

WR: 140



US-ISSN: 0043-9401; Editor: Marvin Malone; Art Editor Ernest Stranger; Copyright © 1995, Wormwood Books and Magazines, P.O. Box 4698, Stockton CA 95204-0698, USA



FAMILIARS

They all laughed, as at a familiar joke,
but to me it seemed an inconsequent
burst of ill will.

I paused, hesitant at the doorway,
assessing the likely sympathy of the group —
perhaps as evaporable as remembered words
that had brought me home.

Only Jane, stone-blind in her sewing corner,
offered a smile,
but Gordon held tight to her hand.

The room was alight from uneven, white candles
ranked down the center of the long oak table.
I saw that no one was missing
and my post card was tacked to the window.

I set my bag down inside the door sill,
and I turned to hang up my coat on a peg.
A sweet, familiar odor lodged in the air.
"Don't anyone go to any trouble," I said.
"It's only me."

— Knute Skinner

County Clare, Ireland

CONTRADICTIONS

Brent remained standing as he made the phone call,
but Shelley sat cringing on the sofa.
What perplexed me as much as anything else
was the eider down bulging in her arms.
Out-of-place things render me helpless
with their contradictions,
and I tend to feel like a non-
returnable bottle.

"Dammit, the line's still busy," Brent exploded,
and Shelley looked even smaller,
half buried by the quilt.
A spot of sunlight from the stained-glass window
just caught the side of her head
like a raffish scarf.
Another contradiction there, I thought,
as I took some hesitant steps to the open door.

Then Brent banged down the receiver, raised it again,
and punched his fingers on the buttons.
From the doorway, standing empty and useless,
I could see their garden alive with benevolent color.
"Father will know what to do about this," Brent said,
"if he ever gets off the phone."
To judge from the look arriving on Shelley's face,
she agreed with Brent.

QUARRELLING

Margaret and I quarrelled
because she would not let me sink
her makeshift boat in the marsh pool,

Sally Beth and I quarrelled
because I went to a fire sale
the night of her concert,

Winnie and I quarrelled
because I made fun of her twenty-three-dollar gloves
in front of the Butlers,

and Babs and I quarrelled
because I left her alone at home with the kids
on her brother's birthday.

It was only a cheap boat,
but it would have made lovely bubbles,

and they would have had one hell of a time pulling it out.

— Knute Skinner

Bellingham WA

THE SPIRIT OF THE LETTER

Clarity is the virtue they exhibit.
For one thing, they're not written but printed.
This is not a case of chance or habit.
It is entirely purposeful and concerted:
That there be no mistake of what they mean.
Like Shaker chairs, it's unadorned and plain.

The stationery is always the same:
White (not off white). Standard letter size.
The ink is blue. Exactness is the aim.
The principle: If something's true, it never varies.
Another way: Get it right, it stays right.
The fold of the letter is always tri-partite.

My mother has a sense of humor, so
These letters aren't without it. I'd color-code
It light brown. Its shape is an eyebrow.
Lifted. When written out, it's an aside
(Parenthetical and often concerning
Money) (that somebody's got and is burning).

Family gossip is my mother's great love
To which she applies her three subsidiary
Loves in the spirit of the problem-solve:
Math, bookkeeping, chemistry.
Siblings are equations. One's character
Must balance. People explode in laughter or anger.

Family is dying. Numbers are pure — but people?
The figure 1 is perfect, but one's figure
Hardly is. These letters end a chronicle.
Adjustment must be made for turnover.
But while others undergo degeneration
My mother's eye is still sharp — and open.

UNFASHIONABLE ADMISSION

"Nothing! They couldn't answer a single question.
They just sat there — Duh! Wuh! ..." He grits his teeth,
Squeezes his face in tension, or derision.
"How long have you been in Japan?" I ask.

"Three months," he says. A cold night, Tokyo. We've both
Just finished teaching. Our walk is brisk.

We stop at a coffee shop. "Next class," he says
"I'll be better prepared. Look —" he breaks off,
"You're an old timer. You must know some ways
To handle these things. You've been around"
Yes, I've been around. I do a little riff.
Drum my fingers. I'm an old Japan hand.

Our coffee arrives. The waitress smiles and weaves
Among the tables. The world got younger on
Me in Japan. "Well, no one achieves
Anything here right away," I say.
"You don't have to make a big impression.
In Japan, steady is better than flashy."

He agrees, but it's hard to shake it. I think
Back on my first days here. Everything familiar
But unfamiliar. Feeling you're on the brink
Of something, but never there. Unsure of just
What's wrong. "The class was a total failure,"
He says, "A table of blank faces. Complete waste."

He picks up the sugar spoon, turns it over.
And over. In fact, I wonder if he'll make it.
Will he have the energy to persevere?
Virtue here is a kind of sublime stubbornness.
Always trudging back. But is it worth it?
Hardly what you'd call a quick-yeild course.

I ask him why he came. "The Pacific Rim
Is the place to be," he says. "The Orient
Is history. A mind set." But for him?
"Teaching in Japan is hands-on experience."
I look outside. A north wind. People bent
Against the cold. Some plastic flowers dance.

"Can you give me any tips? Any angles?
Things I should know?" I really can't, no —
Except that there really are no angles.
That's what Japan's about: no short cuts.
Everything's step by step ... A light snow
Is beginning to fall. He looks out. Frets.

But since he is young, I want to be helpful.
"Japan wears most of us Westerners down.
That's going to be your biggest challenge. Most people
Waste a lot of energy fighting it."
"Yeah, like that class today. Don't want to burn
Out" No, not before you even start.

It's getting late. The waitress comes to collect.
We pay and leave. Head for the station.
"So you like teaching?" he asks. I reflect
On it and then I say, almost to myself,
"No, I love it." Unfashionable admission,
But there it is. Teaching's been my life.

— Michael Fessler

Kanagawa-ken Japan

M'LADY

M'Lady Ocean. Her name is Melady O'Shane, but he calls her M'Lady Ocean.

M'Lady Ocean. The first time he called her that they were pressed together in his single bed, warm and close enough to sleep they could not distinguish the borders of their bodies. He called her M'Lady Ocean and she smiled and her teeth sparkled in the shine of the night. She turned her head to him and she asked him what he meant. He kept his eyes closed and shook his head as he smiled with her. He told her that lying next to her was like lying on a dark beach, watching lightning over a horizon of water. When she asked, he could not tell her why. He just said that sometimes she was overwhelming in a way that bordered on fear.

Pj has lived in California and thinks he knows the ocean. Because Melady has told him her measurements, that she sucked her thumb until she was nine and that she masturbates, Pj thinks he knows all of her secrets. She smokes for Pj because she knows he likes to see her with a cigarette, she once let Pj take pictures of her body, and she stays with him despite his impotency. For these reasons he believes she has top billing in his melodrama.

Pj thinks he knows the ocean but forgets there is more of the sea beyond and below the horizon of his view. For example, he does not know that Melady watches daytime television when she's home alone. He doesn't know where she buys her clothes or that she likes to ride escalators and push the buttons in elevators. That she is careful of cracks when she walks on sidewalks. That she doesn't like horror films, heavy metal, or chinese food as much as she claims. That she gives money to street musicians and once dropped a ten dollar bill in the lap of a man in a wheelchair blowing sax. That she thinks she's too nice.

Neither does Pj know that Melady keeps a plastic bottle of strawberry flavored lubricant in her purse because she likes the taste and sucks the nectar from the finger she's dipped in the bottle when she drives. He doesn't know her fantasies or that she's convinced her fantasies are perverse. He knows that she masturbates but has no idea how frequently. He does not know that once she slept with another man. That she's scared to death he will propose to her. That she's afraid to tell him she sometimes loses faith in their relationship. That sometimes she feels vast like a sea. He knows her tears taste like the ocean but doesn't realize that's where she gets them.

Melady is sitting at the edge of the kitchen. The gossamer dress she wears as comfortably as a bad habit is plain and faded. She is facing the telephone on the wall, sitting side saddle beside an old laminated table with chrome legs that are beginning to show the varicose veins of rust. While she waits out the rings, she traces his initials over the underside of her wrist with a pen that has run out of ink.

The phone stops ringing. Melady hears his best friend, Trash, say hello.

Hi, it's me, she says. She curls the phone cord around her finger.

She feigns a brief laugh. She is smiling nervously, as if he were watching her.

Hey, she says, gently interrupting Trash. I was just wondering about Peej. He's been pretty quiet lately. You know, distant, and I was just wondering if you knew anything. I mean, has he told you anything about what he's thinking?

Pj thinks he knows the ocean but knows nothing about all of the life beneath the surface. And that's what Pj does not see in Melady. That she is the kind of woman that will call a friend to find out what you've been thinking, that will love you after you immerse yourself in her without ever touching bottom.

— Paul JenSi

Paris, France

IT WAS ALWAYS YOUR VOICE

It was always
your voice
even on the phone
especially on the phone
so exciting so

Yet you never sang
for me
letting me
desire

Ah, you said,
hair
in your armpits,
Ah!

The mornings
the many mornings
the music
the cafes

I am a child
you so jaded
full of stories
full of yourself

You said,
just like a dog
you guard the hay
you would never
eat.

You said,
a woman is like
a restaurant,
if she's interesting
never mind
a little dirt.

But you never
sang for me
leaving
me desiring.

— Sonia Topper Weller

Kiryat Ono, Israel

MYSTERIES

It was the beginning of spring. Missy Saylor, Julie Bish and Charlene Nispel were returning to school after lunching at Joe's Greasy Spoon. Charlene wasn't wearing underwear. They were walking west-bound on Saratoga Street. Missy was trailing behind, lost in thought. Suddenly a man yelled at them from a passing car.

Missy thought the guy yelled, "UNRAVEL THE MYSTERIES THAT PLAGUE THE PAST!"

Julie and Charlene continued debating on the five best-looking seniors. Charlene was smoking. Last year at a Nispel residence sleepover, Charlene told her girlfriends that smoking and chewing gum are two things that really turn guys on. Missy desired neither. Turning on a boy was the last thing on her mind, anyway.

Missy persisted in trying to figure out the message long

after the car was gone from sight.

"Who knows what he said? And who cares?" said Charlene.
"It was just some jerk-off shouting."

"Really," said Julie, chewing gum. "Who cares?"

"I care. Listen, I think he said, 'Unravel the mysteries that plague the past!' Is that what it sounded like to you guys?"

"Why are you like so worried about what some guy you don't even know said, Miss?" Charlene said. "God. Get a grip." She squinted her heavily mascara'd eyes as she took a drag of her cigarette, then handed it to Julie. It was a Kool cigarette.

"Yeah, don't hassle it, Miss."

Missy frowned. She thought about her past. She hated her past.

The car contained Richard Druck and Pete Tremmens, both 27. "I HAVE JESUS UP MY ASS!" had been Pete's actual phrase. Blasphemous. Anal. Ignorant. Off the top of his head. Perfect. It was ART.

GAGAKU DREAM

Steve appeared
just to tell
me: "Hit hard
but don't pay
attention to how
hard you hit."

I woke up and
wrote it down.

SHE SAID,

If it was worth
writing then it is
worth saving, smoothing
it out and looking at me
(I force a smile)

HELEN MORTON

The phone rang, I picked it up.
"Yes, is Helen Morton there?"
asked a man. "Wrong number,"
I said. "Oh sorry." A couple
minutes later it rang again.
And again. I knew it was the man.
It might not have been him but
it had the same ring and I just
had the feeling. I let it ring.

My answering machine picked it up.
My message played and then there
was a beep followed by a dial
tone. The caller had hung up. If
it was the man, certainly he had
recognized my voice. Certainly
he had. And hung up.

— Mike Daily

Northridge CA

GAGAKU

no need to hear the words first
as he used to when a young
excuse me
poet

so he clears his throat
of some crap
and goes into kitchen
for glass of arrowhead
water

non
distilled

and it is fine
tasting and he notes the glass he uses
he has used for more than one
year

has
Ramada Inn
upon it

and his demons clap & laugh
and roar
they are just happy with
him

or so it
seems

GAGAKU

now my girl in the kitchen hums to this gagaku
music

it's march 7th or so
1991

about 10 P.M.

me typing to make believe I
am once again a
poet

and demons laugh
and clap their claws and kick their
inner ankle
bones

rather
c l i c k
inner ankle bones
together
and heels too
are touched in air during a
jump

my gymnast demons
seem
jolly

happy

GAGAKU

reading an old gagaku
of mine in
an old wormwood
review I'm
convinced th'poet
is nuts

GAGAKU

while I boast here of my great love and happiness
at what I do
a girl sleeps in my bed
because she values the word
poet

over lawyer and doctor and judge and
politician
dentist
professor
&
tycoon

or am I simply
one more of
her (APHRODITE'S)
witless
paramours?

demons signal me
but I do not recognize the
meaning

their meaning

their body language
gestures
frantic

GAGAKU

o
I feel good
o
he is a buffoon
behind
his typer and feels
good

we
can not stop a buffoon from
feeling
well

my demons don't like this
it's not about them and they don't like odes
not about them
they're fiends for
attention

GAGAKU

he envies his
demons

they give him the dance
in his vision

they do
2 steps one way
sort of prancing
in

slow
motion

and then they turn about
other
way
and prance 3
slow motion
steps

a cat
stalking

GAGAKU

this
just this
everyone knows this
demons know this
they applaud

rise & leave through back
exits
green "exit"

above each door

it's th'discipline & th'craft &
th'sheer escape when there is no other escape

this
my only escape
there's no way to control anything
demons dab at croc tears
and giggle in their napkins
green pastel and canary pastel and blue
pastel
napkins they use to dab at th'crocodile
globules

— Steve Richmond

Santa Monica CA

BECKY ESTROGEN

she seemed
to make a
big deal out
of talking
to jerry
as if i
would give a
shit she
can talk
to jerry till
her face turns
blue for
all i
care ill even
dial the number
for her

OF THE DOOR

the cat
wouldnt go out
when i stood
on one side
but when i
stood on the
other side he
went out

he doesnt
like me calling
him by his
last name but
i dont feel
like calling him
by his first
name so ill
just get into
the conversation
when i see
him without
preliminaries

THE GANG

i asked
them if theyd like
to meditate with
me they said
nothing then i
heard somebody
chamber a round

dropped my
multicolor pen and
couldnt find it

thought it was
happy here

but it
escaped

MISS INDECISIVE

the balls
in your court
carolyn you just
going to look
at it
going to send
it to the
lab have it
dusted for prints,
x-rayed

ive been
sending you morning
poems on my
new typer

but i
think you like
evening poems on
my old
typer

after i
had the snake
tattooed around my
left eye
i received
fewer and fewer
invitations to literary
cocktail parties
then i
had the iguana
put on my
left middle
finger and
the invitations started
coming in again

i remember
the most beautiful
legs in the
world of
course a
poet is helpless
when confronted by
the most
beautiful legs
in the world
but a jock
wouldve just
asked her
out

THE WAITRESS

she had
never waited on
cannibals before; the
plates of
hands and
feet were somewhat
disconcerting

people equate
silence with something
like zero but
it isnt
like that
its alive
it has needs

have big
donothing plans going
to do less
than ever
before see
if anyone notices

i had
snipers on the
rooftops

and the
mailman came

do you
have anything for
me

he started
to shake his
head when

someone chambered
a round

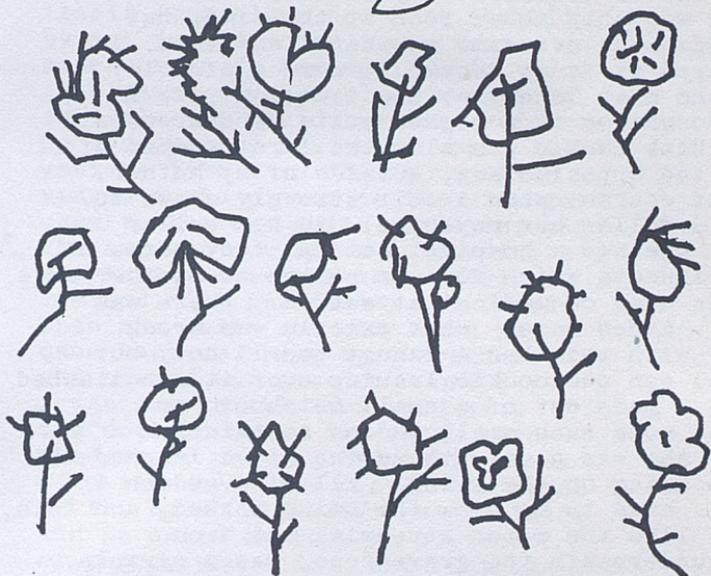
i put
the body in
reverse and it
ran smoothly
so i
walked backwards
through the day

— Les Cammer

Santa Barbara CA

such small gold leaves
this windy autumn morning
like flying fish

OUT IN THE LATE OCTOBER GARDEN



TRONAUD BAATZ

where the stream overflowed
the long grass
is combed close to the earth

THE FIRST PLACE

the first place i lived in was an apartment building in jersey, on the top floor, having two bedrooms, one which was shared by me and my two sisters. out back of a long row of garages was a cemetery, and of the handful of places i used to play in, this was the one i most frequented. my best friend was a girl named cookie, who had freckles and long wavy blonde hair, and who used to take me out amongst the gravestones where we would play our games of endless imagination. and i remember too, that there was one particular gravestone which had water streaming out from underneath it.

this i remember very clearly.

i was only about four at the time, but amazement overcame me when i saw this, and i stared at it as though it were a miracle, and most likely at the time i'm sure it brought me to a higher state of awareness.

i think cookie was also the first member of the opposite sex, outside of my mother, of course, whom i felt strongly drawn to.

i'd follow her anywhere. in her cellar she had a hospital set up, tiny boxes of insects which for one reason or another were in need of medical attention. there was a bee once. what exactly was wrong with this bee i cannot recall now, but i can see cookie leaning over it, in its bed made out of a small matchbox, or some such small wooden container.

she was also with me the day i learned how to swing on the swing. all of a sudden it came to me, how the swing worked, and this, like the water streaming out from underneath the gravestone, was a miracle.

my mother had been watching me from out of the kitchen window, causing me to feel extra proud, finding great joy in having shown her what

a wondrous thing i was capable of.

my father used to fly paper planes out of the same kitchen window

when he'd come home for lunch on workdays. we'd chase them with wild enthusiasm, and they'd be the most fantastic objects.

whenever he needed flowers for some special occasion he'd

collect them from the grave sites.

for years he laughed about this.

but always he hated to talk about death.

GREAT LEFTOVERS

the last house we lived in together was a bungalow, actually, by the seashore. i used to work nights and she would work days. usually i did the cooking, having dinner ready for her when she came in evenings. after dinner we'd do the dishes, and around seven i'd go off to my job, and i'd call her once or twice during the night, or she'd give me a call before she went to sleep. around four in the morning i'd return. i'd sit at the kitchen table and have some vodka and maybe a sandwich. the dog would rouse itself from sleep and come and sit by me, just in case i was in a generous mood, hoping i would throw it a piece of cheese, or something. as i slept i would hear her getting up and getting ready for work. it went on like this for about three years, maybe closer to two. we got used to the sea gulls screaming and the sand in our shoes. then there was that summer she took a trip to ireland with her family. i cried when she left, and then when she came back we split up. freedom, she needed her freedom. one day i was out in the back yard with the dog, throwing the stick into the pines, and the dog coming back with it, when from around the front of the house a sheriff came walking, and he asked me to sign a piece of paper, and i did, and that was that, after ten years: divorce. neither one of us stayed at the bungalow: she went to live with her parents, and i went and hid out in a motel in the mountains for five years. the dog, it went to live with my parents, where it grew old very happily on great leftovers.

i wake exhausted
as though having been in the dreams of many
others

DOWNHILL

after leaving the motel i lived with a nurse
for a few years. mornings she'd be out early, off to
the hospital, and i'd spend the day alone
at the kitchen table, scribbling mostly, in a
battered and torn notebook, or just staring
out the window at a crucifix which rose above
an entirely uninspired clutter of old buildings.
it was on one of the many churches which can be
found in that neighborhood of that rather small city.
i don't have much in the way of writing from
those days. most written stuff landed in a
diary, which i haven't placed my eyes on since
putting in the last entry. i remember
easily getting used to those white uniforms
of professional care hanging in the bathroom,
especially the stockings. the room
had a very determined brightness about it
which made me feel safe from all kinds
of concerns. having been brought up in a
catholic school i've always had an eager
eye for the uniform, having watched so many
girls grow up in them. when this lovely
nurse of cheerful demeanor and quick step
eventually became supervisor of nursing,
and wasn't required to wear a uniform anymore,
our relationship slowly started heading
downhill. of course it was more than that,
that almost goes without saying. we
just were not kindred spirits, not
destined to share the same old age
together. and, sure, i couldn't take
the sound of her mother's voice for
one more second of one more visit.
always questioning me about my intentions,
always pointing out the finer aspects
of her daughter's being. and then
there was that thanksgiving when her mother
insisted on leaving the turkey in the oven
until it was savagely transformed
into a mound of tasteless splinters.
but, sometimes time marches in your favor.
she's married now (the lovely nurse,
not her mother, god forbid).
married some electrician in town,
and sometimes i see them
having breakfast at the bus stop.
they seem like a happy enough couple.
i like eating at the bus stop
myself. one of
the waitresses there
reads chekov
when it's slow.

UNCUT AND CROWDED WITH DANDELIONS

at the old farmhouse here the lawn is uncut and crowded with dandelions, and weeds are starting to take over the driveway, except for where the tires run back and forth. and the stone wall, running against pines, is in need of repair, but as yet i've done nothing to help make it look a little more presentable. it always shocks me when i go over to my parents' place in cairo and see just how neat everything is kept there: the garden has been weeded; the lawn has been cut; the driveway appears just to have been freshly blacktopped. perhaps i should work outside more, but it's difficult when the desire is not there. all i can get myself to do is water the herbs in the flowerboxes outside the back door, and even when i do that i usually have a glass of wine in one hand and the hose in the other. actually i like seeing a field of tall grasses between the house and the barn. and the dandelions are so bright and cheerful, that i can't see doing away with them. it's been suggested that i might want to make dandelion wine out of them. but that doesn't interest me, that idea, no. better just to pick my wine up at the liquor store, bring it home and watch the dandelions grow undisturbed.

AT THIS POINT IN THE ROAD

surprising how out in the middle of nowhere, at this farmhouse which hasn't been used as a farmhouse in i can't imagine how many years, how so often a car comes down the road and turns around in the driveway and then goes off in the opposite direction. naturally at times i think that someone might be paying me a visit. but that's almost never the case, for two reasons: i don't

encourage such visits,
and i don't think many
people feel inclined
to pay me a visit in the
first place. but there
are an awful lot of people
at this point in the road who
seem to change their minds,
or who remember something
that they had forgotten to
bring with them, so
it seems. i should sell
lemonade in the driveway
come summer.

ON THE INSIDE OF THE HOT HOUSE

my father practically lives out in his small
hot house through the month of may, and that's
where i found him this morning when i arrived.
i had some toast and coffee with
my mother first, then walked out back
and went straight into the hot house
to have some private conversation with him.
he was on his green stool, fiddling
around with a group of young plants,
and when he saw me he continued on
with what he was doing, said hello, and
then we settled into the usual topics.
he complained about his knees going bad, about
being too old to kneel on them anymore.
i gave him the glass of orange juice
my mother had given me to bring out to him.
it was just beginning to rain, and
this, i noticed, made him relatively
pleased with matters overall.
flies were going crazy at the windows,
on the inside of the hot house.
flies of various sizes.
a very wide strip of bright yellow
fly paper hung from the ceiling,
and on it were so many flies
that the paper was turning black.
i mentioned this paper, saying
i'd never seen this kind before,
and he told me that it was
nothing new, that often it was
used in gardens. there's
a blackboard, which is used for
reminders. late last autumn i
wrote a haiku on it in large, bold

chalk marks, having something to
do with the garden sleeping.
i can't remember how it went
exactly, now.
and long ago
it was erased.

SO NEAR, SO FARAWAY

coming back from watching a movie in my neighbor's
barn, i hear a rustling over by the opening in
the bushes by the stream, and i figure it is
a deer eating its fill of tiger lilies.
at least i hope it is a deer.
the black bears are around again this summer,
which is strange, since they usually
stay away, high in the mountains.
it was understandable, their coming around
last summer, when it was dry beyond
belief, and they came looking for water.
this summer it is not dry, and they
weren't expected to return.
i heard people talking about them in
the post office. some mention
was made also about the number of deer
having been hit by cars this
past week. this can happen at any
time of the year. i know it's
just a matter of time before i do
my own car some serious damage
by hitting one of these animals.
since i don't have any collision on
the car anymore, i keep wondering
whether i'm covered in such
an accident. over the weekend
someone did hit one,
right out front of the house,
and it lay there at the side of
the road until it was picked up
late monday afternoon.
the crows never went near it;
the deer hadn't been
ripped open. poor
luckless crows: a feast
so near, yet
so faraway.

ALL HIS UGLY DAUGHTERS

evening sky rips open with a vicious rush
of thunder and lightning, and i foolishly
stand at the back door, watching intensely,
making sure that the flowers are
getting enough of the downpour.
and why wouldn't they, i ask myself,
since they are right there
out in the open, fully exposed
to the cold rain falling late in
the month of may. and
then i get even more foolish
and i step outside to inspect the
flowers much closer, and when i do
i see that there are beetles
on the leaves. so
i start picking them off
one at a time,
pressing them dead
between my fingers.
each one i throw out
into the tall grasses which
are way beyond what
could easily be cut
with a mower.
and who cares, anyway,
since the farmhouse seems
happiest when floating
in a world of grasses
gone completely wild.
ah, except for
the job, i'm getting
extremely close to
being the hermit
i've always wanted
to be. the
sound of the hard
beetles cracking
between my wet fingers
makes me feel
as content as
a potato farmer
who had married off
all his
ugly daughters.

LATE IN THE SEASON

tomatoes lining the windowsills,
the counter between the kitchen
and the room which leads to the
mud room, and even on the table,
around the lamp and the single
small cactus that's there.

they are from my father's
garden, and which i picked today
while visiting him and my mother.

i especially like this
period in a garden's life:
it is late in the season
and the garden is winding
down, you'd have to say, yet
it is also wildly bulging
with tomatoes, and string
beans are taken away
in bags. arugula

and potatoes are
crowding into every
meal. there's no end
to the garlic, shallots
and onions. today
my father was tilling
under a row that had
been planted with rye.
the rye had been
planted not only for
adding nutrients
to the soil, but
also as food for
the worms.
it's not seldom
that you'll hear him
boasting
about the
fatness of
his worms.

DINNER

for dinner we had arugula
and potatoes with pasta,
made with olive oil,
garlic and herbs.
of course the beautiful
salad and the peasant
bread were there.
while my mother
was preparing the
dinner i
talked with her
about my week.
she doesn't say
much when she's
working with food.
she gets lost
in her world.
and she appears
so small
at the stove.
her hair is
wispy and white,
and it looks
as though it
is going to
float away.
if she does
say something,
she says it
to whatever
she's holding
in her hand.

NEW AIR

rain

on and off, falling through thin
trees and their small jittery leaves.
and the wind, it's throwing
the tops of the trees around,
against a dark purple sky
staging distant thunderstorms
which never seem to get any closer.
a cold front is expected to
come down from canada by dawn,
and to welcome it the upstairs
windows will be left open.
i want the cold to greet me
when i wake.
this late-august mugginess
has been almost too
suffocating to bear.
i fully expect
the old cotton
curtains upstairs to
come back to life,
and maybe if i'm lucky
the new air might help
rejuvenate my own
fragile ability
to deal
with things.

A POET

good night for pissing outside:
full moon at the front of the house
showering pearly-blue light over the back field.
katydids gone, or at least quiet, and
the only sound is that of a weak and very
unenthusiastic cricket, which must be
poor at letting go of what is lost.
mid-september, and for almost two weeks
autumn has been making some serious inroads.
if i walk out into the field far enough
i can see the moon cruising over pines
on the other side of the road, where
the mailbox stands empty as an unneeded
and forgotten shoe box. slamming
the back door i frighten deer away from
under the apple tree where the pickings
are rich. i'm a bit drunk, and
feebly let out with a yell, desperate.
almost, to inform them that i am
completely harmless.

i cannot tell whether they
hear me or not; all i know
is that if they do,
then they just don't believe me.
they don't trust me.
this, for a poet,
is scary.

OUT IN THE LATE OCTOBER GARDEN

out in the late october garden,
my father says he's been careful not to
disturb any of the raised beds when putting
down fertilizer, not wanting to cave in
any of the tunnels of the worms, his precious,
dear worms. i was tired as all hell, having
slept the night at a woman's house on the other
side of the river. whatever sleep i managed
wasn't much to speak of. my father
offered me some wood, locust, for
the fireplace here, and gladly i accepted.
he told me there was a lot of chinese
cabbage and carrots too, and these i also
latched onto without a moment's hesitation.
seems i'm always unaware of what
exactly is currently growing in the garden.
if i were handed a basketful of
mangoes and papaya and passion fruit,
i wouldn't blink. while
washing my hands in the garage, before
my father came in, my mother
came out from the kitchen and slipped
me a hundred dollar bill, and
told me that it was for my birthday.
when she went back i told the cat
about the woman whom i had spent
the night with, but the cat
ignored me, licking its paw and
letting its eyelids fall.
i've been thinking about turning
fifty soon. not this birthday,
but soon enough. crazy
and unsettling dreams in this
woman's bed. her tailbone
juts out very sharply.
out by the woodpile
my father and i had watched
two of those
walkingstick insects
mating.

OVER MORE TEA

my mother called this morning and told me
not to come over for dinner today, said she'd
be over to see me, alone, since there was
terrible trouble between her and my father
again, stemming from a visit recently by
some of my mother's family. seems my uncle
steve, the baby in the family of thirteen
children, had shown too much love for
my mother, driving my father crazy
with jealousy. an orphan at seven,
and having been brought up by relatives who
might just as well have been strangers,
my father's not a man who understands or wants to
accept the deeper expressions of love.
so, my mother arrived around eleven, and
we sat drinking tea for a while,
and then we drove down to the chinese
restaurant in phoenicia, and by a window
facing the street we ordered steamed
dumplings and stuffed tofu skins.
it was raining out, and we talked about what
the weather of summer had been like and
what we thought was in store for us in
the upcoming winter. over more tea
she told me that uncle steve had told her
that she had been the one child in
the family who had looked like my grandmother.
and she remembered uncle steve as being
one of the boys who had done
the tunneling out to the chicken
coop during the big snowstorms,
to feed the chickens and to make sure
the chickens were getting enough
air. what good were suffocated chickens.
eventually he went into the air
force, married a beautiful young
woman from a neighboring town
and raised three daughters.
my father has spent the last
two days in his room
drunk on table wine.
his father died from drinking
over the death of his wife
who had died from cancer.
i heard myself tell my
mother that i think
i'm very much like my father,
and my grandfather.

AFTER A NIGHT OF SNOW CONTINUOUSLY FALLING

a brilliantly cold morning after a night of snow continuously falling, and i'm afraid to leave the bedroom upstairs because i know how much colder it's going to be downstairs, like it always is. and the house is almost without food, except for what i've put off eating, considering its lack of appeal. i lie in bed knowing that for breakfast there will be pickled beets and some old carrots from the supermarket, carrots which were no good to begin with, so tasteless and like cardboard. there's also some skim milk and a muffin still in the bag from the bakery, which might be going green by now. sure, it was foolish of me not to stock up on supplies yesterday, when i knew it was going to snow all night and traveling out to the store this morning was probably going to be impossible, as i think is the case. there is vodka though, in the freezer, one-hundred proof, russian, a small bottle with a beautiful blue label. but also, what a perfect excuse the weather is for staying in for the entire day. yes, the snow is both the reason i cannot go out and it is the excuse. a long day on which i do not have to go out into the world, my, it pleases me just fine. there's plenty of wood in the shed, so i can make a fire and i can camp out in front of it and forget whatever it was that was scheduled for today. i'll put on a couple of the ragged sweaters i've been wearing all winter and make sure the machine is on to field any incoming calls. and i'll have beets for breakfast, carrots for lunch and for dinner i'll cut away the green on the muffin and eat that. the skim milk i'll drink all day to keep me away from the vodka. and the whole day will be a period of pacing and waiting, a time of preparation blessed with silence. around midnight i'll let the fire get low and then i'll pulverize myself by drinking down a few strong glasses of vodka and water. and just maybe i'll squeak out one meaningful sentence on the typewriter.

CONFUSE THE BIRDS

cold february night,
tape of song birds
playing for the last
hour or so, georgette
fast asleep on the
couch in front of
the dark fireplace.
tonight the tape is
on a little louder
than usual, and
that's saying a lot
because it's been played
every night now for the past
six weeks, at least.
it's strange standing in
the window, staring out
at the back field
the snow that has
been falling since
late afternoon.
it's strange because
with the falling of
the snow there is
the sound of the birds
singing their hearts out.
one night the expected happened:
georgette woke up
on the couch and thought
it was dawn, when
actually it was only
just past midnight.
unfortunately, there is
no information
with the cassette
concerning the kinds
of birds singing,
and my knowledge
of song birds, of
any kinds of birds, is
nil. i wonder if
this tape would
confuse the birds
if one spring
morning i were to
play it loud out the
back window.
i wonder if they
would look towards
the house with
a questioning look
in those beady eyes.
i know
i would.

AT THE SINK

washing potatoes
my mother
her hands under
running water
she turns each
potato
slowly
gently
one
at a time
as though
they were
pups
and she was
trying to
determine
their
sex

THE OLDEST SONGS

the bright sunlight against the snows
of a long winter is almost blinding, so
there is no thought of going outdoors
without sunglasses. i sit on the front
steps peeling an orange, then eating
all the neat little sections until
only peels are left. these
i throw out onto the hard covering
of snow. but the steps
are too cold, and i cannot stay
out here any longer. this
sunlight, it is more intense
than the sunlight of july.
the july sunlight is taken
and soaked and darkened
into green. march sunlight
is primarily converted
into a blinding atmosphere.
the birds won't even fly
about that much, actually only
going from branch to branch
in the same tree, calling out
warnings to one another:
the earth's
oldest songs.

QUIET POTATOES

another snowstorm, perhaps turning out
to be the largest yet of the season, and
there have been many backbreaking storms
already this year. close to midnight i
step out onto the front porch and watch
the flakes coming down, and while out there
i get to see one of the mammoth plows
rumbling by. but because i am on the brink
of catching a cold i don't stay out long.
after making sure everything's closed up
downstairs, i climb the stairs and
once in the bedroom shed my outer clothes.
in the post office this afternoon people talked
about the expectant terrors
of the current storm. i didn't say anything.
and i especially didn't make a peep
admitting just how jubilant i have been
this winter. harsh stares would've
driven me away. i crawl into a bed
piled with every blanket i own.
yes, i'm in complete agreement with
how the world, it seems, comes to

a standstill. it is a peacefulness
easily placed in the category
of blessings. i don't want to see
the green yet. the seasons
of insects and animals and more
people cannot hold a candle
to winter when it comes to sheer quiet.
none of the neighbors are here
during the winter months.
the house floats alone in dunes
of snow. other houses
in the distance are not visible
at night because they are dark.
usually the glass
on the kitchen counter
has vodka in it.
vodka from poland,
made from potatoes.
quiet potatoes.

SHE LOVED MOZART

a sadness to it, sure, this pulling
further and further away from the world.
i remember when i was living at the
motel, there was this woman who
used to come and go, sometimes staying
up to months at a time. every so
often i'd go over to her room and
sit around and talk with her.
the room would smell from clove cigarettes
and dirty wash. and over the
lampshades clothes were placed to
bring the light down to a remarkable
dimness, which never failed to
charm me and attract me, as
a moth, any moth you like,
is drawn to a bright light.
but, i suppose moths are drawn to
dim light also. anyway, i
find myself becoming more and more
like this woman, and it's scary.
except for the dirty wash part.
if anything, i'm fanatical about wash.
dishes too. the car i let
go to hell. i never weed.
and like this woman i'm letting the
place slowly go dark.
she died while she was at
the motel, from cancer.
some nights i'd find her
crossing the parking lot

with meager flesh left on her
bones, wanting me to put my
mozart on the stereo.
she loved mozart.
in her youth she had been a
very promising violist,
but injury and shock
from a fire made her
a ghost of her old talent.
her old self, for that matter.
i used to feed her too
at times, the miniscule
amount that she
could eat. she loved
sharing a cold sandwich
as much as she loved
mozart. i told her
it took a lot of solitude
to write a poem
she told me it took
a lot of solitude
to die.

THE PEAR AND THE EARTH

a terrible grayness today, such a
grayness that i can hardly bring myself
to mention it. and it's as though
it was coming through the walls, seeping
through them, and filling the house like
at night the sounds of insects do.
what can i do but stand at the window
facing the back field, and stare out
while eating a bright green pear.
and certainly i enjoy the pear,
but i almost hate to see it disappear:
it was my only truly effective relief
against the otherwise overwhelming
grayness. and if i'm not mistaken,
i think i remember being told, when i
was a kid in school, that the earth
was not actually shaped like a ball,
but rather like a pear. now that
i think of this i am sorry that i
don't have the whole pear before me,
not only to benefit from the bright
green of it, but also that
i might contemplate the shape
of the earth. and no, i do not
have any other pears; that was
the last one standing between me
and this grayness that is as

persistent as ants or the ocean.
i suppose if i feel the urge
to muse over the shape of the
earth, i must settle for looking
out on the back field,
although it's obvious that
this field gives me very little
to go on. and forget any
greenness out there.
unfortunately, so far spring
has been very stingy.
but i don't question this
stinginess; i accept it.
it is just how this season wishes
to express itself. for my
own sanity i must be as
gracious of spirit as possible.
i lie in my cold bed
looking at the grayness
clinging to the ceiling,
as slowly i
recite the alphabet
to myself.

LASAGNA

father's day, today; hot day, muggy too.
brought over a book on gardening, wrapped
in chinese newspapers i'd asked for while
picking up some take-out. a photograph too,
wrapped in the same newspapers, taken of me and
my father by my landlord's oldest son, who had
enlarged and placed it in a plastic frame.
in this photo i have my father in a headlock
which he cannot escape from. my face
is stern, unplayful, looking straight
at the camera, and i am standing very erect.
his face is crazy with laughter, and he looks
exactly like he does in a photograph
taken of him when he was five years of age.
we took our usual stroll through the garden.
i took the safari hat from the garage
and the sunglasses from my car, and we
went up one row and down another.
it's very scientific and immaculate, this
garden of his. the sweet potatoes
were just starting to assert themselves
above ground. he was in good spirits, and
for the most part i registered
everything he said. this year
i want to make a video of my father
working in his garden, and get

my mother into it too, maybe talking
to the asparagus in the kitchen.
anyway, we hung the photograph
in the kitchen, had dinner,
after which we watched
a documentary on coney island.
my older sister called from
north carolina, wishing my father
a happy father's day; my
younger sister had called from
jersey before i had arrived.
my mother had made lasagna.
it was his day,
and it was what
he had wanted.

BLACK WALNUT TREES

my father gave me some black walnut trees,
little things, about two, three inches in height,
to plant around the farmhouse here. every so often
he'll find one growing in or around his garden.
sometime back he was visiting a friend in jersey
and this man gave my father a bunch of black walnuts
from a tree he had growing in his yard.
my father brought them home, but my mother threw
them out on my father's compost pile, in
defeat, not being able to open them up
easily enough. eventually, after the compost
was put to use, these black walnut trees
started shooting up everywhere. today
he pulled one out of the ground to show me.
and the walnut itself was still there,
black and split open, the little tree being
nourished by the meat of the nut.
so, tomorrow i am going to plant these trees,
after talking to the landlord to see
where he might like them put.
when my father was standing there,
in his garden, holding up the little tree,
the walnut dangling from its roots,
i couldn't help noticing how incredibly
thin he has grown. he talked about
his friend, the one who had given him
the black walnuts, saying that he had died
some months ago from a stroke. before
today i had never known such a tree even existed.
i put the trees he had given me
on the floor of the car by the back seat,
each tree potted in its own paper cup.
other plants were there too; i forget
their names. and in a bucket of water

there were some tall wildflowers, a huge
batch of them gladly gotten rid of
by my father. i take all these
unwanted trees and flowers.

i'll stick them in the ground and
if they live they live, and if they
die they die. only thing is, with the
walnut trees: i don't see myself
being around long enough
to witness them ever
maturing into anything
meaningful.

ONLY FOR THE OLD AND THE FRAGILE

i don't know why i want to live to be an old man.
but i find that i do. it seems odd to me, when i
really think about it. there isn't much that
i want to accomplish. no major goals have made
themselves known to me. i can't see my lazy self
solving any of the serious problems facing this race
of humans i've somehow become a part of.
that sounds condescending, and i am sorry.
i want to love another woman, create more of
these poems and like some other poets i know
drink many more glasses of wine.
at the end of it all dying a gracious death
might prove to be a worthwhile act.
and just once i would like to be able to
charm the birds out of the trees.
i've heard it said that certain people can do this,
and these people are spoken of with very
noticeable envy. it'd be nice to convince
a good number of birds to come down
and land on my shoulders. if i were an
old man i would be thin and light
and these birds could pick me up and
carry me away. they would also be kind
enough to pick my wife up also.
we would float comfortably about in
the air like people in a painting
by chagall. this would be something
to live to be an old man for.
i have no desire to accumulate
wealth, and fame is completely out
of the question.
just to be held aloft
by the birds would be plenty.
birds only do this
for the old
and the fragile.

— Ronald Baatz

Mt. Tremper NY

THE GIRLFRIEND

Afterwards she liked chocolate.
I'd look at her, then push the covers off me.
Drop to the floor from the second bunk. Find
something to put on, search my desk for quarters.

The fluorescent lights in the hall were always on.
I had to let my eyes adjust before I could take the steps
down to the lobby. I usually went barefoot —
the halls were warm but the steps were cold.
Then, in the lobby, it was warm again.

I always wondered if anyone could tell. I wondered
what I looked like, if there were signs
I should know about. I made sure to check
if anyone noticed me.
I'd walk slowly to the machine, look over
my choices behind the glass, get one or two.

Then, after a final look around,
take the steps back to the room.
Sometimes when I returned I'd notice
the light coming out from under the door.
And always, when I stepped in,
she was dressed and ready to leave.

THE GEESE

The geese flew away in the night.
I know because I heard them.
When it happened, I was in bed. Even though
there was nothing to see, I opened my eyes.
I stared up into darkness. Outside,
far above, they were navigating the black sky.
I just lay there, listening.

Each call separate but part of one
succession of calls. One sheet of sound.
I swear I could hear their wings beat.
Displacing each moment, troubling the cold air.

It took only a short while
for them to leave. And now they've gone,
there are no days. The geese took them.
All that's left is rain. Wet asphalt
and muddied grass. The next morning
there was no morning and the geese were gone.
They flew away in the night,
calling to each other in darkness.

ALONE

I like to eat breakfast alone.
I've been eating for years
with people and I just now
realized this. I like
the whole table to stretch
the newspaper. I like
to take a long time — a piece
of fruit, buttered toast, coffee.
A long time with the coffee.
Holding the cup, looking
out the window. Nothing
except what's on the table
and what's opposite
myself through the window.

— Laton Carter

Eugene OR

AFTERWARDS

tiny lakes of salt
flecked the bed
marking the place
where we lay

like a police chalk line

you said
and made me wash
the sheets
even though
I did not want to.

BARBARA

What is there to say about Barbara?

She has a full-time job with benefits, dresses casually,
makes her own hours, wears a white lab coat, gloves
(when necessary), spends her day examining
specimens beneath a ventilated hood, then
sends them away to be properly disposed of.

What else is there to say?

She undergoes a mandatory physical every year and to date there is nothing seriously wrong with her. She does notice more hair in the shower drain, but the hairbrush isn't carrying away large clumps, and the pay is decent. What with the recession and wanting nothing to do with welfare — it's not such a bad job.

What else is there?

— Thomas Gianakopoulos

Los Angeles CA

EASTER SUNDAY: 1994

and we spent it with my
mom and my sister and her
husband and her little boy;

my brother in law worked on
the lawnmower while i read
the chicago paper to see if
i could find a job there;

my lady had just been accepted
into school there and i cldnt

find a goddamn thing and kevin
cldnt figure out what was
wrong with the mower so he
loaded it up and drove it into
town to get it looked at and

my mom asked if we wanted to
scatter my dads ashes before
or after we had strawberry
pie for dessert she cried
while she scattered the ashes;

they looked like white chips
of gravel, burned hard and
angry by the fire from the oven

i had no idea that they would
look like that; i had images
of sooty fireplace ashes,
something like dust that
would just float away when
it hit the air, but these
ashes were SOLID, they hit

the ground in chunks and sank
in — reminding me of how heavy
the box had been when the
undertaker had first handed
it to me in evansville, indiana.

CHICAGO, APRIL 1994

chicago is nothing like
new orleans; i thought
that perhaps it might be.

we're driving around,
looking for a park that
some kid at the art
institute told us about;
said that the rent was
cheap and that it was
safe too. got lost,

i guess, since we ended
up in cabrini green. all
black skins out in the
street, holding up fifty-
five gallon drums one of
them with fire coming out
the top, thats what my
lady said, i didnt see it

too busy watching the street
and the kids darting in and
out of traffic; all of them
wearing clothes that did
not fit; once white t-shirts
hanging around battered knees.

i figure its too damn bad for
all those kids; tooling around
on flat tires and warped rims;
but this place isnt a goddamn
thing like new orleans. i
dont see jesus anywhere and
all i want to do is get out.

SMITTY, 2

i figure that esther will
have some trouble with it
later on; for awhile im
not able to figure out
the thinking of it all;

watching the gun come
out and realizing that
it wasn't aimed at you,
feeling relief and then

horror, knowing and not
able to do anything but
watch as the gun took the
back of his head off;

slumping back on the
couch, aware that this
was wrong, final. i

don't think that i could
sleep in the same house,
collapse tired from work
on the same sofa again,
knowing that fragments of
his brain were there;

somewhere.

— Tom Caufield

Iowa City IA

RICKY WITH THE TUFT AND A PRINCESS WITH A SMALL BRAIN

When Ricky with the Tuft was born
to a queen who knew he'd one day take the throne
she cried out in horror because he was so ugly.
His face was scrunched up like an old man's
and his skin was tough as a cheap walking shoe,
not soft like most babes'. His head
was bald except for a single bunch of weeds
growing straight up from crown of his head.
Thus, his name. Thus, the constant teasing.
To compensate, Ricky with the Tuft
was a delightful child. He could add five or six
numbers without using a pen or his fingers.
He memorized the movements of musical pieces
having heard them just once. He could render
a person's likeness with paint and a brush.
He was insightful and kind when he discussed world affairs.
When it was time to marry, he chose
the most beautiful in all the land. She was the princess
who was as dumb as she was fair.
Some say her brain was so small at birth
that she didn't learn to speak until she was ten
and that she still couldn't hold a fork very well.

At parties, people soon tired of her. When others talked about weather, she replied that she liked pretty horses. Sometimes she stared at the floor and said absolutely nothing at all. She stumbled about, clumsy on her feet, sometimes walking straight into trees. The only thing she knew for sure was that she was the stupidest in the land. She cried on her walks in the forest, the birds often outsmarting her and stealing her lunch. When she met Ricky with the Tuft, she said she couldn't marry him. Like most naive people, the princess didn't filter what might be rude. You are too ugly, she finally said. The prince convinced her that if she loved him enough, he would turn handsome right before her eyes. He said, in return, he had the capacity to make her wise. Suddenly she was talking about Ricky's favorite geometry theorem. An unexpected wind arranged the prince's tuft into a flattering style. The rest of the town's people could see no difference. But Ricky claimed the princess's vacant gaze was deep with meaning. The princess saw Ricky's red-eyed squint as evidence of his passion. They lived fairly happily, fooling themselves, believing indeed that they both finally had what they wanted.

— Denise Duhamel

Williamsport PA

TYING TIN CANS TO TAILS

the distinguished mid-century american poet anthony hecht once wrote a parody of matthew arnold's poem "dover beach" and entitled it "the dover bitch."

hecht's poem has been widely anthologized; "dover beach" is arguably the best known poem in the english language; and norman holland, in his dynamics of literary response, provides convincing psychoanalytical explanations for the popularity of each.

i have studied and taught several other poems of both arnold and hecht, but i can't claim to have internalized very deeply any of these others, whereas i used to be able to recite

"dover beach" by heart, having memorized it during a very boring class in college and having thrilled to it, in silent melodrama, during other equally boring sessions.

hecht and holland spoiled that for me somewhat.

still, "dover beach" will live on, and, if hecht and holland do also, they will owe a considerable debt to matthew arnold.

i sort of hope that i will not be known to posterity for this here "tremulous cadence" alone, but, in the eternity department,

i'll settle for what i can get.

TUESDAY'S HERO

"my god," she says, "you did the dishes."

"i didn't do them very well," i say.

"of course you didn't. you never do. but still, you actually did them ... and just when i had an awful day at work! whatever got into you?"

i say, "i just thought i'd surprise you."

i don't mention that i'd run out of envelopes in the midst of mailing manuscripts,

and that i figured i'd perform my grand gesture before the dishes had a chance to really pile up.

WATCHING THEM UNWIND THE DOUBLE HELIX

charles and i are discussing how feminist extremists seem to want to remove all forms of power, strength, authority, wealth, virility, fertility, athleticism, experience, creativity, prowess, accomplishment, prestige, brains, wisdom, and,

of course, paternity,

from the list of qualities a woman should be allowed to find attractive in a man,

and i realize,
what do i care: i'll always have
my good looks to fall back on.

PAUL CÉZANNE: THE CARD PLAYERS

is this painting primarily concerned
with pipes or with noses?

four pipes hang on a wall.
one pipe has been set aside
on the card table.
a bored man in the background
is smoking a pipe.

all the noses are pointed,
even that of the kibitzing juvenile.

probably the french can place a nose
within a square mile of its birthplace.

i suspect these noses must have
enormous significance for the french.

but what if these pipes
are in point of fact
actually lug-wrenches?

could cézanne have invented the lug-wrench
before henry ford invented the wheel?

there remains the even greater conundrum:
would a bored man standing
against the wall, arms folded,
in the background of a card game,

pass the time

by smoking a lug-wrench?

clearly the quintessence of the theory/practice
of paul cézanne

consists of his precedent-shattering
defamiliarization
of noses and pipes/lug-wrenches.

TO HOPE AND HOPE NOT

yeah, i know it's stupid to play the lottery — to a great extent i even agree with voltaire, who said, "a lottery is a tax on imbeciles."

but i'll tell you why i and so many million others continue to toss away our five bucks or so a week, rather than using two-hundred-fifty a year to purchase, say, a savings bond that will be worth, at six percent, its face value of five hundred dollars in fourteen years:

it's because, as the song from damn yankees goes, "you've gotta have hope," and our only hope of ever getting a little ahead financially, let alone of knowing in our lifetimes any big-time luxuries or splurges, of ever knowing what it is to go first-cabin, like robert de niro in scent of a woman, is to win a million bucks. and frankly, at fifty grand a year before taxes over twenty years, we'll even have to keep the old urge-to-splurge under control if we plan to quit our day-jobs (which in my case is a night-job).

and the guys we hate the most are the multi-millionaires who buy a hundred thousand dollars worth of tickets as soon as the jackpot goes over fifty million, not because they need a dollar more but just to make sure we don't forget that in this life, no matter what the game, it's only them that has that gets.

MY HEART LEAPT UP

when i saw the new movie
advertised in the entertainment section
as

"the sexist thriller of the year."

but on closer perusal i realized
it only said "sexiest."

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

THE LADY IN THE CASTLE AND THE LADY NOT IN THE CASTLE
(1985)

she lived in this huge house
it looked like a
castle
and when you got inside
and looked up
the ceilings were so very
high
and I was poor
and it all rather
fascinated
me.

she
was no longer
young
but she had this
mass
of hair
that damn near
went down to her
ankles
and
I thought about
how strange
it would be
doing it
with all that
hair.

I drove up there
several times
in my old
car
and she had fine
liquors to
drink
and we sat and
drank
but I could
never get quite
near her
and though I didn't
push at
it
something about
not
connecting
did offend my
ego
for ugly as I was

I had always been
lucky with the
ladies.

it confused me
and I suppose
I needed
that.

she liked to
talk about
the arts and
about
film making
and listening
to all that
only made me
drink
more.

I
finally
just rather
gave her
up
and a good year
or so
went by
when
one night
the phone
rang: it was the
lady.

"I want to come see
you," she said.

"I'm writing now, I'm
going hot ... I can't see
anybody"

"I just want to come
by, I won't bother you,
I'll just sit on the
couch, I'll sleep on the
couch, I
won't bother you"

"NO! JESUS CHRIST,
I'M WRITING,
I CAN'T SEE ANYBODY!"

I hung up.

the lady who was actually
on the couch
said, "oh, you've gotten all
SOFT now!"

"yeah...."

"come here...."

she took my penis
in her hand
flicked out her
tongue
then
stopped.

"what are you writing?"

"nothing ...
I've got a writer's
block...."

"sure you have...
your pipes are clogged...
you need to get
cleaned out...."

then she had me in her
mouth

and then the phone rang
again...

in a fury
I ran over to the
phone
picked it
up...

it was the lady in the
castle:

"listen, I won't bother you,
you won't even know I'm
there...."

"YOU WHORE, I'M GETTING A
BLOW JOB!"

I hung up and
turned back...

the other lady was walking
toward the
door...

"what's a matter?" I
asked.

"I can't STAND that
term!"

"what term?"

"BLOW JOB!" she
screamed.

she slammed the door and
was gone....

I walked to where the
typewriter sat
put a new piece of paper
in there.
it was one
a.m.

I sat there and
drank scotch with
beer chasers
smoked cheap
cigars.

3:15 a.m.
I was still sitting
there
re-lighting old
cigar stubs and
drinking ale.

the new
piece of paper was still
unused.

I switched out the
lights
worked my way toward
the bedroom
got myself on the
bed
clothes still
on

I could hear the toilet

half-running
but couldn't get up
to tap the handle
and end that
sound

my god damned pipes were
clogged.

COFFEE (1985)

I was having a coffee at the
counter
when a man
3 or 4 stools down
asked me,
"listen, weren't you the
guy who was
hanging from his
heels
from that 4th floor
hotel room
the other
night?"

"yes," I answered, "that
was me."

"what made you do
that?" he asked.

"well, it's pretty
involved."

he looked forward
then.

the waitress
who had been
standing there
asked me,
"he was joking,
wasn't
he?"

"no," I
said.

I paid, got up, walked
to the door, opened
it.

I heard the man
say, "that guy's
nuts."

out on the street I
walked north
feeling
curiously
honored.

THE WAY IT WORKS? (1988)

sometimes I think the gods
deliberately keep pushing
me into fires
just to hear me
yelp out
a few good
lines.

they just aren't going to
let me retire
silk scarf about neck
giving lectures at
Yale.

the gods need me to
entertain them.

they must be terribly
bored with
the others

but I am too.

and now my cigarette lighter
has gone out.
I sit here
flicking it:
click, click, click....

this kind of fire
they won't
give me.

— Charles Bukowski
San Pedro CA

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Das ist Alles: Charles Bukowski Recollected (edit. Joan Jobe Smith) \$10 fm. Pearl Editions, 3030 E. Second St., Long Beach CA 90803. ¶ Leo Mailman's Granddad's Brain, \$3 fm. David Barker, 1595 Saginaw St. S, Salem OR 97302. ¶ Jim Pritchard's the man with the buzzer in his throat, unpriced fm. Synaesthesia Press, P.O. Box 2422, Tempe AZ 85280-2422; fm. same press, 4 Poets (Steve Fisher, Chas. Bukowski, Dennis Johnson, Lawrence Ferlinghetti) \$1.50. ¶ Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel's Man With a Star Quilt, unpriced fm. Chiron Review Press, 522 E. South Ave., St. John KS 67576. ¶ Fred Voss's Maybe It's All True, \$6 fm. Pearl Editions, 3030 E. Second St., Long Beach CA 90803; also by Voss: Still In The Game, unpriced fm. BGS Press, 1240 William St., Racine WI 53402. ¶ Joan Jobe Smith's When the Movies Were Real, a section of Sestet, \$10 fm. Staple First Editions, Tor Cottage, 81 Cavendish Rd., Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3HD, England.

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US-ISSN:0043-9401

THE WORMWOOD REVIEW: 140
VOLUME 35, NUMBER 4

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* First appearance in WORMWOOD

PRICE: \$4.00

COVER ART: KEITH VAUGHAN

EDITOR: MARVIN MALONE

US-ISSN:0043-9401