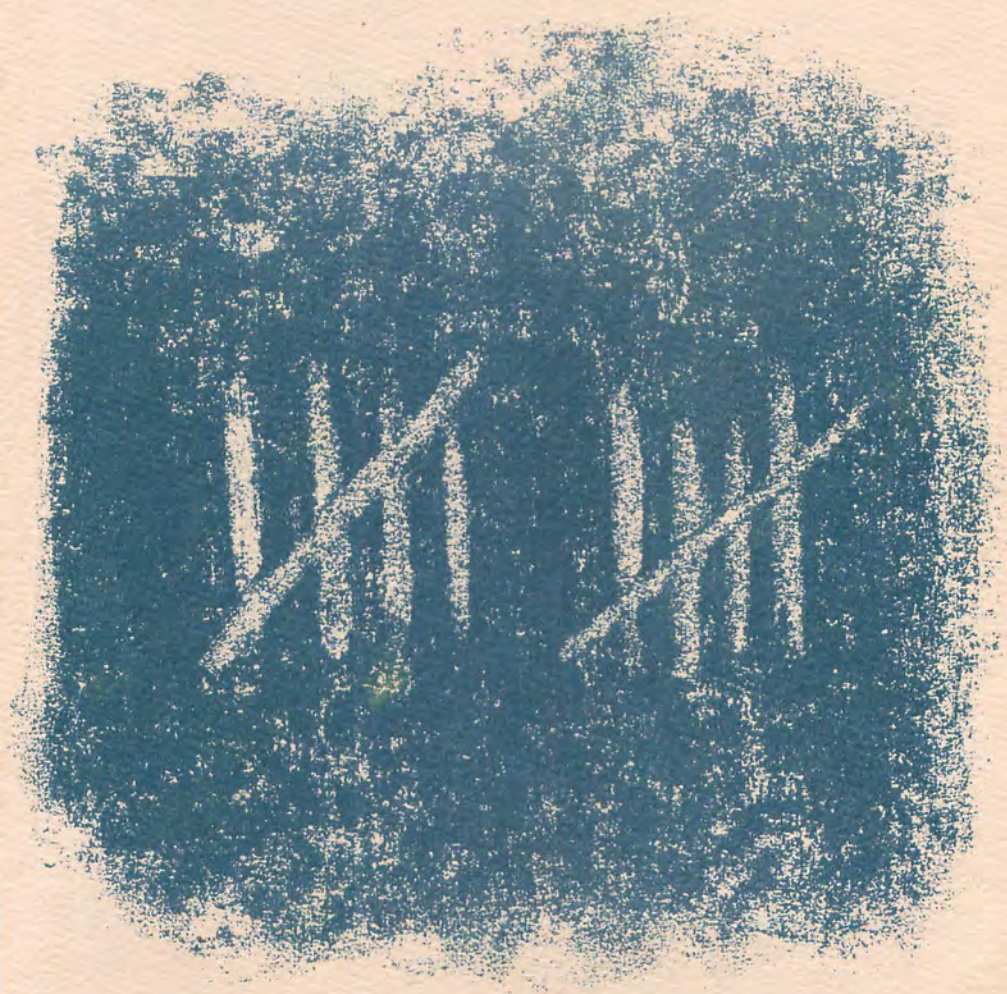


WATERSHED



WATERSHED

A Literary Magazine

Watershed

Editors

Shawn Evans
John Hastings
Lois Hicks
Elizabeth Singh

Advisor

Ellen Walker

Cover Design

Wendy Wyrsh

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Heart of Hearts: The Land and the Book

*May you think about me
All through the day and the night!*

*May you come here to me every day!
May you love me as I love you!*

I say this and I cry to myself. I cry and cry.

I moved.
I met someone.
I changed my diet,
Point of view.

I got over it,
I guess.

The first passage is a Yana “love charm.” The second comes from *Trial Impression* 1979. For millennia, it turns out, here beside the oak trees and trout streams, lovers have been lamenting in verse the inconstancy of the beloved.

Much, of course, has been lost. The songs, chants, and legends have vanished, like the Yana themselves and the Ponderosa pine. We have only scraps. And if the pioneers brought forth poems and novels and dramas, few of us know it. *Diggin's*, the journal of the Butte County Historical Society, records much of interest but no great literary activity. Nor, so far as I can tell, did the written word thrive hereabouts in the first half of this century.

In 1956 Frank Clarvoe, a local newspaperman, published a novel, *The Wonderful Way*, though the book seems to have been written

before Clarvoe came to Chico. In 1959 John Gardner arrived to spend several memorable years before being fired, in part (so the story goes) for an irreverent and soon suppressed history of Chico State. In the introduction to Gardner's posthumous *On Becoming a Novelist* (1983), Raymond Carver gives a wonderful picture of the crew-cut, church-going Gardner and himself in those days, and in *The University Journal* #21 (1982), Lennis Dunlap offers more reminiscences. In fact, Gardner while here published little and though amazingly prolific later on, left few reflections of the place. See, all the same, the 1966 novel *The Resurrection*, which parodies an actual lecture by Dunlap and impishly attributes to Chico State faculty various "books" such as *Capturing and Training the Elephant* by "Prof. P. Nordhus."

In general our local writers, unlike their Indian forebears, have rarely revealed any consuming sense of the spirit of the place. Carver, for instance, has left only glimpses.

Rice fields float under the moon.
Even the wet maple leaves cling
to my windshield.

—"Highway 99E from Chico"

Donald Junkins, the reigning poet twenty-plus years ago, published in *The Sunfish and the Partidge* (1965) fine poems of hunting and fishing, but the landscape is New England. Newly arrived myself, I wrote and published a novel while watching the walnut leaves fall, but the scene is Europe (*The Disciple*, 1968).

Few of us are native (even the Yana were driven from the flatlands by the more aggressive Wintu), and, transplanted, we are pulled toward what we have left as well as to the West where, for the moment, we have settled. Novelist Len Fulton has written about the Wyoming Territory in *The Grassman* (1974) but returns to his own Yankee boyhood in *Dark Other Adam Dreaming* (1976, play version 1984). Playwright Lynn Elliott, a Welshman, is drawn to our past in *Alta California* (1978) and to a brutal local killing in *My Town* (1982), a troubling meditation on racism and evil in the peaceful land of Ishi and the Bidwells, but in *A Woman Called Antonietta* (1984), the setting is Pirandello's Italy. Ken Kuhlken, a San Diegan, writes of Tahoe in his 1980 novel *Midbeaven*, and Ray Barnett, a southerner, deals with China in his forthcoming thriller *Jade and Fire*. And though I, a city boy (New York, San Francisco), drew on the events preceding the Little Bighorn for "A Winter's Tale" (*Pushcart Prize IX* and *The Interior Country: Stories of the Modern West*, 1987), I too have scanted the West and the local

scene, unless you count “Loon Woman” (*Descant*, 1980), an improbable yoking of a faculty grievance hearing to an “archetypal” Yana myth.

It is no surprise, then, that Butte County has not become Yoknapatawpha West, and that we have yielded up no Spoon River, Winesburg Ohio, Main Street, or Lake Wobegon. Still, it is a mid-westerner who has drawn most deeply on our history, even as he looks over his shoulder at the place from which he came.

I am George Donner a dirt farmer
who left the snowy fields
around Springfield, Illinois
in the fullness of my life

So begins our most famous literary achievement, George Keithley’s epic retelling in verse of the fated 1846 wagon train expedition that perished (for the most part) in the Sierras. Excerpts from *The Donner Party* appeared in *Harper’s* in 1971; the book was published the next year; dramatized versions followed in ‘73 and ‘75; then came a readers’ theater production, an opera workshop presentation, and a full length opera with a world premiere in Chico on November 16, 1979. (A detailed account of these incarnations appears in *Phantasm* IV, 4, 1979.)

Drawn once again to history, Keithley wrote a prize-winning play about Aaron Burr, *The Best Blood in the Country* (1981), and later this year he will publish *Scenes from Childhood*, poems of the Midwest. Back in 1974 he published *Song in a Strange Land*, a poetry collection that ranges across time and space to include Butte County and environs: “Geese Going North,” “The Red Bluff Rodeo,” “After His Assassination a Place of Peace.” The last two pieces, along with Michael Lopes’ “Fourth of July (Woodson Bridge)” and three Gary Thompson poems, appear in *California Heartland* (1978), required reading for Valley dwellers, north or south.

Here, in local poetry, we come closest to catching our own reflections and that of the land. Since the early ‘seventies chapbooks and anthologies have poured forth. Some poets have paused—often to teach, write and publish—then moved on: Lopes, *Mr. and Mrs. Mephistopheles & Son* (1975); Mark McCloskey, *All That Mattered: Poems* (1976); Debora Gregor, *Movable Islands* (1980); Deborah Woodard, *The Book of Riddles*; Quinton Duval, *Dinner Music* (1984). Others like Alison Zier, *The Middle Aged Princess and the Frog* (1978), and Thompson, *Hold Fast* (1984), have lingered. A list of more-or-less resident publishing poets might include as well: Phillip Hemenway,

Dennis Ross (*The Conversation of Strangeness*, 1980), Kevin Campbell, Kathleen Gallo, Sharon Paquin, Kate Hulbert, Wayne Pease, Gary Will, Ken O'Connor, Mark Rodriguez, Susan Wooldridge, Paul Gunther, Craig Philbrook, Chris Bristow, Joanne Allred, Byron Fountain, Barbara Kimball, and Elizabeth Renfro. Fiction writers (while we're at it) can claim Zu Vincent, Steve Metzger, Dan Owens, Candice Favilla, Larry Holcomb (*The Libidinal Jitters*, 1983), and CSUC President and sci-fi pro Robin Wilson, recently featured in *Issac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*.

The poets have appeared from time to time in collections like *Hard Six* (mid '70s?), *Back in Town* (1980), *Before the Frost* (1982), and—just last fall—*Five Mile Spring*, where Hemenway, Ross, and Campbell join former Chicoan Norman Mallory, who serves up provocative glimpses of Enloe Hospital and the Bidwells in bed. Poets and prose writers both have published in “little” magazines like *Sweet Thief*, *Phantasm*, *Watershed* (formerly *Trial Impression*), *Digging In*, *Tributaries*, and *Local Anesthesia*. Such publications, like the hero of the old western ballad, are apt to live fast, die young, and leave a beautiful memory, and the most beautiful memory of all may have been left by the earliest such effort, John Gardner and Lennis Dunlap's *MSS*, which lasted three issues but managed in that brief time (1961-62) to publish John Hawkes, Thomas McAfee, Lewis Turco, Howard Nemerov, George P. Elliott, William Stafford, W.S. Merwin and William Gass—when many of these writers were virtually unknown. (Ken Morrow did the graphics; Janet Turner was the art editor.) Copies can be found in the Meriam Library Special Collections. In his *University Journal* interview, Dunlap tells of *MSS*'s frenetic history and of the all-night work orgies fueled by coffee, candy bars, and peanut butter.

More tenacious and certainly at the heart of local publication today is the journal you hold in your hand, ten years old, practically middle-aged as such things go. Its name reminds us that, as Gary Snyder says, the “nation” is a fiction; only the region is real. Water, Tom Robbins claims, invented human beings to get itself carried around, which may be a whimsical version of Snyder's argument that, in a certain sense, no one is ever “alienated.” Like water our real life flows underground, connecting us in unsuspected ways, bubbling up in poems, plays, and stories, and if those who come after us want to know what we were, let them taste this rather than the dust and ashes from newspapers, video screens, and computerized “data.”

Watershed owes its existence to Ellen Walker, a one-woman life support system for “noncommercial” publication. With Gardneresque commitment, she brought forth and has sustained this journal, just as

she assisted *Digging In* and *The University Journal* (which she now edits), and just as she and Len Fulton have produced annually that godsend to writers, *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. For such help we should all be grateful. And here something should be said about Pam Giuliano and Kathleen Gallo's Plum Island Press and their beautifully printed poetry broadsides, and mention too should be made of Casey Huff and Elizabeth Renfro's Flume Press, which sponsors a poetry chapbook competition each year and prints the winning entry in handsome style.

The truth is, we are more favored than we know, and though we writers think with good reason that we aren't welcome in our society, there are those locally who have always been ready to assist: Joe Chrisman of CSUC's Communication Design, Murry Markland of the English Department, Lisa Dauterman of *Off the Record*, Larry Jackson of Heidelberg Graphics, The Butte County Arts Commission, Tower Books—which maintains a first rate “little” magazine section and sometimes stocks local publications at cost—Fulton's Bookstore in Paradise, and all the various “donors” and “patrons” who through the years have anted up with little expectation of conspicuous thanks. To these and others we owe a lot.

For the word has gone forth, not just on the printed page but in cafes, bars, grills, bagel shops, laboratories, classrooms, private homes, and the brick cellblocks of the BMU. For nearly a quarter of a century, “readings” have taken place, shifting about like a floating crap game. It may seem incredible, but in the days of the “Penny University,” Persian, Arabic, Latin, Russian, Chinese, and Greek verse floated above the snarl and belch of Broadway traffic, and before CSUC went high tech, when there was still money for such things, Chico was on the poetry “circuit,” and prize winning writers called regularly like migratory birds: John Logan, Phillip Levine, Robert Bly, James Wright, Gary Snyder, Galway Kinnell, Vern Rutsala, Marge Piercy, Al Young, Jim Houston, Richard Braughtigan, W.S. Merwin, William Stafford, Robert Lowell, Dennis Schmitz, N. Scott Momaday, Kathleen Fraser. Today the university still manages a “name” or two (e.g., Loren Eiseley, Diane Wakoski), and Gardner himself returned in 1975, his blond hair long and limp as Chaucer's Pardoner's, to preside in a velvet paisley smoking jacket while excerpts from his opera *Frankenstein* were sung. Well, the glory days are gone, but local writers and occasional imports still read to and at one another, stubborn as the crabgrass.

Which brings us back to our beginnings—the land, our “watershed,” and our roots, tentative though they may be. Memorably at times the land *does* get into our writing. Think, if you will, of Gary Thompson's

“Hold Fast” with its unforgettable frozen glimpse of man and daughter “in the near-dark” beneath the wheeling hawk (“she takes my hand and we cling to our small earth”). Think too of George Keithley’s slow, rolling psalm of grief for JFK, our quintessential *local* writing.

“After His Assassination a Place of Peace” the poem is called, and the “place” is Chico. In the opening lines we see the mourners and hear the bells of St. John’s Church. Then the poem “cuts”: here, there, here again.

Wind warps the shingled roof slanting by the green
City Plaza where boughs storm;
winter oranges blaze like Christmas balls.

Then:

The rain wells in the crotch
of a walnut tree

The sense of disorder and fear, incipient nightmare continues. Doves “cower” in the “crowns” of palms. Then a moment of illusory relief—a piano playing—but at once:

A raw rain pours and stains
the skinned sycamores.

The rain crawls in the street, it looks insane,
it sits there, at noon, unclean
licked by dogs.

Imperceptibly, magically, the fever ebbs, though jets roar overhead, the wind blows, and “on the road leaves spawn and litter and stream / in a flash chill . . .”

Though disaster and death drive us out
of the solitary city
or town or prairie
we bring in our blood
all the joy and anguish which we see.

After a simple, homely thing—a schoolboy running with a football—the poem ends.

In the ranch air
and the deep farmland
the doves complain and hunt.

Death and madness have transfigured the landscape but are themselves transfigured by the land, then absorbed, like the slain leader, and the poem becomes a sort of mass in which “our small earth” reveals a radiance and a healing power we had not suspected, though the Yana would have understood.

Is that what poetry is all about in the long run? I don’t know, but it is this force, I think, that Lawrence Clark Powell speaks of when he declares that “from Sutter’s Buttes to Mount Shasta” our northern lands await their laureate, for these lands

are rich in history and legendary, and peopled with ghosts whose voices are lost in time. If I were to live again, I would want to come to manhood in the lee of Lassen and Shasta. There it seems to me is the *cor cordium* of California. There is a deep untapped source of creativity.

The Cleaning Woman

Fern liked to begin in the master bedroom closets. They seemed to her the most inner part of the house. From there she moved out. And it was best if no one else were home. Today Ellen Hall would be gone all morning. The house was Fern's.

Oh, the stories closets told! The shoes could practically speak. Fern swore sometimes she could hear them hum over and into the roar of the vacuum. "Rarely a tongue-tied loafer," Fern smiled to herself from the closet floor as she removed all of Mr. Hall's shoes so she could vacuum. More were hanging neatly in compartments on the right. She examined them.

My, this man had shoes with no scuffs. Now Fern's seemed to scuff up in the box coming home from the shoe store, but these shoes hadn't a trace of mud, no wrinkles even, not a scratch. Did Mr. Hall go barefoot and preserve them, or just walk carefully at all times, on guard against curbs and edges, putting his feet just so? He must live in a thoroughly carpeted world, and, it seemed to Fern, he must not bend his feet at all when he walked. He must pick them up after each step almost as if he were marching. Dear me. A controlled, controlling fellow, this one with perfect shoes.

And just look at all those belts. Oh my. Fern turned off the Hoover to look at them in amazement. Two racks of belts, mainly thin ones of fine leather. Well, well. Things were not looking good for Mr. Hall, she could see this already. And Mrs. Hall, Ellen, so attractive and soft. My, my. Two racks of thin belts. Was he afraid he would lose his pants?

Oh, what a morning this was going to be! Well, Edward Hall was a problem with his perfect slip-on shoes, thin belts, and pale button-down collar shirts. He was probably skinny but with a paunch nonetheless. Perhaps he let loose a bit when he'd had a drink or two in

the evening and his shoes were off, but Fern had her doubts.

Ah, some days Fern felt she had more power than the entire police force, folding undergarments and putting them into deep corners of drawers, rearranging slippery ties in the depths of the closet, dusting jewel boxes, polishing and counting silver. She often reminded herself that the police needed search warrants and occasionally entered by force to do what she was paid for. Fern, as much a stranger as they were, was left alone in private chambers with lunch provided or free access to the refrigerator to make cucumber sandwiches on a variety of breads.

There was not much status in the work, but Fern had renounced status when her husband, a fine policeman—soon to be captain—was shot. She was well provided for still, and she didn't need to clean. Her children begged her to stop. It embarrassed them that their aging white-haired mother cleaned house. They didn't understand. "What would you want with other people's messes?" She heard this again and again. Well, other women could sit idly in their houses or play golf or work part time in stultifying offices. How could they understand that Fern blossomed in other people's messes?

Often, when Fern had thoroughly taken stock, read snippets of correspondence, and had the true flavor of a family, she lost interest and quit. Only, of course, after adding to her collection. It was not that she stole. No, she was convinced it was not stealing because the items she took never had any real value and most probably would not be missed. She merely collected—a tie here, a thimble there, an unmatched cup—to fill her boxes, she told herself, and no one needed to know.

Ah, and this was her first day on the job, the best day always, so much to explore. She hummed as she vacuumed cobwebs off the tops of the bedroom curtains and at the same time tried to slip her right foot (in hose, mind you) into one of Ellen Hall's red satin evening shoes. Just a tad narrow, pity. Not that she would have considered taking anything as important as a shoe. She just liked to slip into them sometimes, that was all. "If the shoe fits, wear it," she would always say when she vacuumed in the evening shoes of the woman of the house. Alligator, rhinestones, she always went for the best and then wore them only briefly, imagining herself on an evening out, looking down at elegant feet. But Ellen Hall's pumps wouldn't go on. They were sevens, but too narrow, and Fern wouldn't risk stretching them.

When Fern pushed back all of Ellen Hall's blouses to make room for the upright, after removing the rest of the shoes, scuffed and worn here and there like the shoes of a normal person who walks about in the world, running into things now and then and dancing even, at times,

she heard a rustling of paper in a pocket somewhere and rummaged for it. Aha. The pink silky blouse. She plucked a piece of paper from the pocket. Now, we wouldn't want it washed with the whites, would we? Immediately she sensed a find. Folded beige stationery. Most promising. But Fern was not prepared for the import.

"Darling. I know you don't want me to put anything on paper. But I haven't been able to call and I had to let you know. You must not call me again. I'm sure now that Linnie knows. I don't know what to do. This afternoon is off. Please wait until I call you. No matter what happens I want you to know how much I have loved you. I love you. A."

Fern turned off the vacuum and sat down on the bed. I'm glad I'm not in this woman's shoes, she thought to herself, but how the note gripped her. Waves of loss and longing moved through her chest and belly, and then she felt a rush of fear. Oh me, oh me.

She read the note again. "Darling." And then folded it along the original folds and placed it back in the slippery pink pocket. Oh me. No, this was not for her collection. No, no, though she did have a few notes in her boxes, often from the wastebasket and only once from a stack on a desk, but not this one, oh no, back in the pocket it was and, indeed, Fern wished that it had never come out. Where was her exuberance of just moments ago? Oh dear, and yes, the rest of the house just waiting there in dust, ripe, and here was Fern, paralyzed on the bed, fingers crossed together in her lap. No, she didn't know how she was going to get the house clean now, most probably that was why Ellen Hall had called her in the first place after cleaning on her own for years. This note most likely had her paralyzed too. No woman in the lovelorn state is likely to keep up with the closets and sinks. No. Things languish. They sit and accumulate dust.

And Ellen Hall had most likely hired Fern because of excellent references remarking on the *deep* cleaning she did, organizing, folding as she was putting disheveled lives in order. For as Fern sifted she always improved, and stacked belongings in tight piles like shirts on the shelves of a Chinese laundry. Most women craved that order, and Fern provided it. She took their lives apart and put them back together better, and no harm was done; that's what Fern told herself.

Oh, me. All the joy was out of her exploration, and she barely noticed the cloth bag of condoms in Ellen Hall's closet or the stack of old engagement calendars filled with notes and appointments that could have made her morning on a more ordinary day. "A." Well. His name began with A. Ambrose? Fern began to dust listlessly. Somehow she must continue to polish and order as she always did.

Sustenance, that might help. She went to the kitchen, also normally a

delight to Fern, who had license to rummage through uncharted refrigerators and spread exotic mustards and jellies on plump sandwiches.

But today she was not even tempted by the smoked oysters Ellen Hall had left on the counter or by the cranberry orange salad on the top shelf of the refrigerator. Back to the bedroom. No, maybe if she moved on to the den, another cornucopia of family tidbits, she would get back some of her normal zest for the task.

The phone rang. Well. I suppose I'll answer it. Her employers often commended her for the clear messages she took.

"Hello," Fern said.

"Hello, Ellen?" said a woman on the other end.

"No, this is Fern, the cleaning woman. May I take a message for Mrs. Hall? I expect she will be back early this afternoon." Well, she was in good form.

"You sound so much like Ellen," said the caller. "Well, yes, would you tell her that Lila Olson called about the cookies for tonight, and have her call me back?"

"Certainly. May I take your number?"

"Ellen has it. Just tell her I'll be home from work earlyish. By four o'clock."

"Certainly. Thank you." Fern wrote down the message feeling competent and stronger. She went into the bedroom to retrieve the upright. The handle was poking among the clothes and there was the pink blouse with its loaded love note. Unlove note? Well, for heaven's sake, it wasn't for her, was it? It didn't have anything to do with her, and no, she must get on with it, into the den, where Mr. Hall kept his desk that must be brimming with matters of interest. She smiled in anticipation and reached again into the pink pocket just to make sure the note was still there. Yes. It was back in place. She hadn't just imagined it. "To darling, from A."

The phone rang again.

Fern rushed out of the closet and into the kitchen.

"Hello?"

"Ellen. Hello. I'll have to be quick. I'm sorry about the note. I was frightened and upset, baby. I should have talked to you first."

Fern stood frozen at the phone. "I'm not," she said, "I'm not . . .," but A. continued hurriedly, finishing her sentence. "I'm not ready to end this, baby. Just the thought of it kept me awake all last night. I want you so much. And I'm thinking I was wrong about Linnie, I think I was imagining things, Ellie. I need to see you. Can you see me this afternoon? I need to see you, sweetheart. Two or three o'clock?"

Fern, still frozen, held the phone. I'm the cleaning woman, she said to herself. I'm just the cleaning woman. I have been in the closet. I do know you are A., but out of her mouth came nothing. She felt panicky.

She heard, "Ellen, is something wrong? Is Edward there?"

Fern hung up the phone, to make A. disappear.

But in a moment the phone rang again. It rang and rang and rang, but she wasn't ready to answer. Wait a minute, A. If you'll just wait a minute, I'll have it all ready for you. I'll have everything figured out, cleaned, folded, and then we can talk, all right, just call back in a minute, a minute or two is all I need, really. Her chest and her ears were tight with fear the way they were in school when the teacher called "Fern" and she hadn't been listening or wasn't prepared. Wait. Call back, she thought through the ringing and retreated to the closet until it finally stopped.

"Now," she said aloud from the quiet, cold order of Mr. Hall's closet, with the less-than-reassuring rows of shoes. Back to the kitchen. Oysters. No. She searched through the canned goods. Campbell's chicken with stars. A favorite of her children. It would have to do. Chicken soup. That was supposed to help. She heated the soup and then sat down to eat and sort things out.

Yes. Now then. What a mess. What a mess. A. had called and Fern had hung up but A. had thought it was Ellen, a silent, sullen Ellen. Finished? Oh me, that was terrible! Of course she should have told him. Forget her embarrassment, she must tell him it was Fern, not Ellen hanging up, unable to cope. No, Ellen was coping in limbo with only the note, unable to keep order, but coping, thinking Linnie knew, thinking it was over. When he called back she must tell him that she was the cleaning woman, she didn't know what he was talking about. Or she did, but she shouldn't—no, drop that—and Ellen Hall would be home shortly after noon, not later than one unless she had skipped town, highly unlikely. Okay. It was all in order. Now she was ready.

That was it. You may enter but not alter. Enter, not alter. Rules of the trade.

But as she swallowed the last soupy stars, too salty, she suspected the truth. Her timing was off. He had called back already, hadn't he, right away, and she hadn't been prepared, and who knew if he would call back again? Oh, hell! That was what she liked about cleaning. Controlled messes. No real people to confront and bamboozle with her off-the-mark timing. She had never been ready. Her children had come too soon, in spite of her, her husband had been shot and killed before she was ready, she had always known it was possible but she hadn't been prepared. She hadn't been ready to be born, she was sure of it, she

was not meant to be this old and far along yet, it was all too soon, too soon, too soon! And now, oh me, what a mess she was in.

Well. She must clean the house. And then she must tell Mrs. Hall. Ellie. Ellie Darling. It would be embarrassing, but she would have to tell her. She could leave out what she thought of Mr. Hall and his belts. She could leave out the note, even. A note that had fallen from a pink pocket as she was vacuuming the closets in Mrs. Hall's red evening shoes. No. Of course, the shoes hadn't fit. The note hadn't fallen. Snoop. Was she a snoop? Oh dear, that's neither here nor there. No, she would simply say a man had called up, had mistaken her for Mrs. Hall, had asked urgently to meet her this afternoon, and in her confusion, she had hung up. Now wasn't that the truth?

Oh, Fern wanted to be good. She always wanted to be good, but her timing was off. She told her mother she had broken the bear soap, but only after her brother was blamed and punished for the deed. She confessed, she confessed, she confessed, but that was not the same as making things go right, not withholding information, a violation, and allowing everything to tumble askew and then begging forgiveness. No, this time she would right the course before the crash over the cliff, and, oh my, she hoped she could continue to clean, secretly, safe, with no one, nothing to mess up but shoes, because what else would she do? What else would she do?

Right now she would pack up and leave. It was the only decent thing to do. She would put the vacuum away, and the shoes, and the dishes, and leave a note saying that suddenly she was not feeling well, very true, and that Mrs. Hall should call her. That would do it. When Mrs. Hall called her she would tell her everything. Surely she would call Fern very soon, within a day or two, surely, and Fern would tell her that A. needed to see her. He'd been up all night. No, Linnie didn't know, his imagination had gone wild, he needed her, he wanted her, no, not Fern, Ellie Hall, and she must meet him at two or three or four. Fern was scanning the room for something to collect. And yes, she would be happy to clean as soon as she was well again, though back in A.'s arms perhaps Ellie would no longer need Fern, which was just as well, for at the moment she had lost her appetite for cleaning, cleaning and oysters, and she wasn't at all sure when she would get it back. What would she do now? It took her such a long time to prepare, and so often her timing was off . . .

Jade and Fire

(excerpt from the forthcoming novel)

He saw her framed in the ginkgo trees surrounding the small meditation grove. It was his favorite spot in the entire Purple Mountain complex, of which he was abbot. Meiling sat as straight as ever in the traditional posture in the grove, but tears were streaming from her closed eyes, and her breathing was deep. She appeared small, wrapped in her yellow quilted robe under the ancient trees, like a precious fruit that had dropped from one of the branches sharply angling off the trunk. He stood watching her and knew again the pain of a father for a wounded offspring.

Soon she was finished. When he saw her eyes open, he walked quietly into the grove and dried her damp face with the sleeve of his dark blue robe. He stroked her hair, which streamed black over the gold collar of the robe.

"Still the pain, eh?"

"Yes, Father." She breathed deeply again.

"It will ease, child. Considerably. And soon."

"It has only been three days since he died."

"A pity you had to witness it."

"No. It was right. Else it would have seemed unreal, and I would not have truly believed it, him not bursting with life still."

He continued stroking her hair as the morning sunlight streamed feebly through the ginkgo's bare branches.

"When your mother died, also in violence, I did not eat for two days, could not sleep for four. But after seven days I could meditate without weeping."

A thrush flew from the tree to the ground at the edge of the clearing and began energetically poking its bill in the underbrush.

"He told me once that a part of him still mourned for his wife and son after twenty-one years, that he would never regain that part of him."

"Yes. But, of course, new life arises. Sometimes from the death itself."

She sat, staring at the thrush, then looked up into his face. "He died in violence, Father. His wife and son died in violence. My mother died in violence. When will it stop?"

He stood silent, looking at the clean angles of the branches coming off the trunk. Somehow their crispness comforted him, and he loved winter because then he could see the ginkgo branches clearly.

"I don't know. It is our fate to live in a violent period, my child. Chinese against Japanese—that took your mother. Chinese against Chinese—that took his wife and son. And now it has taken him."

"But why, Father? It could not have been just the jealousy of ignorant monks. But what?"

"I don't know, child. I would indeed like to find out. His death has hurt our work, just as the critical days approach. As well as hurting you. But it is very difficult for us. I do not know that we shall ever get to the root of it."

"I will get to the root of it. I will avenge his death."

"No, child!" He spoke fiercely. "Don't let the desire for revenge lodge in you. It kills the capacity for new life, and takes you as surely as if you had also died. Banish it!"

She lowered her head, but proudly. "I . . . do not know that I want to banish it."

"Child! It is—"

"And I am no longer a child," she interrupted with feeling.

He sighed. "That is true enough." He moved away from her slightly. "And it is true also that the desire for revenge cannot be banished. It must seep out, of its own. It must be crowded out by health and new life. Come. Will you at least do the Dance of the Water's Surface with this old busybody?"

She arose in a graceful motion, and walked with him silently through the trees to the T'ai Chi Ch'uan courtyard. They positioned themselves facing each other, raised their arms until their fingers touched, then brought them back to their bodies in a slow circular motion across the face and chest. Her left hand sailed back to the front as did his right, nearly touching, while her right hand executed a circular block to the right, as did his left. Her body shifted and she unfurled a sweeping arc with her right hand as she turned to face that direction, her left hand "grabbing air" to anchor the movement. He simultaneously executed the mirror image of her movements.

It was one of the most difficult and absorbing of the T'ai Chi Ch'uan rituals, two partners performing the stylized movements in the mirror image of the other, beginning together, sweeping apart, then coming together throughout the entire sequence of over a hundred moves. It added a fifth dimension to the three spatial and one temporal in which T'ai Chi usually occurred: the reflected dimension of perfectly mirrored distance and timing between two moving bodies. The smoothly gliding blue and yellow robes in the courtyard incarnated the interplay of yin and yang, a working out of the constantly shifting balances of strength and yielding, movement and stillness, hope and despair, pleasure and pain. As she turned and advanced, whirled and retreated, struck and parried, joining every neuron, bone, and muscle into a finely integrated whole, she knew the desire to avenge her lover's death was being crowded out. She watched it diminish, but knew it would not extinguish, knew it would grow again, knew that violence was not merely of this time but of all times, and that she could wield it as well as any.

Bei sat at his desk, finishing up the report he had started the previous night. He sipped his midmorning tea. Yuan had been sent early that morning to look into the murder of a courtesan in the Flower House section off Ch'ienmen Street last night. The murder of a common prostitute was usually noted and then dropped, but a courtesan—a woman trained in the arts of poetry and music as well as love, and housed in an exclusive brothel—was a different matter altogether. It should have been Chang's case but Chang was busy with three other cases. The whole city was unraveling, and he had fewer men than normal. He shook his head as he wrote. A sound across the room caught his attention.

"Oh. Good morning."

"Most sorry to bother you, Chief Inspector. My uncle forgot his lunch, so I am bringing it to him. This is his desk, I believe?"

Yuan's niece looked considerably fresher than she had yesterday. Her hair was neatly arranged in bangs and reached her shoulders in back. There was no weariness in her movements today; indeed, her figure seemed more trim than frail, and a certain strength suggested itself in her body. The young recuperate quickly, Bei reflected. The hint of vulnerability remained in her face, though. A pretty face, thought Bei.

"You are a devoted—" he almost said "wife," but caught himself. "A devoted niece to come here with your uncle's lunch."

"He is being most kind to me. I would not be filial if I did not serve him. He is the only family I have."

Bei approved the Confucian sentiment and admired the courage suggested in her voice and words.

"Yuan has told me that you have had a most unfortunate family history. I admire your courage in surviving it so well."

"I have an obligation to my ancestors to carry my name proudly. And when I marry, to honor my husband's ancestors as well."

"With so clear an understanding of your duties, you will have no difficulty securing a husband," said Bei, noting the polished tone of her words and remembering that she had received a good education before the Japanese came.

"I am indeed a woman, with a woman's needs. It is best to marry."

Bei raised his eyebrows. She sounded more like a coarse peasant now; educated ladies never referred to their physical needs. He politely said, "Yes, it is best to marry," as he looked at her again. There was an interesting mixture of peasant and patrician in her air as well as her words. With her family's history, she would have needed the peasant's sturdy strength to survive.

"But marrying the right person is crucial, is it not?" she said.

Bei put down his pen, glad to exchange the report for a conversation with this strangely forward yet vulnerable girl from Shansi.

"Of course. I understand that your sister married poorly."

Her eyes glowed. "She did not marry at all. She was sold to a worthless son of a worthless landlord. She was his property, not his wife."

Bei berated himself for not remembering Yuan's story correctly.

"His property, and his friends' property. Her death released her from an intolerable situation." She turned away from him to hide her emotion. "But then, in peasant society a wife is her husband's property. So does it matter?"

Bei was uncomfortable at blundering into this conversation. But the girl's distress and spirit touched him.

"It must be difficult to have received an education in the classics, then to be reduced to a peasant's poverty again."

"It does strange things to you. It made my sister eager to be sold to a landlord's son." Her back was still to Bei. "And it made me entirely too forward, especially with strangers," she said with a smile as she turned around. She bowed in the old manner of a courtesan bowing to her master, clearly acting out a role. "You will pardon my impropriety, honored sir. It has been my pleasure to speak with you. Good day." With a final flourish she glided out of the room.

Bei sat, not knowing what to make of her. But he had enjoyed the episode, somehow. He turned back to the report, worked on it for

another hour, then sent it by messenger to the magistrate. He then made a phone call to General Fu's office, talked with Zhou Peifeng for several minutes, and hung up the phone as Yuan walked into the office.

"Any problems with the courtesan murder?" asked Bei.

"Well, some things are clear. She's dead. She's a courtesan, and a relatively high-class one, too. But there are some strange things. In fact, several strange things. I think it's over my head, Inspector. You'd better take a look. I've left everything as it was."



Selfportrait

Norman Mallory

Through the Walls

Avram Goll moved into the auto court in 1968 because it was cheap, quiet, and close to bus lines. That Mr. Du Four put him next to my unit seemed sheer coincidence, but I think, privately, it was because Du Four, who spent most of his life hunched over a Caterpillar tractor, saw us both as “college.” That a Distinguished Visiting Professor, diminutive with a halo of white hair, tweed suits, and a goulash of an accent over spittled lips, should have been positioned so that we shared a wall must have been Du Four’s idea of justice, of bunching all the “culture” in the court together. Professor Goll was a cellist and conductor, well known in Prague but utterly ignored in Northern California, even after the local ballyhoo in the arts section of our Sunday paper. “Dvorak’s Cello Concerto with the San Francisco Symphony,” it shouted, “Visiting Professor Scores with Bay Critics,” followed by a long laudatory article.

But here the Splendid Slovak simply melted away into the salt air and fog, carrying on with his composition and theory classes, giving the four public lectures he’d contracted for that spring, and living in the converted auto court on Fourteenth where Du Four had put him, next to me.

Then the private lessons started, lessons for ladies. The springtime had its blossom explosion, the dewy lambent light on the twined grape leaves and myrtle, all of it seeming to speak a secret language, a portent of love muted in the dry digs where I studied, conjugating verbs, converting stems to participles. Some visionary, some Blake or Swedenbourg, some raving Whitman with woodbine in his beard, might have reached me, might have cut through my drek and dark with a flaming line; but for me spring was more a seepage than a crackling.

So with all this swelling and birds singing I heard Goll counting in a

mellifluous baritone through my kitchen wall as I dried dishes, with tiny questions on bowing and interpretation chirped under the melody by winsome female voices. And while I conjugated and shaped pluperfects, translating sentences like "The town elders are going to lunch in the square," the professor entertained his students on a Tuesday-Thursday schedule, when nothing more than an excited giggle could be heard.

But then the rumors started, from places enfeebled in their information, not simply a wall away. This man, this foreigner, whom no one could understand, entrusted with the care of our virginal, bow-wielding daughters; just what *was* happening during those hour lessons that often stretched into two hours? In the midst of that ill feeling, I had occasion to see things closer up than the accusers.

One soft spring day I was doing dishes and heard something through the wall. I deliberately hadn't paid much attention to the professor's sounds, preferring then in my amoral days to know nothing, to corroborate no one's stories. When I shut off the hot water tap, I thought I heard human sobbing, a deep-lunged, spasmodic grief swelling through the plaster. A tearing of paper, powerful ripping, like a strongman working over a telephone book. Then a glassed crash, and silence.

Someone left the professor's cabin in a hurry. I heard the screen slam and from the kitchen window caught a glimpse of black cloth making off into the orchard that flanked the auto court.

The professor's door stood open, and the old man lay on his side, on the floor next to a broken vase, pulped flowers and pieces of a wet music score around him.

When I helped him up he started talking as if he were speaking to three hundred people or lecturing from a podium, staring at the music folder on the table, where a steel engraving of Dvorak stared back at him. He likened his experience teaching in America to his first experience with the cathedral at Chartres. He had entered through the vestry, cramped into a tiny closet of furred, opaque dark; then his spirit soared over a hundred feet straight up into the colored, incensed air, into the light of heaven on earth.

The young ladies had been his light of heaven on earth. But never *touched*. "*Touche pas!*" he punctuated.

The professor's father had been imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, but had managed to pass his wife and son safely to France in transit, a narrow escape. His father had died in the camp. The mother and son had settled in London, where the boy studied at the London Conservatory.

All this I had read in the prospectus that had been passed around on campus.

He asked me, tears in his eyes, if I had heard anything strange through the walls, particularly at night. Since my bedroom was at the other end of my cabin, I hadn't. At first, he said, he had terrible nightmares, because of his relocation, coming to teach here. He had dreamed that he hadn't escaped at all, that he had died in the camp with his father. For fifteen years he had had these dreams every night, but they were particularly intense after he came to America. But when the young ladies had started coming to their lessons, the dreams had stopped. It was that feeling of relief, that same feeling of making it to the train with his mother that night, heaven on earth.

The "Nazi Industry" in motion pictures and television was in full flower at that time, Hollywood prospering on the hair-raising tales of Rod Steiger as the Pawnbroker impaling his hand on a metal spike, slashes of barbed wire in his dreams. But the scene I had stumbled upon seemed empty of commercial potential, just not exploitable. An old man had found relief from his bad dreams and had been accused of unseemly conduct by his American deliverers, the Yanks who marched into his dreams to clear away the battle smoke and effluvia of torture. Who had come to the door? Not his Dean, for these things, these scandals had to be *delegated* for action, handled third person, with limited omniscience.

I lamely offered my '55 Chevy to take his things to the bus depot, and helped him mend his music score with Scotch tape. He did everything up with string in cardboard boxes. Just before they put them in the Greyhound he turned to me and said,

"I only told them to spread their knees. That's how you hold the instrument properly. I only put my hands, so, on their knees and . . . spread them." He chewed his tongue. He looked away, then back. "Thank you. Here, there are no trains. So I am taking the bus." Slavic participles, I thought. The present ever evolving.

Back in my cabin, a rocker moved in next door—a frat with no fraternity. And the groans of pleasure and singing bedsprings replaced the rosined bite of the cello through my walls. The grit and grind of the Rolling Stones at two a.m. Then out of their cabin and into downy spring with foaming beers, shorts and sandals, then back inside to try it all over again, ever fresh, ever new. No more baritone Slav accents, no velvet bowings answering inquisitive female murmurs.

The Russians rolled into Czechoslovakia then, rolled like the Nazis, on tracks of steel into the porcelain heart and cello-dark warmth of the

Distinguished Professor, no longer Visiting, where the yellow-ringed faces of his students smiled at his hands on their knees. There life went on, as it did on the other side of my sweating and scabbed walls, so far away.

Robinson Jeffers: Recovering a Spiritual Legacy

On meeting Robinson Jeffers for the first time, Loren Eiseley felt as though he “stood before another and nobler species of man,” to which he added, “I have never again encountered a man who, in one brief meeting, left me with so strong an impression that I had been speaking with someone out of time.”¹ I doubt that Eiseley could imagine the prophetic nature of his impression or conceive how very far removed from the Modern Period Jeffers would become. Look into any anthology of modern verse and you will no doubt find a few pages devoted to Jeffers’ work somewhere near those of more celebrated poets sharing the age: Eliot, Pound, Stevens, and Williams. But Robinson Jeffers is curiously and consistently disaffiliated from his contemporaries, seen mostly as a cultural aberration, remaining out of time, isolated, and perpetually misunderstood and disliked by the critical establishment.

The acceptance of Robinson Jeffers among the literary aristocracy of his time for his sake is unimportant—he cared nothing for critical acclaim and derived, I think, a certain vindication from the wide disapproval of his work—but Jeffers’ bastard status has amputated a limb of poetic verse, and the recognition of the relationship of his work to that of his contemporaries is essential to any understanding of the poet’s work, or any direction for contemporary poetry to follow.

M.L. Rosenthal has said, “It is interesting to note that, *intellectually*, our poetry is still just about at the stage of thought Thomas Hardy reached a long time ago: jammed up against the tragicomedy of human circumstance.”² Given the humanistic tradition that has prevailed since the Enlightenment, I think Rosenthal is correct insofar as the critical eye has been focused primarily on that intellectual aesthetic tradition that is so much a part of our literature. Although the postwar

chaos of the twenties has been heralded as a time for breaking away from the conventional, underneath the apparent formlessness was a strong traditional framework. "Make it new" may have been the maxim for the Modern Age, but the resulting extravagant variations were ultimately nothing more than new body styles created to conceal a very old and rusty engine.

The engine of which I speak is, as I mentioned earlier, the humanistic tradition that became the driving force during the Enlightenment. At the risk of over-simplification, the Enlightenment paradigm asserted the supremacy of mankind in the universe and the doctrine of perpetual advancement, what C.S. Lewis called "The Myth of Progress."³ Amid the alienation and lack of identity experienced in the twenties, the rebellion against prevailing wisdom focused poetic energy towards the past—a tone set forth in T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent"—and despite remarkable innovations that grew out of the Modernist movement, the "historical sense" left us with nothing more than a reaffirmation of the Enlightenment paradigm. I think the work of Eliot and Stevens to be particularly representative of the kind of humanistic ideal to which I refer, but they are by no means the only poets singing again the old song. My intent is not to denigrate the fine work of these two poets, but merely to show that the "traditionalists, fronting a post-war chaos localized in the spasm of inductive cynicism, soon cut back toward the measured norm."⁴ Other poets could be used to build an equally strong case, but Stevens and Eliot, as the most celebrated of the age, serve best to establish Jeffers' place within their company.

No one articulated the despair and confusion of the twentieth century quite like T.S. Eliot, and as a result he became the cynosure for the entire Modern Age. "The Waste Land" was the anthem for modern man, for all those who had, in the words of Pound, "walked eye-deep in hell."⁵ The use of primitive mythology in "The Waste Land," as borrowed from the works of Weston and Frazer, provided a vehicle for the poet to reach the primal reality that lay beneath the desolation of the period, a way, as Eliot saw it, to regain the meaning missed in the experience. The proposed solutions were not to be found in the current wisdom, but rather in the primordial wisdom of the distant past. But instead of reaching to the very depths of primitivism for permanent solutions as Robinson Jeffers did, Eliot relied upon the story of the Grail to bring hope to the age.

Though there be mystery and magic in the Grail myths, the way out of the wasteland is predicated upon human effort, upon the success of the Grail knight, which roughly translated reads, "Somehow we'll find a

way out of this mess,” and again in keeping with the humanistic tradition, it is man overcoming. Later, in *The Four Quartets*, Eliot moved away from the emotional whining of his earlier works and asserted that the salvation of mankind could be found in Christianity, a religion espousing the ultimate perfectability of man and the linearity of time, both very humanistic proposals. Against this sort of human measuring tape Jeffers commented:

. . . when they look backward they see only a man
standing at the beginning,
Or forward, a man at the end; or if upward, men in the shining
bitter sky striding and feasting,
Whom you call Gods . . .
It is all turned inward, all your desires incestuous, the woman the
serpent, the man the rose-red cavern,
Both human, worship forever . . .⁶

Few will deny that T.S. Eliot was a traditional poet, but say the same for Wallace Stevens, and you will not meet with such broad agreement. Stevens’ relativistic and phenomenological poetry, a poetry of “impenetrable surfaces,”⁷ appears at first glimpse a new breed, but his replacement of the traditional wisdom ended in really nothing more than a new set of propositions. Like Twain’s Mysterious Stranger, Stevens essentially urges us to “dream other dreams, and better.”⁸ He hints at an escape from the ugliness of the Modern Age with seemingly spiritual urgings to “step barefoot into reality,”⁹ yet his verse seldom, if ever, moves beyond the intellectual relativism that places man solipsistically at the center of each individual universe. Residing forever within the mind, Stevens is unable to grant the physical world any numinous power, and has, in Nemerov’s twisting of one of Eliot’s famous lines, “missed the experience, but had the meaning.”¹⁰ Exchanging the corporate Humanism for four billion private “humanisms,” Stevens never moves beyond the realm of the intellect, beyond the Enlightenment paradigm that prevents us from fully experiencing true reality. Said Jeffers,

I think . . . that the beauty of things may be felt without any
mystical recognition. But in that case it seems to me to be
felt incompletely, however keenly. It seems to me that the
mystical experience grows out of the aesthetic experience,
naturally, almost logically.¹¹

As a mystic, Jeffers was intimately familiar with the spiritual experience, and it was his continual repudiation of the humanistic aesthetic that disturbed critics and caused his estrangement from his contemporaries. For a time after World War I everyone wrote poetry of doom, but when it came time to come back indoors—Eliot to his Anglican Christianity, Stevens to his solipsistic philosophy—when it came time to come back to the humanistic norm, Robinson Jeffers remained alone outside the culture. On Jeffers' exclusion from the ranks of great modern poets, William Everson commented, "What Jeffers preaches is utterly unacceptable not only to our prevailing temper, but more especially to our desperate hopes, and all the presence of power will not compel us to jeopardize the future we desire by celebrating a work that repudiates it utterly."¹²

Robinson Jeffers' refusal to partake in the intellectual charade placed him in opposition to his contemporaries and led to his being labeled "the poet of inhumanism,"¹³ a term that is most often misunderstood. The spirit behind Inhumanism is not an antihuman sentiment, but rather a transhuman consciousness that moves the mind of man away from himself. As Arthur Coffin has written, "Robinson Jeffers saw society as incapable of achieving and maintaining a sense of genuine identity because it is doomed to be self-corrupting and disappointingly inferior to the endless magnificence of nature."¹⁴ Living within the same wasteland experience, Jeffers directly opposed the couched optimism of the time and abhorred the "cerebricized substitutes of authentic existence found in our culture and our intellectuals."¹⁵

Humanity is

the start of the race; I say
Humanity is the mould to break away from, the crust to break
through, the coal to break into fire,
The atom to be split.¹⁶

For Eliot, trapped within the Apollonian consciousness and smothered beneath the Christian myth, there was a need to justify existence, while Jeffers saw with utmost clarity man's animalistic primacy and felt it was the departure from the natural state that brought about the ills of civilization:

A severed hand
Is an ugly thing, and man disserved from the earth and stars
and his history . . . for contemplation or in fact . . .
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness,
the greatest beauty is

Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the
divine beauty of the universe.¹⁷

Robinson Jeffers knew well that the price paid during the Enlightenment was the forfeiture of Dionysian consciousness, and during the mass alienation of the twenties he tried to reintegrate man with his primal origins:

A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again.¹⁸

And this is the terrific beauty of Jeffers' work: that his tremendous vision transcends the human element and gets to the heart of existence as revealed in nature and the mythology of the past. In his study of symbolism and mythology in Jeffers' poetry, Robert J. Brophy makes the point that Jeffers' purpose was not to revive specific myths from the past, but rather to "grasp below our rootlessness and recover for us the ancient resources of the race."¹⁹ No dried tubers here, to coin a phrase from Eliot. Rather, Jeffers resorts to the old magic, to the spirit in the primitive myths, so that when we come upon the incestuous Cauldwell household, or upon California in the moonlight wishing to consummate her worship of the stallion, or upon the lunatic priest Arthur Barclay, we are transported beyond characterizations into the heart of humanity to face the questions that have plagued mankind since the dawn of consciousness: namely, "Is there a God and of what nature? Second, whether there's anything after we die but worms meat? / Third, how should men live?"²⁰

These are questions of epic proportion no doubt, "large time-worn questions"²¹ Jeffers called them, but questions the poet addresses time and time again throughout his verse. His answers are, however, not within the boundaries of the comforting, placating humanistic tradition. They are instead derived from what Robert Bly has called "the night-intelligence . . . the old non-human or non-ego energies the ancient world imagined so well."²² They seek to restore to life the mystical and magical qualities of existence.

As to a God in the universe, quite simply, it was the "organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe"²³ that Jeffers worshiped, not the corporate fictions that prevailed. The wholly transhuman God is the elemental vibrancy of things, whose "signature is the beauty of things,"²⁴ whose face is the "enormous invulnerable beauty."²⁵

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that after we die we become nothing more than worm's meat. What greater divinity could men hope to achieve than to reappear as windy grasses growing up out of the burned out rubble of the Cauldwell home? If a hope is to be entertained about what awaits us after death, for Jeffers it is that he again merges with the "cosmic 'Beauty' which he so reverently worshiped."²⁶

I admired the beauty
While I was human, now I am part of the beauty.
I wander in the air,
Being mostly gas and water, and flow in the ocean;
Touch you and Asia
At the same moment; have a hand in the sunrises
And the glow of this grass.²⁷

I suppose the answer to how men should conduct their lives is the most disconcerting to the purveyors of the humanistic fiction. The key to the race is to "uncenter the human mind from itself,"²⁸ to "climb the great ladder out of the pit of yourself and man."²⁹ Jeffers urges each member of the tribe to

. . . make his health in his mind,
to love the coast opposite humanity
And so be freed of love, laying it like bread on the waters; it is
worst turned inward, it is best shot farthest.³⁰

Make no mistake, this is not a clever rewording of the humanistic doctrine to provide hope for the future. Robinson Jeffers, to the end, believed in the cyclic nature of existence, the inevitable collapse of our Apollonian civilization in favor of a Dionysian chaos. Prophetically, the poet felt our culture was "coming to the end of the bad story, that needn't have been bad only we fools botch everything."³¹ The imperative is to live honestly and wisely by not surrendering ourselves to false hopes of redemption in the fashion of Eliot, or to new and artificial realities as in the work of Stevens. Summed up by R.J. Brophy, "This is the whole thrust of Jeffers' poetry—to arrive at the divine 'Beauty of Things,' unhindered and uncompromised by human desire and delusion."³²

Robinson Jeffers moved beyond the thin solutions offered us by his contemporaries, providing us with much more permanent valuations. His was an eternal vision that ranks with the iconoclastic mysticism of Whitman. It is possible that the transcendent nature of Jeffers' verse

could perpetuate his dissociation, but his is a poetry that grew out of the aesthetic tradition in which his contemporaries found themselves, and deserves, if nothing else, an equal respect.

We are at a point in contemporary poetry where the humanistic, aesthetic tradition is running out of fuel and the intellectual left-brained consciousness is failing to yield satisfactory solutions for the continuing alienation. There is a movement afoot to reinstate the night-intelligence to our consciousness, but until the poets "re-discover" Robinson Jeffers and reattach the limb of poetry amputated by his critical exclusion, there will be insufficient force to propel us towards the consummate existence in union with the eternal, inhuman "Beauty of Things." Until then, we remain silently mutinous in the ship of the humanistic spirit whose rudder, stuck left, drives men in spiraling circles ever inward on themselves.

Notes

¹ Loren Eiseley, forward, *Not Man Apart: Photographs of the Big Sur Coast* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1965) 23.

² M. L. Rosenthal, "Some Thoughts on American Poetry," *Contemporary Poetry in America*, ed. Robert Boyers (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) 28.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1962) 82.

⁴ Brother Antoninus (William Everson), *Robinson Jeffers: Fragments of an Older Fury* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968) 35.

⁵ Ezra Pound, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," *Anthology of American Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1980) 1145.

⁶ Robinson Jeffers, "The Tower Beyond Tragedy," *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1959) 138.

⁷ Antoninus 26.

⁸ Mark Twain, "The Mysterious Stranger," *The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1929) 138.

⁹ Wallace Stevens, "Large Red Man Reading," *The Complete Poems* (New York: Vintage Press, 1954) 423.

¹⁰ Howard Nemerov, "Poetry & Meaning," *Contemporary Poetry in America*, 10.

¹¹ Arthur B. Coffin, *Robinson Jeffers: Poet of Inhumanism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971) 28.

¹² Antoninus 12.

¹³ Coffin 3.

¹⁴ Coffin xxiii.

¹⁵ Antoninus 15.

¹⁶ Jeffers, "The Roan Stallion," *Selected Poetry* 149.

¹⁷ Jeffers, "The Answer," *Selected Poetry* 594.

¹⁸ Jeffers, "Return," *Selected Poetry* 576.

¹⁹ Robert J. Brophy, *Robinson Jeffers: Myth, Ritual, and Symbolism in His Narrative Poems* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973) x. Note: Though the quote is from Everson's foreward, I think the point is carried throughout by Brophy.

²⁰ Jeffers, "Theory of Truth," *Selected Poetry* 614.

²¹ Jeffers 614.

²² Robert Bly, ed. *News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980) 80.

²³ Jeffers, "The Answer," *Selected Poetry* 594.

²⁴ Jeffers, "Look, How Beautiful," *Not Man Apart* 68.

²⁵ Jeffers, "Nova," *Selected Poetry* 597.

²⁶ Brophy 5.

²⁷ Jeffers, "Inscription for a Gravestone," *Selected Poetry* 480.

²⁸ Coffin 10.

²⁹ Jeffers, "Signpost," *Selected Poetry* 574.

³⁰ Jeffers, "Meditations On Saviors," *Selected Poetry* 204.

³¹ Jeffers, "Tamar," *Selected Poetry* 47.

³² Brophy 298.

Ed. Note: This previously unpublished essay won second prize in the Robinson Jeffers Centennial Essay competition, November, 1986.

David L. Rodriguez

African Themes

Masked Cat

(following pages)





**Foreword to John Gardner's Book
*On Becoming a Novelist***

A long time ago—it was the summer of 1958—my wife and I and our two baby children moved from Yakima, Washington, to a little town outside of Chico, California. There we found an old house and paid twenty-five dollars a month rent. In order to finance this move, I had to borrow a hundred and twenty-five dollars from a druggist I'd delivered prescriptions for, a man named Bill Barton.

This is by the way of saying that in those days my wife and I were stone broke. We had to eke out a living, but the plan was that I would take classes at what was then called Chico State College. But for as far back as I can remember, long before we moved to California in search of a different life and our slice of the American pie, I'd wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write, and I wanted to write anything—fiction, of course, but also poetry, plays, scripts, articles for *Sports Afield*, *True*, *Argosy*, and *Rogue* (some of the magazines I was then reading), pieces for the local newspaper—anything that involved putting words together to make something coherent and of interest to someone besides myself. But at the time of our move, I felt in my bones I had to get some education in order to go along with being a writer. I put a very high premium on education then—much higher in those days than now, I'm sure, but that's because I'm older and have an education. Understand that nobody in my family had even gone to college or for that matter had got beyond the mandatory eighth grade in high school. I didn't *know anything*, but I knew I didn't know anything.

So along with this desire to get an education, I had this very strong desire to write; it was a desire so strong that, with the encouragement I was given in college, and the insight acquired, I kept on writing long after "good sense" and the "cold facts"—the "realities" of my life told

me, time and again, that I ought to quit, stop the dreaming, quietly go ahead and do something else.

That fall at Chico State I enrolled in classes that most freshman students have to take, but I enrolled as well for something called Creative Writing 101. This course was going to be taught by a new faculty member named John Gardner, who was already surrounded by a bit of mystery and romance. It was said that he'd taught previously at Oberlin College but had left there for some reason that wasn't made clear. One student said Gardner had been fired—students, like everyone else, thrive on rumor and intrigue—and another student said Gardner had simply quit after some kind of flap. Someone else said his teaching load at Oberlin, four or five classes of freshman English each semester, had been too heavy and that he couldn't find time to write. For it was said that Gardner was a real, that is to say a practicing, writer—someone who had written novels and short stories. In any case, he was going to teach CW 101 at Chico State, and I signed up.

I was excited about taking a course from a real writer. I'd never laid eyes on a writer before, and I was in awe. But where were these novels and short stories, I wanted to know. Well, nothing had been published yet. It was said that he couldn't get his work published and that he carried it around with him in boxes. (After I became his student, I was to see those boxes of manuscript. Gardner had become aware of my difficulty in finding a place to work. He knew I had a young family and cramped quarters at home. He offered me the key to his office. I see that gift now as a turning point. It was a gift not made casually, and I took it, I think, as a kind of mandate—for that's what it was. I spent part of every Saturday and Sunday in his office, which is where he kept the boxes of manuscript. The boxes were stacked up on the floor beside the desk. *Nickel Mountain*, grease-pencilled on one of the boxes, is the only title I recall. But it was in his office, within sight of his unpublished books, that I undertook my first serious attempts at writing.)

When I met Gardner, he was behind a table at registration in the women's gym. I signed the class roster and was given a course card. He didn't look anywhere near what I imagined a writer should look like. The truth is, in those days he looked and dressed like a Presbyterian minister, or an FBI man. He always wore a black suit, a white shirt, and a tie. And he had a crewcut. (Most of the young men my age wore their hair in what was called a "DA" style—a "duck's ass"—the hair combed back along the sides of the head onto the nape and plastered down with hair oil or cream.) I'm saying that Gardner looked very square. And to complete the picture he drove a black four-door Chevrolet with black-wall tires, a car so lacking in any of the amenities it didn't even

have a car radio. After I'd got to know him, had been given the key, and was regularly using his office as a place to work, I'd be at his desk in front of the window on a Sunday morning, pounding away on his typewriter. But I'd be watching for his car to pull up and park on the street out in front, as it always did every Sunday. Then Gardner and his first wife, Joan, would get out and, all dressed up in their dark, severe-looking clothes, walk down the sidewalk to the church where they would go inside and attend services. An hour and a half later I'd be watching for them as they came out, walked back down the sidewalk to their black car, got inside and drove away.

Gardner had a crewcut, dressed like a minister or an FBI man, and went to church on Sundays. But he was unconventional in other ways. He started breaking the *rules* on the first day of class; he was a chain smoker and he smoked continuously in the classroom, using a metal wastebasket for an ashtray. In those days, nobody smoked in a classroom. When another faculty member who used the same room reported on him, Gardner merely remarked to us on the man's pettiness and narrow-mindedness, opened windows, and went on smoking.

For short story writers in his class, the requirement was one story, ten to fifteen pages in length. For people who wanted to write a novel—I think there must have been one or two of these souls—a chapter of around twenty pages, along with an outline of the rest. The kicker was that this one short story, or the chapter of the novel, might have to be revised ten times in the course of the semester for Gardner to be satisfied with it. It was a basic tenet of his that a writer found what he wanted to say in the ongoing process of *seeing* what he'd said. And this seeing, or seeing more clearly, came about through revision. He *believed* in revision, endless revision; it was something very close to his heart and something he felt was vital for writers, at whatever stage of their development. And he never seemed to lose patience rereading a student story, even though he might have seen it in five previous incarnations.

I think his idea of a short story in 1958 was still pretty much his idea of a short story in 1982; it was something that had a recognizable beginning, middle, and an end to it. Once in a while he'd go to the blackboard and draw a diagram to illustrate a point he wanted to make about rising or falling emotion in a story—peaks, valleys, plateaus, resolution, *denouement*, things like that. Try as I might, I couldn't muster a great deal of interest or really understand this side of things, the stuff he put on the blackboard. But what I did understand was the way he would comment on a student story that was undergoing class

discussion. Gardner might wonder aloud about the author's reasons for writing a story about a crippled person, say, and leaving out the fact of the character's crippledness until the very end of the story. "So you think it's a good idea not to let the reader know this man is crippled until the last sentence?" His tone of voice conveyed his disapproval, and it didn't take more than an instant for everyone in class, including the author of the story, to see that it wasn't a good strategy to use. Any strategy that kept important and necessary information away from the reader in the hope of overcoming him by surprise at the end of the story was cheating.

In class he was always referring to writers whose names I was not familiar with. Or if I knew their names, I'd never read the work. Conrad. Céline. Katherine Anne Porter. Isaac Babel. Walter van Tilburg Clark. Chekhov. Hortense Calisher. Curt Harnack. Robert Penn Warren. (We read a story of Warren's called "Blackberry Winter." For one reason or another, I didn't care for it, and I said so to Gardner. "You'd better read it again," he said, and he was not joking.) William Gass was another writer he mentioned. Gardner was just starting his magazine, *MSS*, and was about to publish "The Pedersen Kid" in the first issue. I began reading the story in manuscript, but I didn't understand it and again I complained to Gardner. This time he didn't tell me I should try it again, he simply took the story away from me. He talked about James Joyce and Flaubert and Isak Dinesen as if they lived just down the road, in Yuba City. He said, "I'm here to tell you who to read as well as teach you how to write." I'd leave class in a daze and make straight for the library to find books by these writers he was talking about.

Hemingway and Faulkner were the reigning authors in those days. But altogether I'd probably read at the most two or three books by these fellows. Anyway, they were so well-known and so much talked about, they couldn't be all that good, could they? I remember Gardner telling me, "Read all the Faulkner you can get your hands on, and then read all of Hemingway to clean the Faulkner out of your system."

He introduced us to the "little" or literary periodicals by bringing a box of these magazines to class one day and passing them around so that we could acquaint ourselves with their names, see what they looked like and what they felt like to hold in the hand. He told us that this was where most of the best fiction in the country and just about all of the poetry was appearing. Fiction, poetry, literary essays, book reviews of recent books, criticism of *living* authors *by* living authors. I felt wild with discovery in those days.

For the seven or eight of us who were in his class, he ordered heavy black binders and told us we should keep our written work in these. He

kept his own work in such binders, he said, and of course that settled it for us. We carried our stories in those binders and felt we were special, exclusive, singled out from others. And so we were.

I don't know how Gardner might have been with other students when it came time to have conferences with them about their work. I suspect he gave everybody a good amount of attention. But it was and still is my impression that during that period he took my stories more seriously, read them closer and more carefully, than I had any right to expect. I was completely unprepared for the kind of criticism I received from him. Before our conference he would have marked up my story, crossing out unacceptable sentences, phrases, individual words, even some of the punctuation; and he gave me to understand that these deletions were not negotiable. In other cases he would bracket sentences, phrases or individual words, and these were items we'd talk about, these cases were negotiable. And he wouldn't hesitate to add something to what I'd written—a word here and there, or else a few words, maybe a sentence that would make clear what I was trying to say. We'd discuss commas in my story as if nothing else in the world mattered more at that moment—and, indeed, it did not. He was always looking to find something to praise. When there was a sentence, a line of dialogue, or a narrative passage that he liked, something he thought “worked” and moved the story along in some pleasant or unexpected way, he'd write “Nice” in the margin, or else “Good!” And seeing these comments, my heart would lift.

It was close, line-by-line criticism he was giving me, and the reasons behind the criticism, why something ought to be this way instead of that; and it was invaluable to me in my development as a writer. After this kind of detailed talk about the text, we'd talk about the larger concerns of the story, the “problem” it was trying to throw light on, the conflict it was trying to grapple with, and how the story might or might not fit into the grand scheme of story writing. It was his conviction that if the words in the story were blurred because of the author's insensitivity, carelessness, or sentimentality, then the story suffered from a tremendous handicap. But there was something even worse and something that must be avoided at all costs: if the words and the sentiments were dishonest, the author was faking it, writing about things he didn't care about or believe in, then nobody could ever care anything about it.

A writer's value and craft. This is what the man taught and what he stood for, and this is what I've kept by me in the years since that brief but all-important time.

... It was his experience—and it has been mine, in my role as a

teacher of creative writing—that certain aspects of writing can be taught and handed over to other, usually younger, writers. This idea shouldn't come as a surprise to any person seriously interested in education and the creative act. Most good or even great conductors, composers, microbiologists, ballerinas, mathematicians, visual artists, astronomers, or fighter pilots, learned their business from older and more accomplished practitioners. Taking classes in creative writing, like taking classes in pottery or medicine, won't in itself make anyone a great writer, potter, or doctor—it may not even make the person *good* at any of these things. But Gardner was convinced that it wouldn't hurt your chances, either.

One of the dangers in teaching or taking creative writing classes lies—and here I'm speaking from my experience again—in the overencouragement of young writers. But I learned from Gardner to take that risk rather than err on the other side. He gave and kept giving, even when the vital signs fluctuated wildly, as they do when someone is young and learning. A young writer certainly needs as much, I would even say more, encouragement than young people trying to enter other professions. And it ought to go without saying that the encouragement must always be honest encouragement and never hype. . . .

Failure and dashed hopes are common to us all. The suspicion that we're taking on water and that things are not working out in our life the way we'd planned hits most of us at some time or another. By the time you're nineteen you have a pretty good idea of some of the things you're *not* going to be; but more often, this sense of one's limitations, the really penetrating understanding, happens in late youth or early middle age. No teacher or any amount of education can make a writer out of someone who is constitutionally incapable of becoming a writer in the first place. But anyone embarking on a career, or pursuing a calling, risks setback and failure. There are failed policemen, politicians, generals, interior decorators, engineers, bus drivers, editors, literary agents, businessmen, basket weavers. There are also failed and disillusioned creative writing teachers and failed and disillusioned writers. John Gardner was neither of these. . . .

My own debt is great and can only be touched on in this brief context. I miss him more than I can say. But I consider myself the luckiest of men to have had his criticism and his generous encouragement.

On Becoming a Novelist

(excerpts from the book)

When a writer first begins to write, he or she feels the same first thrill of achievement that the young gambler or oboe player feels: winning a little, losing some, the gambler sees the glorious possibilities, exactly as the young oboist feels an indescribable thrill when he gets a few phrases to sound like real music, phrases implying an infinite possibility for satisfaction and self-expression. As long as the gambler or oboist is only playing at being a gambler or oboist, everything seems possible. But when the day comes that he sets his mind on becoming a professional, suddenly he realizes how much there is to learn, how little he knows.

The young writer leaves the undergraduate college, where everyone agrees he is one of the best writers there, and he goes to, say, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, or Stanford, Columbia, or Binghamton. There he finds nearly every one of his classmates was a writing star at his or her college; he finds famous teachers who read his work and seem largely unimpressed; and suddenly the young writer's feelings are mainly alarm and disappointment. Why did his undergraduate teachers so mislead him? he wonders. I'm not sure myself why undergraduate reputations are inflated even by good teachers with high standards; perhaps because outside the specialized, nationally known writers' workshops one encounters relatively few young writers of real promise; or perhaps because at this early stage of a writer's work, the teacher believes that encouragement and praise seem more beneficial than a rigorous assessment of the writer's skills.

In any event, the writer adjusts (or else he gives up). He accepts the truth that he is not as great as his teachers and classmates imagined. He recognizes that the success he hopes for will take work. What a writer in

this gloomy situation needs above all is a community that values what he values, a community that believes, rightly or wrongly, that it is better to be a good writer than to be a good executive, politician, or scientist. Good writers are after all intelligent people. They *could* have been executives, politicians, or scientists. They might not like or want such jobs, but they could do them, and in some ways any one of those jobs might be easier. What keeps the young writer with the potential for success from turning aside to some more generally approved, perhaps easier path is the writing community.

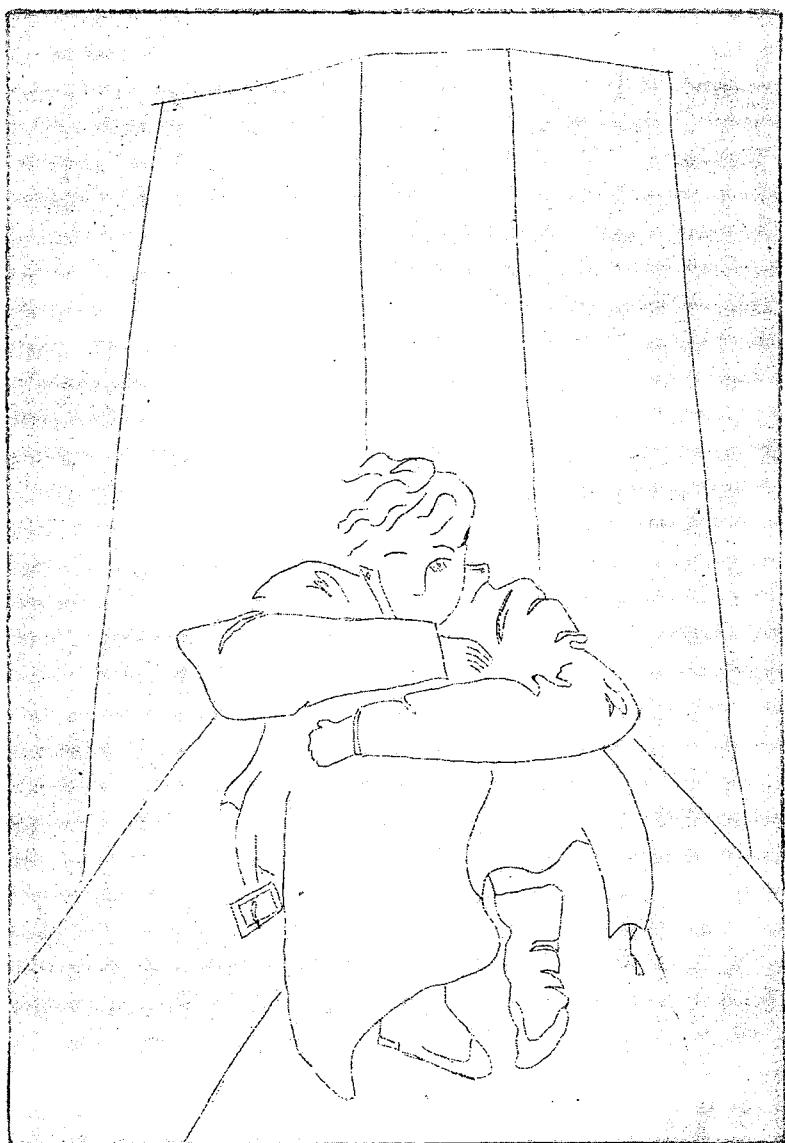
No doubt the truth is that as often as not the writing community saves the writer by its folly. It is partly made up of fools: young innocents who've not yet had the experience of valuing anything other than writing, and maniacs who, having considered other things, think writing the only truly valuable thing the human mind can do. It is partly made up of born writers: people who value other human activities but have no wish to do anything but write. (Asked why she wrote fiction, Flannery O'Connor once said, "Because I'm good at it.") Some members of every writing community are there because they're snobs: writing, or just being around writers, makes them feel superior; others are there because they think being a writer (though they may not have much talent) is romantic. Whatever their reasons or reasonings, these various contingents form, together, a group that helps the young writer forget his doubts. However good or bad the writing teacher, the young writer can count on close attention from all these kinds of people, not to mention a few chemists who enjoy going to readings. The young writer writes, feels uncertain about his work, and gets praise or, at very least, constructive criticism—or even destructive criticism, but from people who appear to care as much about writing as he does himself. . . .

I will not go on to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of studying the social sciences, history or law, and so forth. A good writer may come out of any intellectual discipline at all. Every art and science gives the writer its own special ways of seeing, gives him experience with interesting people, and can provide him with means of making a living—supporting himself while he writes. Since only a few novelists, including very good ones, earn enough by their fiction to take care of themselves and their families, and since after a day of hard manual labor or taxing white-collar office stress it is hard to sit down and write fiction, the young novelist is wise to train himself in some profession where, if he likes, he can ease up a little, take some of his time for writing. Some novelists (Al Lebowitz) practice law part-time; some (Frederick Buechner) are ministers; some are doctors (Walker Percy);

a great many are teachers. The trick, of course, is to find a profession you like and one that will also feed your writing, and not eat up all your time.

It is not necessary—or perhaps not even advisable—that the young writer major in literature. It *is* advisable that he take as many good literature courses as he's able to work in. Only the close study of the great literature of the past, in whatever language, can show the writer clearly what emotional and intellectual heights are possible. And only the study of literature can awaken the writer to those techniques which, if he reads only modern literature, he would never know the existence of. Very good young writers invariably become so by exposing themselves to good models, usually by getting a good teacher's help as they explore fiction of the far and near past. Sooner or later they learn the techniques of the so-called New Criticism (expressed in such books as *Understanding Fiction*, by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Reading Modern Short Stories*, by Jarvis Thurstun, or *The Forms of Fiction*, by Lennis Dunlap and John Gardner; more recent books, such as *Fiction 100*, 2nd Edition edited by J. Pickering, give less emphasis to close analysis but tend to achieve the same thing, an ability to read closely). Learning to read a literary text well helps the student create more complex and interesting fiction. Insofar as possible, the young writer should choose courses dealing with the greatest literary figures available. And he should never study what he can easily figure out on his own. Most survey literature courses, by this rule, should be avoided.

Whatever the student majors in, and whatever he selects for elective courses, college work is enriching, probably more stimulating than anything else the young person can do at this period of his life. If he can, the young writer should give at least glancing attention to as many as possible of the major fields of study: a foreign language, history, philosophy, psychology, one or more of the hard sciences, fine arts. Glancing attention to these fields will enable the student to pursue them further on his own whenever he—or one of his characters—needs information. After his undergraduate years, the young writer who has played the field will find himself drawn naturally to additional interests, picking up paperback books about UFOs, botany, or the Russian Revolution, or falling into intense conversation, at parties, with morticians, go-go dancers, and dog trainers. Even a weak education opens up new worlds. Most writers, one may as well admit, get weak educations. Their minds are too much on their writing, and they lack proper respect. The writer ought not to be too proud of this. At the very least, he should learn to spell.



Untitled

Heather M. Cole

Blood Moon

(excerpt from the forthcoming novel)

"Anyone here?" Megan called into Cannon's quonset hut at the airport.

"Come on in," Cannon said. He rose from his desk and walked out to the entrance to meet her.

"I tried calling you but nobody was here," she said as they walked back to his office, the hard heels of her dark leather boots clapping on the slab floor.

"Did you talk with Father Moriarty again?"

She nodded. "The service is at the old cemetery at two o'clock in the afternoon," she said.

"I'll be there," Cannon assured her without hesitation. "I'll get in touch with Wade Hammer and the rest of the guys on the softball team."

Megan smiled, then turned to walk over to the window of the office. She stared out to the Skyhawk, still listing onto its left wing in the dirt and grass beside the runway. "So Michael was still playing baseball," she said softly, as if she appreciated that rare continuity in her brother's life. "He loved baseball."

"He was a good ballplayer," Cannon said to her, but she did not appear to have heard him.

"God, how long are you going to leave that damn plane there?" she asked. She shook her head, then picked up a folded newspaper and fanned herself, lifting her hair so the cool air stirred the hair along her neck, soft and light as down.

The night before, after they had returned from Cold Heart Canyon, she had fallen asleep on the couch in his living room as they watched an old movie on television. She had showered while he went out and

picked up a pizza. When he returned, she had borrowed a shirt from him, a grey dress shirt with a button-down collar, and lay on the sofa, her head on a pillow taken from his bed. He set the pizza down on the rug, then leaned back against the couch and pulled back the lid of the cardboard box. She propped herself up on an elbow to eat a wedge of pizza, but he could see in her watery eyes that exhaustion had finally caught up with her. She fell asleep shortly after dinner, promising to close her eyes for just a minute, and he watched her sleep, her long dark hair drifting across her forehead.

She had told him about the year she spent in Europe, traveling with Jacob Lewis, the son of a Southern California industrialist she'd met while attending Mills College, a private women's university near San Francisco. He was tall and thin with a handsome aquiline nose and eyes that seemed to look through her, and he lavished money on her as if his family's wealth was inexhaustible. They flew into Paris, bought a Mercedes, then drove to the Mediterranean and across northern Italy and finally through Yugoslavia to Greece, where they stayed on a small island with turquoise inlets and high white cliffs, where the sun lingered on the horizon in an endless dusk as warm and plentiful as the wine. It hadn't taken her long to realize Jacob Lewis was neither the man of her dreams nor the man he seemed. In public he was expansive and gregarious and graceful; but in private he was sullen and secretive and one night she woke to his throttled sobbing and found him sitting at an open window, his face in his hands. He would not tell her what was wrong. He sustained himself through the ensuing weeks with increasing numbers of tranquilizers until he was finally and completely numb. Then one day he was gone; she didn't know where. He left her an apologetic if not explanatory note and enough money to return. When she was settled in San Francisco, she wrote to his parents to ask if he was all right, but she never received an answer.

Cannon was intrigued by the story of her travels in Europe, but even more so by the clinical tone of her voice. She acted as if she hadn't been touched by Lewis's troubles any more than by the desertion of her father and her mother's enduring despair. Yet there was something rehearsed in the way she spoke, as if she had practiced her recollections, repeating them to herself many times over, and even as he watched her sleep on his couch, she seemed redolent of sadness, as if it were a family birthright. As she lay on her side, legs curled up, the shirt fell open, and he gazed down upon her delicate, lightly fashioned breastbones. He could not take his eyes from her; her vulnerability raised in him a dark urge he had never felt before, beyond lust or desire, beyond his control. He reached out and took her arm, and she

woke with a start, her eyes wide and afraid until she recognized him. Then she smiled sweetly at him. There was no way he could think of to tell her how badly she frightened him.

She dressed slowly in his bedroom, then he walked her out to the Impala, an arm wrapped around her narrow waist as they crossed the yard. As they drove across town to her motel, she fell asleep against his shoulder. Her motel room was hot and stuffy; he cracked the window while she was in the bathroom. When she came back out, she slipped her arms over his shoulders and around his neck, then kissed him. He did not wrap his arms around her; he was afraid he'd never be able to release her. She gently pulled away from him, then turned and stepped out of her jeans, then slipped out of his grey dress shirt, and even now, as he watched her staring out the window of his office at her brother's plane, he could see the gentle swells of her back.

"I went to Superior Court this afternoon," he said to her. "They arraigned the three men who killed Michael."

She did not turn to face him. "I suppose they'll release them."

"They'll be out on bail soon enough, probably by tonight."

Megan sighed, then spun away from the window. "It's so warm today," she said. She placed her hands on her hips, then leaned first to the right, then to her left, as if loosening still muscles. "I didn't sleep well," she said absently. "I woke up in the middle of the night and went into the bathroom for a glass of water. In the distance I could hear a train." She straightened and stood upright, then looked down at the floor, as if trying to recapture what she'd felt. "It was so long, such a long train. I opened the bathroom window and listened through the screen, and it went on and on." She turned to Cannon as if she had just remembered what she meant to say. "I loved it," she said. "It was so soothing, so musical."

He could not look at Megan without thinking of all the bleak liaisons he had endured since he moved to Rancho Esquon, the dreamless women he met in bars, the panting wives he taught to fly, their willing bodies as slick as fish on hot summer nights, scarcely cooled by fans humming in the windows. He had had just one relationship of any length since he moved to the valley, and even though he had forged no commitment to Ellen Watson, spoken or implicit, he still felt the guilt and the shame that gripped him the instant he slammed the door of her small clapboard house and walked out into the bitter late winter fog. He had met her through Hammer, who had grown up with her older brother. One afternoon in the grey drizzling rain, she had accompanied her brother out to the airport, and Hammer introduced them. Several days later Hammer told him that she had told her brother she would

like him to call her. Cannon was at once excited and apprehensive. She was sturdy and rather plain with a wide, exaggerated mouth and hair the color of ash, but eventually he raised the nerve to call her. She answered on the first ring and invited him to dinner. As he stepped inside her house, the scorched heat of the wall furnace stung his face. The small low-ceilinged room smelled of the catbox on the floor of the service porch beyond the kitchen. He felt trapped, claustrophobic. She had broiled a steak for him, even though she said she was a vegetarian, and they ate at a table with legs so uneven his wine splashed out of his glass every time he tried to cut the meat.

Afterward they moved into her bedroom, where the potted begonias and wandering Jews had shed more leaves to the floor than they supported. Without troubling to undress, she pulled him down on her as if afraid he might elude her grasp, her heavy bosom spilling out of her blouse. She arched her back and gathered her skirt around her waist. As she reached out to guide him into her, he saw she hadn't been wearing anything beneath the skirt. He did not trust her cries or believe her frenetic ecstasy, but he saw neither a means nor reason to dispute her, and all that night the metal frame of her bed thumped so loudly against the wall that Cannon feared they would wake the neighbors.

She invited him back the next night, and then the next. He could feel her thick arms encircling him, but he was too weak to resist her. He dreaded their plodding conversations; she was dull and dim-witted and possessed by a provincial bigotry that sent shivers through him every time it surfaced. She wasn't a vegetarian, either. He returned to her only for the warmth of her sex and to blunt the effects of his loneliness, but gradually he grew weary of her and began to turn her away with shallow excuses or promises he never intended to keep. At first he simply declined to drop by her house, but then she began appearing unexpectedly at his, and he immediately resumed his pattern of regular nocturnal visits. She asked him what was wrong, but he hadn't the heart to articulate his disdain for her, even though he could feel his frustration stacking up like storm clouds over the Coast Range. Finally he had to tell her he had no intention of returning, that he didn't want to see her anymore. "You're a pig!" she screamed at him. "This is what I get? This is what I get for putting out for you?"

He was startled by her outburst, though he knew he shouldn't have been. All he could say to her was, "I guess so."

But Megan Morrissey was something else. He knew that the first time he saw her, standing on the platform at the Southern Pacific station, waving the bottle of champagne in her hand. He could still see her dress snapping in the wind like a flag, her face lit by the headlights of

her brother's Cadillac. He knew he was falling for her, even as she walked out of his office and drove away; he supposed he knew it the first time he saw her.

The Maid, the Mafia, and Me

I was sweeping the floor and god, so much dust came out from the tin strip where the two floors meet. It rose up into clouds that became people and right away I knew—they would fight and gossip and shake off their aprons and tip their hats and backbite and eat apples, smoke cigarettes and make insinuations, spit, cough, hack and sometimes blossom.

They're still out there now, working, and I could be afraid. But I'm not. Once in a while one of them, the man with the expensive suit, sits on the woodpile, which is getting low, and crosses his legs, smoking while the maid sweeps. Sometimes she sits in the corner, also on the woodpile, while he paces, frankly interested in what role he will play. He looks at me, blowing smoke, and says, "Don't bother with my cigarette nothing turns into dark streets forget it I don't exist for your sweet dreams next I'll have a gun and live in Chicago which is what you thought anyway."

Then he says, "No," and sits back down again, thinking. The maid doesn't say all that has happened to make her a hard luck story, "It doesn't matter honey I can make pies with latticework crust and you can put your arms around me in front of a Paris cafe and kiss me no matter who's looking." Then she turns to me and straightens my collar. "I just wanted to touch you," she says, and am I sure I don't want her sweet kiss and a chasm to fall into?

At least I would not be lonely. I retreat into the living room and my comfortable chair. At first I think the only movement of time is the cat twitching his whiskers in half-open sleep, but then I see the rectangles of sunlight on the carpet are moving toward me casually as the day and my cheeks are blushing with the sun that is almost here. I slip back through the slender eye of a thought and say that I am daydreaming. This way I am safe from my decision, for a while.

Since Then I've Been a City

There once was a beautiful, strange, intelligent and funny man who did not think I was that important. Maybe.

There once was a beautiful, strange, intelligent and funny man who did not think I was that important. So what?

So I went down to the woods in the park and buried myself, and still a little voice cried out, "There once was a beautiful, strange, intelligent, and yes, a funny man, who did not think you were that important."

So I burrowed down even deeper, till I hit rock and I had no nails left. I came to rest and my clothes began to soften and separate into threads, mixing with the rich, loose soil. I blended in so well, even the moles did not notice me when they passed, with their furry soft bellies. The voice said "mmpf und gen youutiful, range, menefegent und yes, funny man." et cetera, but I knew what it was saying.

The hug of the earth is very understanding, and for a long time it enveloped me with a deep singing quiet. I would have stayed there, but I decided to go for a walk, why not, and the voice was no more than a rustle in the autumn leaves. It said, "You are a beautiful, strange, intelligent, and yes, a funny woman . . ." But I let it go at that and became a city instead, because I was not that important.



Passenger

Brenda Kleinfelder

Dedo Aleko

Dedo Aleko was always the last person in the family to go to bed, but Baba Rummyana was always the first one up in the morning. No one needed to be called. She woke and rose. He woke and rose. Then the boys and their wives. Then the two little girls. When Dedo Aleko came into the kitchen Baba was slicing yesterday's bread, spooning out yogurt, and making tea. Before the others were up she would have set the dough for that day's bread. And by the time the two girls were making toast on the hot stove, and his mustachioed sons had shaved, and their wives had taken over in the kitchen so that Baba Rummyana could walk out in the morning sunshine with him, he was gone to turn out the cows, stir up the buffalo, and slop the pigs. The ducks and geese followed him wherever he went. The chickens, one bright eye turned up as if looking at him, scattered as he tromped along. The goats rose on their hind legs and danced around him as the seraphim were said to dance around God.

He finished each day always in the same way. While supper was being put out, he hoed a bit in the garden or picked peppers and eggplant for the next day as darkness fell. Then he had his supper, yogurt stirred with cold water, tomatoes sliced, bread, *bonitsa*, and a bit of cold lamb with roasted hot peppers. Supper out of the way, always in the dark whether summer or winter, he made a round of the place, tightening the closure of the pigpen, driving the sheep and goats and cows into the stable under the house, penning the geese behind the high wire. They all moved for him to their places as he came along. Though he talked constantly to them all, he never had to flail at them; accustomed to their place and to his patrol, they murmured and snorted, but moved to their proper places for the night. Making his rounds, assuring himself that his farm and animals were secure, he felt

awake and strong, not at all tired. In the morning, however, his head was heavier with sleep and his muscles pulled and dragged more wearisomely with every year. He could, after a day's work, sing and dance and drink with his family and friends. It was the beginning of another day that tried him. But beginning over was a part of the pattern of his life.

Year after year there was the plowing and planting before there would be a harvest; there was the waiting for the plums and apricots in late spring, then the corn, then the nuts, and nearly into winter the cabbage. The winter months were cold and restful. He slept more hours than he was awake. Only in the short days could he work about the place, and he eased into a pattern of an early drink of *slivo*, then a supper of cabbage and some meat, drinking thin red wine he had made that fall. Now was the time to enjoy what he had produced: the cabbages, the wheat, the potatoes, the lamb and goat, the *slivovitz* and wine.

After that came spring, a wondrous time that often demanded more of him than he felt he had. The hellebore blooming early on the hillsides marked its presence. And it all started again. He woke slowly to spring. Not until the ewes began to lamb and needed his care did he shudder away his winter lassitude and bestir himself. The trees were there year after year, renewing themselves. He had only to prune them a bit. The geese and the sheep and the goats unthinkingly and naturally welcomed their spring, honking, baaing, bleating, and mounting. The donkey, more like himself than anything else on his farm, had to be broken to the plow anew. And the earth had to be turned and planted with the seed of wheat and oats and barley. It was not that he was unhappy or thought of himself as a beast of burden that he identified himself with the donkey, but that the two of them went at the beginning year's work as if they were called upon to do something that had already been done and should have stayed done. The donkey brayed early in the morning right along with the rooster, and if he had needed something to awaken him, that would have done it. As they moved across the field the donkey would now and then roll out its clumps of manure, or would stop, even though he might urge it on, spread-legged to urinate, and heave itself into the contortions of its hee-haw-unnhh. Across the valley another would reply with its insane sound, and farther away still another. The first was his brother Vladko's donkey, and so he knew his brother, too, was in the field. The second was his cousin's. And if there were responses from farther off, he could name them too. And what he knew was that everyone in the valley was entering into the spring, plowing for the grain.

Once the seed wheat was planted he turned to the garden that Baba Romyana set out each year. Here were the peppers, the cabbages, the lettuces, the carrots, the rapia, the beans, the onions, the blue tomatoes, the potatoes, the leeks that fed them every day. The livestock had to be cared for too; though he kept an eye on them, it was his sons and their wives who herded and fed the two cows, the twelve sheep, the chickens, ducks, and geese. Somehow, though, when it was time to slaughter one of these creatures, that was still his job. Only the little girls came to watch the chickens tumble around with their heads off.

During that time the wheat grew strong green shoots, then lengthening and browning stems as the heads shaped up, then the long period while it grew no taller but ripened slowly. Every day, morning and afternoon, Dedo Aleko would walk out along the edges of his field. He would take the heads of wheat in his hand to sense their weight. He would pinch off some grains to test against his teeth and tongue. He did this even long before, as he well knew, it could have ripened, so that his testing and tasting shared in what was happening to the wheat.

Sometimes, but not often anymore, as he moved slowly through the summer heat and the ripening crops, he thought of the first son and the first daughter who had died when the wheat had sprouted after the winters of their births. Baba Romyana had grown doubtful and fearful. She had cried when she became pregnant again, cried for the two who had died and cried for what might come. But the boy born then was sturdy, and still was, and so was the one who followed. Now they had wives and children, daughters, not sons, but sturdy little girls like their mothers.

August came. It had been a hot, dry summer; the last rain toward the end of June had delayed making hay, but in a week the moisture was gone from the grass. He had to water Baba Romyana's garden from the well, and the leaves of the sycamore trees, large, crisp, and brown, began to fall. The sun burned the hulls of the walnuts and the almonds, and the grain ripened fast. Though it seemed early to him, it was clear that they were going to have to harvest the grain within a few days.

Dedo Aleko set himself to sharpening the sickles and the two cradle scythes. From the wall of the barn where he worked, the funerary pictures of his mother and father, faded into grey during twenty years, watched over him. In his father's day there had been a rebellion against the Turks, little wars with the peoples around them, a losing war on the side of the Germans, and a king. In his own day there had been another lost war, then a civil war and a revolution, and, blessing of blessings, the revolution, unlike the wars, had not touched him. He went on as he always had, working the farm he had been born on and had come

home to after that second war. He swept and watered and packed down the earth of the threshing floor. He turned inside out the burlap bags used to store the grain, shook them and beat them and hung them in the sun on the wattle fence. He scraped and washed the wooden flails. And at supper he said to the whole family, "We will begin to harvest tomorrow." And to the older granddaughter, round-faced, black-eyed, looking more like his bride Romyana than her own mother, he said, "Demeter, you will cut the first sheaf."

The day began well. It was just daylight, the sun not yet risen above the eastern mountains, when Demeter, using a sickle guided by her *dedo*, grasped a handful of wheat stalks and chopped off a small sheaf. Baba Romyana tied it together with a bit of ribbon and laid it on the ground at the corner of the field nearest the house. Then they spread out across the field and set to work, Dedo Aleko, a son and his wife, then the second son and his wife, and last, Baba Romyana. They began in a straight line across the field, but Dedo Aleko and one of his sons, using cradle scythes, soon moved out in front of the others. He stopped once and, embracing them with a sweep of his arm, shouted, "My combine!" The two girls came behind, not keeping up, but doing as much as they could to gather the wheat into sheaves wrapped and tied with the greener stalks.

Morning passed, and there was lunch of bread and *cyrene* and water. They rested awhile in the shade of a sycamore tree where the goats were tied up because there was no one to herd them. Then they went back to harvesting. By midafternoon it was too hot for any of them to keep working, so they stopped. Dedo Aleko went with the others to the house, then turned and looked back over the field. Two more days of cutting, he thought, and a day of drying and gathering will finish it. At the far edge of the field, someone's cows were being driven up the first of the hills. He watched them as they climbed, then raised his eyes higher. Above Shipka Pass, thunderclouds, sluggishly gray underneath and white on top, rolled and piled, going higher and higher, but at the same time, beginning to spill down his side of the mountains.

The sound of thunder, gentle as the purr of a cat, followed him while he fed the animals and resharpened the sickles for the next day's work. While they ate supper, it pounded more heavily. When he went out to close down the farm for the night, the high clouds were over his head; they flared with waves of sheet lightning from beyond the mountains and were laced with bolts of lightning above. "Maybe it won't rain," he said to Baba Romyana. "We only need a couple of days. This is not the time for rain."

When the others were in bed he stepped outside once more to look

at the sky. The sheet lightning from beyond the mountains still flickered up and over his head, but there was no wind and no cool moistness in the air. There would be no rain, he assured himself. He went to bed and slept.

Shouting awakened him. Then one of his sons pounded on his door and called. He looked up to see light in the window, a moving flickering light. "Fire," the son called. "The wheat's on fire."

Dedo Aleko rolled out of bed, weary and straining as on any morning. He pulled on his pants and *obufki* and went outside. Lightning had struck in his neighbor's grassy orchard just downhill from his wheatfield. The grass had ignited, and the fire had moved uphill quickly into his wheat. There it lifted into the heads standing a foot and a half above the ground and began to turn on itself in a fire storm, rolling up the hill toward the house. His sons and neighbors stood there and watched. Nothing could be done to stop it. It consumed the standing wheat in a flash and then burned more slowly through the wheat they had cut that day. Except for places where they had piled the sheaves, the fire died out.

His brother Vladko strode in from the darkness. "Ayy," he wailed. "It is terrible." "But it burned only one field," said Baba Rумына. "We'll share," said a neighbor. "I planted more than I needed last year, and even more this year. You'll do me a favor." Little Demeter struggled up to Dedo Aleko, her arms wrapped around a thin sheaf of wheat tied with a ribbon. Behind her was her father carrying a larger sheaf under his arm. "I found this. It didn't burn."

Dedo Aleko took the two offerings and walked out into the burned field. It was hot on his feet. He threw the wheat down on a small flame and watched while it burned. Demeter started crying. He walked back, saying to her and to them all, "Since it's burned, let it be burned. We'll sow another crop."

He walked past them to the animal pens where all was quiet. Two goats were awake and chewing; the cows and the buffalo turned large, feelingless eyes upon him; the fowl slept. He went into the house and back to bed. He heard one of the boys say he would keep watch to be sure the fire was out. Vladko and the neighbors called goodnight and *sbogom*. Then Baba Rумына lay down beside him. She said nothing but pressed her arm against his side. She slept. He lay motionless but unsleeping until morning came. Baba Rумына woke and rose. Dedo Aleko lay still until she had water for the tea simmering on the stove. He rose and went out to care for the animals. The goats rose on their hind legs and danced around him.

quarter, and it would have been impossible for me to just up and leave like she wanted me to. But I gave it some thought and decided that I could use some time off, and I wrote her saying I could probably be in Barcelona by Christmas.

Jeanie

I took Robbie's letter down to the Cafe Republica, sat down at a table on the sidewalk, and ordered a *cafe con leche* and a *croissant*. It was early November, and I knew there weren't many mornings of Spanish sun left. I dreaded taking my depression indoors.

As I opened the letter, I noticed how bad my fingernails looked, bitten back and peely. I spread the letter on the table, sticking a corner under the saucer of my coffee cup, and read it with my hands between my thighs. A slight breeze ruffled my hair.

I would try to hold on until Christmas.

Chad

There's a little bar in the Barrio Gothico where I've taken to spending my afternoons. Tucked back among some shops. No one seems to know it's there, except the handful of old men who go there every afternoon to drink brandy and smoke. You wouldn't even find the bar unless you stumbled upon it when you didn't know where you were going, like I did.

I have yet to see a woman there. Just frail old Catalan men, ghosts of their fathers and Picasso, who talk of *futbol*, which makes them feel young, and the war, which makes them feel insurgent. They know, though, like I do, and they are only waiting, playing sleight-of-hand games with their fellow mortals.

Jeanie

The days before Robbie got here were long and lonely. Some seemed not to move at all, like the ships anchored out in the harbor. I saw little of Chad. He'd come home just before dawn, and I'd pretend like his getting in bed woke me. Sometimes we'd go out for breakfast—when he'd read the morning papers or scribble notes to himself on small pieces of scratch paper, which he'd fold and stuff into his pockets—but usually he'd take off by himself around noon. I never asked him where he went, and he never told me.

At first I thought maybe he was seeing another woman. Some skinny, dark-haired, dark-eyed, hurrying hetaera. But I knew that couldn't be. It wasn't in his eyes. Even in the half-light of his coming home, I could see

that his eyes were empty, and I knew that he was spending the time alone.

Had I not already written to Robbie, I might have just given up and left, either gone home to California or gotten on the train for Paris. I'd spent a year there on a student exchange before I'd met Chad, and I felt in a way like it was my city. Chad had brought me to Barcelona, and it was somehow always his. But in Paris, I could walk *les rues* and imagine I were its mayor, or even its queen, making sure, in the guise of an ordinary citizen, that everything was going okay.

I didn't tell Chad that Robbie was coming over. He was well aware that I was worried about him, and it would have been just like him to disappear altogether if he knew people were conspiring against him, especially if it was to save him.

Robbie's plane was to arrive at two in the afternoon on December twenty-third. I was at the airport by ten-thirty that morning.

Rob

The night before I left I hardly slept at all. Too nervous. I'd never been to Europe, and I didn't know a word of Spanish. I thought I'd be able to sleep on the plane, but I couldn't, so I paid three bucks for some headphones and listened to what I thought was a country and western station. Turned out it was a tape with only about a dozen songs on it, and it would have just played over and over if I'd let it.

For lunch they served us some mushy lasagna, and I washed it down with a beer. Then afterwards I watched the movie *On Golden Pond*. There was a girl a few rows up and over who was alone too, and I almost asked her if I could come and sit by her during the movie, but she ended up falling asleep anyway. An old Jewish-looking guy met her in New York, and I figured he was her father and that she was on break from school too. They looked like the type of family that would get together over holidays and try to forget how well they didn't get along the rest of the year.

I had a three-hour layover at JFK, and I bought a *Time*, an Irving Wallace novel, and a corn dog. After eating, I sat down against a wall near the gift shop and tried to read, but I kept getting distracted by announcements of departing and arriving flights: Rome, Sydney, Tokyo, Athens, Frankfurt, London. For the first time it really hit me that I was leaving the United States.

After a while I went outside and watched cabbies coming and going, unloading and loading up fares and their luggage. It was snowing and cold, though, so I went back inside and watched part of a football game in a bar.

When the game was over, I went over to my terminal and sat down and tried to read, but the foreign accents and tongues, the announcements on the PA, and just everyone hurrying around so much kept me from concentrating. Not to mention my thinking about what it was going to be like to see Chad and wondering how far gone he really was.

Chad

Dig: There are three things customs won't let you bring into the U.S.: firearms, explosives, and absynthe. That will weigh heavily toward a decision not to go back. Not that I couldn't sneak some through, but that I couldn't rely on keeping some around, and more, that the government of the land of the free and the home of the brave won't let you drink yourself blind and crazy if you want to.

When I woke up this morning, Jeanie was gone. Someday, I'll turn around and she'll have gone home. She wants to talk about it. I don't want to talk about anything.

I took my notebook down to Las Ramblas and drank coffee while I read the Spanish newspapers. A contortionist in a red beret walked by on his hands with his legs locked behind his head, and a band of gypsies showed how they'd trained a goat to stand with all four feet on a bar stool. Some danced around it while two played a simple melody over and over again on a bugle and accordion. Around four it started to cloud up, and the sidewalks emptied. I rolled a cigarette with some hash in it and walked down toward the water. Sitting beside a lion at the foot of the statue of Columbus, I smoked it slowly and watched the drizzle become rain. Then I went down into the subway and listened, between the trains that roared through, to a Dutchman with a little wisp of beard and a boatman's cap playing a guitar and singing Bob Dylan songs.

When I'd dried off, I crawled into a train and headed across town for Cine España, where I sat through two and a half Louis Malle films before I allowed myself to go have a drink.

Rob

The Barcelona airport was much smaller than I'd imagined. I could see it below as we banked out over the blue water and circled back inland. When we landed it was two in the afternoon the day after I'd left San Francisco, and I'd only slept about an hour and a half.

The customs guards were soldiers with rifles, and they waved me through. I went over and waited by the luggage chute for my backpack and suitcase, which shot down right away, and then I followed some other people who looked like they knew where they were going over

toward some metal double doors and another soldier.

The doors slid open and we stepped forward. A crowd of people surged around the door, and most of the people I'd followed saw right away whoever was there to meet them. I looked through the hugging for Jeanie.

Finally, I saw her, waving and shouldering through the crowd toward me. We hugged too, and then she helped me with my stuff, and we stepped off to the side and away from everyone else.

"You made it," she said.

I set my suitcase down and look around. Then I looked back at her and nodded.

"You hungry or thirsty or anything?"

I shook my head. "Where's Chad?"

She took a breath and looked away, then looked back at me. "Come on, let's not talk about that now." She reached down and picked up my suitcase. "Let's get out of here." She turned and started walking toward an escalator.

I followed, watching her. Her hair was stringy and looked dirty, and she seemed more tired than I felt.

We walked past concessions that sold magazines, tobacco, banners with bulls and bullfighters on them, and past a couple of bars where men sat drinking coffee and eating sandwiches. The plane had been more than half-full of Americans, but they had all disappeared. I felt out of place with my backpack, Levis, and down jacket—the Spanish men my age all wore slacks and loafers, or tight-fitting designer jeans and short leather coats; the women wore short dresses and shiny black pumps.

We took the escalator to the second floor and then walked down a long corridor and then back down some steps and got on a train. I sat back and looked at Jeanie.

"How was the flight?"

"Okay."

She looked away as the train started to roll, then reached into her purse for a cigarette. I'd never seen her smoke before.

I watched her light it and blow out the match, then said, "How is he?"

She blew a cloud of smoke up into the air above her head and shrugged. "Oh, I don't know." She looked out the window. "I never even see him anymore. I don't know if he's in trouble or about to go over the edge, or what."

"I'm not sure what I'm going to be able to do," I said.

She reached across the seat and took my hand. "I don't know either," she said, "but maybe together we can get to him. At least we can try. To

tell you the truth, if you hadn't come I think I might have flipped out myself." She smiled, let go of my hand, and watched her cigarette burn down.

I turned to the window to watch the scenery pass, the fields of artichokes and run-down shacks, and old farmers leading old horses down narrow rutted roads into the afternoon.

Chad

My friend Rick was a medic in the war. Came home with dead friends and a piece of Viet Cong shell in his leg. He's the only one I write to. Usually, though, we're just writing to ourselves.

I told Jeanie this morning that things were getting better. Although we haven't talked about what they are, she knew what I meant. At least as much as I did. Didn't believe me, though.

It's shitty to put her through this, I know that. But I haven't chosen to, and I can't explain it. It's just some nagging dissatisfaction with myself, the world, and the way I'm supposed to fit into it.

I was in graduate school. Finished, in fact, with my course work. Just had to write my dissertation. I'm not sure why it took me so long to realize that would be pointless. Big fat Ph.D after my name, just so I could bestow my knowledge on bored undergraduates who either could learn everything from reading books themselves or to whom it didn't and never would matter anyway.

Yesterday, I put all my shoes except for one pair out by the street. They were gone within an hour.

Jeanie

It was good to see Robbie. Even though he looked tired, you could tell he was fresh and full of energy. The sad thing is that only made me wish for the old Chad more than ever.

Not that Chad had been fresh and unjaded when we first got to Spain. He wasn't. He was tired and bitter, but I thought the move would somehow restore that romantic side he had when we'd first met, the romantic side I fell hopelessly in love with.

I was a student of his at Cal. He was a teaching assistant, and I was an undergraduate. The class was a lower division course and for me an elective. I'd been taking nothing but classes in my major—psychology—and I figured a humanities class would give my schedule some variety and give me an excuse to read some books with plots and characters instead of cases and control groups.

Back then Chad had energy. He'd stand in front of the class and

sometimes I think he'd almost forget he was even there, or that we were. A few times he spent the whole class period reading Byron right out of the book. I'd sit in the front row and watch his eyes. I'd never seen anyone get so worked up over anything like he did. Once, his eyes actually welled up and he cried, just a little bit, and when he excused us he sat down on the floor in front of the classroom and kept right on reading.

That's what I fell in love with. That genuine love of what he was doing. Complete honesty and commitment. The first words he ever spoke to me—not as student to teacher—were, “Come home with me and stay.”

I guess the first time you see Chad you think he's not put together quite right. He's about five feet eight with a sort of sunken chest that only seems attached to his legs by a very fine thread, and his legs are like they're made out of metal, each step almost mechanical, like he's not actually in control but is being controlled by a puppeteer who is lifting his legs up and setting them down with strings from somewhere way up high.

And his hair's funny. It's thin and reddish, and I don't think any two strands are the same length. I suppose someone who cared more about how he looked could hide those things by dressing carefully, but Chad usually just wears an old pair of slacks he got at the Good Will and a T-shirt. When it's cold he wears a sweater that I bought for him shortly after we met, and if it's real cold he'll wear over that this old plaid sports coat—gray and plum—that doesn't match the slacks or sweater.

Lately, he's quit wearing his glasses.

Chad

This emptiness. In the black on the bus and the coats in the rain and the spots between the teeth of old women. And on the bottoms of my shoes, which I looked at as I waited for the train.

I got off in Figueras—four hours north of Barcelona—and walked across the plaza and the mud to the tiled streets. Baskets, bread, garlic on strings, pastries. Hats. Kids around corners, eyes wide and feisty.

“*Teatro-Museo Dali*.” The Dali Theater Museum. An arrow pointing up. I look to the sky expecting to see the old man himself bursting through the clouds on horseback, or crucified and smiling. Laughing at his own joke.

I take brandy twice. Tomorrow is Christmas.

Tomorrow is Christmas.

Last Christmas. Jeanie and I are in Berkeley. We walk down to the

BART station, take a train under the bay to San Francisco, come up on Market Street. She is telling me I should not drink so early. I buy her lunch in North Beach.

"Where are you, Chad?"

"Figueras."

"You won't be home, in Barcelona I mean?"

"Will you be okay?"

"Uh huh. Sure. I'll be fine."

"I don't want to see Robbie right now."

"Wha—? How did you know?"

"I found the letter."

"Chad, I love you."

"Love me then." I hang up and whisper Feliz Navidad into the cold and, after another brandy, walk up the hill to the museum.



Angel Feet

Simpson family memorial statue
Chico Cemetery, Chico

Xavier Bailey

Contributor's Notes

Valerie Allison lives and works here and there in California and goes to school on the East Coast and nothing is ever finished.

Xavier Bailey is originally from San Diego and is in his second year at California State University, Chico. He is an intermediate photography student but has yet to declare a major.

Raymond Barnett teaches in the department of Biological Sciences at California State University, Chico, and has done so for the last 10 years. His novel *Jade and Fire*, which will be published this June by Random House, is set in Peking in 1948, with the ancient city besieged by Communist armies without and racked by a series of bizarre murders within.

Clark Brown has taught at U.C. Berkeley, Stanford, and is currently teaching creative writing at California State University, Chico. His short fiction has been published in numerous magazines, and he also has a novel, *The Disciple*, published by Viking Press.

Raymond Carver, a Guggenheim Fellow in 1979, has twice been awarded grants by the National Endowment for the Arts. He has taught at universities in Iowa, Texas, California, and New York. In 1983 he received the Mildred and Harold Strauss Living Award. His books of short fiction number four, and he also has three collections of poetry. Mr. Carver now lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Heather M. Cole is a displaced southern belle from Redding, California. It's a long story. . . .

K. Patrick Conner lives in San Francisco and is currently at work on a second novel called *Restless Heart*.

John Gardner, after being asked to leave Chico State in 1963 by the administration, went on to publish ten volumes of criticism, five books for children, two works of poetry, two collections of short stories, and eight novels. He also continued to teach creative writing. He died in September 1982 at the age of 49.

Brenda Kleinfelder is currently on life sabbatical while obtaining a degree from California State University, Chico, for unknown reasons. Brenda communes in a quadraplex with her camera and cat Aretha.

Norman Mallory has shown his artwork in exhibitions throughout North America and Europe. His poems, essays, and fiction have appeared in over sixty magazines. Mr. Mallory currently teaches English and humanities at Moorpark College in Southern California.

Murray F. Markland has been a Fulbright Lecturer at Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, and has lectured at Sofia University, also in Bulgaria. He currently teaches English at California State University, Chico.

Stephen Metzger is a freelance writer, specializing in travel and outdoor writing. He has also published fiction in several magazines. Mr. Metzger currently teaches part-time at California State University, Chico.

David L. Rodriguez remembers his first day in Chico as being 120 degrees and climbing. After leaving Chico temporarily he returned and now waits patiently for his fifteen minutes of fame and searches for the little green apple last seen wearing a brown paper bag.

Scott B. Stevens is a graduating senior in English and writes, basically, because his life depends on it. Of his prize-winning essay on Robinson Jeffers, he says, "Most sincere thanks go to Dr. James Karman—without his expertise and support, this essay would have never been possible."

Susan Wooldridge lives in Chico with her family and is given to changes at the last minute. She currently works with California Poets in the Schools.

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Tenth Anniversary Issue

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