

# TOWERS 58

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LUCIEN STRYK POETRY AWARD

"Black Hole in an Illinois Farmyard" by Michael Cassidy  
Judge: Craig Abbott

E. RUTH TAYLOR AWARD FOR CRITICAL WRITING

"Traven and Huston: Searching Out *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*" by Tim O'Grady  
Judge: Robert Self



## Drive (For Lucien and Josh)

Long, thin whispers, eddies  
sandsharp, sever  
my lights—this winter  
has turned the russet twines  
of wild trees  
to dust—the earth  
to a desert, prophetless;

by my sides  
old wheatfields lie  
bare, unleavened as moon:  
I am thinking of men  
reaping nothing  
this year  
but shadows.

Ice spins me  
to a halt, darkness;  
the sky leans  
starless, peeling drily  
on my glass,  
its ashen pieces  
holding me in,  
bloodless

as love—  
I am thinking of you  
reaching through  
an airless space  
that once gleaned  
my breath—you  
pulling me  
against the weight  
of roots frozen

against the weight  
of roots frozen,  
again I am breaking—  
here, where there's no  
denying season,  
the falling drift  
of your arms.

A. Jozefiak



## Downtown Rockford, IL

They've overshopped this soil.

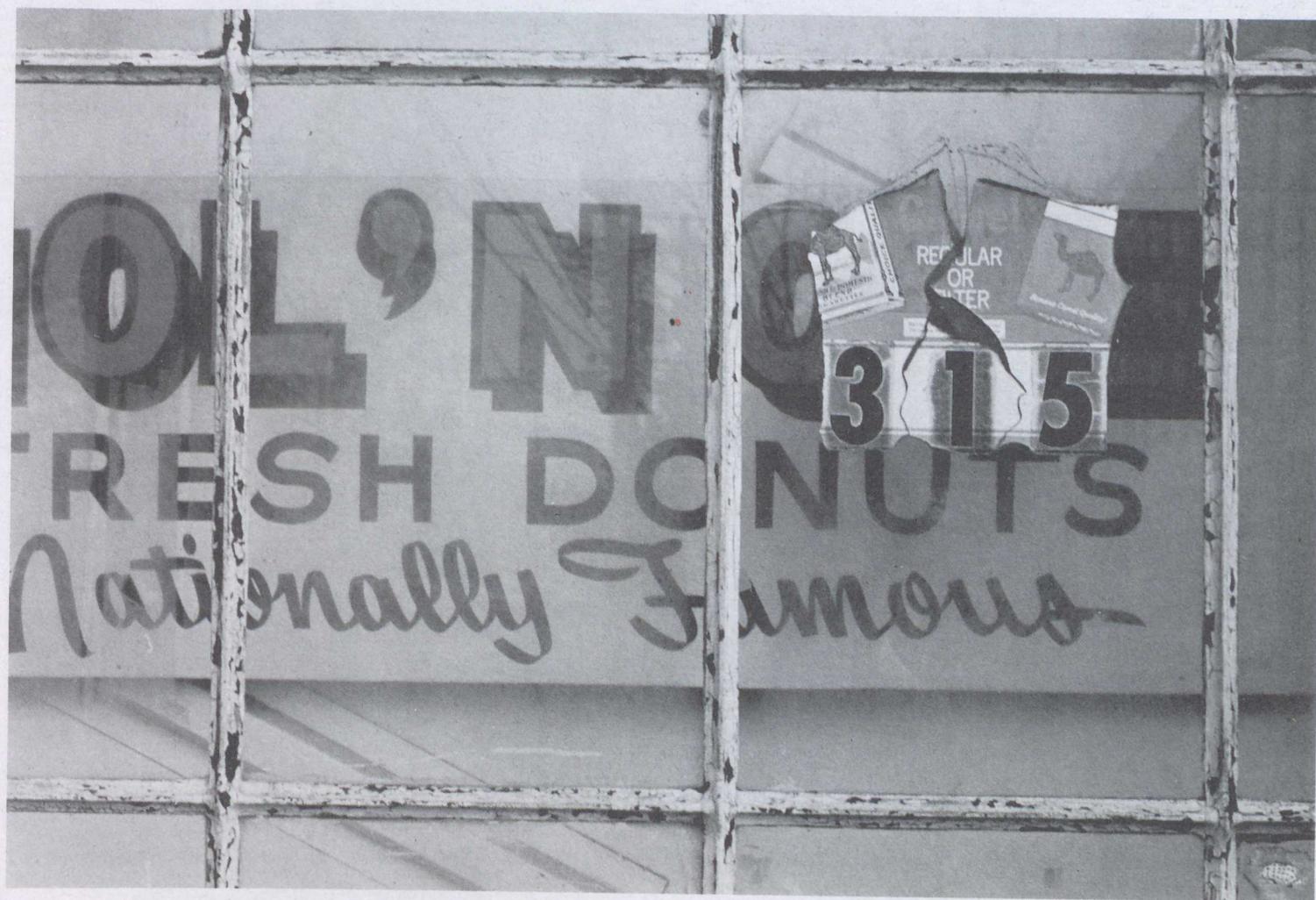
One day, back when  
dollar bills grew tall  
in cashbox rows,  
crowds down here  
sloshed like cabbage slaw.

The next day they dried up  
only to migrate  
to more fertile floors.

Soon weeds cracked through sidewalks,  
but merchants couldn't eat  
that green,

so there are no  
fingerprints left for me  
to windex off glass cases  
ripe for plowing under.

Tim Brown

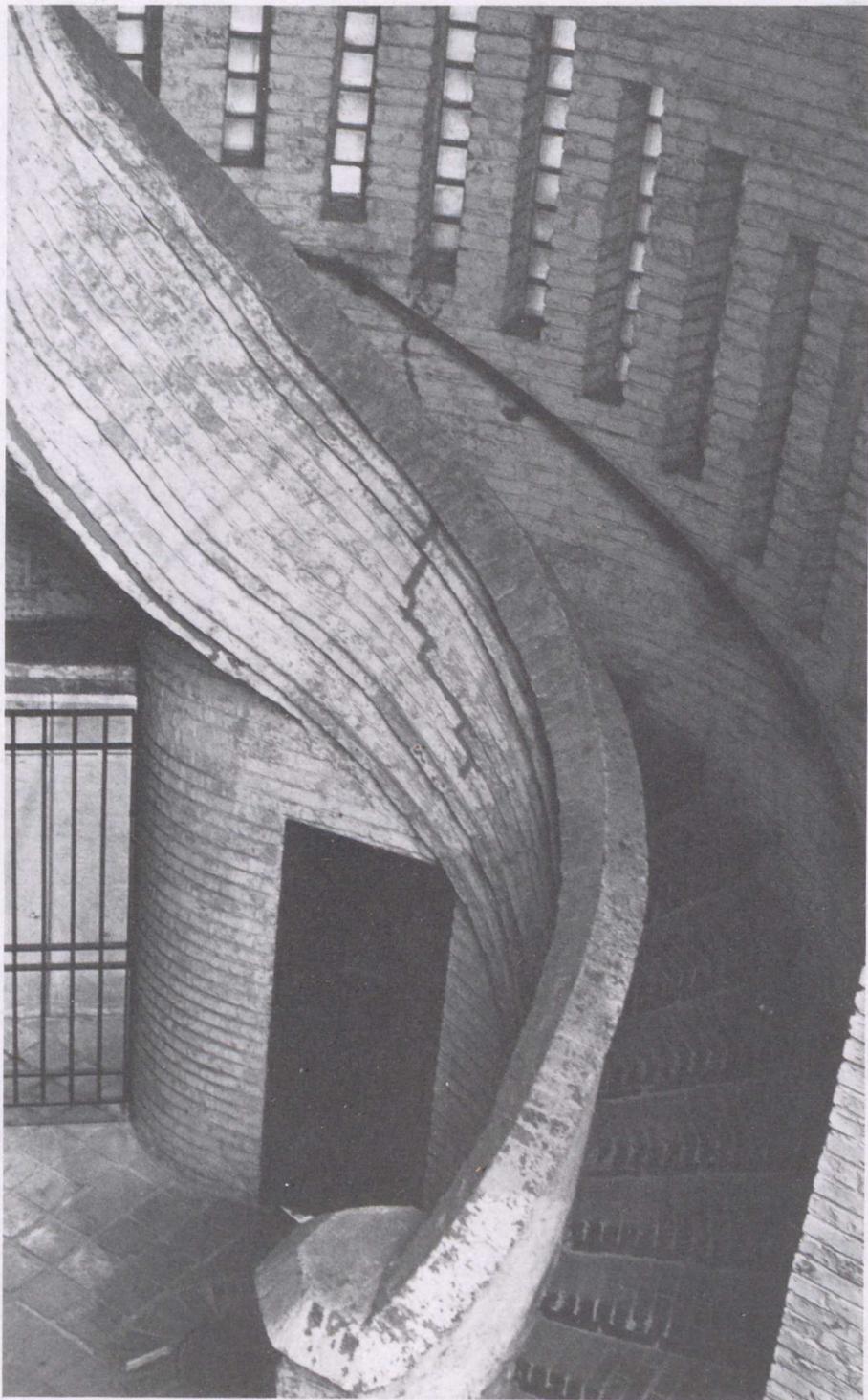




## Winter Weed

Light burns a leaf through my pillow.  
Flowers still float.  
The hoes grub it. You're no chrysanthemum.  
I crack through leaf-smoke,  
your electric tape greenhouse.  
Everything planted goes under.  
You're there to flatten the rifts,  
whispering to your seeds. To you  
I'm the darkest way down,  
all winter in the shed.

Ward Smith



## Black Hole in an Illinois Farmyard

Sleep escapes; it has no weight.  
The night sounds of crickets and light breeze  
of insect wings, the near flutter of leather,  
and the feathered white glide of an owl have come  
to seem but one more side to silence.  
And still, across the broad fields,  
the long sigh of the highway cuts back  
the dark. Stars become headlights,  
distant and dimmed; the domed flare of some  
small town on the horizon outshines  
the slender silk of moon. Tall stalks  
surround me; the earth sinks at my center,  
lies concave around me. A diesel howls  
from beyond this depression, and shifting voice,  
pulls free of the dark field's draw.

Michael Cassidy



## The Shawl (For Irene)

Knitting needles click and turn  
as the hands in your old wooden clock;  
I've gathered the quiet hours  
from this room, to bind tight  
as unbroken cocoons:  
you can take  
no more spaces  
widened to the raw  
farm winters of Illinois;  
I have heard your breath  
grow hard like the river—  
through your deep  
uncertain sleep,  
waited for its undercurrent  
to split bright  
the pallid surface

already the branch  
in your window  
is releasing its  
feathery gold

the needles are flying—  
like monarch wings,  
a soft beat  
against my closed  
unwilling hands.

A. Jozefiak



# Traven and Huston: Searching Out *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*

Tim O'Grady

Probably the most effective way to begin a comparison between an original work of fiction and its adaptation for the screen is to isolate the inevitable differences in the ways the two handle nearly identical themes, plots, and characters. From a study of these variances we can arrive at several useful conclusions on the particular formal requirements of each medium and perhaps even approach a definition of the unique emphasis that each "auteur" — the author of the story and the director of the movie — chose to attach to the same basic material.

*The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is an especially good specimen for this sort of analysis because John Huston's 1947 screenplay deviates in such apparently minor ways from B. Traven's novel, published twelve years earlier, and is so essentially faithful a transposition into film of the fundamental narrative elements of this intriguing literary fable that the omissions and changes which do exist seem much more important than they would in a "freer" rendering of the same work. But when these discrepancies are defined, it becomes clear that the novel differs most significantly from the movie in that it concentrates less on character than on the primary tract-like theme of irrational and tragically destructive human greed as a universal trait in "civilized" societies, intertwining with it a series of related subthemes on such economic and political issues as the exploitation of the working classes throughout history, first by Big Religion and later by Big Business, and the means by which these workers have been subjugated in order to perpetuate and increase the profits of the owners. The film, on the other hand, spends little time on what often appear in the book as parenthetical digressions and chooses for its focus the near-allegorical roles of the three major characters, each of which represents a distinct aspect of the central dramatic conflict. For, while Houston is said to have largely agreed with Traven in his observations on the social and economic pressures that aggravate the "human condition," it was, more than anything else, because

his medium demanded a certain cinematic "logic" of its own that he saw fit to distill and rework Traven's loose little epic into a compelling adventure story with some decidedly vivid thematic overtones.

Both versions of the story can be divided into three nearly equal parts: the first covering the "Tampico" scenes, including the introduction of Dobbs, his winning of the lottery, and his decision, together with Curtin and Howard, to begin the prospecting expedition; the second describing the expedition and mining operation itself; and the third treating the departure from the mine, the disintegration of the partnership, Dobbs' death, and the loss of the gold. In this way there are many likenesses in structure and in theme between this tale, especially as it is developed in the novel, and Norris' *McTeague* (which, of course, was also made into an important film) in that both plots can be similarly divided, both utilize the interwoven motifs of greed and gold, both feature the winning of a lottery as a portentous element of the action, both move from the questionable "civilization" of a port city in the West to the threatening wilderness of the desert, and both are decidedly naturalistic in tone, lean toward an advocacy of socialistic "solutions," and lack the "finished" style of classic Jamesian realism. And, though it is obvious that these two stories are hardly identical in all respects, the wealth of additional details in both books that would lend themselves to such a comparison might add to our understanding of the major influence of early twentieth-century pulp fiction (which, ironically, is referred to repeatedly in a disparaging way by Howard in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*) on works that have achieved higher places in the literary canon.

It is noteworthy that there is no mention in Traven's novel of the name of the city where we first encounter Dobbs. This is perhaps indicative of the author's wish to universalize his story, conceivably to turn it into an explicit parable illustrating his central theme. Huston, however, takes pains to place his characters in a real and specific city (literally Tampico, though the actual location shots were done in Durango); and, as Naremore points out, his uncompromising attention to the precise details of his exotic locales in this and later films probably made him "as responsible as anyone for Hollywood's postwar movement away from back-lot settings."<sup>1</sup>

After a brief opening tableau involving Dobbs and his first handout from "the man in white," the novel lapses into a long

descriptive section on the Oso Negro (Black Bear) Hotel, an establishment which symbolizes, more than anything else in the book, the plight of the outcast expatriot in a country the control of whose economy has been virtually usurped by foreign oil developers. The action then moves to a nearby boom town (Ciudad Madero?) where Dobbs attempts to find work in the drilling camps across the river. The area is crowded with petroleum facilities and is characterized by the tremendous waste of the omnipresent "liquid gold" and the decadence of its largely American inhabitants. Here Dobbs meets Moulton, a drifter like himself in search of employment, and a rather comic Indian—both of whom accompany him into the jungle on a job-hunting expedition. This is the first of two threesomes that Dobbs becomes part of, and it is a clear foreshadowing of his later connection with Curtin and Howard as well as the final native trio of similar but more sinister down-and-outers who wreak upon him his unfortunate end.

The silly run-in with the "tiger," which the three spend all night in a tree to avoid and which eventually is revealed to be a grass-chomping burro tethered close by, also serves to give further exposure to Dobbs' personality and his "me-first" behavior under stress. In every camp they enter they are rebuffed and hear a different explanation for the slowdown in production. Since, but for the lowest caste Indians, the two white men are at the bottom of the social scale in a strange country, the mystery of their failure to be hired intensifies their sense of alienation from the distant powers who can so regulate their economic survival.

Later, when he returns to the river, Dobbs gets a job with Pat McCormick, the corrupt, slave-driving oil rigger who spouts Communist dogma to conveniently insinuate himself into his men's trust. At this point Dobbs meets Curtin; and, after their stint with McCormick is finished, the two join forces to threaten their erstwhile boss into giving them their overdue wages. Finally, Dobbs, miser that he is, talks Curtin into transferring his residence from the relative comfort of one of the better local hotels to the squalor of the Oso Negro, where they hear Howard recite the fascinating saga of the Agua Verde gold mine. It is here, in the first major digression of the novel (a common plot device of the nineteenth century, used not only by Melville, as Huston has suggested, but also by Dickens, Thackeray, and others before and after them) that Traven's sympathies against institutional religion and the

passionate greed at the core of the human soul are most ringingly sounded—dramatically, editorially, and in the two digressions that follow. Dobbs' and Curtin's imaginations are, of course, ignited by the old man's warnings; but only after Dobbs wins the lottery and Curtin, by means of a casually treated but nevertheless fantastic coincidence, is able to collect an old debt, do the two young men compile enough of a stake to convince Howard that it is feasible to mount a gold mission of their own.

We can only surmise that John Huston decided that most of this opening material was inessential to his film, since the greater part of it is omitted from his screenplay. Moulton and the Indian are dropped, as are the entire incident in the jungle and the foray through the drilling camps. Perhaps this is because the opening section of the novel would appear as something of a false start, functioning as it does for the most part as a preface to the later major thread of the plot. In the movie Dobbs and Curtin meet before being offered jobs by McCormick and, as far as we can tell, do not move into the Oso Negro until after the single drill-rigging scene (10).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the hotel's importance as a stark and forbidding symbol of penury, rootlessness, and a weird sort of personalized but uncaring masculine efficiency (on the order of Traven's description in *The Death Ship* of the vessel itself) is greatly reduced, if not eliminated completely. All we see of the boom town on the river is McCormick leaving the cantina where he offers work to Dobbs (8) and the two scenes at the ferry landing (9 and 11); and, at that, these could just as well be set in Tampico, since there is no differentiation made between the two places. The scenes following those showing the men at the ferry landing enroute to and returning from the hellish drill-rigging operation are blended to nice effect in that the meeting with Howard at the Oso Negro (13) is enveloped between two cantina interiors: the first (12) showing Dobbs and Curtin spending their last ten pesos waiting for McCormick, and the second (14), the bitter, animalistic fight in which they literally have to beat McCormick to a pulp in order to retrieve their back pay. This brawl, a noticeable addition to the film, might be considered a somewhat Hollywoodish appeal to the groundlings, but in my judgment it functions as an effective though simplified motivating vehicle for the boys' decision to give up their former passivity and to escape the "jungle" of the city by approaching Howard about digging for gold.

The cinematic emphasis in these scenes is at all times on

the characters as individuals; and nowhere do we receive, as we do in the book, any comment on McCormick as more than a roguish villain or as a representative of the exploiting classes, nor are we led to view Dobbs and Curtin as generalized "victims." Howard, as played by Walter Huston, is also slightly altered in the film, his manner of talking, described as "slow" in the novel, speeded up so markedly that it becomes the most noticeable, if sometimes disconcertingly humorous, feature of his personality. This was apparently done to tone down the "windy" quality of some of his longer monologues, but it also works to rivet the viewer's attention to his words, charged as they are with the easy but authentic wisdom of a dense adventurous life. Howard is an old prospector who has already gained and lost several sizable fortunes, a fact suggested by a mere nod in the movie rather than by his overt admission of it in the book. His speech is liberally laced with genial didacticisms on the fleetingness and futility of quick wealth acquired under the invariably harrowing conditions of a gold expedition. But, though he now has enough knowledge to be wary of the traps implicit in such a quest, Howard is hooked on the very sort of mania that he warns others against; so, he quickly succumbs to Dobbs and Curtin's proposal. The Agua Verde digression, which would have made a wonderful movie by itself, is omitted from the film, perhaps for that very reason, as is Curtin's sudden and preposterous good fortune at the hands of an old pal who repays him double what he had owed him.

In the second part of the tale—that which deals primarily with the prospecting and mining operations—it becomes still clearer how Huston had to abridge and tighten Traven's more discursive storytelling technique. Much that is only spoken of in the book must be dramatized in the film if it is to be dealt with at all. This is obviously because the "distance" between the author and the reader of a novel is much different from that between the director and the viewer of a film. Although a novelist can more easily afford the psychological intimacy, leisurely development, and narrative fluidity customarily, and perhaps even culturally, associated with a verbal medium, a filmmaker—while he enjoys many more of these "literary" benefits than a theatrical director, for instance—is limited by the necessity of having to create visual phenomena for his audience out of what in the book may exist only as concealed musings, authorial observations, or information transmitted by a character who did not directly witness the events he tells of.

An example of this in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* occurs at the very beginning of the first prospecting scene, as it appears both in the film (25-28) and in the book (p. 85).<sup>3</sup> Traven's version runs as follows:

Their idea was that you cannot make a mistake, that when you see something that glitters, it must be gold. To their amazement, they found almost every day patches of ground that were covered with glittering yellowish powder, and they found the same glittering sand in brooks and creeks. Whenever they saw this sort of sand, they were sure that it must be the right stuff or at least something that was heavily charged with gold. Howard did not laugh at them. He just said: "I'll tell you when to pick up. This here stuff wouldn't pay you a dinner for a truckload unless you can sell it in town right in front of a house under construction.

Huston's version, on the other hand, reads like this:

Dobbs is peering at the ground where he splattered water. Now he goes down on one knee to examine it more closely.

DOBBS: Look! Look how it glitters.

Curtain kneels down beside him.

CURTIN (drawing in his breath): Yeah.

DOBBS: It's yellow too . . . like . . . like . . .

He's afraid to say the word.

CURTIN: . . . like gold.

Dobbs reaches for the canteen, pours more water out on the ground.

DOBBS: It's all around . . . (He pours some water onto a rock.) Look, Curtin, here's a vein of it in this rock.

They are fairly prancing with excitement now.

CURTIN (cups his hands, calls): Howard! Howard, come back here! We've found something!

CLOSE SHOT HOWARD high above the others on a mountain. He turns at the sound of their voices.

CURTIN'S VOICE (OVER SCENE): Come back.

Without hesitation, he starts back down, running when he can.

CUT BACK TO CURTIN AND DOBBS

DOBBS: What else could it be? Only gold shines and glitters like that. We've struck it, Curtin, or I'm crazy, and from the looks of things we've struck it rich.

CURTIN: Looks like it.

Dobbs is splashing more water out of his canteen and exclaiming:

DOBBS: Maybe we've found a whaddya call it—a mother lode.

Howard comes trotting up. Dobbs seizes him by the arm.

DOBBS: Look, Howard, the ground—it's full of gold, and it's in veins in the rocks.

Howard doesn't even bend over. They wait for him to speak, full of expectancy.

HOWARD (finally): This here stuff wouldn't pay you a dinner for a truckload, unless you could dump it right in front of a building under construction. It ain't good for anything but mixing with cement.

While in this case the cinematic version is longer than that in the novel (only slightly so, however, since the camera and stage directions account for about half of the length in the published screenplay), it succeeds, as a good film script must, in taking an incident which was often repeated and particularizing it into a single representative one, which adds a great deal of focus to the generalized tone of Traven's description. In the novel, we are led to judge only that Dobbs and Curtin were very slow learners, but in the film they appear not merely naive but veritably ridiculous, prancing excitedly over their "find," jumping to hasty and grandiose conclusions, and making free with terms like "mother lode" that they seem to have picked up from Western movies or pulp novels. To my mind, the screenplay gives these characters much more personality than the book does, which may indeed be only to be expected, given the varying objectives of the two "auteurs." Huston's small clarification of Howard's statement about the "house under construction" is also worthy of some note here. The rather careless ambiguity in Traven's version is typical of his frequently awkward writing style, even if its very defects sometimes contribute a raw naturalistic force to the story that would be absent in a more polished novelist.

The character of Gold Hat is given a similar handling in the film. Interestingly enough, he does not appear at all within the chronological sequence of events in the novel. We hear of him only as the central figure in the "train robbery" digression, which is related to the three main characters by Lacaud (whose name was changed to Cody in the film). The screenplay preserves this gripping little adventure but takes it out of the mouth of Lacaud and has it actually happen to Howard, Dobbs, and Curtin, serving nicely as a transition (20-21) between the first ("Tampico") and the second ("prospecting") sections of the story. Huston then expands Gold Hat's identity so that we meet him twice again in the movie: during the siege of the mine as the leader of the marauding bandits (90-96) and on the road with two bedraggled compadres, where it is he who ultimately murders Dobbs (125). In this way the looser episodic structure of the novel is knit together in the film so beautifully that we get more of a sense of the forbidding arm of "fate" than a cheap reliance on mere "coincidence," as has been suggested; and several characters who remain anonymous and somewhat ill-defined in the book are brought together under a single painted sombrero and endowed with a personality so unpredictable, so insidious, and thus so interesting, that it easily wins our attention away from even Dobbs' and Howard's. Nowhere else in the film is Huston's brilliance or his preoccupation with character more pronounced than in his marvelous exploitation of the Gold Hat figure; and, as Naremore rightly observes, Alfonso Bedoya almost inadvertently captured the role with such "documentary authenticity" that it becomes one of the most memorable performances in the movie.

The film's treatment of Lacaud himself also points up the need and special ability of this medium to magnify and restructure a character of relatively minor importance whose existence we may only have learned of initially through another party. In Traven's novel, for instance, it is Curtin who first tells of Lacaud, having met him in the village near the mine while shopping for supplies. Such secondhand information (all of the digressions and many of the lesser stories) is almost completely removed in Huston's screenplay; and so the Curtin-Cody encounter is literally shown in the film, relieving the director of the extra burden of having to cope dramatically with Curtin's after-the-fact description of it and investing the succession of events with an economy and an immediacy that briefly transports the viewer away from the

monotonous mine setting. There is some irony in the fact that it is the movie version, and not the novel, which takes better advantage of this sort of scenic pliability, although, again because of the different emphasis that each puts on the story, the book is more successful in achieving a near-surrealistic theatrical kind of intensity in laying so large a portion of the action in so limited a space.

Included also in Lacaud's digression is the picture he paints of the mestizo train robbers digging their own graves at the behest of the federal soldiers. This incident—another that is dramatized so as to take place within the film's literal time-frame—is transposed to coincide with Curtin and Cody's meeting in the village, causing them both to witness the kind of frontier justice that Gold Hat would soon fall prey to. But it also deflects the intent of the novel to portray the typical Mexican serf as a passive and stupid victim of a hierarchical social system which exploits his ignorance and his religion, thereby binding him to a life so laden with superstition that it ultimately forces him into ready belief in the flashy promises of the first strong leader who comes along. In fact, all such criticisms of capitalist or ecclesiastical behavior (including the three major digressions, as I've already pointed out) were ultimately excised from the film, although a few, largely Huston's own, made it as far as the screenplay but no farther (e.g., Howard's speeches in scenes 47 and 96).

In general, aside from the "prefatory" elements in the novel which, as we've seen, were omitted entirely from the film, the Lacaud/Cody segment of the story is probably that which underwent the greatest change in the process of transfer from the literary to the cinematic medium. In the book Lacaud is a rather benign, preoccupied, and lonely character whose proposition to the three partners that he join them and receive forty percent of the proceeds from the mine is actually accepted, shortly after which they leave him to his own devices and to work the mountain in accordance with his self-proclaimed knowledge of geology. In the movie, however, while Cody remains a somewhat mysterious and likable figure, Bruce Bennett plays him with a quiet audaciousness that is only thinly based on Lacaud's more scholarly sort of confidence. Nor are his overtures looked upon kindly by the three gold miners; they plot instead to assassinate him, until, that is, Gold Hat and his gang arrive to force postponement of the act.

Cody, unlike Lacaud, also has a wife and child, from whom

he has received a letter found on his person after his death—a death which, as Naremore views it, "helps make the terror of the bandits seem more real; in addition, it provides an opportunity for Curtin to read aloud the letter." This scene "has no counterpart in Traven, being comparable to nothing so much as a device frequently used in Hollywood movies about World War II.... The difference from the typical war film, of course, is that here the letter acts as a criticism of the men's struggle rather than as a validation of it."<sup>4</sup> This is certainly true. The film in its thematic treatment of the search for gold implicitly condemns the blind foolishness of the three central characters and uses contrasting visions, such as Curtin's wistful dream of owning a peach orchard (47), Cody's family expectantly awaiting his return (102), and Howard's new-found career as a doctor-demigod in his Indian Shangri-la (121), to highlight the radical difference between the filthy obsession for material wealth, as concentrated most nastily in the inexorable degeneration of Dobbs, and the "true" riches of life. Traven, on the other hand, while he does anything but condone illusions about the real value of gold, places more importance on the need for a man to do something that will yield a decent living and offers up the possibility that, unlike more conventional jobs available within the capitalist economic structure, the hunt for gold, with all of its risks, and the actual task of extracting the mineral from the earth, with all of its hardships, might still hold out to the man who can curb his greed a fair day's pay for as fair a day's work. To some degree it can be said then that where the film is moralistic, the novel is realistic; where the film opposes black with white, the novel is an amalgam of muted color; and where the film is a neat, tightly crafted dramatic whole, the novel is woven of a yarn full of holes and patches which speak less eloquently of the art of its construction than of the unpretentious, even proud, practicality of its maker.

Although the letter scene is probably the film's most glaring concession to the characteristically maudlin sentimentality of Hollywood at this time, there are also some distinctly melodramatic touches in the way Curtin's and Dobbs' personalities were rechanneled into what could be called a good-guy/bad-guy subtext. Traven's treatment of Dobbs has only superficial resemblances to the McTeague-like deranged beast-on-the-run that he becomes in the screenplay, brought down even further by Bogart's own uniquely compelling brand of simpering cowardice. Like McTeague also, he dies brutally in the desert, though in the novel, especially because of the

irony of his being so close to his destination (Durango) and because of the graphic description of his horrible murder and decapitation, the reader has no choice but to sympathize with a man whom he has come to identify with by means of the frequent glimpses we are given into his mind. That Dobbs is no hero, is in fact nothing more than the commonest type of "common man," inclines more to his favor in Traven than in the film, where he is often made to seem constantly and neurotically nervous, self-serving, and scornful of even the most basic human decencies. In the novel, for instance, it is not only his life that is saved by Curtin when the tunnel collapses,<sup>5</sup> but he also does the same for others when the situation calls for it, out of a spirit of mutual dependence on the survival of both of the others:

Several times Dobbs had endangered his own safety to fetch either the old man or Curtin when one fell into a ravine or into a chasm or was caught in thorny underbrush on a steep rock. Help in dangerous situations had been rendered to Dobbs by the others. Still none of them ever believed that such assistance was given, or that sacrifices were made, out of pure kindness. Each of them felt that this service was rendered because, had one of them lost his life, the other two could not have worked the field alone. (p. 97)

Dobbs, in other words, is not that different from his fellows; and throughout he is perceived by them, despite his evident weaknesses, as hardly meaner than the ordinary man. When the three leave Lacaud at the mine, Dobbs' attitude toward him stands in marked contrast to his itchy readiness to kill Cody in the film:

Dobbs slapped Lacaud on the back. "Lonely, that's what you're going to be. By the way, I noticed you use the same cartridges in your gun that I do. Have a dozen, I can spare them. Well, to make it a round sum, take ten more . . . Well, good-bye and forget what I've said. I didn't mean it anyhow. It was just for fun, you know that. I sure hope you make that million here which we didn't make. (pp. 224-5)

After Dobbs' death even Howard observes about him that he

"had as much conscience as we would have had under similar circumstances" (p. 313).

Though in the movie Dobbs is far from being a callous, rapacious villain on the order of Gold Hat, he does nevertheless confirm all of the dangers of unbridled avarice that Howard has come to know so well. And, while in both versions of the story Dobbs fulfills all of Howard's most dire prophecies, his role in the film as an almost allegorical embodiment of Greed is much more clear-cut. Whereas in Traven, for example, it is not Dobbs but Curtin who originally suggests that each partner take responsibility for his own share of the gold, in the film it is Dobbs who proposes this and Curtin who objects. On a similar note, the gila monster episode (59), absent in the book, was apparently added to the film to emphasize even further Dobbs' miserly concern for the security of his "goods."

Nor does Tim Holt's portrayal of Curtin come much closer to Traven's moral conception of that character. He is made to play foil to Bogart's Dobbs, is much less talkative and idiosyncratic than his two cohorts, and, resembling as he does the uncomplicated "burly farm boy,"<sup>6</sup> can be thought of, if I might extend the "allegorical" analogy, as representing Fair Play to Dobbs' Greed and Howard's Wisdom. His decision at the end of the film to go to Texas to comfort Cody's widow is typical of his behavior throughout, though the ending of the novel has him join Howard in the Indian village as an assistant medicine man. Holt-Huston's Curtin, while not entirely unlike Traven's, is a pared down, simplified version of the more rounded character we meet in the novel; and I would judge that this was because he was considered more necessary as a convenient dramatic device in the film than as a character with any inherent interest of his own. Dreaming as he does in the movie on the most innocent of pleasures, such as the peach orchard, he diverges substantially from the man who in the book could say to Lacaud in a tone that is decidedly Dobbsian:

Understand, stranger, . . . we've no intention of staying long. I've got somebody waiting for me. A dame, if you must know. I need her badly, so let's say one week more. If we find inside of a week a fair trace of what you tell us is here, then I'll be willing to hang on longer. If we don't and it's just so much more baloney, I'm off with you, old man. (p. 136)

Huston, much as one would strain out worthless substances from the glittering yellow ore, removed elements from Traven's conception of Dobbs and Curtin that would seem inconsistent with his more allegorical notion of their characters and at times even reassigned actions or statements from one to the other, such as when in the film Dobbs negotiates with the bandits on the mountain in spite of Curtin's having done this in the book.

Of the third and final section of the story, treating of the departure from the mine and the eventual separation of the three partners, there is little that calls for additional comment other than there is a sizable amount of material in the novel that was apparently considered by Huston to be extraneous enough to warrant exclusion from his screenplay, the most obvious of which are the "vaccination" incident in the town and the confused activities of the three Mexican killers when they attempt to escape capture for Dobbs' murder and to sell his burros and supplies. As Naremore has incisively observed, "There are three bandits, just as there are three prospectors, and the quarrel over the dead man's belongings serves to parody the action of the film as a whole....Once again the acquisition of property turns men into enemies, and once again bickering over who deserves what share of the goods leads to trouble—as the bandits argue among themselves, Dobbs's pack mules almost escape."<sup>7</sup> The film, functioning once more as a rather blatant allegory, is slightly clearer about the analogy between these two threesomes, and the fact that Gold Hat is again involved suggests even more sinister allusions between Dobbs and the film's only true villain. It is significant that the book's villain, on the other hand, is neither Dobbs nor Gold Hat but rather the awesome tyrannical power over the dignity of the individual exercised through history by both the Church and the immense international corporations which have supplanted it. This is made especially clear in the full texts of the three digressions which were deleted from the film: the stories of the Agua Verde gold mine and of Catalina Maria de Rodriguez, both told by Howard, and that of the train robbery, told by Lacaud.

The "Catalina" digression is worthy of some note here because it features a definition of gold, given by the chief in the story, that clarifies Traven's beliefs on the matter and seems to foreshadow Howard's good fortune among the Indians:

If I am hungry or my wife is hungry, what can gold do, if there is no corn or water? I cannot swallow

gold to satisfy my hunger, can I? Gold is beautiful like a flower, or it is poetic, like the singing of a bird in the woods. But if I eat the flower, it is no longer beautiful, and if I put the singing bird into a frying-pan, I can no more enjoy his sweet song. (p. 204)

Dobbs later notices the similarity between the "Catalina" story and the subsequent course of actual events when Howard leaves to "cure" the Indian boy, and it is at that point that the boy's father repeats almost verbatim the fictional chief's concept of the ultimate importance of earthly happiness founded not in the acquisition of arbitrary wealth but in the ability to perceive and accept the gift of life itself: "There is only one business of life on earth, and that is to live and be happy. What greater thing can you gain from life than happiness?" (p. 237)

That there is no such mingling of the mythic and the phenomenological in the film robs it of some of the thematic richness of the novel and, particularly in this case, causes Howard's magical sojourn among the Indians to seem somewhat incongruous with the generally "unpicturesque approach"<sup>8</sup> of the remainder of the film.

Both versions of the story are replete with verbal, as well as structural, ironies, though the film seems to rely on them more heavily as capsulized commentaries on the action that serve in place of Traven's more frequent editorial interjections. Cases in point would be Dobbs' near shooting of Gold Hat in the train robbery scene (which, if he had succeeded, of course, might have significantly changed his future), Dobbs' contradictory characterizations of Howard immediately before and immediately after the beginning of the expedition (15 and 25), and, most important, the ending itself, showing "a torn bag, once containing gold, blown to rest against a lonely cactus plant."<sup>9</sup>

Despite the inevitable alterations that must be made on any story when it moves from words into pictures, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* seems to have been a natural for the movies from the beginning. Traven himself was apparently quite aware of film as a highly influential cultural and propagandistic medium, as well as an aesthetic one. His scenes are leavened from a mix of a romanticized, foregrounded topography, on the order of Cooper's in *The Prairie*, and a dense psychological realism, like Crane's in *The Red Badge of Courage*—both of which as literary works are decidedly

more cinematic than theatrical in texture and structure.

Traven's characters also seem to have occasional fleeting notions of themselves as belonging more as actors to the removed "reality" of film than to the actual situations into which they have been placed. This is especially pronounced in the gunfight scenes on the mountain. When Howard, for instance, warns the others that the bandits are not about to go away quickly, Dobbs responds, "Well, it won't be long now before we have a real movie here" (p. 169). Later, when one of the Mexicans attempts to conceal a gun under his coat, Curtin is well prepared because he, "knowing gangster tricks, had seen this move" (p. 173). It is interesting to speculate here whether the bandits themselves might not have learned some of their "tricks" from the likes of Edward G. Robinson, George Raft, or even from Bogart. In a similar vein, on the next day, when the bandits, using an old Indian ploy, begin to cut down foliage to construct moveable barricades for their final onslaught, Dobbs whistles through his teeth and exclaims, "Just have a look at a fine performance; you don't have to go to the movies this afternoon to learn new tricks" (p. 179). Finally, when the bandit gang suddenly and inexplicably departs, Lacaud suspects another ruse, but Howard responds that the Mexicans "would have to be awfully good movie actors to play such a trick like that so perfectly" (p. 182). And, as the four partners run to observe the battle in the valley below between the bad buys and the soldiers, who have arrived to disperse them like the trumpeting cavalry in many a Western, Curtin, with obvious relief in his voice, says, "Let's take in the second act of the picture" (p. 184). It appears clearly possible that every participant in this portion of the novel, even the bandits and the soldiers themselves, is playing out some kind of ritualized fantasy derived from a source that exerts over him the power of myth—much as *The Iliad* might have done for the Spartans at Thermopylae. It is the charade-like quality of the action here that seems to remove it from a more threatening literal level of reality and, to some degree, gives the combatants the courage to continue, bravely countering the "tricks" of their enemies and devising a few of their own based on what they've seen movie heroes do. In this respect, it should not be forgotten either that Howard and Dobbs have spoken of opening a movie house together (p. 24).

But it ultimately dawns on Dobbs that life is not, in the end, a dream or a series of images on a screen or a clever bag of tricks that he can use to extricate himself from the most impossible of predicaments, as in the "cliff-hanger" serials that

he must have known. In his most helpless moment, just before the three tramps hack him to pieces near the road, Dobbs, perhaps for the first time in his life, is jolted into a vision of himself in the rawest, starkest, most frightening of lights. No longer the safe spectator for whom the full force of "reality" is cushioned by the distance of fiction, or one who can dismiss responsibility for his deeds as easily as he would walk out of a theater after a shoot-em-up double feature, he is now a cornered animal confronting the blazing actuality of existential fact stripped of myth, illusion, or any means by which its terrible menacing presence might be mentally adjusted:

It flashed through his mind that he had seen many a movie in which the hero was trapped in a situation like this. But he realized at the same time that he could not remember one single picture in which the producer had not done his utmost to help the trapped hero out again to save the girl from the clutches of a bunch of villains. Before he could think of any of the tricks he had seen in the pictures by which the hero finally escaped, he felt, with a strange bitterness in his mouth, that this situation here was real. And whatever is real is different. No smart film-producer was on hand to open the trap with a good trick. (p. 277)

Dobbs' death, then, is particularly shocking both because of the casual manner Traven uses to describe it and because of the main characters', and especially Dobbs', inability before this to understand the forbidding dangers associated with their "quest." There are some resemblances here to scenes from films which deal thematically with similar disturbances in a prevailing "mythic" order, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* (the Crusade or Hero myth versus the unglamorous reality of the dead French soldier in the trench) or *Apocalypse Now* (the Game of War versus the naked mystical "truth" of the nightmarish Cambodian temple village and Kurtz's final beheading). This theme is not overlooked in the film version of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, but much less stress is laid on the three partners' failure to grasp the fearsome immediacy of their situation. There are no references to the movies or to any other sort of popular myth, nor does Dobbs' death stun the viewer quite so sharply as in the book; hidden as it is behind the body of one of the burros

and made to seem the just consequence of his delusions and downright sins.

In conclusion, though it may seem contradictory to call the film version of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* both allegorical and character-centered, Huston's avoidance of the wider economic and philosophical issues in the novel enabled him to escape any possible accusations of "preaching" while at the same time shaping Traven's rough-hewn odyssey into a form more recognizable as traditional narrative cinema. That he did not in the process allow the movie to become a mere "thinking man's Western" is much to his credit, and he deserves even more praise for his ingenious manipulation of character, theme, and setting that yielded so unorthodox and excellent a product of the Hollywood studio system in the postwar forties. While the meaning of the movie diverges noticeably from that of the book, the differences lie not in the treatment of the primary theme of the common human susceptibility to greed but rather in how the subthemes are diluted or eliminated and in the way the drama is made to rest more in the relationships between the central characters, who represent distinct facets of the main theme. Although in the novel Dobbs, Howard, Curtin, and Lacaud are all affected—to a degree that is dependent on each's experience and unique psychological constitution—by the peculiar, irresistible lure of gold and are all subjected to the unceasing bombardment of confusion and hardship familiarly known as "the human condition," in the film Dobbs stands out as the story's single most blameworthy character aside from Gold Hat (to whom it is difficult to attach real fault because we are not led to accept him as a human being in the first place). Since this is so, the movie becomes a morality play while the novel remains essentially a biting criticism of the overwhelming social forces which dwarf the significance of the individual in a world of "larger priorities." But, though each version has its weaknesses, and each its strengths, arising out of the particular limitations and freedoms of their respective media, it is, I suspect, as much a tribute to Huston that we now receive in Traven's novel such indelible "cinematic" impressions as it is to Traven that we can view Huston's film with so thorough an appreciation for it as a minor "literary" masterpiece.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>James Naremore, ed., *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1979), p. 31. All further quotations from Naremore are from his introduction to this edition of the published screenplay, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>All numbers which appear alone in parentheses are scene numbers from the Naremore edition of the screenplay.

<sup>3</sup>B. Traven, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (New York: Signet, 1968). All further page citations from the novel are from this edition.

<sup>4</sup>Naremore, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Naremore states mistakenly (p. 25) that this scene does not occur in the novel. Traven's version of it appears on page 97.

<sup>6</sup>Naremore, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Naremore, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>Naremore, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup>Naremore, p. 202, n. 45.





## Blake's "The Garden Of Love": A Critical Analysis

Jody Ollenquist

### The Garden Of Love

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love  
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

Short and apparently straightforward, Blake's "The Garden of Love" may be seen as one of the lighter of his *Songs of Experience*. Compared to the terrors of "The Tyger," for instance, it indeed seems a pretty and pleasant poem. However, a close analysis of the work reveals its depth: beneath the surface of these lighthearted stanzas lies a serious discussion of the effects of orthodox religion upon human sexuality. Through an examination of imagery and diction, meter and rhyme, we may come to read "The Garden of Love" as an indictment of religious establishments that have a repressive and destructive influence on mankind's natural sexual impulses.

To begin, we see in Blake's imagery and lexical choices the beauty of human sexuality and the encroaching quality of religion. The first stanza opens with the verdant natural image of the "Garden" that is love. In evoking this garden image, particularly as a proper name, Blake alludes to the freshness and innocence of Eden, that birthplace of natural passionate pleasures. At once the reader is impressed with this link between nature and human love, both integral parts of creation. The speaker, upon entering the garden, encounters something he "never had seen," an object which, in the man's prior experience with love, had been absent; he knows it is

not an intrinsic element of love's garden. This foreign object is a "Chapel . . . built in the midst." The religious image is also a proper name, as in the title of a particular established "Church." We may clearly read here an indication that this chapel is to represent the institution of "Religion." In this same line, the speaker begins to show us the relationship between the chapel/religion and the garden/sexual love. One important detail is that the chapel is "built," that is, a man-made structure added to the primitive garden; thus religion is an artificial institution imposed on human nature, especially our sexual nature. Another notable point is the precise location of the chapel. It is set "in the midst" of the garden, bisecting the realm of love, dividing human sexuality into halves, separating female from male. Here we are told that structured religion acts as a barrier to natural passions. Not only is this chapel an obstacle, it stands on the very site where the speaker "used to play," or engage in innocent sexual dalliance, on the natural "green" of the garden. In this line, Blake shows a further unfavorable consequence of religion: it displaces sexuality entirely, substituting structure for the garden's lovely greenery. In this way, the diction and imagery of the first stanza cause us to visualize sexual love as an acceptable, wholly natural phenomenon and a rightful part of human existence while we observe the presence of religious organization as artificial and intrusive.

The language of the second division of the poem reinforces and enlarges upon the impressions of the first. The speaker continues his description of the chapel, remarking that its "gates . . . were shut." In using the image of closed doors, Blake creates an impression of the chapel/religion as inaccessible, an establishment which natural man may not enter, rather than an open, welcoming institution. We also associate a "closed chapel" with the dogma and inflexibility that characterize religious orthodoxy. The next line sustains this unpleasant image: "And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door." Instead of the Golden Rule or a similarly beatific biblical quotation, the inscription on the chapel is a reproof, a command to abstain from sexual activity. We see the goal of established religion: to stifle the growth of sexual impulses. Repulsed by this harshness, Blake's speaker denies religion, turning from his inspection of the chapel to the (infinitely preferable) natural pleasures of the garden, hoping to find relief from unnatural religious strictures. He then draws our attention to the population of the garden: the "many sweet flowers" it "bore," clearly men and women produced by the

act of love. Here again is a linking of sex and nature: the garden of love is the source not only of innocent pleasure, but of the necessary perpetuation of life. From human sexual drives springs the natural cycle of creation. However, this truly religious basis for man's passions is sinful, according to the system of rules and doctrines called established religion. Supplementing and elaborating our view of the proscriptive influence of orthodox religion upon the simple delights of love, the figurative language of the second stanza reveals man's natural propensity to reject this prohibitive institution.

The third quatrain contains perhaps the most striking imagery and diction of the work and makes the most vehement charge against established religion. Having turned away from the chapel and looked toward his beloved garden for deliverance, the speaker observes that the addition of the chapel has had a final, dreadful effect on the land of love: "And I saw it was filled with graves / And tombstones where flowers should be." The chapel has brought death to the flourishing garden, destroying the wild vegetation, exterminating happy lovers, crushing the natural urges of humanity. These evocative, macabre images make it evident that religion does not simply restrict earthly passions, it kills them. The inevitable result of the rigidity imposed by a religious institution is the ruin of natural love. The imagery of death persists: we see "Priests in black gowns," as if conducting a funeral. This strengthens the connection between religion and its destruction of love. Here Blake ties a new image to that of death: the priests become jailers, "walking their rounds." It seems that what religion does not kill, it locks away to be guarded by the servants of the chapel. And since all the blossoms of love's garden have been destroyed, religion turns to attack the "joys & desires" of the speaker, tying them up tightly in torturing thorns. In this way, religion, after ruining the fruits of natural love, goes on to force the incarceration of sexual urges. Most definitely, the language of the third stanza effectively creates an impression of the destructive results a religious establishment has on the delicate, growing thing that is human love.

Working with its highly illustrative imagery and diction, the metric structure of "The Garden of Love" reinforces the message that organized religion is pernicious, bent on the destruction of erotic pleasure. The poem is primarily written in trimeter, each line composed of either one iamb and two anapests or three anapestic feet. This gives the piece a lilting, pleasant rhythm, keeping the reader mindful of the innocuousness of the garden, helping us to identify with the

speaker in his affection for the natural place while we simultaneously see religion as increasingly menacing and hateful. A deviation from this light rhythm occurs in the last two lines of the poem, causing us to take note: here the meter becomes tetrameter, half iambic, half anapestic. Because of this sudden shift, we become intensely aware of the macabre closing images of the poem—images that, set apart by a change in meter, leave us with a strong impression of the way religion imprisons our desires, and perhaps even warn us to avoid the institution if we wish to retain these natural urges. Easily the reader may observe the significance of meter (and its variations) in creating the total effect of "The Garden of Love."

In addition to manipulation of meter, the use of rhyme strengthens the development of this attack on religious establishments. The simple rhyme scheme of "abcb" end rhymes connects the second and fourth lines of the first two stanzas. In the first, the words "seen" and "green" are linked, reinforcing the intrusiveness of the comparatively new religious institution in the primitive garden. Similarly, "door" and "bore" are connected in the second quatrain; this link illustrates the harshness of the chapel as contrasted to the sweetness of the garden, just as cruel religion is antithetical to gentle love. Once again the pattern is changed in the final stanza. The "abcb" scheme is replaced with an "abcd" structure that features internal rhymes in the last two lines. Thus, "gowns"/"rounds" and "briars"/"desires" are linked pairs. As before, this deviation acts to emphasize the last striking words of the piece; in addition, "gowns" ties the death image to the prison image of "rounds." Likewise, "briars" joined to "desires" makes more vivid the picture of natural impulses being surrounded by thorns. Blake ends "The Garden of Love" by embedding in the reader's psyche an illustration of the destructive nature of religion. Throughout the poem, rhyme scheme contributes to the construction of this message.

Having scrutinized individual elements of the poem—imagery, diction, meter, rhyme—we see the manner in which the poet establishes sexuality as a natural, beautiful part of the human experience and represents religion as an unnatural, ugly invention, made of inflexible walls of dogma. Expressing sadness for the love destroyed by religious orthodoxy and exhorting us to demolish this unholy "Chapel" before *our* emotions are also stifled, "The Garden of Love" is a song of experience, a portrait of the profound disillusionment brought on by an innocent's experience with religion.



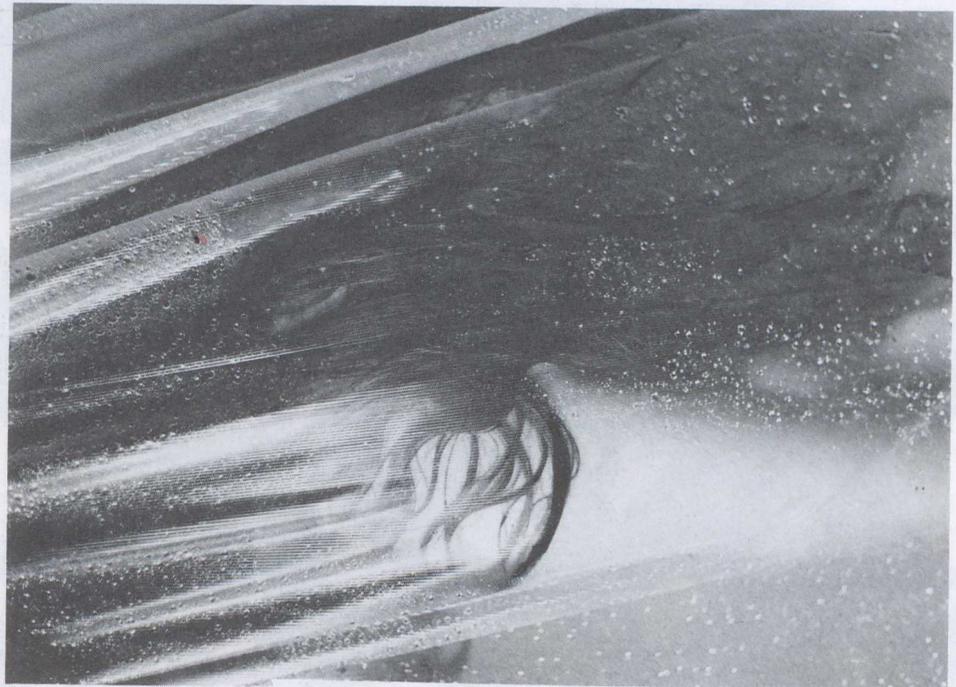
## Routine

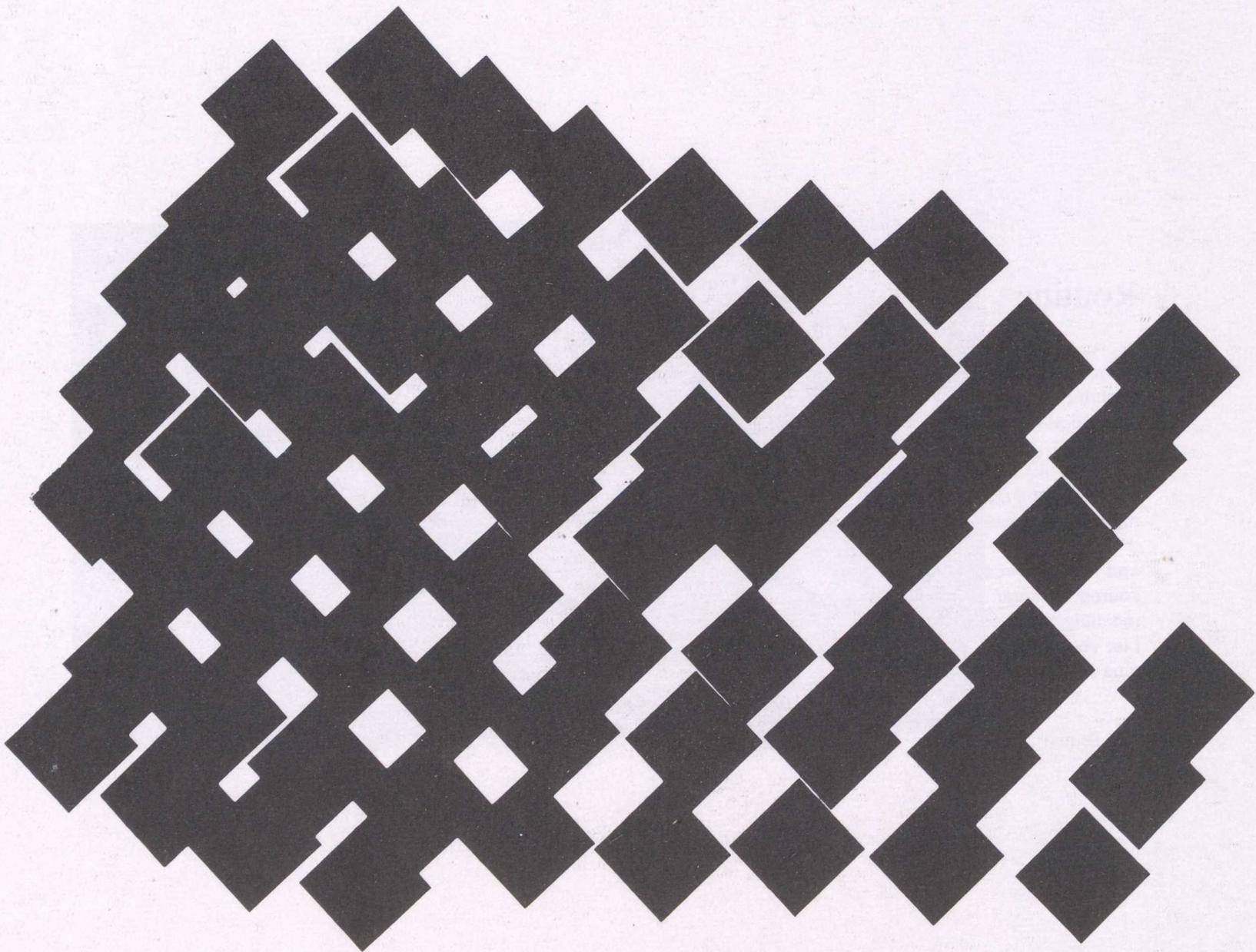
I mouth my pillow  
each morning,  
just the alarm moaning.

Smoking like a loco  
I shiver to the shower,  
harvest more beard,

and later jolt from coffee  
soured by sugar,  
recalling that string of nights  
I let you  
glue the sheets round me.

Tim Brown





## Bugger Square

They fist dough,  
these clods  
who circuit the block  
in cars shiny  
as shopping carts,

the lake whipping wind  
round chesstables and trees,

and me with ice  
in my shorts,

watching some stripling  
in blue vestments  
stride up Dearborn.

A door swings open —  
sweet chariot  
drives him to his knees.

Tim Brown

## Time May Come When Men With Angels May Participate

—*Paradise Lost*, V, 11. 493-4

Tom Dean

The sharp clatter of the spoon falling into the sink shattered the tense silence of the apartment. Anne set the casserole dish down onto the counter, closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths, attempting to compose herself. Sherri stuck her head around the corner of the kitchen doorway, a concerned look on her face.

"You O.K.?"

Anne gritted her teeth and silently nodded her head, picking the dropped spoon out of the sink. She retrieved the casserole and followed her friend to the dining area. As Sherri sat down before her place setting she cast a wry, penetrating glance toward Anne, who was trying desperately to put on an air of composure. She failed.

"You're really worried, aren't you? This has really gotten you upset." Anne looked across the table, grateful that her friend was there when she needed her.

"Yes," she replied. "I know it's silly of me, but I can't help but worry."

"It's not silly at all and you know it." Sherri waved her fork at her for emphasis. "You have every right to be worried."

"Well, it *has* been only two days."

"Listen. When your husband doesn't show up for two days you aren't being silly in worrying."

Anne picked at her casserole, leaning her elbow on the table. "I'm glad you came over for lunch, Sherri. I can always count on you."

"Listen, Anne. I didn't come over here for you to praise my philanthropic tendencies. Let's have it."

Anne sighed, not knowing where to begin. "Well, as I said, I'm worried. Michael's never done this before." She saw Sherri silently chewing her lunch, an impatient look in her

eye. "All right. Enough hedging. I'll get to the point. Has Rob ever made you feel, well, inadequate?" Sherri continued her silent chewing vigil. Anne shifted her weight in her chair and cleared her throat. "Well, uh, you see . . . well, that's how I feel sometimes with Michael."

Sherri could stand no more. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"O.K., O.K." Anne put down her fork and closed her eyes. "I'll start from the beginning. Michael went over to Dean Willoughby's house on Saturday night. He was going over to pick up some material the Dean had for his latest research project. When he didn't come home I became worried. I finally called the Dean's house at 11:00 and Michael had left there an hour and a half earlier. Sherri, his house is only twenty minutes from our apartment! I didn't get a wink of sleep all Saturday night, and when he didn't show up on Sunday I became frantic. Oh, Sherri. . . ." The tears were inevitable.

Sherri reached across the table and patted her hand reassuringly. "Have you called the police yet?"

"No," was the feeble reply.

"Why not? It's Monday already. He's been gone long enough to be considered a missing person."

Anne looked up at her, her eyes red. "You don't understand. He's not missing. I'm sure that, that. . . ." She had difficulty getting the words out. With a tremendous effort she said, "I'm sure he's left me."

Sherri drew back, puzzled. "Why on earth would you think that?"

Anne got up from her chair and wandered over to the window, carelessly parting the sheer curtain and watching the schoolchildren returning to school from lunch. Sherri still sat at the table, watching her friend expectantly. "You see, Sherri," she continued at last, still gazing out the window, "I've been expecting something like this to happen. I figured that sooner or later it would catch up with us."

"What would, Anne? You're speaking in riddles."

"Oh, I'm sorry. It's just so difficult to admit and explain this."

"Come on," said Sherri gently. "You know you can trust me."

Anne looked at her, smiled, and returned to her seat at the table. "You're right. Of course you're right." She took a deep breath and continued. "I've always felt inadequate around Michael. I'm not exactly the intellectual type, you know. He

comes home from the university and tells me of the latest genius in his Elizabethan Lit class, or of the wonderful progress he's making on his latest research project. All I have to tell him is about the jerk who made a pass at me at the cafe while I was serving him his cheeseburger." She paused, cleared her throat, collected her thoughts. "It's torture for me at those faculty parties. All the high-brow talk. I'm so out of place. I'll never fit in."

"Anne," interrupted Sherri. "This all sounds very puzzling to me. I don't see how your intellectual capacities would have anything to do with your marriage. Michael loves you. I know that. I don't see how you could think he'd leave you."

"Well, I know he loves me. But maybe that's not enough. It was so different two years ago when we met. He was a student. A doctoral student, granted, but a student nonetheless. Now that he's teaching at a university the whole situation seems to have shifted. He's taken such a giant step and I haven't even moved since we were married."

"I still don't think that would affect a good marriage."

"Well, there's more, you see." Anne seemed unsure of how to continue, but then plunged right into the heart of the matter. "Lately, he's been working on some research project. It has something to do with Plato and Milton and angels and I don't know what. Well, somehow or another, this project has given him some crazy notions about self-improvement, and he's been on this health food kick, an exercise kick, too. He's reading more and more, he's into meditation, religion. . . ."

"Those sound like pretty good things to me."

"Well, yes, but it seems to have preoccupied him. Lately he's become more distant, more withdrawn. He seems completely wrapped up in this new life of his. I feel as if I'm slowly losing contact with him, as if he's closing me out of his new, improved life."

"Haven't you tried to talk to him, maybe help him out with whatever he's trying to accomplish? Maybe *join* him?"

"Well, yes, but I could never go to the lengths he has. I'm not that interested in bean sprouts and jogging. And even if I tried to keep up with him, I couldn't. I could never begin to understand those books he's reading. Oh, Sherri, he's just gone beyond my reach. And now I think I've lost him. I think he's realized I'll never be what he is." The argument now brought full circle also brought the realization of Michael's disappearance back to her, and Anne's eyes swelled with emotion once again.

Sherri still wasn't satisfied. "You said something about a research project. What does that have to do with any of this?"

Anne wiped her eyes with her napkin, not letting the tears get the better of her. "Oh, I don't know. All this started when he began this project. I just assumed it had something to do with it. I've taken the whole day off from the cafe, and I'm going to see Dean Willoughby this afternoon and see if he can help me make any sense of this. He's been Michael's closest friend since he took on his teaching post, and if anyone can shed light on this, he can."

"You sure you don't want to call the police?"

"No." Her answer was quick. "If Michael's decided to leave me, I don't want him to think he has any obligation to me. I couldn't live with that. I just want to let him go free, without me holding him back."

Sherri stood up. "Well, I should be going. I should let you get to your appointment with the Dean." As she was putting on her coat, she said, "Keep strong. You'll pull through. Trust me. You're wrong. He'll be back."

As Sherri stood in the doorway, Anne put her hand on her shoulder and smiled weakly. "You're a good friend. Thanks for coming over."

Sherri smiled and winked. With her hand on the doorknob she added, "Oh, and Anne—about your wanting to let him go free, you know that I know you don't mean it." She closed the door.

Anne put her hand on the closed door and gazed down at the floor. Sherri was right.

"Come in, come in, Anne," greeted Dean Willoughby, stepping out of the way to let Anne step through the doorway. "Please, sit down." He waved his large hand to a chair in front of his desk.

Anne looked around the small office and felt uncomfortable in its aura of academia. The only word that entered her perused the stacks of books and papers was clutter. She felt no sense of order to the random disarray of the room but did feel a sense of impending doom, fearful that the tenuously stacked piles would come crashing down on her head at any moment.

Dean Willoughby plugged a cigar into his mouth and shuffled through several stacks of papers on his desk in search of a match. After finding one and lighting his cigar, he smiled at Anne with his best F.D.R. grin, the cigar clenched in his teeth.

"So." He leaned his portly frame back in the chair, the springs squeaking. Anne could see that his twenty-five years at the university had made him comfortable and contented. "It's nice to see you, Anne. I don't get the opportunity to see you during school hours here. What brings you?"

As Anne cleared her throat, deciding where to begin, the Dean rummaged through his drawers looking for an ashtray. "Ah. I knew there was one in here somewhere. Filed under 'B' for 'bad habit.'" He let loose an explosive belly laugh. Anne did not respond to his humor, silently watching the last wisp of smoke escape from his mouth and the laugh subside. He leaned forward in his chair, a sober expression crossing his face. Anne could see that he had suddenly realized her visit was not just a pleasant social call.

"You look worried, Anne. Something wrong?"

She sighed, grateful for his finally coming around to seriousness. "Yes, I'm afraid so. It's Michael."

"Michael? What's wrong with Michael?"

"Well, I'm not sure. He hasn't come home in two days."

The Dean set his cigar down in the ashtray, his look of concern replaced by one of consternation. "Has he contacted you? Do you have any idea where he may have gone?"

"No. I thought maybe you could help. He trusts you so much, and he's been working with you on his latest research project. I thought maybe perhaps his disappearance might have something to do with the project. As far as I know, you were the last person to see him on Saturday night."

The Dean jutted out his lower lip and slowly shook his head. He pushed himself out of his chair and walked over to the window overlooking the campus walking mall below. At length he replied, "Michael's been like a son to me ever since he took his position here. That boy has a great future ahead of him." Anne puzzled over this last statement, trying to fit it in with the context of the problem. She had the sinking feeling that Dean Willoughby was about to engage in one of his impromptu pontifications again, a fear everyone eventually had, especially at faculty parties. His verbosity was the Dean's weakest point and Anne attributed it to his lifetime of bachelorhood. Living alone as he did, he probably never got a chance to expound the wonders of his intellect privately, so his guests were most often subjected to his lengthy discourses.

Anne was in no frame of mind to surrender to his soliloquy now and impatiently interrupted the Dean's tribute to her hus-

band. "Dean Willoughby, I know you think highly of Michael, but what I came here for was to see if you could shed any light on any connection between Michael and his research project."

The Dean looked at her with obvious disappointment that his oratorical balloon had been burst. He shook his head solemnly, tripping over the complete works of Wordsworth piled on the floor as he made his way back to his desk. "Yes, yes. Of course you're right, Anne. I'm sure you must be terribly worried."

Anne nodded her head in assent, grateful for the progress in their conversation. The Dean fiddled with his matchbook and attempted to relight his cigar, a searching look on his face, as if he were choosing the correct passel of words to attack the problem.

"Well," he said at length, "I really don't see what his research would have to do with his disappearance."

"Neither do I. That's why I came to you."

"What made you think there may be a connection?"

"Well, it's the way he's been acting since he began this project." Anne proceeded to outline the changes in her husband's lifestyle and the growing sense of alienation she had felt as a result. As she concluded, she added, "I just have the feeling that he doesn't need me anymore. He's reached a point where I no longer fit into his life."

The Dean was shaking his head. "Well, his research could certainly have influenced his change of habit." Anne leaned forward in anticipation, despite the obnoxious cloud of cigar smoke hovering over the cluttered desk. "He was working on Milton's use of Plato's chain of being in *Paradise Lost*." Anne felt the inexorable knot that grew in her stomach every time these intellectuals began talking about something beyond her comprehension. The Dean whirled his chair to face the window. "You see, Anne," he waved his cigar in the air, "Plato said there are different levels of being from the lowest animal to the ultimate being, God. Milton picked up on the idea. When Raphael comes down to Earth in *Paradise Lost* he explains to Adam that if he lives right (that is, eats right, takes care of himself, worships his God and more or less behaves himself), someday he could become just as he was, that is, an angel. His actual state of being could undergo a metamorphosis and he could move from one plane of existence to another."

He whirled back towards Anne and placed his cigar in the

ashtray and stared at the typewriter at his desk. Anne didn't know what to say, feeling out of her element in this mini-lecture on angels and philosophy. At length, suddenly snapping out of his reverie, the Dean shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe Michael's taken it to heart. Maybe this research project has made him realize taking care of yourself isn't such a bad idea. God knows I could follow his initiative." He nodded toward the smoldering cigar.

Anne shifted her weight in the chair, a sense of unease coming over her. She wasn't quite satisfied with the Dean's easy explanation.

"I don't know. He *has* done all these things that do point to his trying to improve himself. But I still get the feeling that it has something to do with me, that he's not satisfied with me anymore." She cast her eyes down to the purse resting in her lap. "You know that . . ." The trouble getting those words out arose again. She regained her courage, though, when she remembered she was able to talk to Sherri about it. "You know that I can never be as smart as Michael is. Or any of you people he associates with for that matter. I, I . . . I think he's finally realized that, and he's decided to leave me."

She could see that the Dean was uncomfortable now. She realized he wasn't the sort of person to handle such problems and could see his obvious uneasiness with the subject. She decided to bail him out. "I'm sorry to have bothered you with this, Dean. Please forgive me. Perhaps I'm being silly about this whole thing." She could see the relief washing across his ruddy features.

"Er, yes, yes . . . perhaps there's nothing to this. Perhaps you *are* making a mountain out of a molehill." She could tell he hoped this easy explanation would settle the matter. "I'm sure Michael is fine and he'll be back soon. He probably just went away for a couple of days to gather his thoughts on the project."

"Yes." She smiled. "The project." Anne realized she had brought the discussion to an awkward, truncated finish and wished to bring the scene to an immediate end. She smiled weakly at the Dean.

He abruptly stood up. "Er, well, it was nice to see you again." He offered her his hand. "I'm sorry I couldn't be of more help."

Anne reached across the desk and took his hand, sensing his eager anticipation to conclude this interview. "That's quite all right. You have been of great help, Dean Willoughby."

As she headed for the door, he called back to her. "Oh, Anne. Michael is supposed to teach a 2:00 class this afternoon. Do you know if he'll make it back by then?" Anne shook her head, the question jarring her fragile composure. "Oh." He smiled, attempting to cover his faux pas. "My secretary will see you out." As Anne closed the door, she saw the Dean plop back down into his chair and seek refuge in a volume of Keats.

As she stepped outside, Anne realized that her hands were shaking. The afternoon had been wholly unsatisfying and she was no closer to any answers than when she had first come. And she now realized that talking to Dean Willoughby had been a mistake. He was just not the person who could deal with personal matters and his parting question had merely put the finishing touch on his unintentional insensitivity to her plight. She had always found many of these academics slightly askew in their social interactions and was grateful for Michael's ability to harmonize with others.

A comforting thought crossed Anne's mind as she gazed across the tree-lined mall of the university, watching the students scatter to and fro in their quest for intellectual enlightenment. Yes, Michael always had been unlike the others in his professional life. Perhaps that's why he had married her, because she *was* so normal, so average. Perhaps he *wanted* someone who had not been infected with the academic malaise college occasionally brings about. Perhaps he *was* just on a self-improvement drive. Perhaps she *was* making a mountain out of a molehill, putting too much blame on herself. Perhaps her visit to Dean Willoughby had been worthwhile after all.

She drove away from the campus with at least a partial sense of comfort.

Anne's feelings of resolution of the problem quickly disappeared on the way home. As she walked down the hallway of their apartment building, she reflected on the small glitch in logic that had allowed her to temporarily rationalize the situation. Even if Michael had in fact gone on a simple self-improvement drive, even if she had been seeing ghosts in the closet when it came to her feelings of alienation, Michael's unusual disappearance was still unaccounted for. As she approached her door, she reflected on the words Sherri had left her with there earlier in the day. She said he'd be back. She said she knew Anne wanted him back. Sherri had been cor-

rect in her second statement. Anne hoped she was right in her first.

As Anne put the key in the lock, she stopped in mid-turn. She cocked her head slightly, a strange impression that something was not quite right wafting over her. She became worried, becoming conscious of the peculiar feeling people often get when they somehow know a stranger has violated the sanctity of their home. She thought of going next door to Mrs. Nesbitt's and calling the police, but irrationally decided against it and plunged on into her apartment.

She gave a start, her heart leaping into her throat, when she saw the figure standing before the window in her living room. As the man turned around, her sense of relief was quickly replaced by jubilation when she recognized Michael.

"Oh, Michael!" she cried, dropping her purse in the middle of the floor, running toward him with open arms. "Oh, God, Michael!"

Halfway across the room, she stopped short, as if an invisible barrier had suddenly arisen in front of her. She dropped her arms and looked questioningly at the figure of her husband standing there. His stoic expression had not changed when she entered the room, and his hands remained behind his back, unresponsive to the invitation of her open arms.

"Michael?" Her voice was muted. "Michael, what's wrong? Where have you been all this time?" She wanted to pour forth an endless stream of questions, but it was stopped by the strange, aloof, almost cold aura surrounding him.

At length, he spoke. "Why don't you take off your coat, Anne? And please sit down. There are some things I have to tell you."

Childlike, primeval horror welled up inside of her as her worst fears were realized. She obeyed him silently, took off her coat, dumped it on a dining room chair. As she sat down on the edge of the couch, she observed the back of her husband's figure, silently standing at the bookshelf, observing the volumes acting out their quiet sentry. Her mind raced as she attempted to fathom what Michael was about to say to her. But rather than getting the ugly scene over with, he just stood there, silent, cold. She could not understand the change that had come over her husband, his distance, his remoteness. At length she gained courage. "Michael? Would you please tell me what the matter is? I've been going through hell the past two days wondering where you've been. Would

you please explain yourself?"

Michael turned around and looked into his wife's expectant face. Anne was somewhat startled as she received the piercing gaze, taken aback by the strange intensity, the strange ethereal glow in his eyes she had never noticed before. He walked over to the couch and sat down, though at some distance from her. Anne thought to move closer to him but was unconsciously held back by the same feeling of unapproachableness she had experienced when she first encountered him in the living room.

"Anne," he began, his voice gentle, soothing. "There's something you must understand."

She tried valiantly to hold back the tears. "I know, Michael. You don't have to explain. I've always known I could never be like you. I understand why you feel you have to leave me."

His eyes bored into hers, attempting to reach some part of her consciousness that would allow her to understand what he had to say. "No, you don't understand, Anne. That's why I've come back. To try to help you understand." Anne could not shake the strange feelings she was receiving from her husband, as if the person sitting across from her on the couch were someone she had never met before. She waited for his explanation. "Anne." He paused. "Men have always striven for a higher ideal. Literature is rife with characters who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of this ideal." The obligatory knot grew in her stomach. "Faust sold his soul to the devil for his ideal. Manfred found his ideal only in death. Shelley's characters never could reach their ideal. Neither could Childe Roland when he came to the Dark Tower."

"Michael. You know I have no idea what you're talking about."

Michael stood up and glided over to the window and looked out. "It's something different for everyone. The ideal, that is. And yet it's the same for everyone. And yet it's unexplainable." He paused. "It's just the notion that there's something beyond this life we lead that's infinitely better. Something we're missing out on here on Earth. Most people are content to let that ideal existence, that ideal state of being come to them naturally, usually through death. But then there are some who have the incredible desire, the *need* to attain that ideal right now. Right here and now."

Anne's mind was a muddle. "Michael, all I ever wanted to do was love you and be happy with you. That's all I ask for, and that's all I expect. What you're talking about is going

right over my head and I don't understand this at all." She still held back the tears. "Not at all."

Michael looked back at her, a compassionate smile crossing his face. "Anne, Anne. My God, you don't know how lucky you are. You don't know what I would give for the contentment you know. I think that's why I married you. Because I saw in you what I never could be. You're so satisfied with your lot in life." He shook his head. "But it's just not that way for me. Byron's Manfred said that knowledge was not the way to happiness. The more we learn, the less happy we become, the more we realize what we're missing. And he's right. Anne, I've reached the point where I have to have something better."

Anne's mounting grief gave way to despair. "Something better? Oh, Michael, I've really lost you, haven't I? You don't know what it will do to me to lose your love."

He quickly sat down on the couch again, though Anne retained her position, not moving closer to him. "Oh, Anne. You'll never lose my love. I've always loved you and I always will. Just the way you are and always have been. You've got to understand that. You're the most important thing in my life. It's just that . . ."

"What, Michael? Lord, I have absolutely no idea what you're getting at. *What, Michael?*"

Michael laughed, the short, resigned laugh expelled when the irony of a situation completely overwhelms someone. "Gary Cooper said, 'A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.' You don't know how much this hurts me, Anne, but it's what I have to do. I've striven for the ideal existence and I've finally found a way to achieve it. You don't know how much it pains me to realize the hurt I'm putting you through, but I've actually found a way to achieve it!"

Anne's stare served as his invitation to continue his explanation. "Well, you see, Anne, you know I've been working on this research project."

It was little satisfaction to have her deduction confirmed. "Dean Willoughby told me all about it."

Michael nodded his head. "Then you know the basic premise behind the subject. Well, I decided to take Milton seriously, literally. I decided to transcend my humanness, my worldliness, improve myself to the point that Raphael promised Adam he could improve to." The explanation of his recent behavior provided little comfort to Anne. "My God, Anne, Milton was right. It worked. You *can* overcome your humanness. It *can* be done. Don't you see, Anne? Milton was right!"

Anne was dumbfounded. "I can't believe what you're saying to me. Are you actually sitting here, trying to tell me you've turned into something . . . something better than human?"

Michael stood up, the strange aura she sensed about him growing in intensity. "Anne. As I said, you don't know how much it pains me to hurt you. But this is something I had to do. You've got to understand. You've got to." She knew she never would. "I get comfort in the knowledge we *will* be together again. That's the only thing that's allowed me to do what I did. And our life will be even better. You've got to trust me. It will be. You have no idea how great, how glorious, how *peaceful* life will be. Trust me."

He smiled at her, and Anne's heart filled with a warmth she hadn't felt in ages as the loving expression of the husband she used to know graced his features for the first time since the whole incident with the project had begun. But it was short-lived. As she sat on the edge of the couch, dumbfounded, Anne mutely watched the figure of her husband standing before her slowly, almost imperceptibly, grow in luminescence. As she felt the unexplainable aura which she had noticed when she first saw him today grow ever stronger, the muted glow surrounding him became unearthly, then marvelous in its lustre, eventually crescendoing into a silver blaze that caused her to shade her eyes. Through squinted eyelids, she witnessed his usual corduroy pants and jacket that framed his form slowly meld into the glow, eventually disappear into the now-white mist that had been his body. The intensity grew to an almost unbearable level, and at the moment before the white blaze finally forced her eyes closed, she perceived a pair of huge, white downy wings emerge from the misty vapor that had been her husband.

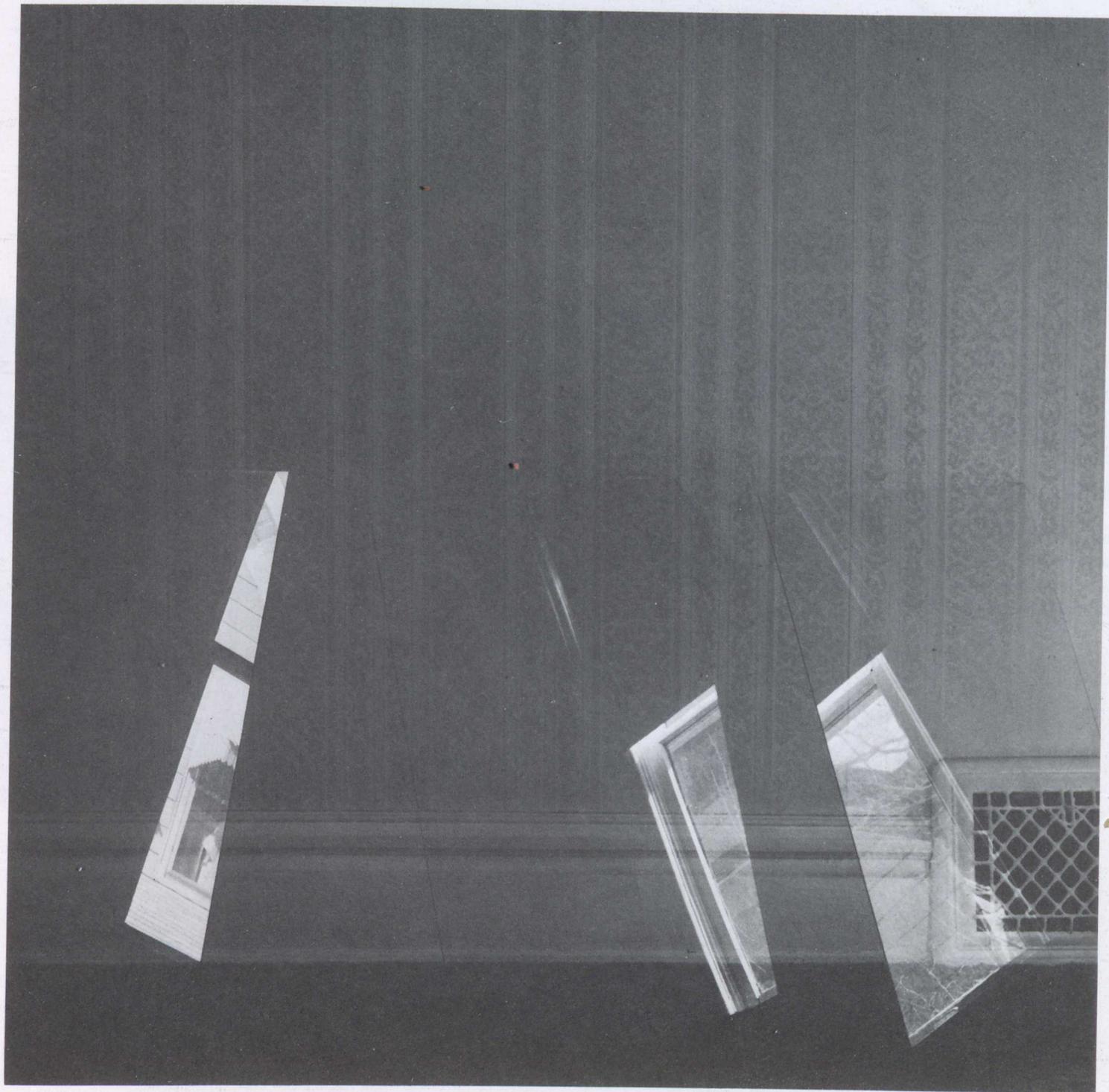
The experience had knocked her prone onto the couch. All was deathly still in the apartment, unearthly still. Anne took her hands away from her eyes and looked at the ceiling from her position on the couch. She slowly turned her head and gazed at the bookshelf where her husband had been standing. Sitting up on the couch, she shook her head, the ticking of the grandfather clock the only thing disturbing the silence, the emptiness. She slowly made her way to the window, looked out at the schoolchildren making their way home from school. The tears broke through the barrier. She would never understand.



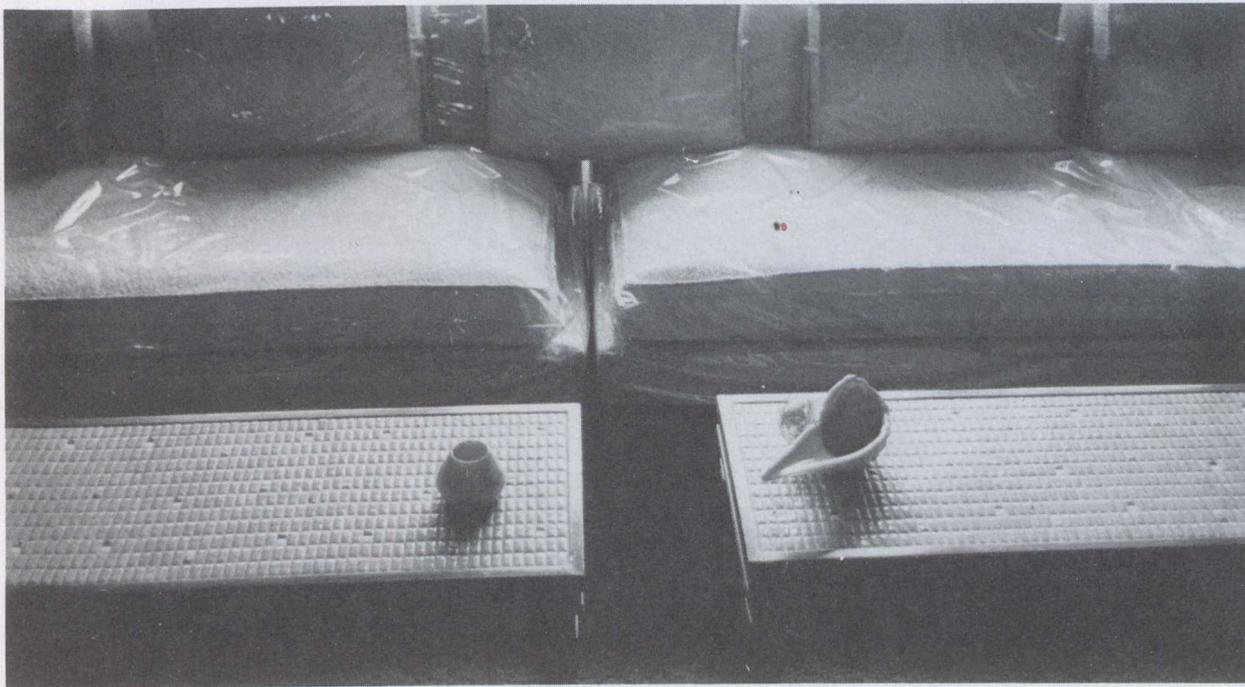
## Don't Laugh (or Put Down the Movie Listings) Until You Have the Gun Loaded.

Unable to stand the darkness,  
I open my eyes  
and lids spin around,  
the shade that can't catch.  
A train could be in my future,  
it runs in the family,  
smoke streams are grayer  
than I can remember.  
Grandfather and the  
Living room trick:  
he would scale the  
orange studio couch  
and run the marked  
wall until he  
stood on the ceiling  
telling us he did it with mirrors.

Jean Swiderski







## The Straight Man

Grandpa is the straight man,  
I thought.  
Then with a pipe after dinner,  
Tilted back on the recliner  
He blew incurling smoke-rings,  
And exhorted them to  
"Dance my children."

Tom Purdy

## New Day Tommorrow, Tom Waits

The toasters toast, tip glass and boast  
here's cheers to salute many years to your  
health

half-lifted lights out, candle wax melt down  
phone man phoning out  
last night doesn't count  
early morning on the boat  
ship's ahoy, chips afloat  
here's to the cow, and Billy the goat  
say, tin man, lid man, trash can, lid jam  
here's to jelly rolls of cake  
here's to Quaker's oats, and Waits  
be friends before  
now behold a friend and more

Chris Stanley



Monk died today  
but his music  
his moods  
in flatted seconds  
chuckle thru the night  
making more from less  
like the wood carvers of africa  
that turn trees into living totems  
breathing and flying away  
with our spirits  
with shades of coltrane, diz  
bird and roach  
moving and singing  
under a beret  
playing straight, no chaser  
ruby moods  
laughing with each epistrophe  
it's almost round midnight  
but not quite  
thelonious  
hey, I mean you make us  
feel alive.

G. Christie



## Beginnings

Last days of bloodstone  
winter give way to this land.  
Its river marrows a thousand  
white suns and carries them.  
The yellow bruise of its  
willows root the bones  
of my grandfathers. The cords  
which bind them sleepless, undie.  
Music the wind  
charms us with beginnings.  
Winter woman—I crawl out  
this bonehouse and dance.

Catherine Allen

