

Trial Impression

a literary magazine

volume 3 number 1



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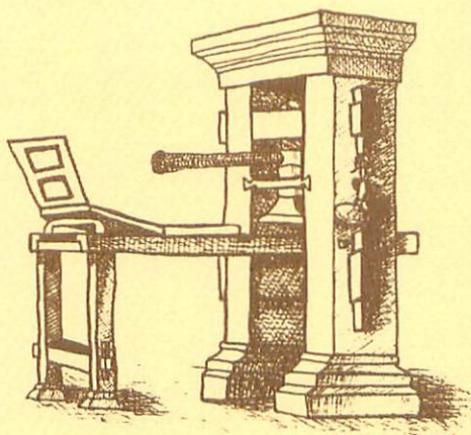
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Trial Impression is a literary magazine produced through the English Department's Literary Editing class (Engl. 296). With each semester the student editorial staff changes allowing more students the rare opportunity to experience the actual production of a literary magazine. *Trial Impression* also serves as a sounding board for new student writers who might not otherwise be published and for the seasoned writer in our community.

This fourth issue of *Trial Impression* contains a greater proportion of prose than previous issues. This increase reflects both the quantity and quality of prose submitted. Editors were also pleased to note an increase in submissions from the off-campus community.

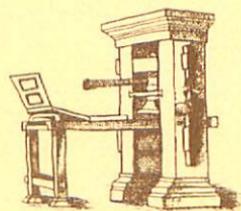
Despite generous financial support from Patrick Kopp and Instructionally Related Activities, the purchase price is higher for this issue. *Trial Impression* is a long way from financial independence—so what else is new? We hope this does not impair our growing readership.

All interested writers are encouraged to submit manuscripts for consideration in our Spring issue. Dates are not determinable at this point but questions may be directed to the English Department Office.

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This Day Given Over To Trees

this day given over to trees,
branching.

some hint of a sky cut
to the needle's eye,
greenly threaded,
unsewn.

this day given tree,
tree opening
surface to surface,
earth under earth.

long-grown fingers
of the eye touch
nakedly,

this day given over.

—*Stephanie Dennis*

God-Damn You, Buckaroo

Oklahoma blood surged
through the tales you told
of riding ponies bareback
and farming Indian land.
We drank your joy in life
from tin cans
before we went to do the morning feeding.
We walked the corn fields which towered
over a shovel's length above our heads
and rode the wagons in with new-mown hay.

You gave us cold river water
swirling round our feet
the untamed joy of galloping
behind you on the mare
the heady smells of peach blossoms,
of stew cooking on an open fire.

Life poured out of you
sweet and thick
like the golden sorghum
you used on our pancakes
and it was never better
than when we climbed the hills
looking for Indian paintbrush in the Spring
or watched the sun set
behind the desert buttes.

I'm sure you never meant
not to say good-bye
or leave so quickly
and I'm sure you didn't mean to take
that homey, perfect knowledge
with you
that we, and life,
were good and all things
just as they were meant to be.

You just thought you were going
one more time to the hills
to bring the cattle
in for winter.

—*Kathleen Gallo*

Sylvia
A Play In One Act
by Frank Boschan

The actress who plays Sylvia Plath in this drama is also obliged to create Sylvia's two children, Frieda and Nicky—who do not appear—by more or less improvising their existence.

Much the same can be said for the phone call from her husband, Ted Hughes, and the one she makes to her sometime lover, Edward Boyce. Neither of these two characters are heard.

Whoever plays Sylvia, then, is responsible for creating and maintaining the tensions that rise and fall between these five, of whom Sylvia remains always the locus and the play's moving spirit.

Three rooms, dominated by the living room, are indicated within a larger flat or apartment. The living room should have at least a couch and coffee table, an antique porcelain enamel stove, a desk with chair and telephone, and several doorways visible within the room.

The children's bedroom and the bathroom should both be left of the living room, and the furnishings for both rooms—beds, dressers, toilet, etc. are optional, and would depend upon the amount of improvisation intended with respect to the children.

Sylvia: *(Sylvia is seated on the couch, thesaurus in her lap, as she attempts a revision of a poem. An infant's crying is heard offstage. To Nicky in the bedroom) Nick? Please be quiet . . . Nick . . . (Throwing down what she is doing) . . . Nicholas Hughes, you've had dinner and a diaper change and mommy wants a little peace and quiet this evening . . . (He continues to cry. She blows her nose with a Kleenex) Damned this goddamned asthma! (Rushing towards the door where he is sleeping) . . . Nick, mommy is going to beat hell out of you if you can't keep still. (Realizing what she has said, she sags against the door, beginning to cry) . . . It's not true, Nicky! Mommy's just upset for no damned good reason. It's cold, baby. This clammy cold eats its way inside us like death and doesn't want to go away . . . go to sleep now and let mommy work on her poems. That's a good boy! (But he continues to cry and she finally plunges into the bedroom, emerging a minute later comforting the child, who is swaddled in her arms in a blanket) . . . Nicky! Nicky! what will your dear father say? . . . he'll be very disappointed if you keep on like this . . . it's not British to lose your temper, sweetheart. Come on now. Mommy loves. Yes she does. Mommy loves you and Sissie, hope to die. We don't want to wake her. Sissie will be mad . . . what's the matter sweetheart? (Feeling his diaper) . . . Mommy knows . . . on the floor now. (She lays him on the blanket, face up on the floor) . . . that's a good boy. Don't cry. Mommy's going to fix everything up ship shape. (Beginning to undo his diaper) . . . No more screaming! No more! Sounds just like daddy. Yes it does! (She goes to the bedroom for a clean cloth and a new diaper as Nicky wails away lustily) . . . Mommy's coming. There now. Mommy will wipe all the nasty old shit off . . . That's funny?? . . . Yes it is! By golly, that's the funniest damned thing we've heard all week. Help mommy, Nicky. Help her. Mommy needs another word, baby. Just one more silly old word and she'll hug you half to death . . . yes she will! . . . How's that . . . better now? Mommy is looking for a word that sounds just like war. That's what she wants . . . Mommy needs just one more word and then it's sleepy time for mommy and Nicky! (She begins to cough and wheeze again as she finishes diapering, and the noise upsets Nicky after he had quieted) Now, now . . . not fair baby . . . help mommy . . . that's a sweet angel. (She carries him back towards the bedroom and is forced to lean against the livingroom wall as the coughing spasms take her breath away. Unable to hold him, she sinks to her knees and deposits him on the floor. She then rolls onto her side gasping for breath) Goddamn this goddamn cold! (She manages to kiss Nicky, who has quieted a little, then she rolls over on her back, staring up at the ceiling as Nicky begins to cry again) Oh Nicky!*

Nicky! Mommy's so damned sick with this asthma. If I could just breathe baby . . . just a little . . . there . . . and there! . . . Shhhhh! Don't wake Sissie (*She struggles again to her knees, coughs violently, and waits for the spasms to cease. She picks up Nicky, who has quieted again, rises, and begins walking him back and forth across the room*). Mommy's okay now. Yes she is!! . . . Oh you're not hungry again! Nicky, you're going to eat us right out into those icy streets one of these days . . . Nicholas B. Hughes!!! (*She laughs and moves to the stove with him to fix him his bottle*). Mommy should have breast fed you when she had the chance, baby. She wanted to, too . . . look at the pout on that silly old mouth . . . Nicholas Hughes . . . hold still now so mommy doesn't kick over the milk pail . . . wait now!! . . . too hot!! That's right . . . oh runny little nose . . . damn this mausoleum . . . it's not hard to believe it's haunted . . . now baby . . . drink it . . . wait sweetie (*She moves to the couch to feed Nicky. As she feeds him she tries out lines from the poem she is working on, correcting and trying again*) . . . "Daddy, I have had to kill you" . . . (*To Nicky*) Don't fuss now . . . "You died before . . . before" . . . no . . . oh Nicky please . . . "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God, ghastly statue . . . with one . . . something toe big as a seal?" . . . it needs an adjective sweetheart . . . "You do not do, you do not do any more, black shoe . . . In which I have lived" . . . (*Lining it out*) It's not right . . . the final stanza's wrong, too. (*To Nicky*) sweetie, where's the connection here between daddy and grandpa?? . . . "There's a stake in your fat black heart and the villagers never" . . . liked, I suppose. "They are dancing and stamping on you" . . . (*Beginning a search near the couch*) Now where in the world did I put that thesaurus . . . (*Shivering*) What a depressing day, but it can't be helped. The BBC loves us Nicky . . . drink it down now . . . you were just hungry a minute ago . . . sleepy baby?? . . . No? . . . Mommy's got to go to work for us . . . They've promised me 150 dollars this weekend, baby . . . yes they have!! . . . sleep now so mommy can rest awhile . . . (*Rocking him gently and singing*) "Rain, rain, rain and cold, makes a baby cross and old" . . . (*The phone rings*) . . . O hell and damnation . . . (*To Nicky*) Will you go to sleep!!! . . . (*As it rings again*) yes, just a minute, if you don't mind . . . (*Picking up the phone*) . . . what?? . . . oh . . . Ted . . . where are you? . . . no, he's wide awake and I've got you cradled here against my other arm . . . it's two in the morning and I haven't got a damned thing started . . . yes . . . I'm sorry . . . will you send me something . . . you're in London aren't you? . . . well it's quite cold as you know, and Nicky and Frieda do need some decent bedding . . . it's cold right now Ted, and it will still be cold 15 minutes to an hour from now . . . yes . . . very

bad . . . wait . . . I can't manage with both you and Nicky in my arms . . . (*Putting down the phone, she rocks Nicky gently and sings*) "Mommy's going to bake you a sweet sugar cake" . . . O please Nicky . . . (*Taking up the phone again*) . . . Ted? . . . No, he's got the beginnings of another cold . . . what did you expect? . . . Is Olivia there? . . . it doesn't matter . . . no, I've just got to get some work finished . . . alright, but hold on while I make up his bed . . . (*She sets the phone down. To Nicky*) . . . come on, sweetheart . . . ready or not mommy's taking you inside and putting you on a little pony that's going to ride you off into a land of sugar plums and fairy princesses . . . alllllll aboard and here we gooooo!!!!. (*She carries him into the bedroom, still rocking him gently in her arms and singing to him. The phone remains off the hook on the table. She removes the wet sheets from Nicky's cradle and replaces them. She talks and sings to him continuously, whispering her love to him as Frieda sleeps on in the small bed next to him.*) . . . Mommy says . . . mommy now says the magic word tonight is sleep!!! . . . I want to hear the sound of some pretty tall trees getting cut down before I leave this room . . . yes I do!! . . . Now don't wake sissy whatever you do. That's all mommy needs right now is a symphony orchestra to listen to . . . night sweetie . . . daddy's on the line . . . sleep now . . . (*Returning to the phone*) . . . Ted? . . . are you still there? I thought I heard you talking to Olivia . . . I told you it didn't matter . . . I'm fine except for the cold . . . it's just my asthma . . . no, but it gets in the way of a great many other things that need doing . . . did you tell her about the children? . . . it seems a shame she's not capable of understanding their needs . . . does she? . . . just tell me you'll send the money and everything's forgiven . . . yes, like crazy . . . I only have time very early in the mornings when the moon's still up there somewhere above the fog . . . it all comes bubbling up inside me like a gusher now and it almost frightens me because I've always had to reach for everything in my poems, so each line became a war I've had to fight and win through . . . I know . . . yes . . . just a minute . . . (*She rushes to the couch, picks up the poem, returns and begins reading segments to him*) . . . "You died before I had time" . . . the first stanza begins with "You do not do, you do not do anymore big shoe" . . . I'm reasonably sure about it . . . I don't know . . . "You died before I had time/marble heavy, a bag full of God./Ghastly statue" . . . no, ghastly . . . let me give you the whole stanza . . . "Ghastly statue with one grey toe big as a Frisco seal/And a head in the freakish Atlantic where it pours bean green over blue/In the waters off beautiful Nauset, I used to pray to recover you. Ach du" . . . I don't mind . . . no . . . it works . . . it's supposed to read that way . . . I don't want that

kind of language in there, Ted . . . yes, completely . . . yes, you do need the entire context . . . "It stuck in the barb-wire snare" . . . I've skipped down a stanza . . . "It stuck in the barb-wire snare" . . . because he was German, you idiot . . . "Ich, ich, ich, ich, I could hardly speak. I thought every German was you./And the language obscene . . . an engine, an engine, chuffing me off like a Jew" . . . chuffing . . . C . . . H . . . U . . . F . . . F . . . I . . . N . . . G . . . it works beautifully that way . . . yes, if I read you the entire poem . . . it's done, but I can see stanzas that need reworking . . . part of it when you called a week or so ago . . . I kept the lines about the Panzer-man . . . and I've added more now . . . it is, in parts . . . I want it . . . Yes . . . I need lots of trendy Fascist allusions . . . "Not God but a swastika" . . . that's right . . . "So black no sky could squeak through. Every woman" . . . yes, thanks . . . "Every woman adores a Fascist" . . . please, don't laugh . . . "The boot in the face, the brute brute heart of a brute like you" . . . about two thirds . . . I want to deal with it . . . I can't refuse to accept something that's been stirring around inside me for so long . . . there's more . . . "At twenty I tried to die?" . . . Ted? . . . "At twenty I tried to die and get back, back, back to you. I thought" . . . You're not getting any of this . . . I've told you why it's like that . . . that would work just beautifully if I were Ted Hughes . . . it comes out that way because I want it . . . I'm glad . . . Ted, I don't really care a great deal for these kinds of conversations . . . I'm always glad to have anyone's opinion, but Olivia obviously lacks even rudimentary knowledge . . . I'll bet she's great . . . thank you . . . don't make excuses . . . I'm glad you loved the poem . . . yes, I've got the BBC reading on Saturday . . . Oh I do wish you'd just shut up . . . (*Slamming down the receiver, she sits staring at the phone. She lays her head in her arms on the desk and begins to nod off to sleep. . . A long beat. . . the phone rings again*) . . . O Jesus no!! . . . Please? . . . (*The phone continues to ring*) . . . what time is it . . . (*Picking up the receiver*) . . . yes . . . I'm sorry . . . Ted . . . listen, I'm just not interested in analyzing your guilt again . . . I know . . . but why talk to me about being fair . . . I'm not after some kind of revenge. I just want a little money from you to help pull us through this awful winter . . . I'm tired, yes I could go off and hibernate this minute and sleep my way into spring . . . they need me . . . constantly . . . I know you don't understand and neither does Olivia . . . Oh Christ what's the use . . . I'm not a martyr . . . I just haven't the time for it . . . what the hell does love have to do with it anymore . . . you will come Sunday? . . . Frieda almost lives to see you . . . yes she does snore . . . like a grandpa. Of course she doesn't understand . . . but it will have to be explained to her, I suppose . . . I wish you'd

explain it to me . . . perhaps you need someone like Olivia . . . I don't care . . . I'm tired Ted . . . yes, it's two o'clock and I'm fighting it off like death as usual . . . I'm not in the least bit interested in laying blame . . . no, mother's fine . . . she's to receive her doctorate next month . . . yes, it's Sunday, so don't forget . . . all right . . . *(She hangs up and lays her head in her arms again, beginning to give in to her fatigue . . . a long beat . . . she lifts her head and idly shuffles through the pile of books and papers lying in front of her near the phone. She rises and moves towards the stove and begins to heat a pan filled with coffee. She stirs a spoon through the coffee, unconsciously fingering the oven door handle with her other hand. She grasps the handle and slowly opens the door, persuading herself she's inspecting its cleanness for the first time. She stares down into the oven's open mouth as the coffee heats to a boil and begins to run over. She lets the door slam shut, quickly removes the pan from the burner, and pours the coffee into a cup. She goes to the refrigerator for cream, returns for her cup, and moves to the couch. She relaxes and sips her coffee, enjoying the moment. The children are at last quiet, a reluctant rain begins to sift down through the fog, and it is perhaps the first moment of peace she has known all day. She takes up her thesaurus and the sheet of paper she has been scribbling on since last night, and with an indulgent smile resumes her labors. Occasionally she reads snatches of the poem aloud to herself between sips of coffee. A purposeful intensity begins to replace the dreaminess of moments ago. She rises and paces the room, reciting the almost finished poem to an unseen audience. She hesitates and makes changes as she moves through the poem. Occasionally she pauses near the coffee table in front of the couch and sips her coffee. Her asthma and her responsibilities seem forgotten. She has become a different, almost incandescent person):*

You do not do, you do not do

Any more, black shoe

In which I have lived like a foot

For thirty years, poor and white,

Barely daring to breathe or Achoo.*

*[At this point the author intends for the actress to read lengthy passages from the poem "To Daddy" but due to copyright laws we cannot print the poem in its entirety. Ed.]

(Coming to a stop in the middle of the room) Frieda? . . . Frieda? . . . I'm sorry sweetheart. Mommy didn't hear you . . . yes, but go to sleep . . . all right . . . (She goes to the sink, fills a glass with water, and heads for the bedroom) . . . let Nicky sleep now honey. Mommy had enough trouble getting his eyes closed tonight (Handing her the glass) . . . Sissy didn't want any water . . . no she didn't . . . oh Sissy, mommy is so damned busy right now! . . . She's tired too . . . yes mommy will help . . . (She picks Frieda up from the bed and carries her through the living room into the bathroom, unbuttons the bottom of her pajamas, and places her on the toilet seat) . . . Sissy's playing a big game with mommy, isn't she . . . no? . . . Sissy isn't thirsty . . . Sissy doesn't want to make do do . . . (Making an ear trumpet with her hand pressed against her ear) plunk? plunk? . . . mommy's wrong . . . Sissy wins again . . . (She wipes her off, flushes the toilet, buttons up her bottom, and carries her out into the livingroom. Frieda squirms and Sylvia lets her down on the couch. Frieda jumps to the floor and a game of follow the leader begins around the furniture) . . . it's two in the morning, baby . . . two A M . . . shhhhhh! Nicky's sleeping. Sandman's got him . . . gitcha baby . . . gitcha for sure this time!! . . . (Stopping to listen) Nicky? . . . (To Frieda) wait baby . . . (She goes to Nicky in the bedroom) . . . still sleepy? . . . I'll just bet you are! . . . mommy's closing the door . . . (To Frieda) . . . Nicky's sleeping . . . no, not again, sweetheart . . . Sissy's got to sleep too . . . got to . . . then mommy will read you a story . . . Frieda, please do as you're told! Please? . . . (Motioning towards the couch) mommy will read to you right here . . . that's right! . . . not the farmer girl . . . let's read something brand new . . . give mommy a minute . . . (She takes a book from the shelf and begins a reading from Robin Hood for Frieda. Sylvia looks up after a page, reads on, then looks up again. Frieda has dozed off. Sylvia stands and gazes a moment at the child . . . a long beat . . . she goes to her knees in front of the couch and kisses her with a great tenderness on the forehead) . . . sleepy baby . . . do it for mommy . . . (She brushes her cheek with the palm of her hand and smiles at her . . . shaking her head) oh God, I need to stay awake . . . (She picks up the empty coffee cup and moves towards the stove. She stops in front of it and stands before its shiny porcelain as a blind person might do attempting to familiarize herself with something that seems very formidable. She fingers the knobs on the front of the stove, and turns on a burner without lighting the gas. She listens to its hiss a few seconds, looks towards Frieda sleeping on the couch, and turns it off. She grips the knobs with both hands and begins swaying, eyes closed, from side to side. She stops, lights a burner, and

watches the friendly flames lick upwards towards the half-filled coffee pan. She laughs, pats the gas knobs as if to reassure herself, then moves back to Frieda on the couch, singing) . . . "Mommy's going to bake you a sweet sugar cake" . . . at least she will if this damned poem ever decides to get itself written . . . (She picks up the thesaurus with the page full of notes in it, lays it down again and moves towards the bedroom. She emerges with a small blanket, crosses to Frieda on the couch, and wraps it snugly around her. She smiles again at the child, and kisses her on the forehead. She moves to the stove and pours more of the boiling coffee into her cup and returns to the couch) . . . "Daddy, daddy, you bastard" . . . everything's such a damned compromise . . . "Daddy, daddy you bastard" . . . dammit . . . (To Frieda) You could have said it better, couldn't you sweetheart . . . (She tucks the blanket again around Frieda and drinks from her cup) . . . doesn't the rain sound beautiful? . . . a small steady tap tapping of drumsticks on the roof . . . (Beginning to doze off) . . . no wonder you've stayed on here all these years you damned silly old ghost . . . so would I with such a lovely place to haunt . . . and I suppose even the rain and fog turn friendly after awhile, bless them (Patting the air as if it were a head) . . . I thought at least you'd get to like the children . . . (a long beat . . . she rouses herself and is slow to re-orient to her surroundings. She sits a long time, oblivious to the room and the sound of the rain, shakes her head again and attempts to stand) . . . I need a good long walk in the rain right now, but I've got these responsibilities . . . (She moves to the oven again and stands over it, running her hands randomly over the burners. Then she turns on her heel and walks to the table with the telephone on it, her back to the still sleeping Frieda. She sits before the phone trying to decide, then quickly picks up the phone and dials) . . . Ed? . . . Edward? . . . It's Sivy . . . No! That's my poor teeth chattering against the cold . . . yes . . . it's good to hear your voice again . . . tired as hell and fit to be tied as usual . . . Frieda's asleep on the couch and Nicky finally passed out about ten minutes ago . . . yes . . . coffee helps a little . . . Ed? . . . It's so terribly cold here . . . of course, it's the dampness . . . he called earlier . . . I don't know really . . . he's trying to get rid of that guilt of his somehow . . . what are you up to right now? . . . I suppose you've sold it for a bundle to some filthy rich publisher . . . that's wonderful . . . you can't give up on it now, can you? . . . Yes, I have to give them a finished script this Friday . . . it's terribly hard to work with a gun pointed at your head . . . you were a journalist weren't you? . . . I'll get by . . . I've got a ton and a half of projects in mind for this year . . . thousands of stories! . . . yes . . . you do sound tired . . . but I can't afford to

slow down . . . thank you Edward . . . I wish you would . . . perhaps tomorrow? . . . I know I'm repeating myself, but it feels like I'm re-discovering the North Pole around here . . . I keep hugging myself so I'll know that I'm still alive . . . perhaps you could come over in an hour . . . after you're finished, I mean . . . I just want you to come put your arms around me . . . yes, it is late . . . or early, if you've put a couple of very unwilling children to sleep and had them wake up on you again . . . I'm just going crazy . . . I am . . . don't make a joke out of it . . . Ted used to make snide little remarks about my suicide attempts . . . "Miss Goodie Two Shoes gone hunting the devil again" and things like that . . . I told him I didn't give a damn what he went to sleep with . . . Edward? . . . I'm so damned tired and nothing ever gets done. I only have these few hours to work every evening . . . sometimes I remind myself of Charlotte Bronte scribbling away next to a flickering candle somewhere on the moors . . . I mean she's locked away in the house or something . . . yes, and Heathcliff's probably out there, peering in through the window, slobbering all over himself . . . I always get them mixed up . . . I suppose I'm really afraid of dozing off and losing control, so I drink coffee to stay awake and write 'til the words start to swim before my eyes . . . no, I need to talk . . . everything's going well for her . . . mother's staying in Nauset and it's five or six o'clock in the afternoon there . . . because she couldn't ever think of the right things to say and I do need somebody who can say them . . . I bet you really think I've gone bananas . . . we're all a little crazy, reading and writing like fools when the rest of the world seems to be ticking itself away like a big time bomb . . . no, I won't read you my work over the phone and I don't care to hear even a paragraph of your damned story either . . . all right, but give me a synopsis or something . . . God, a few pages ought to be enough! . . . Edward, come on over and you can read me a whole novel if you like! . . . (*A long beat*) . . . Oh . . . you see, I should have known, shouldn't I . . . why should it matter . . . I suppose it does affect me a little . . . you know I'm always running behind on who's sleeping in with who . . . now please hang up Edward and forget that I've called . . . no, don't be so damned gallant . . . I can't stand it . . . and for God's sake don't give me any of your pity . . . (*A beat*) . . . I'm getting to be trial, aren't I . . . I'm glad you agree . . . Joanna Sims? . . . Joanna . . . at least she's not a bitch, I hope . . . I'm going to have to put little Frieda to bed if you ever decide to get off the line . . . I probably need a gin and tonic . . . does she? . . . I call that an advanced case of extra sensory perception or something . . . I've told you about the loonies in my family . . . not you . . . I call you old straight up and down Edward . . . not to your face, of course

. . . yes, I've been reading some Kierkegaard . . . there's a trunkful of somebody's old books lying about the place . . . Ted thinks they may belong to the former owner . . . a little nutty too, I'm afraid . . . one of Ted's all-time beserkers . . . oh, do hang up Edward . . . no, I don't want you flying over here in your pajamas at two in the morning . . . I know, and that explains why I've come to like you . . . *(A beat)* . . . what a letch you are! . . . sleep, as you know, has become a stranger to me . . . there'll be plenty of money once some of my projects are completed . . . I'm going to carry on regardless of what he does . . . O please do shut up, and curse you for a remark like that . . . poor dear Edward . . . poor Sylvia too . . . write your story darling, and leave me in peace . . . your secret is safe . . . no, I don't know . . . the cold takes my breath away . . . someday perhaps . . . I think Frieda's waking up again . . . of course she loves you . . . oh, Edward just goodbye please . . . yes, in the morning . . . *(She holds the buzzing phone to her ear a few seconds before hanging up. She remains in the chair and lays her head in her arms again on the table in front of her . . . a beat . . . she shivers involuntarily, hugs herself against the cold, and lifts her head questioningly, listening for some sign from the children. She turns her head and encounters an open-eyed Frieda staring back silently from the couch)* . . . poor baby . . . mommy's sorry, letting you catch your death on that couch . . . *(She moves to Frieda and wraps the thin blanket more snugly around her)* . . . sleepy baby . . . *(She picks her up, placing the child's head on her shoulder, and begins pacing back and forth across the room, patting her gently on the back, singing)* "Momma's going to bake you a sweet sugar cake" . . . *(She pats the child on the backside, carries her into the bedroom, turns back the covers, and deposits her on the bed. During the time she is in the bedroom, she continues singing and humming . . . she bends and kisses Frieda once again)* . . . mommy's good baby . . . *(She moves to Nicky's bed and repeats the ritual. She retreats to the doorway, gazing at both children. She smiles wearily, leans her head against the doorway and appears to doze off again. She rouses herself, moves to the couch, wraps a shawl around herself and sits, tucking her legs underneath. She leans her head against the back of the couch and begins to weep. She dozes again a few moments, awakens, and finds herself staring at the stove. She rises, casts off the shawl and moves to the stove. She leans over it and caresses its surface with both hands as before. She opens the oven door, turns on the gas, and lights the oven. It burns fitfully, sputters, burns a few seconds, then goes out)* . . . goddamn it! goddamn it! . . . *(She slings the box of matches across the room, scattering them. She stands back,*

hands on hips, facing the oven and trying to keep control. She picks up a match from the stove, re-lights the oven, and watches the small beads of fire sputter again and extinguish themselves. She sways against the stove and sinks to her knees on the floor, her head pillowed against the stove's edge. She weeps again quietly, making no effort to move. She raises herself from the floor, turns off the gas and moves back to the couch. She sits and drinks absently from the coffee cup . . . a long beat . . . she reaches a decision. She rises and goes into the bedroom. She returns, dragging a tattered white bed sheet behind her to the couch. She looks around for a scissors, and then begins tearing the sheet into several small sized strips with her hands. She gathers them neatly together, rises again, and moves to the various doorways in the room, shutting the doors and stuffing the strips of sheet underneath to prevent air flow. She has left the bedroom door until last. She stands with one hand on her hip at the side of the couch, the last strips of bed sheet dangling from her other hand. She moves to the open door and remains there a moment, trying to re-adjust her eyes to the darkness within. She leans her head against the side of the doorway and appears once more to doze. She backs up, closes the door, and stuffs the last bed sheets underneath. She begins singing and humming to herself again. She checks to be sure the strips under the bedroom door are secure, then she moves to the stove with the oven door standing open. She removes the plaits from her hair and lets it fall full length to her shoulders. She kicks off her shoes, stares down at them a second, then kneels before the oven door much like a worshipper before a shrine. She lays her head down on the oven door, and remains in this position momentarily. She reaches with one hand and turns on the gas, waiting as the odor begins to permeate the room. She whimpers and shuts her eyes against the nightmare she is creating. She opens her eyes, raises herself from the oven door and shuts off the gas. She rises and moves now as if in a dream to the phone table, tears a sheet out of the scratch pad, and scribbles rapidly on it. She picks out a thumb tack from the small box near the phone, and moves stage right through the front door. She pins the note up outside the door, moves back inside and secures the strips of bedsheets underneath. She turns again towards the oven, and instead walks to her thesaurus with her work sheets tucked inside on the coffee table. She takes out the sheet with the draft of her poem on it, considers what she is to write a moment, then carefully replaces the sheet inside the thesaurus and leaves it on the table. She advances towards the oven with assurance now as if carrying out the last steps of a ritual. She kneels at the oven door, and turns on the gas. She allows it to jet out again into the room in front of the

stove, then breathes in deeply. She slumps groggily against the oven door, managing a few disjointed words. She cries out as her control over her life begins to slip away, and the stage lights go slowly to black. She whimpers again against the darkness, and then only the steady hiss of the gas passing through the oven burner out into the room is heard.)

Wally, Bascomb, and the Rest

Ten years ago they were my friends,
who stank of sweat and fungus,
dreamed of clean sheets and steak
as I did. The jungle sucked
their laughter like foreign
matter from the air; when they died,

the monkeys took no notice. Sometimes
at a traffic signal they live,
immutably young, until the green
light whisks them away; or at dinner
their presence dulls the taste
of good meat, briefly.

If I met
them this morning, one going to fat,
another divorced and balding, would I
find them my own? Or would I scuff
my shoes on the sidewalk, hoping
for remembered errands, needing
an excuse to say goodbye?

—*David Cowan*

Poem

The crow disappears

At dusk. At dawn

The sun releases its cry

—*Joseph Walker*

A Simple Poem

Mona Rose cooks patiently from herbs
And scratches of large green leaves,
A salad for our dinner. She heats the house
With the water boiling spices through the air.
Back on earth, we sit poised at the table
Praying in silence. Mona Rose sparks the candles
And they leap up like torches in the shape of thin hearts.
With hungry eyes I've watched for dinner,
Have waited home half the day to see Mona Rose
Create my life. I am a strange party to love
As perfect as a deadly avalanche, or a lily
Against the sky. I have not seen many fields of grain
Directing the wind, I have not seen myself dancing
With the bread of life in hand. Now I see myself
—my spirit, my heart, my body—
Breathing like a man the breath of another.
I am the lover of Mona Rose, and eat
So much so fast I am liable to explode
And die in my sleep

—*Joseph Walker*

Chantz the Break

Be it so long as the roadside
you twirling carnations, swirling broadsides
from the concepts
you've weaved/

Were bound to explore and adventure something neu
besides

found out to sing a song from stop
and captiously sophisticated the bop
Amp. Chanced the change s'il revolutionarily
no hide

“ locally captivated when subduly, harmoniously
fascinated whilst allured by thine majically
emotional natural feeling from rustication
whilst I is Alsirating time like a
ride . . .

Flowing on thine orbitarying planetary
dansensemble carrying our fleeting
Mass rite 'ere
In the countryside.

. . . etc. amp. © 79
0, 2 Sky
A.B.

Ta va

—James Pepitone

Dialogue of Soul and Body

A Herbert Joseph Translation

This poem was written in Anglo-Saxon some time prior to the tenth century. Conventional portraits of the dying individual in many Medieval paintings picture the soul as a very small human which separates from the inert body at the time of death.

The nude body, the naked shell lays,
Preparing itself for Eternity,
Begotten by the iron end ash weaver.
The little round man, the white soul
Slips out at the navel and says,
“What have you done to me, worm food,
Now that the fullness of earth drops from the bone?
Little did you think of what the end
Might afterward become
When you ran lizard-ward at lust;
Little thought you gave to worm knowing;
Little thought on the world before,
How this is long thus hither.
The Lord sent you out of Heaven
The soul through the Self’s hand,
Out of his main strength

Into the hallowed hollows of blood,
But you bound me with your hard hunger,
Hefted Hell - let us know it communally.
I have suffered inside you, bound in flesh,
Pressed in the rings of bone,
I thought it would be thirty thousand years
Before you died.
Nor is the end now so good
You knew pride and the seed of wines;
I thirsted after God's body and the Spirit's drink
Finding only Hell rendered out of your separate Lust's
need,
But you shall suffer on that Mighty Day
When fragmented man is gathered together and judged,
No beloved, no friends to make
No father, no mother, no siblings,
No gold, no silver, no bird heads,
Only the dark raven.
I have passed out of you.
We are alone together.
Your deaf and dumb dreams wash away.
I shall visit you only at night, sin sorrow seeking

Turning away at the first signs of dawn,
(When Holy men praise light, dust specks,
And evil tidings - do praise songs,)
To seek that home you have written for me
While you without honor, in the earth dung place
Shall with moldworms be sorely slit,
Hewn to black and greedy gray.
It would have been better, if you had been
A bird (in the beginning,) a fish on sea
A cow on the earth, tilling in the field,
Cattle without wisdom,
Or the wild waste deer, or whatever God wanted,
Rather than a man without Grace.
What will you say to God on Judgement Day—
You who rode street cars, tickled telephones,
Leaped walls, threw stones,
Dreamed raw dreams, was late for Black Mass,
Had sexual intercourse with strange tribes in little rooms,
Did the Seven Deadlies, in a day, in a minute,
In the very crack of doom.
Then the little round man departed,

Hellward, not to Heaven-bound dreams.
The dust lay where it was,
And could not answer the sad Spirit.
Then the worms came marching
Like Coxy's Army. Like visiting firemen
They broke the doors, smashed the windows,
Broke out the walls, stripped the gears
Ate all the candy out of the penny candy machines.
And dropped the bulbs.
Gifur is the name of the worm
With eagle sharp teeth,
The first of all the earth scrapers to arrive.
With a trace of alcohol on his breath
He tears the tongue, totes the teeth,
Bites through the eyes and out the Head
Marking out a highway for friends to follow,
And the lean brown loin collapses in its room
To seal the liquids in.
To every wise man, this *may* be a warning.

Voice

for Robert Creeley

Reaching in
I have played with
And wanted to
Play with your eye.
A short adventure
In marbles
Or an experience in
Rolling meter
Sliding along slicked tongue
In silent pitch.
To touch that which
Is not in place
Is to clutch
At the form.

—*C. F. Gill Jr.*

With Usura
by Clark Brown

With usura hath no man a house of good stone.

—Pound

What makes a novel modern? Many things, no doubt, but often an attitude—right wing, left wing or no wing at all—toward money, or, more exactly, toward what money has done to human relations. Or—more exactly still—toward a society organized *only* around the cash nexus. Invectives against greed and sharp practice have been with us forever (*radix malorum*, etc.), and we cannot fairly lay every economic debasement at the step of capitalism. (As Gore Vidal says, prostitution has been around since the dawn of money itself.) All the same, there is in that literature we insist on calling “modern” a recognition, instinctive or otherwise, that what man has made of man has been chiefly a “commodity,” and it is *this* dismal perception rather than any technical explosion (technique being essentially a matter of vision) which separates such an archetypal modern novel as *Madame Bovary* from such a pre-eminently Victorian one as *Silas Marner* (actually published four years *after* *Madam Bovary*), and it is this same melancholy realization which flickers throughout so a-political and mandarin a novel as *Ulysses*.

We reap what we sow. No belief is more persistent in George Eliot's fiction. “Repentance doesn't alter what's been going on for sixteen years,” Silas Marner tells Godfrey Cass. But who doubts it? Certainly not Flaubert. What, after all, is the theme of *Madame Bovary*? Emma, like Godfrey, lives a secret life and, like him, becomes desperate for money with which to hide that life. As Dunstan blackmails Godfrey so Lheureux blackmails Emma.

Like Godfrey yet again, she comes to recognize what George Eliot calls "the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind," or as Godfrey himself expresses it, "While I've been putting off, and putting off, the trees have been growing—it's too late now."

Silas Marner and *Madame Bovary* are close to mirror images of one another. Superficially they appear to be the same novel with different endings, one book set precisely in space and roughly in time, the other roughly in both, but both having a deceptive timeless fairytale quality. "Yonville-l'Abbaye has remained stationary in spite of its 'new outlet,'" Flaubert tells us, and adds a page later, "nothing in fact has changed at Yonville."¹ Raveloe too is "a village where many of the old echoes lingered . . . nestled in a snug well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horseback from any turnpike, where it was never reached by the vibrations of the coach-horn, or of public opinion."

Clock time in fact in both worlds blurs or stands still at key moments. Dunstan, robbing Marner, finds that, "hardly more than five minutes had passed . . . but it seemed . . . like a long while." Godfrey, waiting to learn if his first wife is dead, "never knew how long it was before the door of the cottage opened." So Emma, finding life meaningless, feels "that she had been sitting on that bench since the beginning of time," and, calling upon Mere Rollet in final desperation, she is "no longer conscious whether she had been here a century or a moment." Both authors are precise in noting the passage of time (Hivert waits "fifty-three minutes" for Emma), but these time segments seem to refer to nothing. The real time is the rhythm of the seasons, an eternal round. Mere Rollet calculates time by holding one hand to the sun, measuring a different time—or so it seems—from that renter's or lender's time when notes fall due to which Godfrey and Emma have mortgaged their lives.

In other specific ways each novel suggests the other. The loafing, drinking and gossip in the Rainbow Inn call to mind the Lion d'Or. Marner's myopic sterile weaving reminds us of Binet's inane lathe-turning. As the Squire's Christmas party is a pivot for Godfrey and indirectly for Silas, so the ball at Vaubyesard is a pivot in Emma's emotional life. Emma dies of arsenic poisoning, Molly Farrens of opium. At the end of both novels the industrial revolution penetrates briefly. A factory replaces the old chapel from which Marner was expelled. Mademoiselle Bovary is sent off to a cotton mill. In both novels ignorant and complacent villagers offer patronizing and inept advice, though no one in *Silas Marner* is so splendidly obnoxious or so full of half-baked learning as Homais.

Despite these similarities, *Madame Bovary* is *Silas Marner* turned inside out. Consciously or otherwise George Eliot wrote *Silas Marner* as a counter to Marner's blasphemy, "there is no just God." Flaubert has no such impulse. When Charles, overwrought like Marner, blasphemes "I hate your God!" the moment—like everything else—is trivialized by the all-encompassing banality of Yonville. "'the spirit of rebellion is still upon you,' sighed the priest." The author who received a rose blessed upon the sacred stone in Jerusalem and called the moment one of the bitterest of his life is not disposed to any belief in a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may. True, Flaubert flirts with fate in the blind man and possibly elsewhere,² but "fate" is simply part of Rodolphe's romantic claptrap, "a word that often helps," as he cynically says, his justification for both approaching and abandoning Emma, just as "fate" is the single "phrase" Charles makes. Nor does Flaubert let coincidence run unchecked. His irony is essentially rhetorical where George Eliot's is mainly dramatic. Indeed, Flaubert's blind man appearing like the soothsayer upon the Ides of March embarrasses the reader, implying what Wordsworth calls that "dark inscrutable workmanship" so foreign to Flaubert's vision and so central to George Eliot's.

This moment, however, is an uncharacteristic lapse, and in any case, it is not the respective attitudes toward destiny which separate the two writers so much as their attitudes toward fundamental economic realities. Both books are "village" novels, relationships that turn about money in a way that makes *Madame Bovary* almost a parody of *Silas Marner*. Emma is isolated by her romantic daydreams, Silas by his dreams of "the guineas that were coming slowly through the coming years, through all his life." Robbed, Marner rushes to the Rainbow Tavern, the center of communal life, as Emma in final desperation rushes about Yonville. But Marner's loss is the beginning of his rebirth, Emma's the beginning of her destruction. Her financial distress awakens no neighborly sympathy just as the advent of a child unlocked no hidden store of tenderness within her. Marner's loss dissipates the "repulsion" he had aroused, but Emma meets only indifference, repugnance, attempted sexual exploitation and hostility. Guillaumin would take her to bed. Binet is shocked when she seems to suggest "something abominable." Mesdames Tuvache and Caron, eavesdropping, agree that she should be whipped. Neither Leon, Mere Rollet nor Rodolphe can or will help her. Charles, of course, would forgive her, but she cannot bear his "magnanimity."

Silas Marner, ending with a wedding, records a movement from Marner's cottage near the symbolically named stone pits into the world (tavern, church) and back again to a cottage transformed by bride, groom, garden and the flowers which shine "with answering gladness." *Madame Bovary*, ending with funerals, records a series of sorties, always frustrated, culminating in a empty house and Charles dead among a garden of vine leaves, jasmines, lillies and Spanish flies (!). From the opening pages when Charles keeps rising and sitting, the same pattern of balked motion occurs, a tethering in which Emma is continually brought back to her starting point, each time more dissatisfied. The ball, the trip to the yarn mill, the forest adventure, the secret early morning flights, the projected escape, the trips to Rouen all find her back where she began. So in the closing pages she repeats the pattern in short frantic flights to Leon, the notary, Binet, Mere Rollet, Rodolphe, and finally returns to kill herself.

"Everything comes to light," Godfrey says sententiously, "our secrets are found out." That which comes to light in *Silas Marner* is painful but ultimately healing. The love-letters appearing at the end of *Madame Bovary* kill Charles as the truth about the Bovary finances finished Emma. But *Silas Marner* is a fairytale, after all, in which the cash nexus is destroyed. At the start of the novel Marner loves money precisely because "no man expected a share . . . and he loved no man that he should offer him a share." At the novel's end Eppie has married a gardener and Silas need work only for his "own pleasure" or not at all. Although a factory has replaced Lantern Yard, Raveloe, which keeps its own time, retreats further into the pervading feudalism. Not so in Yonville where the grasping Lheureux establishes his own business, *les Favorites du Commerce*, in competition with the Lion d'Or. In both novels money blights love, temporarily in *Silas Marner*, where the loss of gold is the first step in regeneration, permanently in *Madame Bovary*. When in the last pages Guillaumin kneels before Emma it is to urge her to a kind of prostitution. When Roldolphe kneels soon afterwards the mention of three thousand francs brings him "slowly to his feet."

Emma like Marner learns where she stands with the people around her, but where Marner discovers that money has cut him off, Emma learns that nearly every relationship has been debased by money. The movement toward these revelations is the "action" of each novel, but in *Madame Bovary* this action is a series of advances and retreats leaving Emma like the scorpion of folklore trapped by a circle in the sand and turning inward to inevitable suicide.

* * * * *

The Rainbow Tavern and the Lion d'Or become Barney Keirnan's; the county fair gives way to the Mirus Bazaar. Silas Marner, the mysterious foreigner with his herbal secrets and legendary powers, becomes the commercial traveler ("a bloody dark horse himself") with his Masonic craft. That Dublin in 1904 is a modern metropolis should not hide the fact that it is also a village where everybody knows everyone else's business (Frank O'Connor's idea of hell), and where Bloom in spite of himself keeps running into his wife's lover. Here the cash nexus exists all right, but with a characteristic Irish twist—nearly everyone feeds off everyone else—and only foreigners like Bloom and Mr. Deasy worry about keeping accounts straight. If the characters cannot live in the sentimental world of Raveloe they can at least mitigate the harsh financial realities of Yonville with Celtic vagueness.

"I paid my way" may be an Englishman's proudest boast, but it has little appeal for Dubliners, nor in practice for the Englishman Haines who savors Ireland's literary and agricultural wealth ("This is real Irish cream I take it . . . I don't want to be imposed on."). Although Haines tells Mulligan, a kind of false-Irishman, to "pay up and look pleasant," he doesn't himself pay, nor does Mulligan pay the milkwoman (Ireland) in full. Stephen Dedalus, son of all-too-Irish Simon, provides the money for Haines' and Mulligan's pints and pays the rent just as he buys drinks for the *Freeman's Journal* hangers-on and the drunken medical students, and just as he "lends" Lord John Corley half a crown to Bloom's distress. But Stephen is himself hopelessly in debt ("The lump I have is useless."), and although he wants to be paid for the collection of his sayings, for his contributions to *Dana* and for his "interview," he isn't serious. Like his father who jokingly tells Dilly that he looked all along O'Connell Street gutter for money, Stephen refuses to seek money with any energy. Like Molly who hates conserving and who flings money to a beggar as Emma flings a five franc piece to the blind man, Stephen is generous—self destructively so—before he is just.

Bloom too is generous, sending money to Milly and Martha and subscribing five shillings to Dignam's family. ("There is much kindness in the Jew."), but Bloom's generosity lacks the flamboyance and carelessness of the typical Dubliner—Boylan standing the parasite Lenehan a beer, or J. J. O'Molloy and Joe Hynes standing rounds in Barney Kiernan's. By keeping accounts square—hinting to Hynes about his debt—Bloom keeps himself apart, sealed off like the unredeemed Silas Marner. Even his brief relationship with Stephen—the significant event of the day—is in part financial. He follows Stephen, fearing "He'll lose that cash," guards Stephen's money ("I don't answer for what you may have lost."), settles with Bella for the damaged lamp,

"unobtrusively" deposits four pence for coffee and bun in the cabmen's shelter, having checked the price list, and advances various schemes—some mildly exploitive—by which Stephen (and he) might make money. The meeting ends with the return of Stephen's money and the rite of micturition (another kind of spending). Unlike Stephen and most of Dublin, Bloom devotes considerable mental energy to ways of making money, though he doesn't make much. Money even figures in his masochistic fantasies. Boylan arriving for a go at Molly throws him sixpence, and he is himself auctioned off as "maid of all work." "One and eightpence too much," a VOICE cries after the opening bid of a florin, recalling the joke which echoes all day in Bloom's head about Reuben J. Dodd and his nearly drowned son. Both atonement between father and son and resurrection are reduced to a financial transaction.

Bloom, who has "sustained no positive loss," who has come out ahead on the day, who has a small savings account and a paid up insurance policy, discovers neither the kindness of his fellow villagers as Marner does nor the blighting of love by money as Emma does. The moral of *Silas Marner* might well be that he who would gain his soul must lose his cash, but Bloom does neither (and does not understand the idea of soul as Stephen describes it). For Emma money becomes one more part of the reality which destroys the illusions she needs in order to live. ". . . she did not remember the cause of her confusions, namely the money. She suffered only in her love . . ." For Bloom money is a reality he understands, though he does not understand how money and money considerations separate him from nearly every communal gathering.

So it is, however. Business causes Bloom to intrude upon the discussions in the newspaper office and library, and even in Barney Kiernan's where his errand of mercy is straightening out Dignam's dubious insurance. He goes into the Ormonde Hotel partly because it is the "best value in town," and remains outside the bar and the music. Wary of being robbed, he stays on guard in the brothel and shelter. At the cemetery he considers the monuments wasteful, parodies Socrates by imagining a deathbed scene ("I owe three shillings to O'Grady."), and thinks disapprovingly that Martin Cunningham has spent "a lot of money" coloring his face (though Simon Dedalus has declared drink "many a good man's fault"). "We have all been there," Cunningham says of the pawnbroker Reuben J. Dodd, then, looking at Bloom, adds, "Well, nearly all of us." A non-communicant, Bloom in church sees confession and the mass as successful business gimmicks, hidden persuaders against spiritual and financial sales resistance. In the same way he admires the

Church's practical organization. "And don't they rake in the money too?" At Davy Byrne's he drops out of the conversation when the talk turns to horseracing. "Fool and his money." Bloom's refusal to stand drinks contributes to the Citizen's ire, hiding the fact.

True, money lacks the weight in *Ulysses* it carries in *Silas Marner* and *Madame Bovary*. The epiphany at the end of "Circe," for example, does not depend on financial disaster as do the perceptions of Marner and Emma, yet *Ulysses* like *Silas Marner* and *Madame Bovary* reveals a web of village relationships in which the main characters are trapped—the most important relationship being economic. "Well?" Stephen says simply. "The problem is to get money."

The point is not that the author of *Middlemarch* failed to understand the importance of money (!) or that the Victorian novelists required any splendid rhetoric about the pitiless tearing asunder of motley feudal ties. The lesson was clear enough. Dickens, the writer whom Orwell said everyone wanted to steal, puts it into the mouth of the unpleasant Bitzer in *Hard Times*.

"I really wonder, sir," rejoined the old pupil in an argumentative manner, "to find you taking a position so untenable. My schooling was paid for—it was a bargain, and when I came away, the bargain ended."

Rather, in those novels which seem most distinctively modern the lesson has been so well assimilated—"internalized"—that no one bothers to argue any more. That man is a wolf to man is no new perception, but in modern literature the fact is simply taken for granted. In Machiavelli's play *Mandragola* men plotting to convince a virtuous woman to commit adultery hit upon the idea of using her confessor. But, asks one character, who will persuade the confessor? "You, me, money, our baser selves—his," comes the answer, and we feel a delicious sting in the line, a perverse relish in human corruption. No longer. Money talks and everyone knows it. We need no Bitzer to remind us "that the whole social system is a question of self-interest." Of course it is, and modern fiction is full of Silas Marner's descendants shut up in the cottage of the self in a world where exploitation and disloyalty have become so much a part of the scenery they no longer raise the ghost of a leer or a shrug of outrage.

Felicite was about her former mistress's height and often, on seeing her from behind, Charles thought [Emma] had come back and cried out:

"Oh, stay, don't go away!"

But at Pentecost she ran away from Yonville, carried off by Theodore, stealing all that was left of the wardrobe.

NOTES

¹All quotations from *Madame Bovary* are from the Paul de Man translation, *Madame Bovary: Backgrounds and sources, essays in criticism* (New York, 1965).

²See Alfred G. Engstrom, "Flaubert's correspondence and the ironic and symbolic structure of *Madame Bovary*," *Studies in Philology*, XLVI (1949).

Mare's Nest

With my eyes closed I blueprint
stencil cuts in the picture plane.
Harsh crisp shapes fill the sketch
sympathizing with the edges.
I color decorum into this Mare's nest
and leave subject matter,
co-habiting with the impressionists.
Searching for new strikes, I find
only fool's gold within my cerebral
frame. But, I always go on, go on
to plot, go on to repeat these
charted discoveries.

—*Helen Hart*

Two Letters

—Diana Crosswater

#1

"I am moved by fancies that are curled around these images
and cling;
The notion of some infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing."

T. S. Eliot "Preludes"

dearest _____,

evening holds its head in its hands and wonders
. . . the new growth on each bush and tree, each possible leaf is looking for an answer. and even the cement wishes to find a reason . . . i am confused, befuddled and riddling . . . in a kind of circuitous fashion, i mean at least as compared with usual processes, i've realized that science and its (supposed) hard cold fast rules, is not the ground of reality and therefore absolutely true . . . i grew up believing that science was enlightened, and all other truths and beliefs were not only atavistic but also psychologically explainable. after reading *Crack in The Cosmic Egg*, i realized that science was just one of a constellation of possible faiths, also, that the only way to an alteration of reality is through the process of faith - well, actually not just an alteration in terms of contrast, or in terms of a more pleasurable (thrilling or novel) alteration . . . so after shipping away those basic tenets, i am left with a host of possibilities . . .

"In order to arrive at what you are not
you must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not."

T. S. Eliot "Four Quartets"

also, i find myself seeing a kind of illusion in the exclusively literary life. the people i knew in Iowa, beset by meaninglessness, labored to find something all-encompassing in themselves, in their personal translation of reality, but became covetous of their own emotions, constantly watching themselves like barometers to

utilize each quirk, each emotion, each impulse for writing, less as some kind of universal contribution than as an ego gratification. without any larger context, writing can become confessional and narcissistic. i used to believe that my personal poetic breakthrough would be *to try to attempt* (after a lot of years of ripening and skill changing) to draw a new feminine mythic Way from contorting and expanding language . . . to break through to something beyond just emotion; to something feminine and archetypal and primordial . . . and that because so much women's poetry is propaganda or solipsistic or beautifying oppression. but that implies finding something godlike in myself, and i have no greater presence to believe in that would echo in me so that i could find it in myself. the trap seems to be making singularly precious your own emotions and perception . . . its a sort of hubris, if there is such a thing.

what i guess i'm trying to say is that suddenly psychology, particularly this freudian analytic shit, seems to at best teach you to vascillate on some piss-poor-excuse-for-meaning gamut from pleasure to pain . . . and, now, feeling finally liberated, ironically, from science as a cult belief, as a tacit accepted truth, i feel at a loss with knowing what or where to believe in or go to find out . . . i don't know what i believe, or what i could believe, but i do know that i want to focus on my higher possibilities, tether my desires, my impulses - not hating or despising them as sinful and ugly, but harnessing them toward a transcendent fruition (god that last phrase sounds either pedantic or nonsensical).

God's Grandeur G M Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shing from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and share man's smell; the soil
Is bare now. nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spend;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black west went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs -
Because the Holy Ghost over the bend
World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings.

so, from here, where? i'm confused.

more later,

all my love,

#2

dear _____,

out under the symmetrical half-moon, (a natural thing too clean and sharp for me to ever look at tonight,) in the midst of glamorous and deathly pale snows (flakes upon flake into a thick tumult of white till there is no one thing unique, but only a melting mass of heartless cold) i can understand how lovelessness can glitter under unearthly lights, how loneliness holds a simple kind of charm . . . a utility of spirit, pared down and honed to something both calm and infinitely empty and ever so painfully enticing. i feel like some crisp leaf in the hollow that surrounds a tree in winter, something leftover; alien. sadness and sadness and the night around me like some penance garment, like a hair shirt. i suppose all this rises in me like some long moonless tide suddenly pulled into motion because I have been so long unhungry and loveless . . . loss, loss in the sound of the wind, in the stale air unmoving . . . being here is a sequence of harder and harder trials, to turn something hopefully in me to steel; or at least transformed from jello to bamboo!?! its not the actual activity but the act of going, or being present instead of absent, developing stamina by acting as if i already have it. i, for one detest growth . . . give me a blanket and a color tv . . . and yet i am sorely attracted to growth, as all live things are, and what i probably want is a lever and a place to stand so i can move my world.

peculiar how events turn and where we end up, (or should i say begin up) and how its all new and awful always. The journey of the thousand miles.

i will find that passage in Jung tomorrow . . .

love to you all,

Rescue Mission

Though she smiles like the gypsy in your dreams

you are worried,

tucked in her cheek bones, drawn in the flushed pores

is your aunt—

squat, nervous, her thin rusted hair in tiny curls as she

 crumbles

soda crackers with a rolling pin to stretch the meat loaf,

your uncle, as usual, still at the swap meet and she never

 knows when he'll get home,

at Sunday Dinner it is obvious from the way he sucks on a

 capped molar

he committed an obscene act that very morning while you

were itching against the pew, a collar tight on your upper

 vertebrae,

now slouching on the couch like a broken kewpie doll

he has intentions on your mother—

you are afraid of a miracle because your cousin would shout

 “Amen”

her voice thin as piano wire

and she was weary at seven years old even with the smell
of lemons.

—*Steve Funk*

Now Voyager

Through a boomerang's hole,
She gave a gaze of glazed praise,
To the shadows on the wall,
Taking a puff of veil,
Closing her purse on the phantoms.

Oh Seasons! Oh Chapeaux!
Oh rail of rails,
Leading us around this ship,
The headless torso,
Pees like a fountain,
Inscribed above the captain's clock:
"Be sincere."

It was all gardenias,
On your borrowed dress,
And the glazed eyes of
Substitute daughters,
And a weenie-roast,
And the reeling around of
Tennis-court sky,
The paranoid wallpaper,
And the hot shots from
Face to face,
and the conspiracy of mantelpiece clocks against
First fucks,
Stuffed, stuffed ashtray
I saved to dump on your deck.

I was fool enough to
Follow fateless masters
Like yourself,
Scratching at the marble,
With a metal claw.

Fool enough to ruin the hotdogs
and laugh like a cured woman,
The chandeliers so assuredly in their places,
The plans for new homes on the floor;

Mother never let us near the fire,
So we're burning down the house.

—*Lloyd Stensrud*

The Five Little Taggarts

From

UNTOLD PIONEER STORIES

by T. E. Rendall

The banging of the mill's steam-carriage was distant as Mrs. Taggart stepped from the cabin. Her red hair was pinned up in a neat but lusterless bun and her pregnancy swelled her long white dress. She walked the length of the porch and into hot sunlight. Trees around the clearing cast shadows over the wilderness beyond; and at the forest's edge, past the garden to which she walked and began picking tomatoes, her children played in a barbed-wire pen, their shrills piercing the multitudinous buzzing, the sum of sounds that in summer is the atmosphere of a forest.

All her children but one was a towhead. Beatrice, the oldest at five, had red hair. She was on her hands and knees in the dusty pen giving bronco rides. Sam jr. was on her, gripping the rope around her chest, squealing as he bounced, one arm flailing to his sister's bucking.

"Hold on, Sammy, hold on," shrieked almost four-year-old Auby, as the twins' bleats of "Beatie, Beatie" encouraged Beatrice to hurl Sammy on the ground.

With a mighty thrust of her small body she sent Sammy somersaulting over her shoulder onto his back. He scrambled to his feet and began cheering as Auby raced to the bronco and slapped its rump and howled "yahooo," mounting.

The game continued. A jackrabbit darted from the forest and across the clearing, bounded over the cabin's porch and disappeared behind the woodpile. Mrs. Taggart shook dirt from a handful of carrots she placed with the tomatoes, which pouched her dress and extended further her swollen profile as she returned to the cabin clutching the material about her thighs and ignoring a chorus of "Mama, Mama" from the twins, who had become aware of her brief presence.

The cabin's interior was large and wooden. Three bunks and one large bed were on the right side of the room, each laced with rope and covered by a straw-filled mattress. Sam Taggart had planned ahead when he built the cabin. Unmarried and childless at twenty-seven, he built the bunks and left space for another. Near the bunks a large dough can stood upon a wood cook stove.

Including having already built the pen in which his children played, Taggart had had the homestead completely outfitted for a family when he met and married his wife.

Mrs. Taggart stood over a pine table packing the vegetables into a picnic basket. Her husband sat near, cleaning a rifle. Blond stubble covered his knobby head—a phrenologist's field day. She

came west from Ohio; he from Missouri, only son of an original Sierra pioneer, a gold miner. Taggart's tobacco pouch was an Indian scrotum his father gave him.

"Git me my hat," he said.

Mrs. Taggart put down the blanket she had begun folding and from the mantle brought him his hat. Taggart put it on and nodded to the oiled rag he had been wiping his rifle with; his wife picked it up and put it on the mantle, below an empty gun rack made by Taggart's father, whose tongued, eared, scalped and naked body Taggart had found in the chapparal of the canyon when he was sixteen.

"Where's my whiskey?" He rose from the bench. Reaching into a pocket he pulled out a handful of dull brass shells and began loading the weapon.

"It's on the porch, Sam."

"Th'n gitit."

"Sam?"

"GITIT." From a cupboard Taggart brought a flask.

"Sam," Mrs. Taggart reprimanded, "Bader said he'd take you back at the mill if you'd watch yerdrinkin'."

Taggart had been carriage operator. He turned a screwed up face upon her. Short blond whiskers shined on his swelled cheek, and his blue eyes were squinted.

"Well ffurk that old goat. He drinks more'n me hisself."

Mrs. Taggart scratched at some pitch stuck to the blanket. "But he's the boss, Sam, and don't do a dangerous job like you done. And besides," she paused, looking up, "you knows we have another little Taggart on its way."

Taggart spat. "Cherokee mine shootin'nother tun'l. Reckon they'll be needin' a timberman."

"Things'll work out, Sam, and we'll go on as always, anyhow. We have to." Mrs. Taggart walked to her husband and hugged him sideways. She rubbed his stomach and groin lovingly.

"Let's put down for a spell," said Taggart, caressing his wife. She looked up into his face. "Five little Taggirts 'er waitin'?"

"Ready?"

She nodded. "It'll be right nicer in the meadow."

Mrs. Taggart picked up the basket and the blanket; Taggart got his rifle. Together they left the cabin, she stopping and filling the flask from the bottle on the porch, he walking to the pen in which his children were clustered at the gate, waiting. They scurried out.

"Picnicday, Sammy, Picnicday, Auby," squealed Beatrice. The twins clapped.

Taggart ordered his children to stick close and like quail chicks on the warm and buzzing summer afternoon they followed their

parents down the hoove-marked logging road which passed near their cabin. Mounds of fresh droppings spotted the wide dusty trail. Ahead out of sight cattle were being herded.

Waddling vigorously with the weighty rotundity of her pregnancy, Mrs. Taggart carried the picnic basket slung over an arm sturdy from caring for the first five little Taggarts, and the blanket under her arm, snug against her bosom. At the end of her other arm were the twins, themselves holding hands, their sunlit heads shining profusely, radiant orbs bobbing heavily to their mother's swayful strides.

Ahead walked tall and stooped Sam Taggart—a Winchester rifle rested on his shoulder. Puffs of dust rose from the worn heels of his pointed boots. And his hat, like a parched, tightly-rolled tongue, rode high upon his head.

Had his rifle been a mandolin, rather a fiddle, as he walked under the tall pines, firs, and cedars—here and there an oak—he could have been a western minstrel. But he was Sam Taggart, son of a mean and rugged pioneer.

And here and there as he led his family along the trail, either side of which grew tall blackberry bushes laden with clusters of ripe berries, Sam Taggart turned his head and spat, each stream gathering into a glutinous puddle which his oldest son squatted over and with a twig rolled into a dust covered sphere, as though enamored with his father's ability.

Whenever Sammy stopped and squatted, Beatrice also stopped—to thrust her hands into the berry bushes and busily pull as many berries from the vines as she could, until her brother had satisfied himself with their father's expectoration. Then together they caught up with the brood, Beatrice putting the harvest of her stained and scratched hands into the pockets of her green dress to share with Sammy and the three tow-headed little Taggarts who had obediently been following their parents. The sweet berries were like candies and the mouths, chins, and fingers of the children were soon juice stained.

It had been nearly a month since the children were away from the cabin, let loose from the pen built to protect them from the cattle that in late summer were herded through the area to more abundant pastures, the branded hogs that sometimes roamed, and, especially, the wildlife: bears and cats. Other children living in the area seldom visited: Sam Taggart had a reputation for being a nasty, belligerent man for which reason his friends were few, mostly hard-drinking single men, miners and loggers, who found Taggart compatible and somewhat like themselves, and who had been his friends since before his marriage, had helped him build the cabin and dig the well. It was they Mrs. Taggart blamed for her husband's continued drinking.

Sounds from the sawmill had become faint. Leaving the road, Taggart led his family down a trail through a ravine of thick chaparral: An elfin forest from which that buzzing heard in the treed forest seemed to be produced, louder here, as though the burning sunlight bathing the chaparral and scrub oaks raised the pitch by convection. The trail, also marked frequently by fresh droppings, crossed Mosquito Creek at the bottom of the ravine, at which point it turned left and followed the water until it came upon a large meadow of squaw carpet, the picnic grounds.

High on the other side of the ravine, where the trail from the meadow eventually led, was a ridge overlooking a deep, sweeping canyon on whose gently sloped walls sugar pines grew thick among firs and cedars. At the canyon's mouth, far below where Taggart was leading his family on the trail under the ridge, the canyon met the Sacramento Valley perpendicularly; and it was to the canyon floor, an inlet of the fecund Valley—an expanse of lush meadows dissected by a river—that the cattle preceding the Taggarts were being herded.

Followed by his family, Taggart crossed Mosquito Creek. The banks of the small stream were pitted deeply and the flora uprooted where cattle had crossed.

"Look, Sammy," whispered Beatrice, holding up a cluster of white tap roots she had separated from a trampled plant. "White carrots." She pulled them away from her brother's reach and put them in her pockets with the berries. Mrs. Taggart carefully led the twins through the shallow slow running water and continued along the creek, looking back as though assuring herself that her other children had forded it safely.

Alders growing along the stream cast spots of shade on the trail. Nearing the meadow, Taggart spat. Followed by Auby, Sam jr. found the wad. He broke his twig in two and gave his brother a piece; they pushed the spittle back and forth in the silt as Beatrice busied herself picking berries.

A coiled snake basked before Taggart. He crushed its head with the butt of his rifle and turned around. He glared at his squatted sons. Looking up, Auby and Sammy froze in his stare, their once busy hands motionless near the dirt. Almost imperceptibly they dropped the twigs.

"*Gawdammit, little Taggirts, git yerasses up here,*" drawled Taggart, menacingly. The boys remained frozen.

"*QUIT YERDAWDLINS 'N GIT.*" Taggart's savage bark quieted the hot buzzing of the chaparral; the twins covered their stained faces and their mouths trembled.

Tiny Sammy and Auby bolted toward their father as though it were a race, their bared little feet pattering blindly through the dust but instinctively missing the puddles of shit.

"You too, Beatrice," said Mrs. Taggart.

Beatrice appeared from behind her blind and hurried to her father.

"*Get downwarts of me, alayas.*"

The three oldest little Taggarts, ages three, four, and five, lined up behind their father down the trail, their stained mouths pouted.

"*Turn around Beatrice and open yer hands.*"

She did; on her empurpled palms were two clusters of mashed blackberries that with a vicious swipe of Taggart's big hand thumped in the dust. Beatrice bit her lip and hung her head. She cried silently. Mrs. Taggart, holding the twins close, looked away.

"*Now git to yer Ma and stick close like you was told.*" Taggart jerked up his hand as if to strike his daughter. "*Git.*" Ducking, Beatrice trudged to her mother and sobbed loudly at her touch.

The two unpunished little boy Taggarts stood at attention next to each other, perfectly straight, shoulders square, arms like tiny fence-posts at their sides, waiting.

"*Kissyballs little Taggarts,*" Taggart drawled in a way to let them know the drill was to be carried out as usual.

Auby and Sammy Taggart bent over and put their heads between their knees. Their little rumps stared up at the father. Auby was smacking his lips when the hard heel of Taggart's boot jolted him face forward into the trail; he laid silently but turned his head ever so slightly as though to see how his brother fared. Grunting, the father sunk the sharp toe of his boot deep into his oldest son's ass crevice, causing Sam jr. to yelp before he lay quietly next to Auby.

"*That'll teach you little summabitches to stick close when you's told.*" Taggart cocked his rifle and thrust the barrel toward the sky. "*Now gitup 'n git.*" He pulled the trigger.

As though shot from the gun Auby and Sammy were instantly up and marching. Sam jr. massaged his buttocks.

"*Getcher thumb outayer asshole, Sam Taggart, junior.*"

The hike resumed along the creek. Taggart passed his sons and as they reached the edge of the meadow, a man on horseback appeared, having come down from the ridge overlooking the canyon. It was Bader, a small well-dressed gray man with a trimmed gray mustache. He was unarmed.

Taggart stopped. "G'day, Mr. Bader," he said, nodding, and then waved his family to the side of the trail. Bader nodded back, tipped his hat at Mrs. Taggart and momentarily scrutinized her swollenness. He looked back, down on Taggart. After a moment, he spoke:

"Got a Willamette Steam Donkey 'rivin soon. We're razin' the

canyon below Doe Mill. Wanna run the donkey, Taggart? For a good man it'll be steady till snow."

As if surprised, Taggart stepped back, removed his hat, and bowed slightly. "Me and the wife, and the five lit'l Taggirts, soon to be six as you can plain see, Mr. Bader, 'er much obliged."

Bader spat. "What'd you shoot for, Taggart?"

"Oh," said Taggart, as though embarrassed at having missed, "jist a buck wanderin' up the ravine. Figgered me without work for a spell things'd be hard and I'd better be stockin' up."

Bader winked. "I'll be at the mill in the morning. See you then, Taggart." He started his horse and passed the family, tipping his hat once more to the mother. "Enjoy the day, Missus."

Bader crossed the creek and disappeared. Mrs. Taggart came to her husband and kissed his shoulder. "I told you things'd work out, Sam." Taggart put his arm around her and smiled, revealing a stained bridge and the blackened rot of an eyetooth. "Steam donkey," he mused. "The more I drag out the more I git." He kissed his wife's forehead. Below, Clay kissed his twin sister.

The family continued the short distance into the meadow. A warm breeze blew through the clearing, and in the sky over the ridge a buzzard soared. Taggart brought the flask from his pocket and took a long pull before walking down to the creek. Mrs. Taggart let the twins go, put down the basket, and with Beatrice's help, in the shadow of a twisted oak tree from which mistletoe hung in large clusters, spread the blanket.

"Can we have cookies now, Mama?" asked Beatrice when they finished. Behind her were the other little Taggarts, their light-colored eyes wide.

"I'll let you pass them out, Beatrice." She brought a stack of five cookies from the basket. Her children watched closely. "Don't let Sammy or Auby take the twins' cookies away." The mother handed the daughter the cookies. "And you watch the children and leave yer father and me to ourselves. Understand?"

Beatrice nodded knowingly, and then followed by her brothers and sisters ran to the other side of the meadow, where she stopped and handed out the cookies. Auby ate his in three bites; Sammy ate half of his and put the other in his pocket. The twins nibbled, humming as they tasted the sweetness.

Mrs. Taggart lay back on the blanket. A bar of sunlight crossed her pale, lightly freckled face. She placed her hands on her mounded torso and spread her legs wide as her dress allowed. A smile crossed her face as her husband's footsteps approached. They had been here before.

Taggart set his rifle against the tree and lay alongside his wife. Neither spoke. He kissed her neck; she put her arms around his chest as he, with elbows close, unlaced the front of her dress and peeled down the cotton, revealing a crude brassiere made from a food sack which he then tugged forcibly over her white and freckled breasts; they hung heavily at her sides. Taggart grasped one and sucked its nipple; his other hand caressed her rotundity as she moaned softly, pleasurably. Making animal sounds Taggart knelt and as his wife squirmed to help, began working her dress up her legs, finally bundling it over her veined and swollen belly; likewise, Mrs. Taggart helped him peel her big blue undergarment past her knees and over her feet. Thus free, she opened her heavy, quaking thighs, exposing the opening of her great body's thickly pelted passage, the flume of life, to the warm breeze, and her husband, Sam Taggart.

Squirrels scurried up and down and about the oak trees in the clearing gathering acorns, stopping here to look to and fro, on their way again to stop once more halfway up a trunk in their spiraling ascent to look again, and then to the high limbs to stash the nut and transfer to an adjacent tree, descending and beginning the cycle again with another scavenged acorn—as a doe, her mottled fawn close behind, stepped quietly to the meadow's edge and nibbled Manzanita berries, watching Beatrice in the creek holding her dress up over her knees and leaning over, taking stones from the creekbed, discarding some, putting in her pockets the others as four little Taggarts waited on the bank, the twins standing, Sam squatting, and Auby, pants at his knees, holding his elfin penis and aiming its stream on the frog his brother kept pressed against the bank with a stick.

Over the meadow of squaw carpet in which Sam Taggart supported his torso over his wife's and undulated his loins between her lifted thighs, adjoined dragonflies flew slowly and heavily while a bumblebee, buzzing persistently, held down a dragonfly in the resilient and woody carpet, chewing and stinging the helpless lace-winged blue victim until it lay impregnated by its foe to become a parched, hollow carcass, burnt by the hot summer sun and finally tumbled into minute flakes by the south winds of Autumn.

Overhead the buzzard continued its circular soaring, the ridge of the canyon the diameter of its seemingly descending course.

Their parents partly obscured by the oak tree, the five little Taggarts sat in a small circle on the other side of the meadow. Beatrice was playing mother. The five wide but small stones she took from the creek were placed before the children, and on each she had balanced one of the tap roots foraged from the creekbank earlier. And next to each was the cap of an acorn she was presently pretending to fill as if with a pitcher.

Finished serving, Beatrice sighed heavily and put out her up-turned palms.

"We ain't got much now children, but what we got is enough," she said, acting the part, her affected voice firm, her head moving up and down with each word. Beatrice pursed her lips and when all eyes were upon her, she hung her head and put her clasped hands under her chin. In a moment she said "Amen" and the other four looked up at her.

"You can eat now children."

Auby quickly snipped off the point of his white carrot, and, finding it pleasantly sweet, finished the rest. The twins hummed as they chewed the root. Beatrice and Sammy soon finished theirs and the three oldest little Taggarts watched Clay and Kay swallow the last of their supper.

Then came dessert. Beatrice placed two blackberries on each plate and put a slender twig alongside.

"Enjoy your pie, children, that's all we got." Daintily, she sipped from her tiny cup and then traded it for her fork.

Imitating Beatrice, the children picked up their forks and stabbed a berry. The twins giggled as each little Taggart guided an impaled, succulent blackberry into his mouth and repeated the motion.

When dessert was over, Sammy leaned back and pulled the other half of his cookie from his pocket. "Look what I got, Auby," he said, holding it just beyond Auby's reach. "My cookie." He snatched it away quickly and put it safely into his mouth, humming praise for its good taste as he chewed.

Auby turned and picked up his fork. He pretended to smoke. "Durn good fiddles, Beatie," he said, loudly blowing smoke as the familiar sounds of their parents copulating filled the meadow before ending with a long, tapered moan from their mother.

"Turn around Auby and quit yer watchin'," commanded Beatrice. She gathered the dishes and rubbed them clean on her dress. Auby answered by forcing a tearing fart, and he and Sammy rolled with laughter.

The violent and deadly symptoms of water hemlock poisoning first struck the twins. As though synchronized, Clay and Kay rolled over clenched in a vicious ague and howled, as if they had lost their senses. Convulsing, their heads were thrown back and their backs arched radically. They urinated profusely. Their jaws locked and bruxism began shredding their tongues; their eyes rolled. Blood trickled from their ears.

"Mama. Mama. MAMA," Beatrice shrieked hysterically. Auby buckled up and showed the symptoms, followed by Sammy as Mrs. Taggart waddled rapidly across the meadow pulling down her dress, her big breasts swaying heavily. Taggart grabbed his rifle and followed.

"Mama," whined Beatrice as she fell, succumbing to the poison as her brothers and sisters had. Mrs. Taggart threw herself among her convulsing and bleeding children screaming prayers. Limbs flailed. The mother held the twins close and suddenly feeling the large, hard protrusions on their little bellies wailed louder among her dying children.

"Mollie may ay ay ay. Mollie may ay ay ay," sobbed Taggart, thrusting the barrel of his rifle into the sky and shooting blindly, as though at God himself. He shot the ground, cursing, before slinging the rifle toward the creek and falling among his children and sobbing his wife's name in the same deep hoarseness that had been wrung from his chest when he discovered his father's body.

The tiny faces of the twins were chalk white, swollen like their bellies as they lay on their backs motionless, having breathed their last breaths. Green froth bubbled from their locked lips.

Each little Taggart passed into death likewise. Auby twitched last.

Groping each other and wailing among their dead children, Mr. and Mrs. Taggart in time gained strength to do what was necessary and humanly proper.

The next day, with lumber from the mill, Bader helped Taggart build five little pine boxes for the children and in a wide and deep common pit beneath the earth they died so gruesomely upon they were buried. A tall wooden marker, oval at the top and painted white, over which was painted in thick black letters, *Five Little Taggarts*, and under that their names, was put over the grave in the meadow by the creek. And it was three years before another little Taggart played in the barbed-wire pen at the edge of the forest, Mrs. Taggart's pregnancy producing a fat baby girl she and her husband, without long deliberation, named Beatrice.

Contributors' Notes

Frank Boschan is a graduate student in Mass Communications at Chico State. **Clark Brown** teaches fiction writing and is best known for his novel *The Disciple*. **David Cowan** is a senior at Chico State majoring in English. He is nearly thirty-two and says he dodders slightly when writing poetry. He used to despise it, but now dabbles with poetry when he should be doing something else. **Kathleen McParthland Gallo** grew up in Eastern Oregon and graduated from the University of Oregon with degrees in English and Education. She says, "I've finally let the desire to write, and the process of writing take precedence over my fears of judgment." She lives in Chico with her husband and son. **C. F. Gill Jr.** is a recent graduate of Chico State. He says he is currently working on the "Great American Get-Rich-Quick Scheme" and that his one real ambition is to be part of the Chico Five. He too, he says, is waiting. **Helen Hart** is in her last year as an Art student with a Creative Writing minor. She has been writing poetry for two years and says that it is now in her blood. **Herb Joseph** teaches (sporadically) in the English Department and relishes the fabliau. **James Pepitone** (Tava) says, "I believe we should make the year 2000 the year one (A.B.), denoting modernity." **T. E. Rendall** drinks only Perrier water, listens only to obscure jazz, is adamantly anti-middle class and lives in the "hot dog and bean community of Magalia" with his dog and his typewriter waiting to "become unstuck at age twenty-three." **Lloyd Stenstrud** says, "understanding poetry is a difficult process. As a writer you work from two different directions. One, the belief that you might have some talent, the other the actual talent itself. Good work comes when there is a spark across this gap." **Joseph Walker** is busy working on his Master's thesis, a book of poems tentatively titled *The Early Seasons*.

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