

"i wish they wouldn't lock the door
the single women use," she says.

"well," he says, "i'm sure it's fine
if you use this one," and he transfers
the door gently to her grasp, thinking
that the clerks at this y truly do
earn their meagre salaries.

I'M ABOUT READY FOR THE VENERABLE BEDE

when she was a young novelist and philosopher,
iris murdoch wrote under the influence
of sartre and wittgenstein.

these days she writes under the influence
of plato.

i suspect that, as one grows a little older,
and the finitude of life becomes palpable,
one returns to those writers who have stood
the test of time, rather than squandering
one's dwindling hoard of hours
on contemporary works of questionable value.

AN ACHILLES LARYNX

he says that ezra pound
was a horrible declaimer
of his own verse,

and i think it's just as well
pound wasn't better at public speaking
or mussolini might have won the war.

WHAT WE READ AT THE END OF THE DAY

i've read just about all of
lawrence block's matthew scudder crime
novels, and a lot of those by colin dexter
featuring inspector morse. so i'm in
the market for others i'll enjoy as well.
you'd think it would be easy, but it isn't.
i try a lot of books by writers with big
reputations, like ruth rendell and ed
mc bain, and others recommended to me by
friends whose taste i trust, such as mark
weber, and i can see what others enjoy in

these books, but for me they just don't deliver the same pleasure.

i even know what the problem is: it's a matter of identification. for my pleasure reading, i want a protagonist that i feel very close to, such as scudder or morse; i don't want to have to expand my empathetic capacities — i do that in the rest of my life, as teacher and father and writer and even, sometimes, as husband, not to mention as citizen of long beach, america, the world.

as i close out the day and prepare to slip into dreams, i want to be able to sympathize with myself.

MY LAST AUNT

my aunt has lived as many years, fifty-seven, in the same apartment, as heinz had varieties of soup. her doctor would like her to move because there are no places nearby to walk to anymore, and it's not a good neighborhood for walking anyway. the friends she has left either don't drive at all now, or don't like to. a couple of years ago, she fell getting off a bus and injured her foot, though not, at least, her hip. but she can't face moving.

i don't blame her. i dread the possibility of having to relocate from my office in humanities building, what with the ramshackle shelves of books, the boxes bulging with manuscripts, the drawers of correspondence. we are an easily addicted species, even to wallpaper and the shape of our surroundings. hers is an awfully small place, though, one bedroom with tiny parlor and kitchen. the building smells, not noxious, but as musty as its years, its threadbare carpeting. the neighbors are nice but don't visit. her eccentric fifty-year-old niece who stays with her on weekends mitigates the social benefits by smoking up a hurricane.

i think my aunt just turned ninety. she might live a little longer in a newer roomier place,