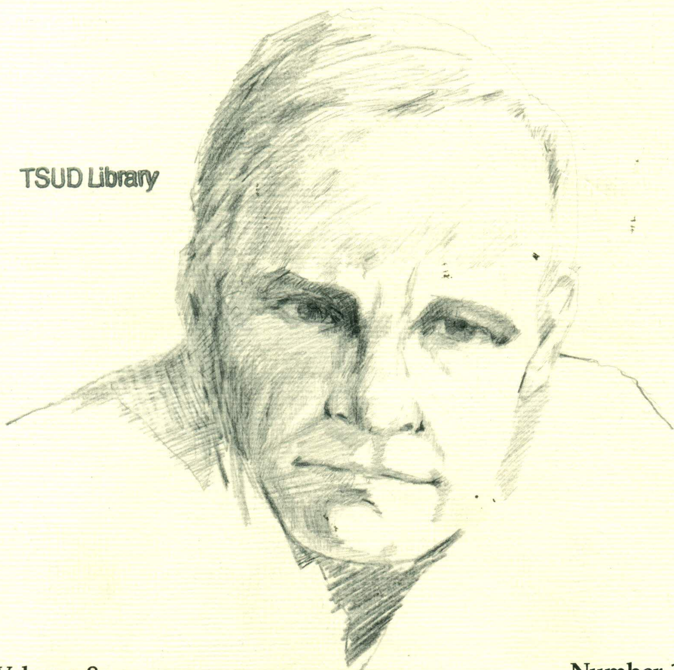
ALABAMA LITERARY REVIEW



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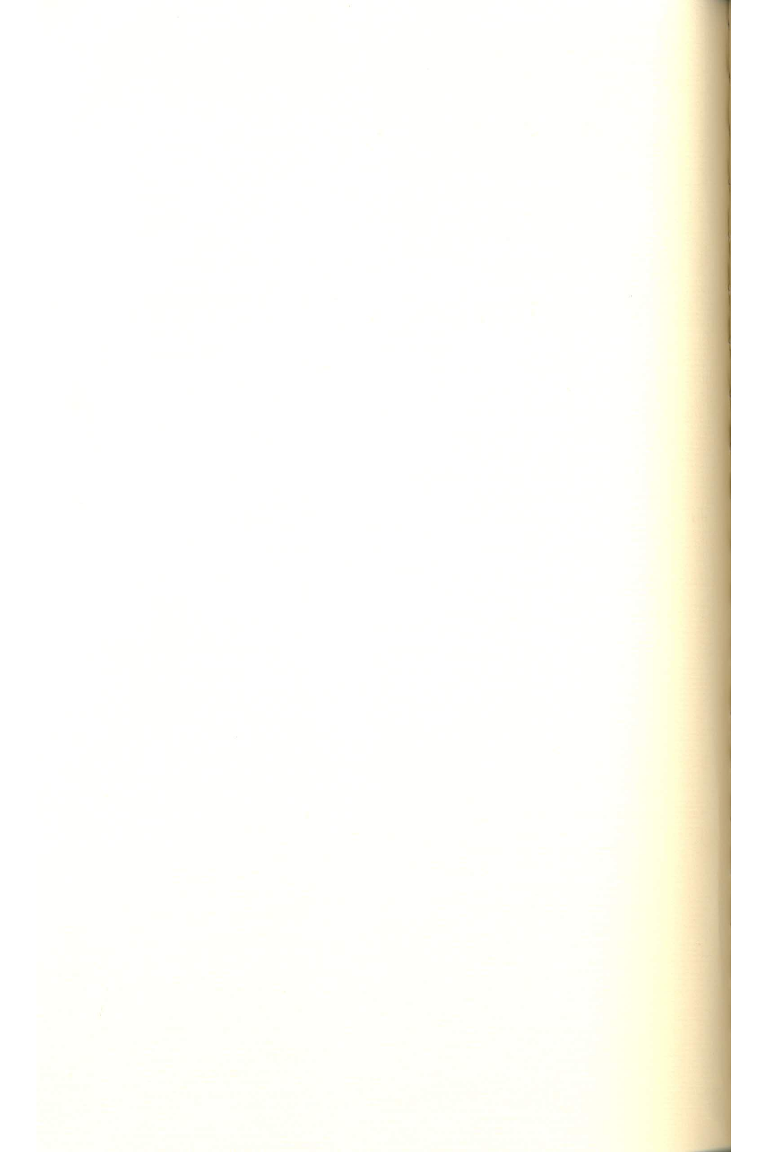

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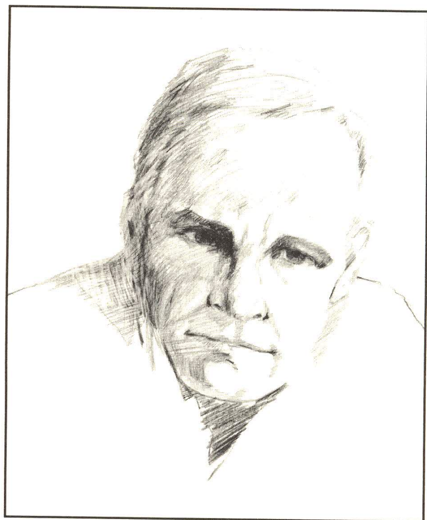

Cormac McCarthy

1994:
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. . . they said that a man leaves much when he leaves his own country. They said that it was no accident of circumstance that a man be born in a certain country and not some other and they said that the weathers and seasons that form a land form also the inner fortunes of men in their generations and are passed on to their children and are not so easily come by otherwise.

—Cormac McCarthy

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Contents

1 *Joe Lane*
Scar

8 *David James Smith*
Beauty (poem)

10 *Gwen L. Nagel*
Mount Auburn Cemetery (poem)

13 *Michael Fontana*
Creation and Loss

24 *Trudy Guinee*
Trailmaker (poem)

27 *Norberto Luis Romero*
Six Times Six

36 *R. T. Smith*
Tinder (poem)

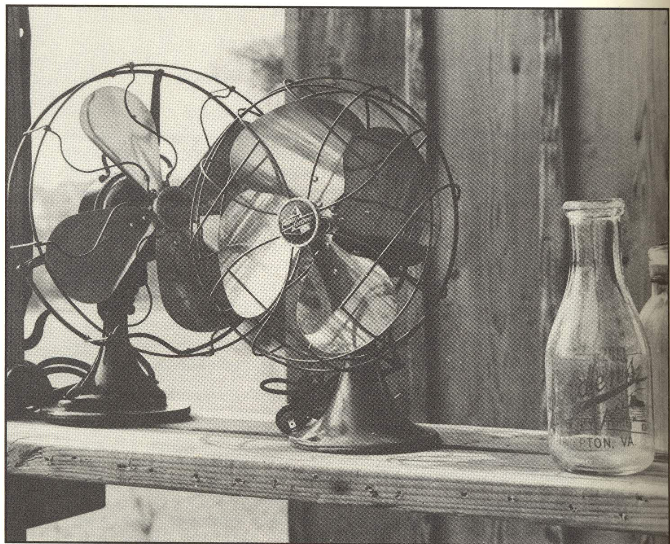
39 *Simon Levy*
She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay (play)

49 *Noelle Kocot*
The Last Time I Saw Him (poem)

51 *Neal A. Lester*
Priscilla Hancock Cooper's *Call Me Black Woman* (review)

56 *Alan T. Belsches*
Coming Home in North Carolina (review)

61 **Contributors**



Charley Vance

Scar

Joe Lane

February in Florida, and Al and I sit on our parachutes in raunchy flight suits, sweat-dampened backs against the wooden shack, watching the hogs grunt and squeal on the pierced steel plank. We watch them line up one by one at the edge of the pancake-shaped pad and explode in a cloud of oil smoke and hot piston noise. The pattern is flown at two hundred feet, so the parachutes are a joke.

The shack we lean against is linked to N.A.S. Pensacola by a grease-smudged phone and a radio that sometimes works, and the pad is Bloody Baron, an oversized garbage can lid of asphalt and pierced-steel plank dropped flat in the pine woods of west Florida. It's an auxiliary to Pensacola where midshipmen, replacing cadets in the post-war navy, and ensigns just out of Annapolis slam Corsairs and Bearcats into the asphalt the way they'll slam them onto the carrier in a couple of weeks. The only differences are the absence of arresting cables and the stiff wind that will be down the deck of the ship, and those differences have given Bloody Baron its name. It's a little more than a carrier length across, and the shack sits to one side like an island. If you're going to screw up, they figure better here than on the ship. With the pad round, you always land into the wind, any that gets through those tight-packed pines. Today it's Corsairs.

They're ugly on the pierced-steel plank—squat, mean-looking hogs. With the large-eared cowl flaps full open they look more like prehistoric lizards, and the metal around the big radials is stained like the hull of a tramp steamer. But once in the air and cleaned up, they take on a look of function and the mean turns to deadly grace. Whistling death, the Japs had called them. The

props are so large they put that bend in the wings to get them up off the ground. Al and I had asked for them.

It had been a long day. They had flown out only four Corsairs that morning, and there were still a lot of us sitting around waiting for the half hour and six or seven circuits we'd make. We were getting used to that after almost two years in a program that was supposed to have had us qualified and out in the fleet for the past six months. Pools had built everywhere we went, the flow of midshipmen backing up at every stage and equipment breaking down too often. Most of the birds had seen hard combat in the Pacific, and on some you could see beneath the canopy rail the painted-over meatballs. It wasn't rare to have a main wing spar give way on a hard landing and that was the only kind we knew. The way it was going we'd have ensigns' boards before wings, and that wasn't the way it was meant to go.

I knew Bloody Baron from before, when I was getting ready for the carrier in basic trainers. That had been a year earlier and before the navy ran out of money, before the program bogged down. But even then we should have seen it coming. They sent us all home on leave from Saufley Field until they could get more money for aviation fuel. It seemed a gift at the time. It only took eight hours to get home on a bus, less than that for Al; he lived in the slash pine end of Mississippi.

I knew Baron from the front seat of an SNJ, and that time there was an instructor in back. He'd told me that next time out I'd do it alone. We sat idling at the edge of the pad, waiting for a slot between the bouncing Bearcats so we could get back to mainside. I was looking at the one on downwind, cocked up and looking slow. Then suddenly he was below the line of tree tops. I watched, unbelieving, as chunks of trees spit into the air, like grass from a giant mower, and saw through the trees the bright flash of his hitting. I felt the rudder move, and the throttle tore from my hand. The instructor gunned the trainer across the mat, almost against the chain link fence at the edge.

"You got it!" he yelled and scrambled down the wing.

I watched him climb over the fence and run into the trees. From where I sat, I could see the canopy of the F-8, always pulled back in carrier landings, and through the billowing smoke a ghostly figure stood in the cockpit then toppled toward the ground. I heard the wail of the crash truck, saw it skid to a stop at the chain

link gate, watched, sick in the gut, as the man in rubber boots and rescue gear struggled with the padlocked chain that held it closed. Time froze like it later did over Beeville, and that's when my mind took the picture. It all stops in that instant, and nothing moves. It's one of those times you can go through life without knowing. It's like a truth, a sour wisdom that changes you, and you're never the same as those it never happened to. The man is dead. All previous knowledge, the fire, the thing in your gut supports that. It's a given: he's gone. And it all happens instantly. He'd be young and clean-looking and probably a fair jock, and he'd be gone. Your mind takes the picture.

Then others were climbing the fence, and through the haze of smoke I saw men struggling out of the trees, one of them my instructor; they were bracing another between them. The gate was somehow opened and they brought him around to it. I taxied along the fence until I could see the pilot's face. I knew him. Beneath the blackened mask I knew who he was, and I knew he had a kind of luck not many have. He might never shave the same again but the trees had cushioned him, and he'd gone in right side up.

There is still a burned-out spot in those trees, a scar. You can see it while flying your pattern or from the chain link fence. I had walked over there and looked, the first day back from Corpus Christi. That was the week before.

Those fire-scarred trunks of trees had made me wonder again about luck and the kind that midshipman had, and I thought about others since in other places who hadn't had it. There was Jerry Lear at Cabannis Field in Texas. A schedule change had kept him from going to Mexico with us one weekend, and he'd given me money to buy some leather stuff for his sister's birthday. Jerry was in an F-8, too. And Ron Gillette, in a routine landing at Correy Field, torched a row of parked Corsairs and his own a week after his bride came down to Florida. And there were the two in my flight over Beeville, Texas. I had pushed that picture away for a long time, but looking through the fence it broke through raw and open, like a cut.

Besides Al and me, there had been four others in the flight that day, split into sections of three. My section had bounced at Beeville auxiliary and were circling above, smoking cigarettes and listening to Texas shit-kick on the radio. The instructor was in the

mobile below, critiquing the others. When he radioed the lower section to join up, mine began closing on me and I banked into a wide circle for the join-up.

Then something happened. I was looking left, watching the instructor's Corsair climb up so I could join on him. From the corner of my eye I caught a flutter. I snapped my head right to see my wingman jerk up and out of echelon. Before I knew what had spooked him, I see the Corsair to his right float up in slow motion, then the one climbing up from below, rising almost as slowly and head-on into him, never seeing. I see the two lock like freight trains, rearing back on their tails, strobes of sunlight as a prop flashed off into the sun an instant before the fusing of metal and plexiglass.

There is shouting in my headphones to bail out. I move my hands and feet to keep the tumbling ball in sight and spiral down with it, toward the sun-scorched Texas fields. Like waking from a nightmare, I snap alive and level off above the rolling hills. The ball is there in a black scorched hole with metal raining down and the dry grass on fire at the edge, and I am pulled tight in around it and the voice still shrilling in my ears is mine.

"Smoke 1, come back up!" I hear through my shouts. I know that only seconds have passed. The edged voice of the instructor cuts through. "Count off, Smoke!"

"Smoke 1," I shouted and stared into the glazed sky above for the others. I waited to hear 5; Al had been 5 that day.

Three didn't count off, but Al did and all the others except 4. Mattley and Bergeron. We'd played poker the night before, and I'd admired the Frenchman's hands when he dealt the cards.

They gave us a new instructor after that, a marine captain, and two ensigns to fill out the flight. The first thing the marine did was take us up to Beeville, then down on the deck in trail, over the black hole in that field. I knew what he was doing and that it was the right thing to do.

Then just before leaving Texas there was Bill Bolton, and that was the worst. I had ridden on a train with his casket to Baton Rouge and met his folks.

I look over at Al, leaning against the shack, smoking a cigarette and lost in something he's thinking about. He thinks a lot. Reads, too. He says the atomic bomb changed everything, and the navy

is in real trouble if the politicians don't get their shit together. The Secretary of Defense thinks carriers are obsolete and all the money should go toward building B-36s.

"It don't look good for the navy," Al said on the bus coming out that morning, then told me about some trouble in Korea. I don't know where he gets it all. I've come to know him well over the past year, and he is changing. But so am I.

Al gets a bird, and I climb up on the wing and help him strap in. With my back against the shack, I watch his patterns through a cut and a wave-off. There are a lot of wave-offs, and I wonder about the landing signal officer, the j.g. with the paddles. Then it's my turn. I climb up the oil streaked wing, the engine belching and the big prop idling, and help the midshipman out of his straps. I jerk a quick look at the fuel gauge and check that the brake is set. He helps me strap in and jumps down off the wing. It's getting late, the sun is slicing in through the tops of trees when I line up to go.

Twenty minutes later I finish my landing checklist for the third time and look down to my left to mark the L.S.O. with the paddles. He's waved me off twice, too fast the first time, then too high. The long nose is reared up now, the flaps full down and the airspeed just above stalling. I let the nose fall into the left turn, then hold it, keeping the bright flutter of the paddles against the edge of the cowl, playing the turn. Some days it feels like you're on rails and you know it's right, but today the airspeed drops and I bring in some power, keeping the paddles against the mark I've set on the cowling. The paddles go low and I nudge the power up, still turning, almost there, until the paddles are nearly level. Then in that instant when I should level the wings, cut the throttle, and pop the nose down—hauling it up just before I hit—I get flashing paddles, the frantic wave-off.

No time to wonder, no time to think, just slam it to the wall and muscle the stick forward and right with all the top rudder I can get. From the tail of my eye I see paddles fly into the air, and I know I'm in trouble. The bottom is falling out of my airplane, and I hang in a stall at fifty feet with two thousand horses behind that big prop, and it packing the air so solid the airframe is rotating instead. I see in stop frame a windshield full of revolving chain link fence and pine trees laid on their sides. In that instant, all the buried thoughts of crashing and burning, all the drummed-

in drills of mandatory wave-offs, flashed by. In that fast-time instant of hyper awareness, I stand on the bottom rudder with all the strength in my leg and will the prop wash to work on it. I stand on it until the nose starts to drop, the left wingtip straight at the ground but coming up. The screaming engine goes slack when I haul the throttle back.

The Corsair hardly rolls when it hits the ground. The left wingtip has kissed the pierced plank, and the bird bounces level on the main gear, all forward motion bled off. It stops at the edge of the pad and I pull the throttle to idle cut-off. I sit, watching them run across the oily steel. But I don't hear what they're saying; I'm looking for someone.

"Where's the L.S.O.?" I ask the first face up on the wing.

"In the shack."

"Is he OK?"

The face nods, and I unstrap and climb down off the bird. When I walk through the door of the shack, the j.g. is on the phone. He doesn't know who I am. When I hit him, the phone flies the way of the paddles, and he backpedals across the floor and sits down against the wall. I feel hands on me, then, and people are shouting at me; I begin to tremble.

On the bus ride back to Pensacola, I sit alone. There is none of the usual grab-ass, and the talk is hushed, none of it meant for me. It's dusk, and I look out the window at the pines on the side of the road. Al has flown a bird back to Pensacola, but I know he's gotten the word on the radio. I wonder what he's thinking.

I'm not much worried about the wingtip, or even hitting the L.S.O. He'd gotten up by the time they cooled me down. But aborting a wave-off is something else, even if there wasn't any alternative. The L.S.O. is never wrong, and I guess it has to be that way if you are going to fly off carriers. I'll have trouble with the accident review board: If I lie and tell them the engine stalled, I could well be exonerated; yet when I tell them the truth, that it wasn't possible to take a wave-off at that instant, and blame the L.S.O., I will in their eyes be wrong. And of course they won't give much weight to the time I lost in the bird when I took Bill Bolton home. I feel relieved and somehow it doesn't matter.

I walked over to the fence before I got on the bus and stood

with my fingers hooked in the wire and looked for a while at that fire-scarred spot. I'd had some luck myself. Maybe more than I knew.❑

Beauty

David James Smith

The sky, a thickening mirror I watch, groans
with the stubborn sounds of a chained stump
Ripped from soil. And I feel within me
The cyst of a prayer that has hardened for years
Pulse with blind insistence. Perhaps
Beauty is an image projected, the luminous clouds
I stared into as a boy burning
My eyes.
It was years ago
Under the vague, dirtied paint, curling
From the ceiling of a two-hundred-dollar apartment
Off Washington Square that I grew
Quiet in the sudden
Absence of her dress, almost holy,
Watching what was left of the sunlight
Striping the mattress and the solemn
Curves of her shoulders. I traced
The long question that scarred her
Belly, swollen like a vessel of water
And placed her hand on my chest, pressing
Her finger, *There,* as if it could enter the blood
Streaking the walls of my heart. The window
Left opened.
Somewhere in the distance
I heard a line of boxcars rush east
With the sureness of history, mindless
as the fear I carried for years
Like the medal tapping my chest. I imagined

The few men sitting cross-legged on top
of that train, drowsy as buddhas, faces
Darkened with the muted
Ambitions of rust, riding that iron
Carcass, slippery with mud
And the rain's iridescence.
I suppose later
They fell off the cars, steaming
In the moonlit switchyards
Of a city in Kansas
Or Montana, the fading crunch
Of their boots on gravel, the sound
Of something like ice
Breaking apart.
Once a boy
In a public urinal showed me, I guess
In what was the loneliness of adolescence, his
Penis. I was strung there
In the raw silence of the high windows,
A few flies buzzing lazily, feeling
Sickened, not by his
Presumption but by the emptiness
Of his offer. Something
In the ragged landscape of his face
Reminded me of the hunger my
Mother had once shown me
In the paintings of saints.
That was
A long time ago.
I tell you there is a student now,
In one of my classes. When she laughs
The faces of young men grow still as
Pools of rain a cold wind has passed
Over. Yesterday I saw her
Dressed in the thin light of summer, coils of silver
Around one ankle. I try to touch her,
Late at night, with these fingers
Of type striking paper. Do you see?
I hate her. She is moving too quickly.
She wears red ribbons in her hair.

Mount Auburn Cemetery

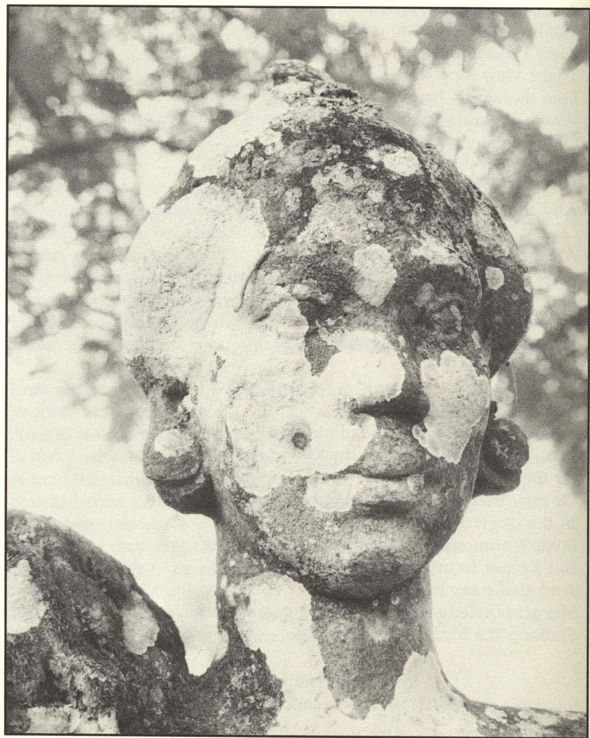
Gwen L. Nagel

I have come to photograph
Close up, the blooms that glimmer
Lucent on black branches
White, pink, gold freight
Of flowering plums, magnolias, tulip trees
Some past their prime, the earth beneath them
Littered with fallen petals,
Some, like the lilacs, just coming into their own.

I am surprised to see I have companions
In these acres of the dead
An old couple walks hand in hand
A girl pushes a child in a stroller
A man, recording names in a notebook,
Stands before ornamental trees, the labeled specimens.
Workmen ride by,
The bed of their truck loaded with shovels
And the shrubs to be planted this morning.
A pair of ducks fly over,
Land in a pool banked with jonquils,
And six turtles sunning themselves
Slip into the dark
Pond that reflects, with the gold of the willows,
The edifice of someone no one remembers anymore.

Everything here seems quickened, in bloom:
Blue faces of petunias, freshly set,
Red tulips, from bulbs buried in an earlier time,
Yellow sprays of forsythia and
A dogwood, its airy white blossoms
Floating unwedded to each other,
Each a discrete flower
That I view singly
Like the words handwritten by a girl I know
Which separate until you lose all sense of matter and see
Only fragments on the page.
When I step back to see the tree whole
I set my lens on infinity
And the assemblage of stones
Once a blur, intrude.
All the old ghosts, ungrieved by me
Now in focus.
I try other angles but finally concede
To the four white lettered stones
Inseparable from the flowering tree,
And I shoot.

"Have you seen anything?"
An old woman with binoculars asks.
I could tell her about the ducks
Or the frightened turtles
Or how there is something to be divined
In the dogwoods
Some testimony, inescapable, worth hearing
But I point to my camera
And shake my head.
She acknowledges her error and moves past,
Stalking the birdlife of this place.



Natasha Babaian

Creation and Loss

Michael Fontana

"Creation—happens to us, burns into us, changes us, we tremble and swoon, we submit."
—Martin Buber

1

Jack works the bar at Aladdin's on Saturdays while his sister Louellen tends the restaurant upstairs. Both are the only friends I have kept since high school, over forty years ago. For every drink he mixes for me, Jack pours himself a shot. This way, he better understands the slurring of his customers as something more than mere aging.

Louellen comes down from the kitchen to fetch a liqueur for her cooking. She stands very near me, her hands cupped and prayerful in front of her. Her hair is much lighter now than what I recall from school, her face lined. She is far more radiant than in her youth, more assured. She has earned the right to curl her lip into a smile. She has earned the right to place her hands atop the counter with softness.

I admire her as I sit on my bar stool, her back a smooth linen as she reaches for the bottom shelf. Her bracelet jangles on the neck of a decanter. She never takes a nip, even on the coldest day of winter, even in her darkest gloom. Perhaps this is what makes her so desirable, her unwillingness to sink to our depths. Her skin is far looser than it used to be, and there are brown spots on her hands. Jack speaks of her decay as he tips another shot out of the bottle. He speaks of how her body has dissolved into the squalor of old age. I disagree. Her eyes have not lost their ember, they glisten in front of me like tumblers in the rinse.

I think of it as gold, the way we age. Life deposits enormous

troves of experience within the body and it grows heavy with the weight of such precious cargo. The passage to these riches is clearly delineated, through the eyes.

As I sip my rock and rye, Louellen asks if I would like to attend her church tomorrow. She is quiet, yet she attends services where the parishioners speak in tongues. Charismatic, she calls it, the way they utter unfamiliar syllables and flop on the floor. I decline her invitation and yet her smile isn't swallowed between terse lips. Tolerance is another present granted for one's time on this planet.

I remain at Aladdin's until it closes. Jack can barely stand and Louellen is called down to close the bar and put him to sleep on the cot inside the storage room. Louellen and I are left alone with the piped-in music and the artwork on the walls. I watch as she counts the money in the register, as she rinses the tumblers and ashtrays, as she runs the vacuum cleaner. She occasionally kneels to lift a nickel off the carpet from beneath the shadow of a bar stool.

By the time she is prepared to leave, the temperature outside has dropped considerably and rain splashes over us. We escort a patron to a waiting taxicab then stand under the awning. Louellen ties a plastic scarf onto her head and a long blue coat around her body. By the street lamp I can see indentations in her lips from where she has bitten them. She often has these moments, choosing not to express her anxieties overtly but instead distributing small deformities about her body.

She clutches her purse and pats my shoulder, her hand in a blue driving glove. Rain spouts from the bill of my fedora and splatters about her feet. In these departures I am most awkward, every movement or mannerism bringing more embarrassment. Still, the serenity of her eyes is not diminished, nor the presence of her hand upon my shoulder.

A car splashes along the curb with a lone man inside, beckoning. She asks me to stop by again some time and then vanishes into the car, enveloped by a sheet of rain.

I have told neither her nor her brother that I cannot go home. A Catholic church is open a block away, so I run to it. I try to sleep in a pew but I am cold. I rub my eyes but cannot shake the image of Louellen in the rain. A janitor sweeps the floors, his hearing aids shut off and his back turned to me. I am not religious but I

often find these buildings useful when I encounter a vague spiritual or moral lapse. Poverty is perhaps such a lapse.

The janitor sweeps away in other parts of the church, the whisper of dust beneath his broom like the sound of a barnyard in a windstorm, the imminent upheaval of one's surroundings into particles.

He whistles "String of Pearls." A chill stretches down the aisle to my heart. He turns off the lamp in each section he has cleaned, sealing the doors and gradually the entire church in darkness.

As a child I once saw an image of the church as being perpetually stabbed by a beam of heaven's light. To see inside church walls and know this darkness is startling at first, then makes great sense. Before creation, there was only this darkness. It allows one co-existence with God outside of time.

2

Jack stands in the doorway of Aladdin's to allow me in. Each morning he awakens and hobbles out of his cot. He seldom changes clothes, seldom showers, seldom undresses to sleep. His life is a continuum. Not a collection of days dissected from each other by sleep but one solitary day in the illusion of Aladdin's walls, in the vision of his Seagram's 7, in the smell of his sweaty undershirts. His event was Korea, catastrophic enough to last him all his hours. He prefers the darkness of the bar to all else he has discovered; it reminds him of the peaceful trenches of the war where sound was muted and a man allowed a moment's respite from the rushing bullets.

Naked women adorn the walls of Aladdin's, bending and flowing. Men eye or chase the naked women on the walls, men in a form of reverie, their heads wrapped in turbans and playing snake-charmer flutes. The wall is a landscape of intoxication in the desert, the figures covered with stale ash and dust. Above Jack, behind the cash register, is a particularly graphic painting of a woman lying nude beneath a large and menacing eye. He often stares at her as if she might yet come to life.

Louellen will not arrive until dinner time and I will be quite drunk by then, so I will not see her today. Instead I imagine

myself as one of the men painted on the walls, as we share the same intoxication, the same remote desire to chase a woman into our dreams. I will chase Louellen from morning into afternoon, a thousand Louellens bending in siroccos on the hourglass of sand.

Jack enters the storeroom and counts cases of Budweiser and Cutty Sark. He rarely moves a case out of the storeroom but invariably checks his inventory every morning. He brushes dust off the cardboard boxes, flicks his ash into an empty tumbler on the desk next to the adding machine, and hacks. He holds his stomach as he coughs and phlegm sprays from his lips. His eyes squint and water; his face reddens. I step behind the bar, pour two fingers of Seagram's into a shot glass and walk into the storeroom. His hand wavers as he takes the shot and dumps it down his throat. The coughing stops and he wipes his lips with a hairy wrist.

"Thanks, Danny boy."

"Are you well, Jack?"

"Fit as a fiddler crab, pal. Let me do you one up on the house once I get done in here."

I return to my bar stool and watch him strain to carry each case from one end of the storeroom to the other.

3

I wander out of Aladdin's and examine various parts of the city: smokestacks turned off, breweries whose empty floors smell of rat dung. The city decomposes in its way. Perhaps everyone is brighter now. Perhaps the children of the bullet-headed brewery man have advanced beyond their father's comprehension. He is probably in a car not unlike one I would own, should I have had the grace, glaring at the vacant buildings, wondering just when his efforts and his sense of history evaporated.

It is much like the horror of intimacy: the profound sense of knowing someone's life so well that you also come to understand their evolution into death.

I was trapped in my house with my wife for several months before she expired, nurturing her illness. I hovered in the kitchen

and seasoned pots of chicken soup. The house was unnaturally still the duration of her illness, like a tree branch full of leaves awaiting the wind. She coughed into her palm. A floorboard whined beneath my foot. Little other sound invaded our hours. The house was suffused with color.

I ate only pears, apples, raisins, walnuts, and wine. My limited appetite aided in my perception of the subtleties of color in our home. I had often seen my wife's face with a cosmetic mask across it, a beauty mask, greasepaint, an inverted minstrel. White clay would ooze from between her fingers as she faced the mirror. She had seen the procedure in a magazine. She in no way could perceive herself as beautiful and hence neither could anyone else. She lacked the primary necessity for beauty: self-assurance. She tried to steal self-respect from a glossy page and was doomed to failure. She never even noticed that it was colorless white that she smudged on her cheeks. In pursuit of beauty, she nullified all color.

My hunger and my drink make me so mean-spirited, so hateful of the dead. Or maybe I'm just jealous.

I grew so abstracted in my sick room chores. I beat her dead skin off the sheets while she bathed. I placed a chilly glass of water on her forehead to ease her fever. Words should have been spoken. Tenderness expressed. I could find neither. She slept most of the final days and I was grateful, for both of us. She sometimes dribbled soup from her lips and down her neck. I would pluck a tissue from the dispenser to dry her off. She kissed my hand. She placed a hand to my brow. She seemed to look for an assurance before drifting into sleep.

Once the phone rang from the other room. I lifted the receiver to my ear. Rarely did anyone call for me. I was astounded to hear Louellen on the line.

"Daniel?"

"Louellen. . . ."

"Is this a bad time?"

"Why, no. . . ."

"I can call back later."

"No! Please. It's fine really. How are you?"

Those were the first lies out of my mouth, lies from which I have tried to extricate myself ever since. An infidelity hanging in the air like a spider on its web.

For some reason I recalled a large pipe organ in a concert hall, where I once stepped in from a snowstorm during college. I listened for hours yet retained nothing but intonations. That feeling lingered as Louellen spoke. The marvelous pedals and pipes of her voice resounded in the empty house. I smiled and my eyes watered. I wished then that I were touching her and her lips were placing that sound directly into my ears. Each variation in pitch would reflect a button undone by her fingers. Each fluctuation in tone would reflect a kiss against her neck.

I allowed the telephone to dangle from my hand. A recorded voice told me to hang up or dial the operator for assistance. I know that I spoke profusely but cannot recall one word. I have tried to write it down since, and this is what escaped from my pen:

"Louellen, there are no words I can conjure to express my sorrow at our distance. I pour myself a glass of wine while my wife sleeps and with each swallow I feel closer to you, farther from my home. I am frightened by the motion taking place within my heart. I am cold and hunger reaches through my system, yet I struggle toward a clearer vision of you in my mind. My wife is ill. Dying, if the truth be known. And perhaps it is my fault. Whenever my attention slips into another area of life, another person, she is stricken far more deeply by her illness. My time is spent watching her dream. My own dreams are focused on rubbing lotions into her skin to ease the soreness, doses of medication to temper the pain, boiling soup. I cannot reach you from here. Years are wedged between us, beyond miles, beyond the breadth of existence."

4

I ride a bus and sit next to an old man in a Greek sailor's hat. He eats a candy bar and reads the business section of the morning paper. The windows are dirty with snow. The bus tosses puddles onto the sidewalk as it lunges forward.

I notice panic on the faces of people waiting at each stop. They cluster together as if to share warmth. They will not look at one another, nor the driver, nor the other passengers. They look only

at the sky or the soil. One finds an old detective novel wedged between the seats and pretends to read it.

I am similarly distracted, discovering new plots of land between buildings I've passed many mornings of my adult life, discovering the abandonment of buildings I had presumed to contain someone's life and property. Many of the boarded windows belong to what were formerly nightclubs and restaurants, food and drink long since passed off by the bodies of their patrons, the bodies themselves now replenishing the earth.

It is reassuring to know that there once was a procession of bodies and voices within these boarded buildings, of love and drunkenness much the same as now. I am not the only soul in time to have frittered away my breath in pursuit of weakness.

This line would lead me to my former work place, had I the ability to concentrate. I remember paper, the words so much black string on my finger. But any noise eclipses me these days and words on a page are often noisiest of all, more wings beating in the aviary.

I was never interested in the success or failure of the company. All my actions added up to a mere stop-gap in its infrastructure. If the company had failed, I would have been the man with the broom pushing its fragments into a dustpan.

5

Louellen and I agree to meet on Monday night. She has discovered an outdoor cafe that has dared open so close to the edge of winter. We sit on chairs beneath an umbrella. I drink chambord and cranberry juice, on her suggestion. She drinks the juice alone. The waiter learns our orders and assigns them to our faces, extends them further into our personalities and develops prejudices as to our hidden characteristics. Louellen orders chicken parmagiana and I order rigatoni, Americanized versions with soybean in the meatballs and bland sauces.

Louellen wears a black and white blazer over a thin white blouse. Dusk smooths the lines in her face, rendering her ageless. Light creeps under the umbrella only far enough to let me observe

the swelling and deflation of her chest as she breathes. She has no shame on Mondays; she forgets her Sunday timidity.

She brushes a few stray hairs out of her face, uses her fingernail to trace the veins that rise to the surface of her hand. The red from our drinks transplants itself into the sky, the waiter's uniform, the shadows on her cheek. She pays our bill when we are done and we walk with arms interlocked down the stone path to her car. I kiss her hand under the lamplight. The sky is without cover; we could drive all night beneath it.

We travel to a quiet spot by the river where picnic tables and grills sit. I open a bottle of white zinfandel with the corkscrew on a Swiss army knife that Jack had hidden in her glove compartment. The cork resounds in a small heartbreak under the circling of bats. The river splashes beside us. I drink wine from a dixie cup, a splash down my throat as if I am drowning.

I place my jacket on the grass and ask Louellen to sit upon it. She reclines as crickets bleat about us. As I continue to drink the wine, I no longer see her but feel her next to me like hands over braille. We have lost our identities and revert to some basic form, two atoms in the chain of occurrences that result in the creation of a universe.

I am grateful to her, grateful to be rid of my identity and limitations. I wish to share more with her, more than just my body and its imperfect presence, more than just my hasty words and their inexpressiveness, more than just the evening stained with liquor churning in the riverbed.

6

The quest for love gradually becomes the quest for one's self. This from someone who spends hours preoccupied with his image as it glares at him from storefronts, bus windows, hubcaps, spoons, metal trays in cafeteria lines. I am separated from myself, and as I examine the women I have loved I discover I have sought my own attributes or the attributes I might have possessed had I been born female. An angular hairstyle, somber dress, adornment all mean a lot to me. As I quested for my female self I became more and more of an auctioneer, giving quick appraisal to potential

mates and raising their status to someone who could have filled a void in my heart. I became entranced by quick flashes of color, by light glittering off an earring as a woman entered a doorway.

One cannot continue to see oneself as the end and means of the world without feeling a bit disturbed. I have not seen my wife for years; I cannot recall her most ordinary expressions. Instead I obsess about my own, my eyes turned sideways peering in a window, exploring every crater and incision of my face, discovering wrinkles and blemishes, uncovering the awful truth that I am nothing like I had presumed myself to be. I wish I were of larger build, teeth trimmed as evenly as hedgerows, the slit eyes and sooty hair of a Manchurian. I feel ridiculous and old. I relish aging until I see it occur within myself. Someone sits next to me on a park bench and I am moved to curl up so as to avoid contact with their body, as if I might cling to them like a snail.

I am no longer concrete. I cannot visualize. There is no importance to the buildings looming over my head. The people, the constructions, all are figures in an abstract equation beyond my comprehension.

7

A festival occupies a park in the center of town. Trailers open to reveal carnies hawking baseballs to children passing by. The festival is designed for younger people, yet I stand with the throng in front of the bandstand as the boys onstage tune their instruments.

The streets surrounding the park have been blocked with sawhorses. Lamps glow above displays of buttons, T-shirts, costume jewelry. Popcorn fills the lid of a popper. The sounds of excavation intrude on the notes of the musicians. The theme recurring in the speeches of the politicians is that of growth and development. There will be no traditions other than erasing history and thereby memory as well. Soon we will be able to recall nothing of our childhoods other than old syllables spelling out invisible locales, while we wonder at how unfamiliar and menacing the new surroundings have become.

Jack and Louellen stand inside a trailer as they pour beer into plastic cups for the crowd. I stand beside their trailer until Jack notices me and invites me to help. He removes his apron and hops out of the trailer, his bladder filled with furtive cups of beer. The lines are long at the portable toilets and he sways in an uncomfortable rhythm that seems to be in time to the beat of the band. Louellen fills more cups while I collect the money. We continue this pattern for some time, and the activity numbs me. My ears ring with the music and crowd.

Louellen and I have little opportunity to speak throughout the evening, except to total sales. I note the smallest interruptions in our rhythm, as she kneels to tie her shoe or open up a box of plastic cups.

By night's end a few people return to the trailer with their crumpled cups. Our kegs are empty. One man with a large dog leashed to his wrist is outraged at our lack of beer and sicks his mutt upon us. The dog leaps toward the trailer but cannot scale the sides. The beast barks and gnashes its teeth, then is called off with a snap of its master's fingers. Louellen remains immobile during the episode, squatting down and loading the contents of the trailer into boxes to be taken back to Aladdin's. The dog is not an ordinary hazard in her life; she has always been protected by Jack, or by her parents, or by her ex-husband. She has never learned to protect herself, which dates her in some way.

Jack returns and places a watermelon at our feet. He has stolen it from a fruit stand at the other end of the park, an act of revenge against the proprietor who beat him at poker the week before. Jack leaves again, his happiness expansive as he mingles with the young people, people he dreams will flood into Aladdin's and return it to its rightful position of glory within the community.

I pick up the watermelon to pack it away, when I notice that Louellen is crying. She weeps soundlessly, her eyes closed and her lips pinched together. I put my free arm around her, holding the watermelon in the other. It is as if her every possession is on sale, gathered in these boxes, expended in these hollow kegs, cursed at by animals. At Aladdin's she only deals with the dignity of her childhood, the best of people, noted friends of her parents. Now there is only this unprotected trailer, a crowd that sweats and gyrates, the barricades and blinding bulbs of a ferris wheel. I clasp her tightly and see the lines in the corners of her eyes. She lifts her

face as if to speak; she holds my hand as if to remove it from her body. Her hand lingers there. Then we kiss.

I yearn to define her in my hands. I caress her as we kiss, but she resists. I content myself with the dangling of her fingers on the back of my hand, kisses grazing my lips like moths against a lamp. Jack returns with a butcher knife and we place the watermelon on the countertop. He drops the blade in evenly spaced strokes through the fruit, its juices spattering the sawdust on the ground. We all three take a slice and slurp the flavor out, spitting seeds into an empty cup.❑

Trailmaker

Trudy Guinee

for my father

You'd beach the boat at the river entrance
to Snail Shell Cave and wade us
and our straggly friends
through underground streams,
creep us under low-hanging rocks
past slimy boulders, seeping
limestone walls, your lantern blinding
the weak-eyed bats, mushrooming
us into looming shadows.

From inside the cave,
you wanted to find another entrance,
convinced that from some deep chamber
you'd spot a circle of light,
would crawl through to a new landscape—
a grove of gnarled cedar, maybe,
some rocky hillside pasture with watermelon
smell of sweet grass, Holsteins chewing, staring
at you half-sprung from rocky ground.
We never got to it.

Three times now, ignoring
your wishes, our instructions,
your doctor and nurses
have pumped oxygen into your lungs,
filled you with antibiotics.
They insist on dragging you back
when you, 93, struggle
to climb out of your heavy body.

Curled fetus, wilted
mushroom, abandoned shell,
past sight, past hearing,
you're wakened now
only for cleaning,
the timed pabulum feedings.

There should be no impediments:
no shin-bruising boulders, no
pebbles beneath your tender feet.

It hurts to tell you this: *We don't*
need you to hang back anymore.
If only I could borrow the voice
of your father, that stern commander
you were afraid not to obey,

or your mother's gentle encouragement.
Like the time near dark
when you, a bawling toddler
stuck under the porch, kept bumping
your head. She coaxed you,
Come on now. You can do it.
Don't try to stand. Crawl
toward the light! It's late.
How can any of us find you,
lost as you are?
Is there still an echo?

Breck Parkman

Six Times Six

Norberto Luis Romero
Translated by H. E. Francis

Pura. Concepcion, perfectly pure, like the Virgin. His aunt makes no noise moving about the room, walking barefoot in the dark, surefooted, scarcely brushing the wooden floor, carrying the spiral, just lit, in her hands. "In Buenos Aires you can't live with so many mosquitoes. And the spirals no longer affect them. My arms and legs are covered with bites." He hears her murmuring as she sets it apart on the floor, in a small plate, so the ashes won't fall near his bed.

For four crazy days
that we are going to be
we'll live with no mosquitoes
with spirals Fuyi.

He sings the jingle that he hears every afternoon between the episodes of Tarzan, sitting in the hall with one ear glued to the radio, turned low, while his aunts sleep the siesta, and he wonders if there are mosquitoes in the jungle like in Buenos Aires.

From his bed he can see a tiny red dot, the embers of the spiral, and immediately smells the penetrating odor of burnt weeds that comes in little clouds and suffocates him till he gets used to it. Pura kisses him and says goodnight, goes off to her bedroom next to his, and before sinking into sleep he hears her chatting with Aunt Isabel. The streetlights pour weakly through the Venetian blinds, horizontal strips of still light vaguely outlined on the wooden floor. A mosquito buzzes near his ear and he covers his head with the sheet, but in no time he feels the heat, the humid heat of Buenos Aires, where he has come to spend the summer, and he

throws the sheet off hoping the spiral has driven the mosquito away.

Often the firemen's siren also sounds from around the corner, and he wakes up in the middle of the night—he knows because he hears the clock in the hall, its striking overriding the siren. Fires are caused without warning, and he wouldn't like to be a fireman and have to get up at any hour. He has never seen a fire. He has seen the firemen go by now and then in their red truck, sounding the piercing siren so all the autos will let it pass, when he was playing in the yard gathering snails that hide under the calla lilies and at the foot of the Santa Rita bush, and, racing, he reached the iron gate and, climbing the grating, he mounted the wall and from there, hurling handfuls of snails, he applauded them because they are good and save people from the flames and always arrive on time to keep the fire from spreading and destroying everything. When the siren wakes him he can't go back to sleep again, and he amuses himself gazing at the red spot reflected on the waxed wooden floor. Now there are no mosquitoes, but as soon as the spiral is consumed and the strong smell of palo santo and piretro has dissipated, they will come through the cracks in the doors and windows, buzzing again about his ears in search of tender skin and his sweet red blood.

"Purita, when are you and your sister moving to Cordoba?" the curious fat diabetic patient asks.

"When we retire, God willing, in a few months. This coming fall."

"And the house, how's it coming along?"

"Slowly. We're building it little by little, but my brother-in-law, Alberto, wrote and said it's getting there, they'll be putting on the roof soon."

"And won't you miss Buenos Aires?"

"No. We love the mountains and Alberto's there, and our nephews. Our dream's been to move and enjoy the mountains and the children, *although some are not so good in arithmetic.*" And she looks at him and smiles, winks, as she brushes cotton soaked in alcohol over the puncture in the patient's arm as if for a mosquito bite.

For four crazy days
that we are going to be,

we'll live with no mosquitoes
with spirals Fuyi.

High up, glued to the corners of the ceiling, which almost no smoke reaches, like hardly perceptible dark dots, are the mosquitoes with their sharp stingers ready, waiting for the spiral to burn down before darting down in search of blood. So fragile, but painful, despite their inoffensive appearance.

Slowly, in the stillness of damp early morning hours, the spiral burns down, following its implacable circle as it approaches the live ember, until it dies out, its dark green core hardly a thread in the corner of the tin. For a long time he lies watching the ember coiling imperceptibly like the hands of the clock in the penumbra, reflected, symmetrical, on the waxed wooden floor. And the following morning he gets up and looks at the consumed spiral in the plate, where its ashes maintain its form intact. He touches it and it dissolves under his fingers. He runs with the plate in his hands, reaches the kitchen where his breakfast is already awaiting him, separates the metal plate at an angle to preserve the unconsumed tip of the spiral, tears it free, and throws it with the ashes into the trash.

During the sultry weather of the siesta Tarzan appears, screaming like a siren, announcing his fleet arrival on a vine, climbing the distorted trunks of gigantic trees, crossing rivers infested with crocodiles. He arrives just in time to save the good ones, like the firemen, and the radio sound is lost among whistles, dies out, inaudible. He adjusts the dial again and the voice of the jungle resurges triumphant. During his lethargy, Pura arrives, yawning and brushing her hair back. With one hand she protects her eyes from the light. She looks at him and smiles. She asks how the program is and if he has studied his multiplication tables.

"Tarzan's caught in a trap the Indians set for him," he tells her. And she hugs him and pinches his cheek till it hurts.

"Today he saved a girl from the lions, he scared them away with a cry."

"Oh? And what else?"

"Then he talked to them, because he talks with animals, and he convinced them to go away and not bother them anymore."

The doorbell rings. "They're here already," Pura says. "That must be Dona Rosario coming for her insulin." And she opens the

door. In the sunny rectangular opening the fat woman's charred silhouette appears. She says hello and sits down to wait for his aunt to sterilize the syringe. She's almost too big for the chair. She complains of the heat and humidity, breathes heavily, and asks, curious, "It won't be long before you move, will it?"

"A month and a half. In April, God willing. . . ."

"I'm sorry that I'm going to have to look for other nurses to give me my shots."

"I hope the fat one bursts," he thinks, because she often comes early and interrupts his radio program, he can't hear because she talks. And at that very instant the harsh sound of the siren from around the corner begins and he goes running out to the yard to see the firemen go by and applaud them.

He suffers the summer in Buenos Aires—suffers humidity and bloodthirsty mosquitoes, consumed spiral ashes, and interrupted radio programs of "Tarzan, King of the Apes"—and goes back to the sierras to his father and brothers and sisters, laden with gifts and with the last kisses his aunts gave him still fresh on his cheeks.

"My dear Sister-in-law,

If all goes well and it doesn't rain, this week we're going to work on the roof and lay the tiles. I enclose a photo so you both can see how it's coming along. . . ."

Pura, perfectly pure Concepcion. She's retiring and she's coming with Aunt Isabel to live in the sierras and enjoy herself after so many years of work, so many injections and so much first aid. Near her brother-in-law, and them, the nieces and nephews she loves so. They're coming to rest from so many behinds and so much sickness and so many patients waiting with their arms bared: There you are. It hurt. You see? it wasn't anything, a little prick, like a mosquito's. To breathe this pure air and sleep without mosquitoes, without the fear of being awakened by the firemen's siren or by the doorbell at the strangest hours of night: Pura, please, my father's sick. I'm coming. And off to prepare the syringe, boiling it for a good while, the cotton, the fine alcohol, then hurrying out. Now Isabel and I are going to enjoy our retirement, we'll live in the house we're having built beside theirs, my brother-in-law's and nephews', we deserve it.

And so on that day so long awaited everybody goes to the bus station. At eleven a bus arrives direct from Buenos Aires, and at eleven-twenty another. They're always late. Anxious, they peer out the Santa Maria entrance, toward the curve where the bus will appear. One arrives. Some passengers, mostly tourists, retired old couples undone by the humidity who come for the sun and air of the sierras, fleeing from the mosquitoes of Buenos Aires, but his aunts do not get off. One more wait to see if on the next one. . . . Be still, child! He cannot stop leaping and laughing, crossing the street to look up the sidewalk ahead so he can see the curve better. He sees the bus, white and blue like the flag, round the curve, and he runs across the street shouting, Here they come, my aunts are coming! And he can't stop laughing and jumping up and down. Pura, Purita!

He sees them standing in the aisle of the bus, looking out, anxiously looking for them among the other people waiting, waving with their hands open wide.

"Aunt Pura! Aunt Pura!" he shouts excitedly, tears leap to his eyes, and he wants to board the bus and hug her without waiting for them to get off, but his father holds him back with one hand. They descend, he slips free of his father, hugs her, she lifts him in the air and presses her face to his.

"Aunt Pura, what'd you bring me?"

"Toys. Lots of toys."

His father and his brother carry the suitcases and head toward the house. His aunts talk and talk to his father and his brothers and sisters. He walks ahead of them all, running to be first to open the front door for them. Pura's aphonic laughter seems to spring from around the corner like a minuscular siren of good firemen; she laughs and says what joy it is to be with her own in the sierras where there are no mosquitoes or patients interrupting the siesta. Tomorrow the truck with the furniture will arrive.

And from those enormous suitcases spring like miracles airplanes with springs and rubber bricks to build houses and a frying pan that doesn't stick and a very modern potato peeler and a pullover for you, Alberto, who had to look after the work on the house and haggle with the bricklayers. And you must see how beautiful the house turned out.

Here, in Santa Maria, there are no mosquitoes, they can sleep peacefully with the windows wide open, but there are ants. How

lucky to be able to rest after so many years of having to give shots in the tail and get up at all hours of night to tend the sick and listen to the firemen's siren that startles you in the middle of the night!

For four crazy days
that we are going to be,
we'll live with no mosquitoes
with spirals Fuji.

We'll put the beds here. On this wall Mama's and Papa's portrait will look good. We'll plant tomatoes, lettuce, and carrots out back, pansies and primulas in the garden. Set the white wardrobe here and the table on that side . . . the painting of the snow scene on that wall that looks so empty.

He darts around like a hornet, heavier than a mosquito, unable to stay away from his aunts. Pura embroidering beside the window opening onto the garden, Isabel in the garden or putting up shelves in the little back room or watering the grass here in Santa Maria, in this chalet that is not very big but enough for the two of us, we'll make out. And on Sundays they all eat together in his house or in theirs, and he sits down beside Aunt Pura, who is so blonde and so like his mother. . . .

A wrought-iron gate out back connects both houses and he is continually with them, sticking his nose into everything, opening wardrobes and asking for presents. Pura sews his pants and to kill time in winter weaves him pullovers because clothes are too expensive.

Some afternoons when the sun is warm enough they take a walk through town and he leads, pointing out everything, indicating neighbors' houses and bringing them up to date on what's happening in town. He gathers white snails, dried and empty, and gives them to Pura to keep for him in her skirt pockets.

"I'm going to make you a box to keep your jewelry in."

"We don't have any jewelry," she says, smiling.

"For your thread," he says. "I'm going to make you a wooden sewing box decorated with white snails, round ones and pointed ones.

And the winter goes by with chilblains that prevent him from gripping the pencil to do his work by the window beside Aunt

Pura, who sews and shortens trousers and makes an old, long skirt into a shorter, up-to-date one, and he practices multiplication tables: six times six is thirty-six. And Isabel trims the hedges along the fence and puts out poison for the ants, which eat up everything. Here there are no mosquitoes, but millions of ants.

One morning Pura's left hip hurts and she limps, and his father says it doesn't look good to him: surely it's arthritis or something old age is bringing on. And she laughs, as always, with that aphonic laughter that delights him and is contagious.

Pura. Perfect Concepcion enjoys herself embroidering at the window. Now she seldom leaves her little house, free of the smell of boiling syringes, the scare of firemen's bells or sirens, the need to set out spirals . . . because there are no mosquitoes in the sierras, because this hip I'm worried about hurts so and I'll have to go to the doctor. Pura makes gifts for him because he's the youngest, and she coats the underside of the white snails with glue while he sticks them to the top of the box.

"When we go to Buenos Aires I'm going to bring you the car I saw in a store window, it has lights and everything."

"What are you going to Buenos Aires for?"

Isabel interrupts. "To finish off a little business, about retirement. . . ."

And Isabel takes her to the heat and humidity of Buenos Aires. Surely the mosquitoes are waiting, ready to suck our blood.

At seven, when night has almost fallen, they go to say good-bye to them at the bus stop. He sees the bus go off into the distance around the curve, blue and white like the flag.

And they go back home, climbing the crest. His father and older brothers and sisters say almost nothing. From time to time his father shakes his head.

"Why'd my aunts go to Buenos Aires?" he asks.

"You go play with your friends."

"Can I go to the playground?"

"Yes, but I want you here for supper. Do you know your multiplication tables?"

"Yes," he answers, and he goes to play ball with the kids, and to collect more white snails too, because he hasn't enough to finish the sewing box.

A letter comes from Isabel. His father reads it in silence.
"When's Aunt Pura coming back?" he asks.
"We don't know, child."
"Is she going to bring the car with lights she promised me?"
"Yes, child."

And he waits, sitting on the bench under the peach tree, pasting snails one by one on the wooden box for Pura's needles and thread, shaping borders and flowers in relief, as he recites the sixth table by heart.

But his aunts do not return from Buenos Aires, and from there Isabel writes a couple of letters close together. The two of them will surely return together when they have finished all their affairs. And Pura will arrive all music and flowers, laden with gifts for everyone, and toys, bringing him that car she told him she'd seen in a shop window, she'll come and sit beside the window to embroider and knit pullovers while he says his tables. He knows she won't miss Sunday dinner, he'll sit next to her, and he'll give her the sewing box decorated with snails.

Instead of Pura the mailman comes with a telegram that his brothers and sisters don't want to show him. Nelly covers her face with her hands.

"I'm going to Buenos Aires," his father says.

"Why?"

He doesn't answer.

"I'll leave tonight."

And his brothers and sisters burst into tears as he races toward the garden because he hears his friends calling him to play ball.

For four crazy days
that we are going to be. . . .

The auto will have lights and the motor will make noise like the real ones. He'll play while Pura sews facing the window. He'll look up at the corners of the ceilings at night to see if there are any mosquitoes and if he sees any she'll light a Fuyi spiral to kill them.

And between sighs he listens to his brothers and sisters talking, whispering in the afternoon, sitting around the table, not smiling, holding back their tears. And they go down to the village to wait for the bus his aunts will return on. He carries in one pocket the

box he made with his own hands, wrapped in many-colored paper and tied with a red ribbon and a bow. It is cold this morning, and cloudy. His hands are stiff and a pain in his chest keeps him from jumping and laughing. The bus stops by the sidewalk and he sees his father and Isabel in the aisle, but nobody greets them with open arms, or smiles, and they get off in silence. They all embrace them and cry.

Quiet, he looks at the package with the box made of white snail shells and imagines the siesta in Buenos Aires: Pura in that house flooded with sunflowers, gliding along in the dark with a Fuyi spiral in her hands, embroidering beside the window, listening to Tarzan during the siesta, or wrapping the little toy car as a gift, while the killer mosquitoes watch her from above, and he chants softly:

Six times one is six.
Six times two is twelve.
Six times three. . . .

Tinder

R. T. Smith

Even quartered and corded,
the green wood dreams
mischief, remembering

its life when the far stars
like embers glittered
in its limbs, and after

the story hour and hot
cocoa, the girls in their
nightgowns and deep

in quarrel hear a bad
crackle in the damper.
The stovepipe is glowing,

but it is no misguided
swift we hear thrashing
the creosote chips to cinders.

The Vermont Vigilant has
gone wild on its podium
of stone, and we are addled

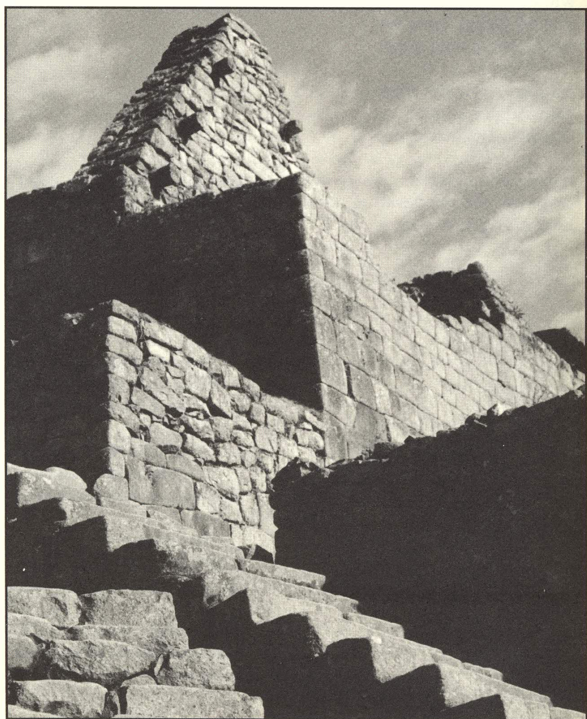
to inaction until I
recollect the chimney
fire drill, shut valves

and drop the flue. Then
we simmer down to embrace
in safety and consider,

while the last sparks drift
toward Orion, how lax
habits and a cold night

conspire, how the slow
gathering of smoke
crystals says that every

breath is in danger,
that even the strongest
love is fragile as ash.



Breck Parkman

She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay

Simon Levy

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTER: She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay
TIME: Early 1800s.
PLACE: A small island on Tulare Lake, San Joaquin Valley, California.

(Complete darkness. A burning stick glows in the dark. The stick moves and we hear the sound of singeing hair. Someone begins to quietly chant.)

VOICE: Ah-hah-now'-uh
Ah-hah-now'-uh
("We sing.")
We-ah'-ah-hah
We-ah'-ah-hah
("We are crying.")

(The chant grows louder.)

VOICE: Wuk'-e le'-o
("We cry again.")
Ah-hah-now'-uh
Ah-hah'-nah
Yoo'-e uh'-la
("You are going to burn.")
We-ah'-ah-hah.

(Lights up slowly on a marshy area surrounded by tule reeds. The tules are a natural fortress protecting the dry high ground center stage from the outside world. It is late afternoon and the sky is a searing blue-white. Bird songs and frogs are everywhere. It is a place of intense life.)

(On the ground, sitting like an Indian woman with one leg tucked under and the other thrust to the side, is She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay, a Yokuts Indian in his early 30's. He is naked and completely unadorned, except for an elaborate tattoo on his chin—three straight lines from lower lip to chin, and a zig-zag line from each corner of the mouth. Using a glowing, split stick to singe off his long hair, he stares straight at us singing the Mourning Dance for the Dead.)

SHE-WHO-IS-MADE-OF CLAY: Ah-hah'-nah
Yoo'-e uh-'la
We-ah'-ah-hah
We-ah'-ah-hah
We-ah'-ah-hah.

(Note: She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay is a berdache, *what we would call a transvestite; but in the tradition of many American Indians s/he is both man and woman, sometimes homosexual, sometimes not, and the actor should make every attempt to not play effeminate but to simply be both man and woman—to create a third gender. Additionally, the play is greatly enhanced if all props are as authentic as possible and not reduced to the clichés of the Plains Indians that we have become used to.)*

(A funeral bier has been constructed UC. It is made out of scrub oak branches and tule matting that have been laced together and stands five feet high. Sitting on it, one at each end, are two effigies. They have been lovingly made out of branches, bunch grass, and tule reeds and include arms, legs, and rough representations of faces. The male is dressed in a rabbit blanket and deerskin loincloth; on his head is a djuh, *an elaborate ceremonial headdress made from magpie and crow feathers; in his hand he holds a very large cocoon rattle. The female effigy is dressed in a* chohun, *a string skirt of eagle down; on her feet are brand new antelope skin moccasins; where her nose would be is an elk bone as if inserted into the septum; her earrings are sticks tipped with quail crest feathers.)*

(The effigies stare straight at us.)

(Scattered all around She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay are baskets, strings of shell disks, a babies cradle made from greasewood and tule matting, bows and arrows and crude bark quivers, pottery, and grinding stones.)

We-ah'-ah-hah!
We-ah'-ah-hah!

(He continues to singe her hair off, carefully laying it in a pile in front of him. He speaks directly to the audience.)

I am the Daughter and Son of my People. I am She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay. When I told this to the man in the brown blanket at the Mission, he smiled and said, "In our world there is only man and woman, as God intended. You cannot be both." "I am between," I said. He touched me gently on the head and said, "You will learn soon enough. But first we must get you clothes and give you a new name." And I knew then there were many things he would not understand.

(She finishes singeing his hair, places the burning stick upright in one of the stone bowls, gathers the singed-off hair and places it carefully in a basket with a rattlesnake design.)

He was a good man, with kind eyes. His face, like mine, was round and the color of elk. And though he spoke the language of the Southern tribes, he was not Yokuts. Not of the People.

(During the following, he rises, crosses to the male effigy, removes the leather loincloth and puts it on.)

How then could he understand that I was *tongochim.* That the irresistible call came when I was only a few worlds young. That among my people I was honored. When other boys would play *katauwish* with their sticks and balls, or learned how to shape the different arrows, I would sit with the women and girls learning to grind and leach acorn, or pound tule roots into meal, or weave intricate designs into baskets.

(She crosses to the female effigy, removes the eagle down skirt, and puts it on.)

The people of my village whispered and smiled, started dressing me in the best eagle-down skirts or earrings made from crests of quail. They would leave gifts on my mat and give extra food to my parents. They said I had the calling, and gave me the tattoo of woman. Even when I was very young, they treated me with respect, like a great shaman, as if I knew secrets, because I straddled the world between woman and man.

How could I explain all this to a man whose god created only a man and a woman. If he could not understand *tongochim*, then how could I make him understand that only we can bury the dead and sing the prayers:

> You are going to another land.
> You will like that land.
> You shall not stay here.

How could I make him understand the only reason I had come to his great *kawi* was to dance the death of my people. That it was here among his people I lost mine.

(He begins to dance, raising one foot high, slamming it down, then doing the same with the other. He dances counterclockwise around the bier.)

> Si-woh! Si-woh!
> Ah soon po-ro soo en-no ka-ro.
> Si-woh! Si-woh! Ah soon po-ro.
>
> So aht po. So aht wah ne-vo.
> Yi-vo. Yi-vo. Soon po-ro soo e-no ka-ro.
> Si-woh! Si-woh! Ah-soon po-ro!

(At the end of the dance he stares straight out at the audience.)

How could I make him understand that I wanted to dance for all the Yokuts—the Tulamni and Tuhohi, the Hometwoli, Paleuyami, Bokninwal, Yokol, Choinok, Entimbich, Wetehit,

(His litany turns into a chant.)

Gashowu, Nutunutu, Kawia, Dumna, Chukaimina, Hoyima, Chauchila,

(Then into an aria of vowels and consonants, a cry that rings out over time and space.)

Wikchamni, Choinimni, Toltichi, Kechayi, Dalinchi, Koyeti, Chukchansi, Yauelmani, Telamni, Kumachisi, Yaudanchi, Wimilchi, Tachi, Apiachi, Pitkachi, Wakichi, Heuchi,

(He is crying now.)

and all the lost peoples who lived in the great San Joaquin Valley.

(She cries for a long time. When she is done, he takes the moccasins and earrings from the female effigy and puts them on.)

How could I make him understand that I even wanted to dance for the Salinans and Chumash and Costanoans to the west, the Shoshoneans to the east, the Miwok and Maidu and Wintun to the north. But I am not of those tribes, and though it is forbidden to name the dead, the names of my people are in my heart and for them I can sing and dance and send their *ilit* to *Tihpiknits Pahn.* Other *tongochim* will have to sing and dance for all the other lost people whose names I do not know.

I knew I could not make this man and his god understand these things, so before they could change my clothes or take my name, I decided to come back here, to the home of my people, the island of the Wowol, in the Lake of the Tules.

(She takes the elk bone from the male effigy and places it in his nose.)

On the trail back over the mountain five men on horses found me catching grasshoppers by the side of the trail. I thought I had been careful, but I was very hungry.

They would have killed me there if they thought I were man, but because I wore my skirt of antelope and had my hair tied back like

the women of my village, they thought I was woman and surrounded me with their horses. I did not run. Could not.

(She ritualistically picks up all the items scattered around the stage and places them on the bier.)

Their horses pushed against me as the men reached down and grabbed my hair, rubbing their legs against my body. I trembled and tried to stay very still. Oh, how I wanted to run—and I understood this is what the animals felt when we surrounded them in the hunt. I now knew their fear, and why they screamed and ran wild. But I could not run, and I had to live so I could perform the rites that would let my people live in the land of the dead.

Then one of the men, his face overgrown with hair, climbed down and reached under my skirt. He yelped like Coyote when he discovered I was not woman—then hit me across the face with a strap of leather and put his gun under my skirt. Its coldness burned. There was much shouting and other straps of leather hit me. Inside, I tried to go somewhere else, to be anyplace but here. What if I had left the Mission earlier? Or had stopped for grasshoppers somewhere else?

But I was here. And the men laughed as two of them dragged me from the trail. But their laughter was without joy. It did not come from the belly like a great rush of water or the splitting of a tree in a great wind. It stuck in the throat like a frog, and I could not understand why they would laugh if there were no joy in it. And when they tore my skirt from me and bent me over a rock, their laughter turned into the sound of night animals. I was afraid, not because I hadn't given pleasure to other men—after all, I am *tongochim,* it is my calling—but this taking of pleasure was so angry and full of hate. What were they ashamed of?

Through the pain I thought about their smell. They smelled of horse. It made me hungry. And I remembered my first antelope hunt. I was sixteen worlds then, and it was a great honor to be the one to cook and bear for the hunters and to give them pleasure when they came to me at night. We traveled away from the Lake

of the Tules, from this hidden island here, and went out into the great valley where we joined with other tribes from the east.

They, too, had *tongochim,* and we cooked the meals and played dice with acorns late into the nights. There was much laughter and sharing of secrets. When they learned I was also a rattlesnake shaman, even the older *tongochim* treated me with great respect.

(She continues to place items on the bier.)

We finally came to the magic place where they say the antelope come to share their meat and leather with us. There were hundreds of us and we formed a large circle. It was so large we could not see the men on the other side, and we shouted and beat the ground until the antelope leapt out of the dry riverbeds and bushes and bounded away. But wherever they ran, we were there, shouting and scaring them back. And the circle got smaller as we came closer together until we could see each other. Then one warrior from each tribe stepped forward, chose his animal, and killed it with one arrow to the neck.

As the circle opened up to let the live antelope escape, a strange animal charged from the brush—one we had never seen before. He was tall and powerful. He frightened us because we did not know his name. Two arrows took him down. And in a great feast that night we shared him between the tribes.

Never had we tasted anything so sweet. Few ate the antelope. There was much dancing and lying about the animal's name. But one old man from an eastern tribe said the animal's name was Horse and that men from further east rode them and were coming over the mountains. This was the first we had heard of the strangers, but it did not take long for us to see them come and see what would happen when they did.

The taste of horse became our destruction. As the strangers built upon the land, our men would steal their horses. They were easier to hunt than the antelope and the disappearing elk. And we hungered for meat. We would do anything for the taste of horse. And so we hunted them down just as the new people hunted us. There

was no way to keep the strangers from the valley or from the shores of our lake. This island, crowded with the tules, hid my tribe for many worlds. We were safe here. But some of the men tired of fish and bird and turtle and would sneak across when the fog was thick to find horse. Many never came back, some did, and that's when the red spots began to appear and the people began to die.

(She's finished putting all the items on the bier, except for the rattlesnake basket.)

I must have fainted from the pain or hunger, but when I woke the men were gone. Maybe they thought they had killed me with their pleasure. Maybe they did not care. It took many days to get back here, days without food or drink. I had decided that my hunger and thirst were no longer important. Still I came carefully, hiding whenever I heard or smelled horse.

(She picks up the rattlesnake basket with its alternating rows of black and red triangles.)

Before anyone ever taught me about rattlesnake, I would make small baskets like this.

It was Frog-Bite who told me I should be a rattlesnake shaman. She was the *tongochim* my parents apprenticed me to. She was many, many worlds old and very, very ugly. They say he had always been ugly. Because frog is forbidden meat, she was nick-named Frog-Bite because no one would want to eat her. He would tell this over and over to anyone who would listen. And each time he would laugh a laugh like a hundred owls scattering into the night. He taught me all the songs and dances and duties to the dead. And like all *tongochim,* she was very wealthy because all the belongings of the dead belonged to her.

(He crosses to the male effigy, removes the rabbit blanket, and puts it on.)

During the winter of my fourteenth world, Frog-Bite took me every night to a water hole far from the lakeshore. For weeks I

would sit in the pool and wait for the spirit of the rattlesnake to inhabit me. Then one night a six-mouthed rattlesnake came to me and led me down into the water through a cave with four doors and out onto a ledge where the sun like a giant red spot sat on the edge of the land and said:

> I am eagle and coyote,
> water and air;
> you are earth
> run with the rattle.

And I entered the sixth mouth of the snake and came back to the surface of the water.

(He takes the cocoon rattle from the male effigy.)

This is the tail of *Trah-ud,* chief of all rattlesnakes, messenger and spy of *Tihpiknits,* who is Keeper of the Dead.

(He shakes the rattle.)

After the doctors and the bear shamans died from the red spots, I tried to save my people. I sucked the poison from their bodies, cut out the spots, wrapped ants in eagle down and made them swallow the medicine, sang the songs of the *Trip-ne shamans,* "Ha-lahl-mo-hah'-hah hah-'hah!" But still my people died. And all my *tipni,* all my powers could not save them.

(She dips her hand into a stone bowl and draws a broad black line diagonally across her face. Then dips his other hand into another bowl and draws a broad red line below the black one. She climbs up on the bier, takes the elaborate headdress from the male effigy, and places it on her own head. Her outfit is now complete. He looks out over her land and at all the items on the bier.)

This is all that is left of my people. The Yokuts are no more.

(She shakes the rattle.)

Hear me, *Trah-ud!* I call you from the earth to take my people to

Tihpiknits Pahn! Hear my song! and come to me! for I am She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay! and I can no longer live in a world where there is no name for what I am!

(She reaches down, picks up the burning stick from the stone bowl and places it on the tule matting. As the bier catches fire, and the lights begin to fade, turning the stage blood red, She-Who-Is-Made-Of-Clay dances and sings atop the bier, among the remains of her people.)

O, Chochin Witche Pah
O, Chochin Witche Pah
(There is a bird's children.)
O, Chochin Miah Witche Pah.
(Oh, bird, I want your children.)
O, Chochin Witche Pah

O, Yo-e he-te ketre e-he Dinne
(Poor rattlesnake.)
Kiowhi No-wu utu Sudongtow
(I am looking in the tree.)
O, Chochin Miah Witche Pah
Yah weah . . . . . Yah!
(Everyone hear me!)

(Blackout.)

The Last Time I Saw Him

Noelle Kocot

We built a wooden airplane
and painted it with orange
chrysanthemums, my birth flower.
When it fell, it broke into halves,
one side covered
with flowers and the other,
a mute blank brown.
We were at the house
the courts designated
as a neutral place
where my father could see me
every Sunday. My father's fall-
green eyes changed color
with the colors of the paper
we drew on.
He drew mostly shapes
and I drew beautiful women
I imagined I loved.

That hot day in June
I keep with me like a tooth
under my pillow. My father
and I and our airplane,
talking about how the leaves
would fall in October drunk
with xanthophyll, taping tissues
dotted red to our faces
pretending they were measles.

But then the cab came to take him
home just as my mother was walking
up the street to take me home
and he pulled me in. The driver
started pulling away, one of my red
leotarded legs still dangling
out the door. I thought,
now you've done it and he had.
I knew through the cloud
of my parents' struggle
that I'd never see him again.
And as they both pulled me,
one on my left side and one
on my right, a police car's
siren stuck in me like stray
wires from a fence I tried to jump
over and missed. I was sent back
into the house quivering
and sinking into the muddy-
colored afternoon.
I wanted to tell him
just one more thing
before the police took him.
It was that I wanted something
of his for comfort when I sleep.
Maybe a sweater I could wear
and unravel ten years later
and tie into a net
before he thudded onto the gray
littered street from a New York hotel.
Instead I became a mute
six-year-old stepping from
the front porch onto midair,
not knowing if anyone would
be there to catch me
if I ever happened to land.

Priscilla Hancock Cooper's *Call Me Black Woman*

Neal A. Lester

COOPER, PRISCILLA HANCOCK. *Call Me Black Woman* (Louisville: Doris Publications, 1993). 51 pp.; $6.95 paper.

In her first published volume of poetry, *Call Me Black Woman,* Priscilla Hancock Cooper, local Birmingham educator, consultant on multiculturalism, performer, and poet, offers a rich potpourri of African-American experience. With distinctly black feminist vision, Cooper celebrates black poets, black language, black romance, black sexuality, black ancestry, black music, and black creative possibilities. Just as passionately, Cooper attacks pop generation's droopy-pants revolutionary wannabees ("Ode to a Would-Be Revolutionary") while trying to understand how today's black youths' senseless involvement in gang warfare might grow logically out of America's age-old attraction to violence as a social determinant ("American Legacy: There Is Blood in the Soil").

Using a style of minimal punctuation that also emphasizes the visual appearance of words on the typed page to accentuate meaning, *Call Me Black Woman,* with its twenty-nine poems and artwork by Alan Mosley, aligns itself thematically and aesthetically with the poetic visions and expressions of black revolutionary poets of the 1960s and 1970s such as Sonji Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange. Cooper also turns back to African history as a way of celebrating modern African-American identity in a racist society conspiring to negate black experience or to deny African-Americans a range of complex and human responses to being alive.

Cooper orders her volume into three thematic sections: I. Call Me Black Woman, II. African Genesis, and III. Love Songs. While

each section articulates particular African-American experiences, each of the three sections is centrally rendered from Cooper's stringent black feminist perspective.

Section I, with its seven poems, opens appropriately with a kind of acknowledgments to leaders of modern African-American poetic tradition. In "Poet's Dream," Cooper pays homage to Baraka, Sanchez, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Carol Rodgers, who dared to articulate and expand creative possibilities and vision for black poets, for black people. "Blues Song" is a black woman's realization that the blues is not always someone else's song of trouble and heartache. This woman, thinking herself removed from a "lowly" world of problems and pains, feels insulated by her education and economic status. In a matter of moments, her world changes without her control and she too learns to sing the blues, assuming her rightful place among those who have loved and lost and survived. While other poems in this section deal with failed romance and subsequent individual recovery ("Change of Seasons"), or a black woman's desire to have a relationship with a man who perceives her as a woman and as a complex human being, "not as a challenge / to be overcome / or a sex object / to be taken / or a mistake / to be justified" ("Conversation"), perhaps the most poignant in this section is one that expresses a woman's confusion before, during, and after an abortion. Debunking pro-life myths about the sacredness of children's lives in our society, the poem reminds us that as a nation we are not committed to protecting, nurturing, feeding, and sheltering unwanted children. As this female persona observes national apathy toward children's rights to a quality standard of life, she moves from confusion to affirmation that she has chosen what is right for herself and her unborn. Such a poem invariably affirms a woman's right to control her own body, to control her own life.

The eight poems that comprise Section II offer and urge for a conscious return to Africa—its history, its culture, its spirituality, its cultural and aesthetic rhythms—as a bridge to understanding African-American identity in the present. Such a return to Africa—"the mother of all life" and "the birthplace of humankind" ("African Genesis I")—aesthetically and spiritually affords a beauty and a richness that sustains African-Americans in their struggles against American racism and its varied manifestations. To return to Africa and Afrocentrism is, according to Cooper, to recognize

the reality that African-Americans' "yesterday today is tomorrow / tomorrow today will be yesterday / [African-Americans'] present is inseparable from [African-Americans'] past ("African Genesis III: A Plant Is Only as Strong as Its Roots"). In a move to connect contemporary African-American music and popular culture with past African history, Cooper, in "Hannibal's Rap," offers a brief history lesson à la Rapper's Delight. Cooper urges that Hannibal—"Prince of Africa / Conqueror of Rome / [and] Protector of Carthage [247–183 B.C.]"—assume his rightful place along side of "Napoleon and [other] geniuses of war." Connected also with this conscious cultural move to legitimize rap as an artistic form is Cooper's attack on reefer-smoking, crotch-grabbing, black-female bashing and exploiting, violence-thirsty, black male rappers who think themselves today's black revolutionaries ("Ode to a Would-Be Revolutionary"). Amiri Baraka's "SOS" seems a model for Cooper's "Calling Black People," a poem that warns blacks against the political, personal, and cultural dangers of economic gain and assimilation that conspire to drain the black community of its life source. Cooper maintains that material success and career climbing can threaten political and cultural awareness neccessary in recognizing and combatting racism. Additionally, "Hey Negro!" recalls June Jordan's "Okay 'Negroes' "; both are wake-up calls for blacks to empower themselves economically and politically. Cooper's poem goes beyond that call to warn against capitalist greed when a national war is on to destroy black community and African-American identity.

Section III, with its thirteen poems, is a black woman's feelings about loving, being loved, and being in love. Cooper here basks in the often neglected and often stereotyped sensuality and sexuality of black people. As does Paul Laurence Dunbar in the 1800s when he legitimizes black people in love ("A Negro Love Song"), Cooper brings black sexuality and sensuality into a public forum not for debate but for affirmation and the debunking of racist myths. In this section, Cooper shows the depth and complexity of those who learn the lessons of love, particularly a woman who finds a satisfying and sustaining relationship with a man, a relationship based on mutual understanding, mutual tenderness, mutual hip-grinding and caressing, mutual respect—mutual loving ("Thank You"). An interesting dimension of loving is presented in "Love Poem II," which expresses the anxieties of losing a love that is so

all-consuming and satisfying, a love that seems too good to be true. In a celebration of black sisterhood, Cooper, in "Dear Sistuh," addresses another black woman who has loved and lost. The persona's advice to this woman is to become her own warrior, one who is not totally dependent upon love or a man for self-validation. A clever piece, "Gone and Found Me an Angel," answers Aretha Franklin's Motown hit, "Angel," with details of a black woman's finding in her black man an angel, one with "nappy black hair, / a matching moustache and beard / . . . warm, smooth tan skin / and a pair of the deepest, darkest most loving brown eyes / i have ever looked into." Other poems affirm sexuality as a vital part of a satisfying and sustaining romance ("Kinda Funny" and "Love Songs"). This section includes the heartache and desperation of a woman whose garden of romance refuses to grow no matter what she does to cultivate it ("Love's Garden"). And while romance is central to this part of the volume, Cooper does acknowledge that a woman's selfhood need not and cannot be solely defined in the context of being involved in a romance. Only through personal feelings of wholeness can any partner contribute fully and unselfishly to a whole relationship that satisfies beyond the moment ("Spaces"). And Cooper does not abandon a black male's perspective in her revelations on black womanhood and romance; she includes a poem, "Greetings My Love," written by a deceased fellow black male poet and friend, Vernon E. Douglas. Douglas luxuriates in the rhythms, the passion, and the beauty "of two together / [black] individual hearts merged / into / a mellow movement / of smooth colors / soft touches." In a poem dedicated to this friend, "To Vernon," Cooper remembers the closeness of their connection artistically and spiritually, a closeness that neither time nor death will diminish.

In "Call Me Black Woman," the title poem, Cooper accentuates the diversity—physical and spiritual—that is black womanhood. With lines and sentiments that recall Ntozake Shange's choreopoem, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf,* Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman," Mari Evans's "I Am a Black Woman," and Langston Hughes's "Harlem Sweeties," this poem and this volume give voice to black female experience, affirming complexity, selfhood, love, sexuality—affirming life. Cooper proves that her personal experiences as a black woman can be as particular and/or as universal (i.e., women's experiences, women's

experiences with men) as she allows. She also shows that a black woman can calmly and emphatically articulate her experiences with black men without antagonism and condescension. Ultimately, Cooper demonstrates in her first published volume that the complexity of human experience can be accessible to those both inside and outside that experience.

Coming Home in North Carolina

Alan T. Belsches

CLARK, JAMES W., JR., ed. *The Lost Boy: A Novella by Thomas Wolfe.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). 95 pp., illus.; $9.95 paper.

GINGHER, ROBERT, ed. *The Rough Road Home: Stories by North Carolina Writers.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). xviii, 332 pp.; $24.95 cloth, $14.95 paper.

During the decades between the two world wars, a time now referred to as the Southern Literary Renaissance by scholars of American literature, the state of North Carolina could tout its Thomas Wolfe as a native son equal to the magnificence achieved by William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Eudora Welty. But since that time as scholars argue whether the Southern Renaissance has continued, whether the South still produces a greater share of the United States' major writers, a shift has occurred from the Deep South to North Carolina as the home of the contemporary South's best writers. As shown in Robert Gingher's *The Rough Road Home,* North Carolina is home to many of the South's best, and the themes and narrative techniques early developed by Thomas Wolfe in his novels like *Look Homeward, Angel* and the novella *The Lost Boy* continue to be important during the last thirty years for the writers selected for this volulme.

James W. Clark, of the English Department of North Carolina State University, has edited for the first time the text of Wolfe's *The Lost Boy,* which is in the William B. Wisdom Collection of Thomas Wolfe Papers in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Although this work was first published in 1937 by *Redbook Maga-*

zine and then included in a posthumous collection of Wolfe's works in *The Hills Beyond* (1941) and in Francis Skipp's *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe* (1987), Clark's version is the unexpurgated typescript of the story that Wolfe completed in March 1937. This version retains the Gant family names and emphasizes how it should be read as a continuation of the Gant family saga that Wolfe began in 1929 with his first novel *Look Homeward, Angel* about his fictional North Carolina mountain town of Altamont. That work describes quite closely Wolfe's own family life in Asheville, North Carolina, and his matriculation to the university in Chapel Hill, the fictional Pulpit Hill of his novel.

In *The Lost Boy,* Wolfe recounts the return of his narrator to St. Louis over thirty years after having lived there at the time of the 1904 World's Fair. The mature Eugene Gant attempts to recapture through his memories a sense of his past relationship with his older brother Grover who died there from typhoid fever. Like Faulkner's achievement in *The Sound and the Fury,* Wolfe presents in the four sections of the novella first-person perspectives on Grover Gant. Part I is seen through eleven-year-old Grover's eyes when he experiences a fusion of present and future on the town square of Altamont in 1904, Part II through the mother's eyes as she remembers their train ride to St. Louis, Part III through the sister's eyes as she remembers Grover becoming sick, and Part IV through the eyes of the youngest son Eugene who returns to St. Louis in the 1930s seeking the house they had lived in and attempting to reconstruct memories of his lost brother.

Throughout this novella Wolfe develops fully the common Southern literary themes of the importance of family, class and caste, history, the past, and memory. Throughout each Gant's memories Wolfe explores how the family unit provided a basis of security, a sense of identity, and a means of passing on a sense of tradition and ties to the past. Grover finds security in realizing that he and the town square exist together in the fullness of the present. The strong-willed Mrs. Gant stresses the importance of her son and of all of her family in response to the questions of the doctors. The sister when looking at a photograph of the family has difficulty reconciling her idealistic view of the world as a child with her more realistic view as an adult. And in the final section Wolfe has Eugene Gant realize that the past need not be lost, that through

memory his brother can live on, affecting Eugene's life even after his death more than three decades ago.

Clark has provided scholars and general readers with a valuable version of Wolfe's work that shows his mastery of the short novel form. His careful research and unobtrusive documentation provide an enjoyable version of Wolfe's *The Lost Boy* for all readers.

The biographical ties to North Carolina of the twenty-two contemporary writers included in Gingher's *The Rough Road Home* are not always as strong as those of Thomas Wolfe. Only ten were born in North Carolina, although eighteen live there now. But each has spent considerable time in the Old Catawba state, and its Southern flavor resonates throughout each of the stories, even those not set within its boundaries.

The fifteen short stories and seven excerpts from novels were published from 1964 to 1992, but even those stories written more than fifty years after the publication of Wolfe's first version of *The Lost Boy* retain many of the themes dominant in Wolfe and other writers of the Southern Renaissance. The earliest story, Elizabeth Spencer's "The Fishing Lake" from the 1960s, examines the processes of change, of growing up, and of realizing that home is not the same now as then. In this story a young woman returns home to Mississippi with her alcoholic husband and remembers the lazy afternoons as a youth fishing and stuffing herself at supper with her catch. But in harsh contrast to the sense of family unity and security remembered from her youth, the husband now argues with her mother, and the wife must steal the family's bourbon to satisfy her husband's cravings. Yet all of her youth was not peaceful. She remembers once attempting to make friends with a wild dog who had killed calves. When she was unsuccessful, she recalls that she told the community's hunters where it lived. When the family-made bench collapses on which she and her husband reminisce, Spencer shows that the past cannot be relived in the present. Only memory remains, memories that the main character can only accept now but never change.

Selections from the 1970s are best represented by Doris Betts's "This Is the Only Time I'll Tell It." Betts recounts the violent end of a child abuser whose death comes at the hands of the first-person narrator, a Presbyterian leader and storekeeper in a mountain community. In the 1930s he had helped rescue a nine-month-

old girl from her abusive father by encouraging the Presbyterian congregation to lie to the authorities by saying that a single woman in the community was related to the infant and should raise her. Throughout the decades as the child matured, the storekeeper was responsible for secretly helping the two financially and also for monitoring the father's presence in jail. When the abusive father returns to the community and attempts to contact his daughter, the storekeeper murders him. Throughout the story Betts plays with the themes of religion and community, and through her use of first-person narration, she echoes Wolfe's *The Lost Boy* by having her adult narrator attempt to come to grips with a dreadful moment from his past.

The stories collected from the 1980s include Louis D. Rubin, Jr.'s "The St. Anthony Chorale," another first-person retrospective narrative concerning a young newspaperman's first major job in the small mountainous town of Staunton, Virginia. Like Wolfe's return of the mature Eugene Gant to St. Louis in his attempts to recapture events from his family's past, Rubin has his mature narrator recount his memories of coping with rejection from his fiancée. Only now as an adult does the narrator begin to understand the peace and assurance that hearing Johannes Brahms's variation on a theme by Joseph Haydn, the *St. Anthony Chorale,* was able to bring him then.

Over half of the selections in Gingher's collection were published in the 1990s and here especially one sees the continuance of Southern themes. In Lee Smith's "The Bubba Stories," the first-person narrator from rural McKenney, Virginia, struggles with memories of the stories she concocted in college of a fictitious older brother to assure her acceptance among her upper-class, genteel roommates at her exclusive Virginia women's college. In Kaye Gibbons's "Trudy Woodlief," the first-person narrator recounts experiences from her youth in 1937 when she became friends with Trudy Woodlief, eleven years her senior. Trudy is a would-be flapper who resents the mores of the closed community she moves to, and the narrator's mother, like the storekeeper in Betts's story, takes responsibility to provide for the Woodlief family. Gibbons suggests the closed quality of the community and the narrator's admiration for Trudy, who rejects the community at every step and yet succeeds in winning help from them. And in Elizabeth Cox's "Bargains in the Real World" a father and son search in the

woods for a runaway teen and experience a spiritual awakening that leads them to acknowledge that the old bones they are called to bury are symbolic of their own past that each must bury, the father as he chooses a new wife and the son as he accepts his parents' divorce.

A quotation from T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" from *Four Quartets* opens Robert Gingher's collection: "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (XVIII). In both Thomas Wolfe's novella and Robert Gingher's collection, the authors return home, sometimes literally and sometimes figuratively through memory, to moments from their past in order to achieve a brief epiphany, a time of comfort and solace through which they can return to cope with the present.

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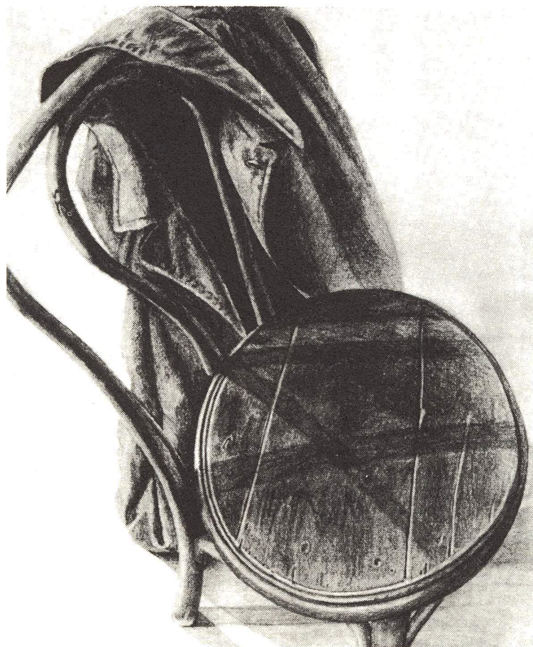

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