

SHOES TO FILL, OR DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH

i saw today, in coda: the poets' and writers' newsletter,
a highly amusing item:

the state university of new york at binghamton
is advertising to fill the chair
formerly held by john gardner.

among the qualifications is that the candidate
possess "similar achievements" to gardner's.

maybe they haven't heard in binghamton
that hemingway, faulkner and edmund wilson
are all also dead.

PHILIPPE NOIRET

he's middle-aged.
overweight.
middle-class.
doesn't ask for much.

he does not resemble
clint eastwood or burt reynolds.
he likes to eat and drink.
he is a french sex symbol.

i'm counting the days
till my next sabbatical.

ONE OF THE ONES WHO HASN'T WOKEN UP

when i make my nightly call,
she says, "are you feeling better?"

"yes," i say, "i let myself lie around all day
and i am feeling better.
my throat is still sore,
but the aching in the legs is gone.
i'm wondering, though, if it was really the flu
or whether it wasn't maybe the acid fog."

she starts to laugh
and i demand, "what's wrong?"
and she says, "oh i just can't believe
what a paranoid you are."

i begin shouting then:

"don't you ever read the goddamn papers?
don't you even listen to the goddamn news?
that fog was the most acidic
in the history of california!
it was more corrosive than toilet cleanser!"

she says, "you know i don't have time
to listen to the news.
you know i'm working on my shakespeare paper."

we both calm down then,
smooth things over.

i don't really care if she ever
watches the news or peruses a front page,
but i am sick of being called a paranoid
on the plains of a biochemical armageddon.

A CASUALTY OF THE RECENT WARS

we're lying there holding each other
and agreeing how good sex always makes us feel,
when she says, "except, of course,
when it's really awful, like this one guy,
a couple of years ago, he really had a problem."

"what was his problem?"

"his problem was that nothing happened."

"jesus," i say, "sometimes nothing happens
when we start out, but you always know
how to make something happen."

"but this guy was only nineteen!"

"look," i have to tell her, "that's even worse.
when you're nineteen and nothing happens
you're apt to give up altogether.
by my age you've learned that,
give it a chance and sooner or later
the sun always rises."

"well," she says, "i was younger too,
and of course the first time we were together