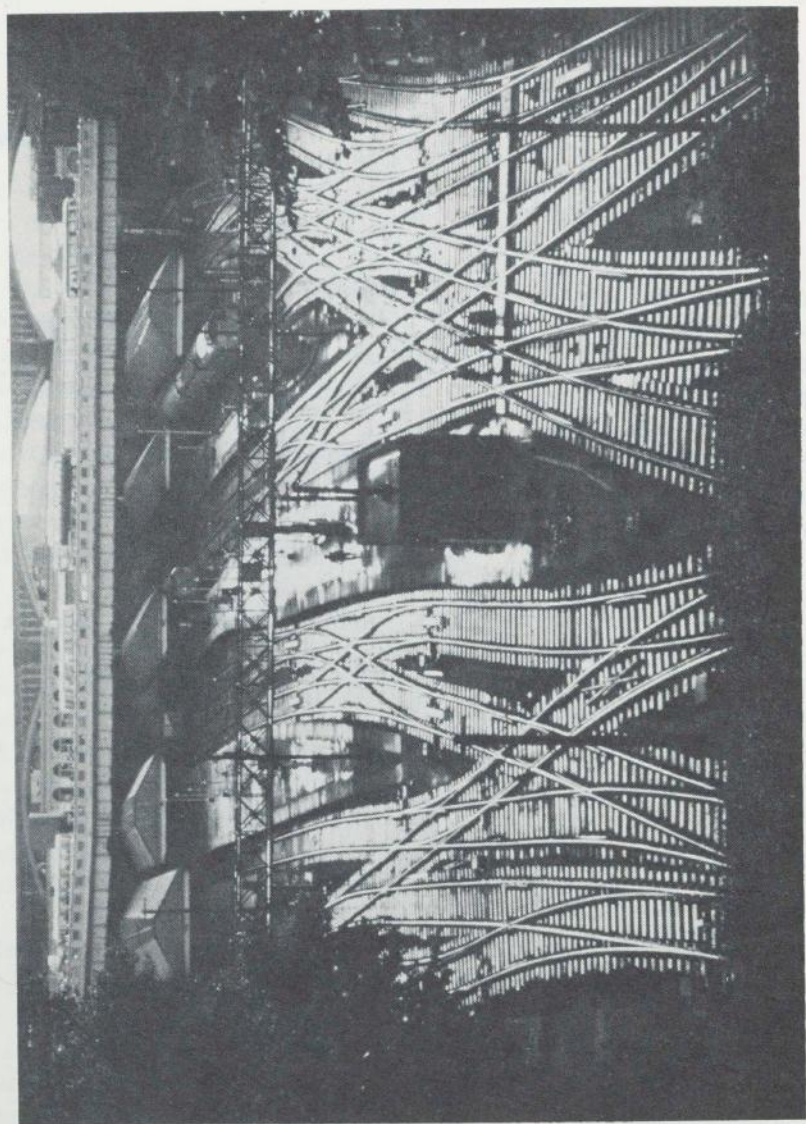
What colors do I wear?
It is too difficult for
me to crave purples
now. I suppose that there may not be
enough silently thundering water.
And there are no waking songs
of Chopin blue.

Nor are the carefully laid seams
my character.
What is now settled in my shoulders
has little promise for piety.
New motions must be made.
What clothes will I wear?

Daniel J. Marcus

It's Cool

It's cool with me
Very cool with me
No problem
No problem at all
Honestly there's no hassle
Wherever you go
It's cool with me
Very cool.



Laurance Smith

The Favorite

I have laid waste his hill country
and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.

—Malachi 1:3

"Come, my hands are hungry for you,
To hold you to a mother's breast.
Jacob, how pale you are, your hands
Are so cool and white. Your brother,
Red Esau the hunter, shuns me.
And yet one womb produced you both."

"These are a young man's hands, mother.
My voice is still soft, unbroken
By the morning chill, or the shouts
To sheep straying over the green.
Leisure has been my way too long.
My brother, first-born, will receive
The patrimony, goods and name:
Magic blessing in a worn touch.
Esau, no doubt, will grunt his thanks."

"In the fields, he kills his father
Game; he is a violent man. You,
My favorite, sit idle in tents.
With our wit gleaned from many days
Of watching, let us play our hand,
Hide your hands in the skins of beasts."

"My game was barter: his birth-right
For a meal of lentils and bread.
All I want now is what is mine,
That which he cared so little for.
And no man can call me trickster
To supplant him in Father's heart."

Slow Dance

A lioness
follows the dodges
of a zebra.
The plain falls by,

we can see
the dust fly behind,
form dry clouds.

The slowmotion camera
almost shouts to us,
"the predator
will win."
We clutch
livingroom furniture.
We don't know
who to root for.



Picture by a Mentally Ill Patient in the Ohio State Hospital

The trees are thin,
Translucent shapes.
Their dead leaves
Ask for the roots. Answers
The dirt, There are none. Still,
These trees aren't moved
By any wind.

Once a stranger told Baudelaire
That he could only love
The clouds that pass,
But these clouds are connected
To the earth with invisible threads
Like the stars at night.
But these scattered clouds
Are gray, gray stars
Brought closer to the earth
To make a larger presence
In the daytime.
The fire is gray,
The burning is within,
There is no sun.

The house, more a mound,
May be a farmhouse surrounded
By teeming fields
Of weeds
Which tell me
That the house is empty,
That harvest passes by.

In the foreground stands
A human, a shadow,
Out of touch, the body
Made of threads, apart
From everything. He stares
At the observer and asks
No questions as he cries mechanically
For help.

And in that cry lives
A fist of loneliness

Directed toward the world
And toward the artist,
Telling me the artist
Won't live again until
The fist is drawn
On the arm of a whole man
The likeness of himself.

But suddenly, the mountain in the back!
It isn't drawn as it should be:
Its form like a human
Mold covering a man waiting
Underneath to explain
The shadow in the front.

And everything is gray,
As gray as shale
Which took the sunlight
Underground.

Rolph Schaebin

Headhouse Square August 1976

The moon is hanging low over the city.
Look down toward the river where the blue-cold
shimmer threatens the startled vessels. There,
dangling in its black-and-whites, minutely
sways that full pale face wider than any deadman's
glazed tongue and open gallows stare.
And the moonlight—
it is angry and insatiable,
hurling itself against the panicked office buildings
and choking the exposed cornices.
People hungry it is and unstoppable, strangling
the talcum-soft city nightwalkers who
rub off at the edges step by lunatic step,
powdering the busy intersections and
coloring the swirling river waters.
Look past the shivering masts: the moon has
a bitter look and chews but cannot quite swallow.
Its mastications tease the dry breath from sawdust lungs
and smother the unsettled sailors' dreams.
The moon is hanging low and full and it menaces the city;
it is the city night, the city's suffocation.

God and Boundless Time

That motor is running.
 Its quiet hum will destroy me someday:
 the pieces of machinery working in unison
 to end me; and just to tempt me into
 believing in the myth of nature,
 there are songbirds to add harmony to
 the droning of that infernal machine.

That motor is running.
 The game is in progress:
 its quiet hum will destroy me someday,
 on and on it goes with cyclic motion,
 each small piece working in unison
 to throw me out of the game;
 and just to tempt me into believing in
 the myth of nature,
 the sounds of songbirds disrupt
 the droning of that infernal machine.

The game is in progress

Someday I'll either win
 or
 lose
 On and on it goes with cyclic
 motion
 the pieces and players
 moving in
 unison
 to throw me out of the
 game
 and just to tempt me into
 believing in
 the myth of winning
 there are songbirds
 to disrupt
 the droning of
 that infernal
 machine

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