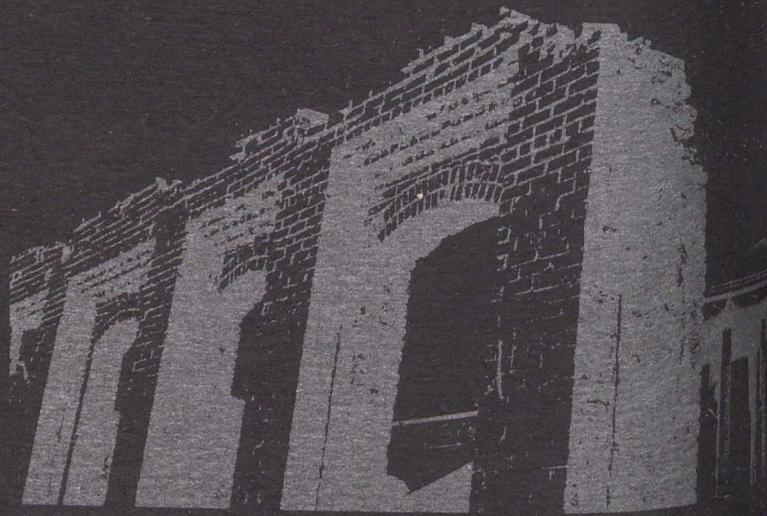


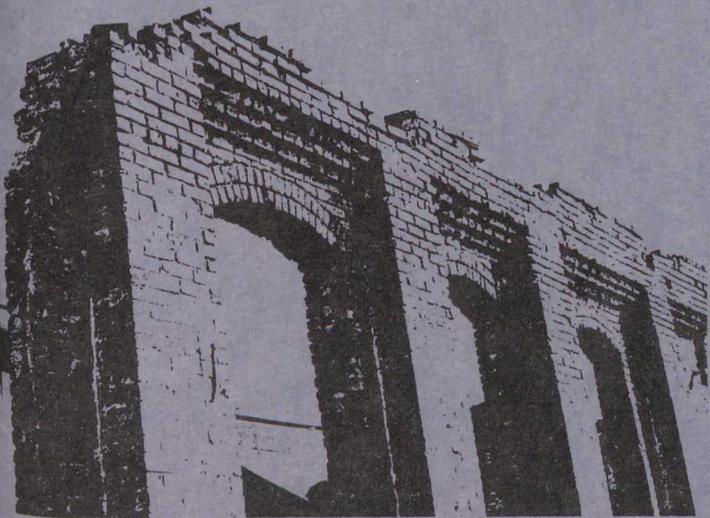
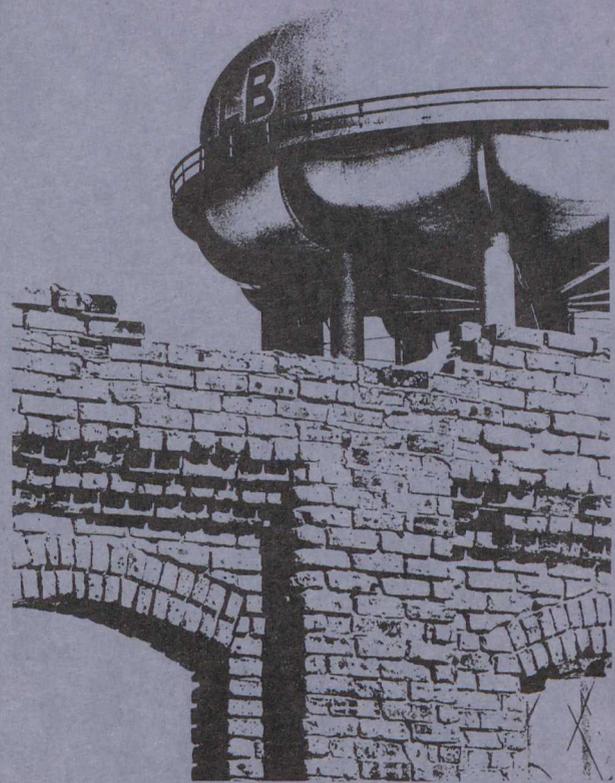


DEKALB, ILLINOIS, 60115

TOWERS

DEKALB ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY
NORTHERN ILLINOIS
FALL 1975
VOLUME XXXIX
TOWERS





**TOWERS
VOLUME XXXIX
FALL 1972
NORTHERN ILLINOIS
UNIVERSITY
DEKALB ILLINOIS**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Towers is published twice yearly by the Xi Delta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, National English Honorary. Its purpose is to stimulate creative and critical writing and to promote an appreciation for literature and art within the university community.

The prose and poetry in each Towers reflect the choice of staff members who carefully read, discuss and select the best of the material submitted. Authorial anonymity is observed in selecting material. Prize winners are chosen by five faculty judges from the manuscripts and artwork selected by the staff. Awards reflect the choice of the judges only and are chosen anonymously.

This issue of Towers witnesses the beginning of a new tradition. Beginning with this issue, the Towers poetry award will be called the Lucien Stryk Poetry Award. The staff agreed unanimously to rename the award in tribute to Mr. Stryk, teacher and poet-in-residence at NIU.

Awards

LUCIEN STRYK AWARD FOR POETRY
Judge, Russell Durning, Associate Professor
of English, NIU
Coordinator, Deirdre Offen

Undergraduate: William Hoagland, After a
Gardener's Death, page 6
Graduate: nothing deemed worthy

J. HAL CONNOR AWARD FOR CREATIVE PROSE
Judge, Rosalie Hewitt, Assistant Professor
of English, NIU
Coordinators, Colette Lythgoe, Ray Heilmann

Undergraduate: John Manderino, Abraham,
page 10
Graduate: Kevin J. Brosch, The First Street
Five-And-Ten, page 21

E. RUTH TAYLOR AWARD FOR CRITICAL WRITING
Judge, L. Terry Oggel, Assistant Professor
of English, NIU
Coordinators, Tricia Vidinich, Joanne Starzec

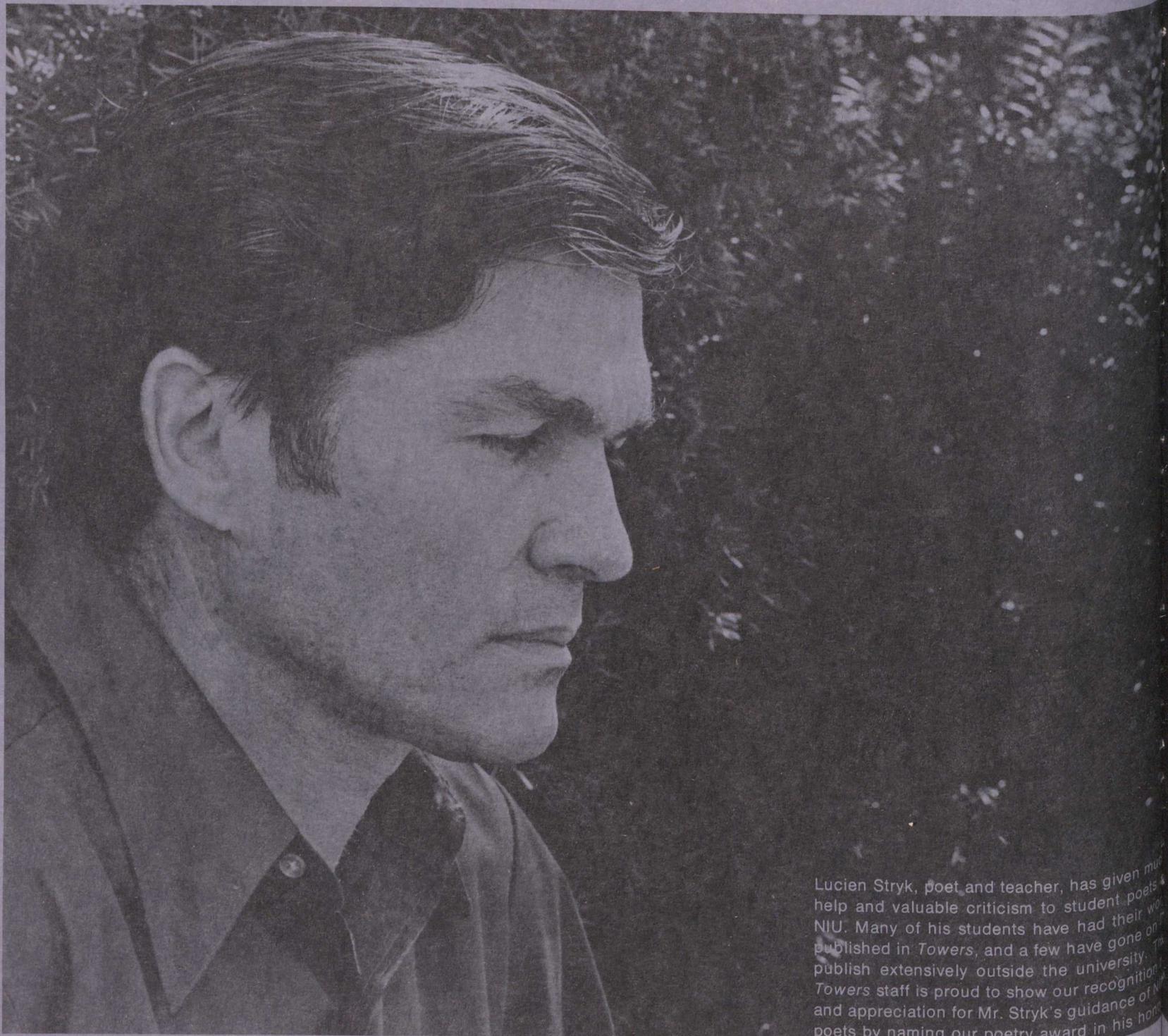
Undergraduate: nothing deemed worthy
Graduate: Lynn Yaeger Guss, Camus' Promethean
Christ: Hero of the Absurd, page 29

MAUDE UHLAND AWARD FOR FRESHMAN WRITING
Judge, Anne Greene, Professor Emeritus
of English, NIU
Coordinators, Karen Kirkhus, John Cebula

Cathy Arden, Ashes, page 45

TOWERS AWARD FOR ART
Judge, Ed Syrek, Associate Professor of Art,
NIU

Undergraduate: Julie McCorkle, print,
page 20
Graduate: Christopher Williams,
drawing, page 28



Lucien Stryk, poet and teacher, has given much help and valuable criticism to student poets at NIU. Many of his students have had their work published in *Towers*, and a few have gone on to publish extensively outside the university. The *Towers* staff is proud to show our recognition and appreciation for Mr. Stryk's guidance of NIU poets by naming our poetry award in his honor.

LUCIEN STRYK

Letter to Jean-Paul Baudot, at Christmas

Friend, on this sunny day, snow sparkling
everywhere, I think of you once more,
how many years ago, a child Resistance

fighter trapped by Nazis in a cave
with fifteen others, left to die, you became
a cannibal. Saved by Americans.

the taste of a dead comrade's flesh foul
in your mouth, you fell onto the snow
of the Haute Savoie and gorged to purge yourself,

somehow to start again. Each winter since
you were reminded, vomiting for days.
Each winter since you told me at the Mabilion,

I see you on the first snow of the year
spreadeagled, face buried in that stench.
I write once more, Jean-Paul, though you don't

answer, because I must: today men do far worse.
Yours in hope of peace, for all of us,
before the coming of another snow.

"Letter to Jean-Paul Baudot, at Christmas" is included
in Lucien Stryk's new book of poems, *Awakening*,
Swallow Press, Chicago, 1973.
Mr. Stryk's portrait is by Barry Stark of Northern
Illinois University.

WILLIAM HOAGLAND

After A Gardener's Death

Undergraduate Award

I. The Gardener

He scrubbed the acre clean
On hands and knees.
Tomcats knew to tack
From his scowl, rabbits
Squealed beneath his heel.
The sand grew plants
Like manna and
He asked for more.

Now, in waist-high weeds,
Tomcats sleep through garden
Noons on rabbit fur.

II. The Widow

In all her eighty years she can't
Remember such an early spring.
The house is aired in February.

"Heavens," she says, "how crooked
The old elms look this year." Arthritis
Has settled snow-like on the block.

Accepting rusty hoes from corners
Of her basement, neighbors rumor
That the garden has been sold.

III. The Son

He wastes kitchen nights
Behind brown glass,
Liquor flowing through him
Like lost rivers of childhood
Eroding favorite banks,
Filling holes where
Catfish once grew fat.

IV. The Grandson

Thunderstorms warp boards
On the newlywed home.

Bored, his wife hungers
For exotics.

He gives her pine cones,
Early clover.



L.D. Lund

On The Ramblas

In Barcelona,
Tall glasses of rum send
Salty smiles to girls who
Troll the room with baited pouts.
Why do they all seem to know me?
They cock their heads like tired fishermen
But add a practiced upward twitch
Replacing fatigue with direction.

A fragile blonde
Who clearly loved me most,
Whispered rather boldly
Of a rapid holiday.

Swagger turned to shuffle;
I spoke my lines
Admitting my premier.

Her eyes in Cannes,
She looked much older.

PATRICK J. PENTECOST

On The Way To Paris, Tennessee

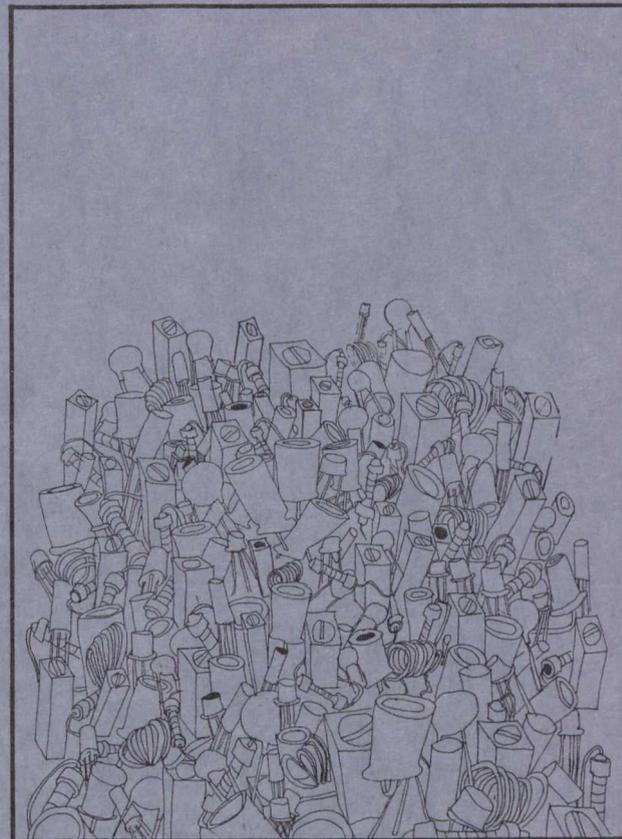
a few miles before Bell City
on highway 97
a sway-back shack exists to the
right of the road.
two old brothers with brown faces
and white foreheads—
a pair of half-burned buttermilk biscuits—
sit on a concave wooden porch on
straight chairs that tilt back nicely.

they always wave.
forty-five degrees, reaching waves—
corn cob fingers fanned around
kale greens and fatback lifelines—
coming at me
with out-of-state plates
looking for big-boobed country girls to ravish.

PENTECOST

To A Dry Martini

You little red-eyed sneak,
Basking in your glorious marinade,
Peeking around transparent corners,
Watching my chameleon transposition.
You've often heard of grand days past
And hopeless present melancholy.
'Tis well your simple composition
Prevents diluting tears from
Flooding Sahara perfection. You, Cyclops Mermaid,
Begging me to dive to dry-cleaned depths,
You hint of blissful future while I smile,
Late fall will come with water levels low,
And red-eyed, green-skinned fishes calmly wait,
For red-eyed, green-skinned gods to chew their fate.

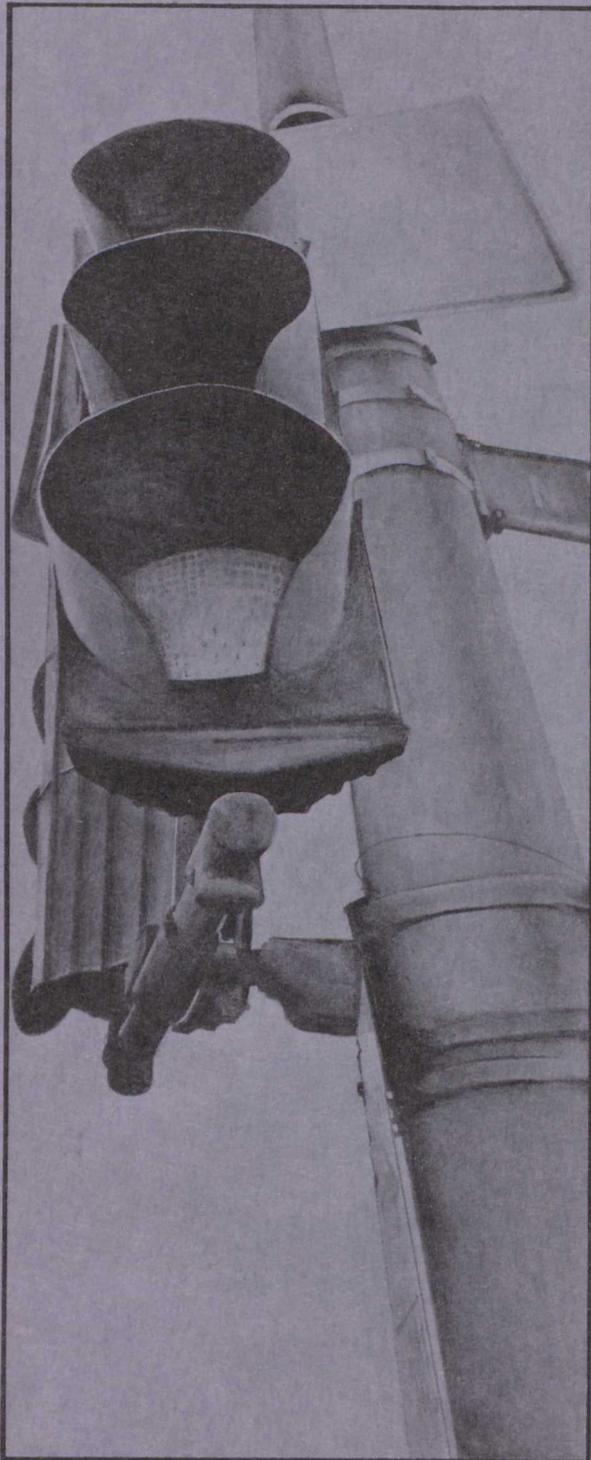


James Hollich

Swing Shift

Tempered forearms melt into the bar—
A man-made horizon
Oiled by years of shots and beers,
Machined by small change, wipes, and gripes.

Their dirty faces are sooted twilight suns
That come back tomorrow.



Abraham

Undergraduate Award

Billions of miles from the train window where Abraham sat, the sun went down. He watched between flecks of bird droppings as a lingering spread of crimson slowly drained away. Early French Romantic, he thought, Boucher or Corot. He began tracing the argument for the notion that truth is beauty.

He would often ride the train, usually twice downtown and back. He rode it when a pretty girl smiled at him one day when he had firmly decided that the nature of human love is essentially ego-oriented. He rode it the day he had read *Siddhartha* and went to the Calumet River and left with a headache. He rode it the day a fine line of drool trailed the pit of a prune in a spoon from his grandmother's lips.

He found in the train ride's straightaway rumbling gallop past houses people streets and trees, too swift to be touched, a smoothing hum of the nerves, a sweet poised suspension, a clean detachment favorable to thought. The people were comforting too, especially the regular commuters, mostly (for he usually rode it after his last class at five o'clock) businessmen in cool metal-colored suits, mechanically turning through newspapers. The train was a kind of limbo where people settled back to themselves. He often wondered if there was not perhaps an ultimate truth in the coldness of the commuters: perhaps this was the reality behind the guise of warmth in human relationships. Other times he would scorn their lifelessness with E. E. Cummings or D.H. Lawrence in mind. Either way, he found them comforting.

JOHN MANDERINO

Now, as he sat with his head leaning against the steel windowframe worrying over what negative implications Brady's "The Cultural Relativity of Ethics" held for any form of aesthetic absolutism, someone stopped at his seat. "Mind if I sit here?" she asked with a strained smile. He sat up straight and answered, "No . . . no I mean yes, sure, here," shifting closer to the window. She looked older than he, maybe thirty, with a pinched, hawk-like face.

As she sat, he glanced at her legs and turned to the window. Some small boys were waving to the passing windows as they straddled their bicycles. Why had she sat there, he wondered, annoyed. There were plenty of empty seats. How could he think straight with her sitting there, jiggling her foot? "You're sure you don't mind?" she asked. "No, I don't mind. Really." He flushed damp. What did she want? "I just asked to make sure. You seemed like you were mad or something." "Oh . . . no . . . no, I'm not mad." She took a cigarette out of the red plastic purse on her lap. "Well," she said, lighting it and blowing smoke off the grey head of an old man sitting in front of them, "I'm glad you're not mad because you look like a nice person," and sharply nodded her head with mock finality. He fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. His stomach ran cold. "Oh thanks," he said.

"You don't talk much, do you?" she said.

"Well . . ."

"I can tell, Me, I love to talk. Talk talk talk. My friend Eileen says 'Sadie, you could . . .'. That's my name, Sadie, what's yours?"

"Uh Abra . . ." he cleared his throat, "Abraham . . . Abraham." He wiped his wet hands on his knees. What would Sartre do? Is this valid? Man is trapped within his own consciousness. Human intimacy is an illusion. But what of Wordsworth? "Abraham, let me see . . ." she said. "Nope, you're the first Abraham I've ever known."

"Yeah, I don't . . . either . . . I mean except for myself I mean."

"Yeah, except for yourself" she laughed. "Hey, you're funny. I like people that are funny. It's a rare commodity these days," she said philosophically.

He wished the train would go faster, faster than the blood runs, than the naked earth turns, faster, up and away.

"This is probably nose-y or something," she said, "but where are you headed?" He suddenly thought of a way out. "Oh, I'm glad you reminded me," he said. "Yeah, it's the next stop. I have this appointment." He could just wait for the next train. "Oh, I see. Well," she said, pretending to be looking through her purse, "I was just sort of hoping you could . . . oh, maybe stop at my apartment for a little bit. It's only a couple of stops past yours." He knew it! A nymphomaniac! He should have gotten up as soon as she sat there. "Oh . . . well . . . jeez, I'd like to, ya know, but this appointment. It's pretty impor . . ." "Okay, okay," she said. "I just thought I'd ask." "Well, listen, that was nice of you. I mean . . . you know . . . it really was." The train began slowing down. "Well, I guess I'll be going." He was about to get up when she put her hand

on his thigh. She met his startled look with one of a deepfixing urgency. "Why not, Abraham," she said. Blood filled his head. She flexed her fingers. His groin tightened sweetly. The train had stopped. "I don't know," he said staring into her face.

The apartment door opened onto a small living room. "Sit down, Abraham. I'll be right back," she said as she walked spritely down a carpeted hallway. He sat in a soft sagging armchair. He had been wrong, he thought, almost aloud. Of course. This was the way. Abstraction was empty when separated from feeling, from passion. Truth must rise from the blood. Poets knew that. Angels in the alleys, under the gas lamps. He heard the toilet flush, and he shuddered slightly.

She came back barefoot. "C'mon," she said happily, as she passed him and walked toward the bedroom. He followed her and stood at the open door. He wished he wasn't a virgin. She went straight to the bed and lay there, smiling at him as she stretched luxuriantly. "Here, Abraham," she said lightly, patting a spot next to her. He quickly thought of Baudelaire, the wine-dark pleasures, the back alleys of Paris. He walked to the bed, the poet of the flesh. Like Baudelaire, aroused. But he wasn't! But Beauty, yes, Beauty, the beauty of the beloved in whom the lover sees reflected that absolute Beauty, towards which his passion projects her individual beauty. He sat on the edge of the bed and leaned to kiss her forehead, tenderly, thinking of Plato. Yes, here in the dying fall of the eyebrow, the swooning line of her neck: intimations of divinity, primordial gestures of the Absolute celebrating itself through the material medium. Did not Socrates call himself, first and above all else a lover? He bent to kiss her mouth. Her breath came sour yellow but her tongue slid silky and sly around his own. Oh Socrates! He tucked his

hand behind her damp neck and lay against her, aching to believe in the absolute significance of the firm round pressure of her breasts, of her keen slender fingers under his shirt, up his back; to believe in every dip and swell of her body as an expression of nothing less than the mother of all living. "Did you know," he suddenly asked her, just as she was feeling for his belt buckle, "that Socrates once said of himself that the only science he knew was the science of love?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Socrates. You've never heard of him?" She sat up and pulled some strands of hair back off her wet forehead. She sighed. "I once knew a Socrates Katos," she said matter of factly. "He had his hair dyed silver and used to always go 'Thay, wathn't that a fiathco?' He jumped from the bed to his feet. 'Oh shit that's right!' he cried, turning from her with a hand at his hair, 'Socrates was gay!' 'Naw' she said, 'he wasn't gay. He was just a faggot. That don't mean you have to be gay . . . Hey, so what anyhow?' He walked to the window on the other side of the room and stared at the night. It was beginning to drizzle. Drops pocked the dirty glass. 'Don't you see . . .' he said, turning from the window, his voice quiet but urgent, 'don't you see it has to mean something? Not between you and me but . . . beyond that . . . transcendentally.'" "No," she said harshly, "I don't. Not at all." He walked hard and quick to the bed. "Look," he said, his voice tight and quivering as he began unbuttoning her blouse. "Hey what the . . ." she began but he shouted "Listen! Just listen," yanking the blouse down her arms. He propped up her small left breast with a cupped hand. "You see this? It's soft, you see? Feel it. Feel it dammit." She carefully placed her hand across the breast and just as carefully took it off. "You see, and . . . and it's like, who once said

it was like, oh how did he put it, it was like . . . a shimmering pool, or something like that. And it is Here lie down," pushing her on her back. "There," he said, cupping the sides of the flattened breast with both hands, "see? How it lies? Like a pool. And . . . and a shimmering pool has to be like something even higher." He was up now, walking back and forth beside the bed, working his hand through his hair with his thoughts. "Like something higher . . . no, that would make the breast somehow less than the pool, it's not a heirarchy like that . . . No, I know, they both—see, the breast pool analogy implies this; in fact all, all analogies do—um, they both contribute to an essence purer than themselves. That's it, some essence that contains the idea of shimmering and everything else these two images suggest of qualities of a perfect absolute Beauty." He walked back to where she was sitting up again. "Do you see? Or else we're just . . . we're just fucking, and it doesn't mean anything. We're just . . . fucking!" He had her by the shoulders and was shaking her as he said this. She was too frightened to resist and could only stare at him, her mouth hanging stupidly open. He stopped shaking her. He drew his hands slowly away and slowly walked to the window. It was starting to rain fuller now. He watched the drops splash and run easily down the pane. "Hey," he finally said, attempting a casual smile in his voice, "I didn't mean . . . you know . . . like I didn't mean to get weird like that." He put his fingers against the cool glass. She walked over and held him from behind, laying the side of her head on his shoulder. He felt her, warm, and delicately firm, around him as he held her hands to his chest. He closed his eyes and listened to her breathing. His blood eased into a murmur, gentle as the rain against the window. And he knew only that he felt good.

Terry Beckman



THOMAS SANFILIP

Autumn by Old Love

I have not seen her sit and croon,
hold the air with an actress' care,
laugh and shake her waved, brown hair
excitedly once she did.

Her hands fell limp like two shaken
twigs; and roaming eyes I knew have
gone—a deep-cut sigh lies close to
a cry that wants to trickle from
her lips.

Over her stricken hands lay mine,
and gave strong-loved words to her ears;
but she is walking, stepping somewhere
overthrown by an autumn, by her years.

Yet she will not let me kiss her eyes,
to keep the falling of her tears,
she really does not want to hear.

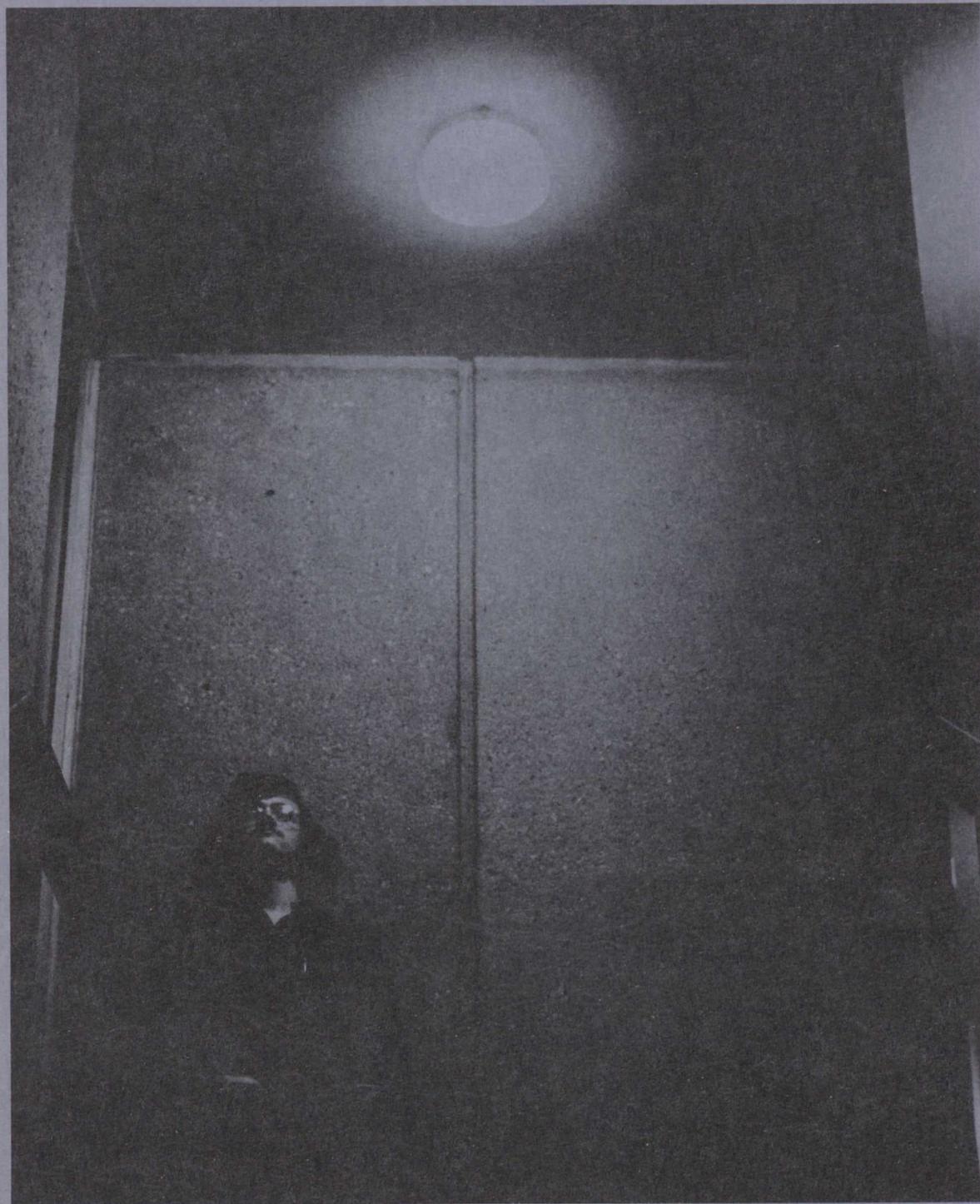
Since My People

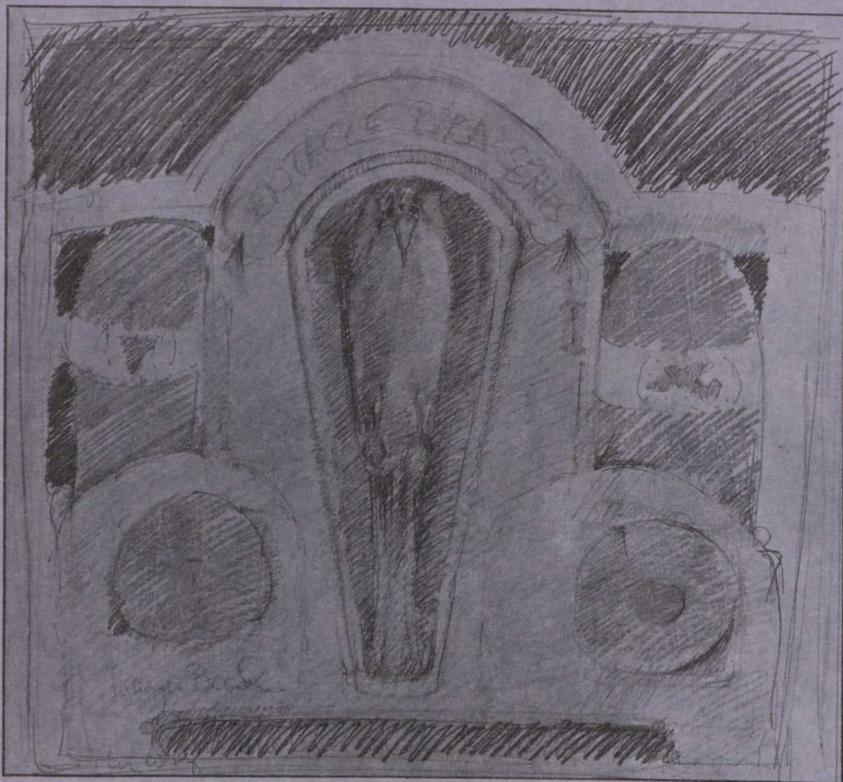
I have not broken bread with my
father, dipped its crust into the
juice of his fruit; laughed with
the strained masks of my unassuaged
brother nor listened to the sister
who sings like a bird with her wings
sheared.

In distant moments, too, I have forgotten
the image of my mother: the sorrowful
incarnation of a day once vital,
exultant.

And since the relinquishing of my people,
(oh! by the earth on which I stand!)
I have never hugged life so hard.

Nancy Sreenan





Lizabeth Wolf

Not Even Something Relevant

It's difficult. I know. I've tried.
I've strained my sinews, rent my hide,
gnashed my teeth and crumpled pencils,
cracked my fingers, crushing stencils,

twisted elbows, arms, and torso,
ears and jawbone even more so,
tortured myceps (bi- and tri-),
sweated till my guts were dry,

meditated contemplations,
lost myself in mesmerations,
thought all thoughtful thoughts—till pain
alarmed me that I broke my brain!

I sought within my soul of souls
and wheresoever else enscrolls
Nature, beneficent and couth,
her Universal Cosmic Truth.

Yet while the effort I expended
never ended, never ended,
fruitless were those desperate hours:
I could not write a poem for *Towers*.

THOMAS R. LISZKA

I.
Grandma
deaf as dead bells—
my portrait to be, in your face
are years of never seeing
ahead to silent clocks.

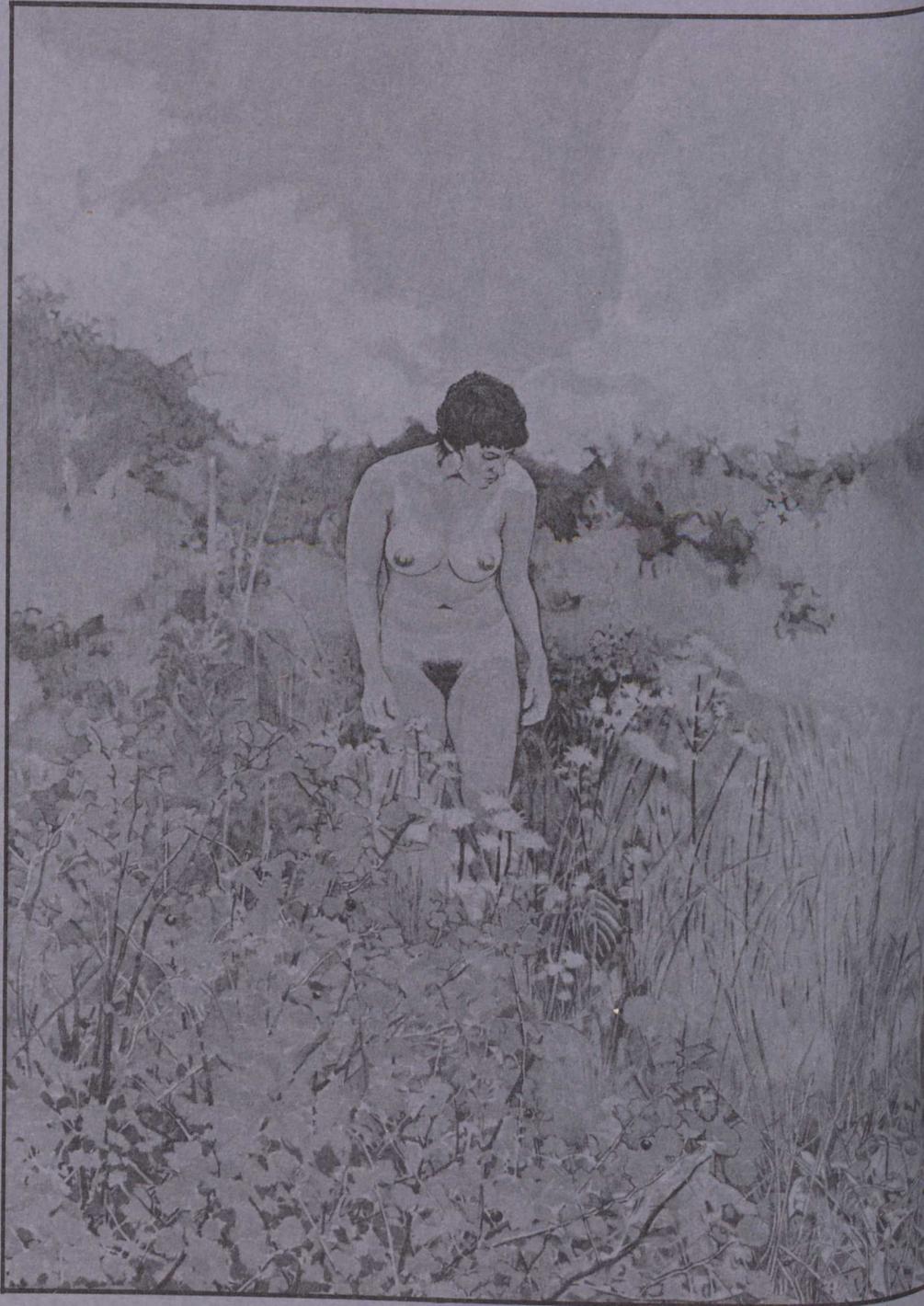
II.
Age
dry as October leaves
your eyes, singed with dried
tears, of pity to come
with the inaudible dawn.



Alexis Simmon

CHRISTINE OKON

Richard Lund



Remember to forget
 or
 can't find sunshine where fiddles never play
 (for a river and frog)

flushed.
 perspired.
 consequently smiled—your face . . . as i remem-
 ber to forget it.
 that spring seemed to be only promises wrapped
 in swaddling, sweet
 conversation.* i still forget your whines—trying
 so hard to
 be deemed a song: those blue-tune windows that
 i played that
 day swept through your not-so-cold, fresh-from-
 florida eyes.
 well, at least that's how i forget it. you should
 realize that
 like that river, time never returns. that moment
 was only
 ourselves . . . myself.
 oh, but that day, by that river. you—a patched
 madonna.
 blessed in innocence, too perfect for my winter
 just passed.
 there you were, a quicksilver lady, intruding on
 breezes—
 promising summer, but knowing of "fall."
 no separate sea will cool our shore again.
 no gain of gold.
 we'll reap but winter's wheat now.
 you turned down the harvest that called.

watching tea boil and windows steam will be here
 soon enough.
 yet as i wonder of wondering of thoughts yet to
 come, i know
 i'll remember to forget about you. and why not?
 vested in us now, are nothing short of
 smiles—bleeding within.
 enough of being caught in this senseless tie.
 to you i wish
 a grander morning—
 —a morning with glimpses of subtle ponies,
 snickering,
 knowing once again . . .
 they've
 played
 the
 fool.

*note: "god, are you a bummer sometimes."



Julie McCorkle undergraduate award

The First Five-and-Ten

Graduate Award

There is a dime store on First Street called, logically enough, the First Street Five-and-Ten. It is an old store in an ancient building, all of it very clean. It is a genuine old-fashioned five-and-ten with bins of articles that one is never exactly sure what to do with, and toys like tops and flutes and whistles and kites that don't do anything but are things that you have to do something with, which is the real magic of toys. And there are tropical fish in the back in large tanks, foreign fish, imported from little islands in the Pacific, that have multicolored stripes all over, and American fish like goldfish and guppies and fish that look like minnows, but can't be since they cost far too much to be minnows. And there are a few bigger fish that I once told a friend were piranha, but really aren't at all. There are trucks with friction motors that one runs across the tile floor to make humming noises, and guns that use rolls of red caps, baseballs with sawdust centers, sparkle wheels that throw sparks behind a rainbow plastic shield, and a big bin of balloons, all colors and sizes.

Some of the toys there still cost only a dime, and a few, the balloons, whistles and guppies are, remarkably, priced at only five cents. Such low prices are extraordinary in times when most five-and-tens are really Fifty Dollars or even more.

Inside the store they still have cash registers that don't plug into the wall and wooden floors that cry out for polish even though they are religiously swept every night. There are fans on the ceiling for the summer to keep the air moving and the flies away from the popcorn machine at the front of the store. The lights are large round globes that droop yellow light here and there around like a haphazard painter missing an occasional nook or corner. The store is lit, although nothing is clear or bright. It is the same light that floats murkily in the fish tanks, obscuring the natural stripes on the tropical fish and turning the gold fish brown. The fish appear laminated, and everybody and everything in the store seems to be wearing plastic raincoats.

I go into the First Street Five-and-Ten every week. Usually on Tuesdays. In fact, I can't recall any

time that I ever went in on any other day, although there may have been one occasion that I don't remember. I am first attracted to the store because it is very much like a store in my neighborhood when I was a boy.

But more than that, the store is a life riddle for me. It stands halfway down First Street between my office and my apartment, exactly five blocks from either. The store is more than just a store for me then. Twice a day it becomes a landmark for me as I walk back and forth on my daily route. And I think of the riddle. Five and five are ten. I pass it twice a day and two times five are ten. In this way it sums my life each day, divides it into parts, multiplies my awareness and equalizes all efforts. The riddle brings a smile to my face and strength to my heart. How wonderfully it balances my present situation while lending significance to my childhood. Another part of the same riddle lies in how toys and timetables have their own monuments in this strangely familiar setting that is the checkpoint between my leisure hours at home and my working hours at the office. It is a windless stage on which I can juggle past and present, then and now, here and there, keeping them all in the air with ridiculous ease and fluid symmetry. I often wonder if all people have their own visible reminders of the unity that somehow manages to float on the rocking seas of time.

So I go into the store to see what else I may have cast away into a forgotten toybox as a child that I can now alter and reuse.

There are several people working in the store. All of them are long and pale, long like elastic that has lost its stretch. They wear faded clothes, and their skin is drained into whiteness as if the color of their faces has tried to run down and salvage the fading hues of baggy blue suits and print dresses. It's no use.

There is a young girl among the store clerks. I hardly notice her for she is also very pale. When I look harder, I wonder how I have nearly missed her. Her clothes are bright, stripes and patterns, and although her face is wan, she is oddly different from the others. It is the difference between milk and chalk,

the distinction between bone and ivory. While the other clerks are chalk and bone, she is the purest milk and the smoothest ivory.

She works behind the toy counter. Every Tuesday I go to see her, to buy something from her bins and to talk with her. Her job is to explain and demonstrate the toys, to help the customers, to ring up the cash register and to put the purchases in small brown paper bags. She manages all of this with surprising delicacy, always maintaining a pleasing smile.

The first time that I visit the First Street Five-and-Ten I watch her work. She is delightful, laughing with the children who come into the store to buy toys. And, although she is young and looks even younger, with curled brown hair framing a round and slightly freckled face, I realize how wise and clever she must seem to the children. And how reassuring as she packages the purchases and makes change from dollars that their mothers have given them and that they have clutched tightly on their long walks from home.

Her name is Rosalie. It says so on a white plastic badge that is pinned to her blouse. The children call her Rosalie and cleverly she answers to the name. To them it seems to fit her perfectly—her youthful face and plump figure. I alone suspect that it is not her real name. I have seen her before it seems to me. Rosalie can be no more than a code name that she has used to slip secretly into the present. I dig into the files of my memory and come out with her folder—the face and figure and fingertips have another name in another time. Elaine.

Now that I know this first word in her language, the rest is easy to decipher. She is speaking in a code of a now-defunct club, a code learned from the back of a comic book. I show her that I know the words. We converse over the countertop at the dime store while pale figures move about in the pale light. I handle the toys and ask questions about the five-and-ten, dropping a password here and there. It becomes apparent that I have spun a thousand tops and have lined up countless rows of toy soldiers. I know all about the dime store, I am telling her, and therefore I understand who she really is and how she came to be here. We share the wisdom of our smiles like secret decoders received in the mail.

We begin to converse in the code.

"I don't see the box kites," I say. "Do you have any box kites?" And she knows that I am telling her that I am glad to see her after all this time, that I

remember her so well. I tell her how natural it now seems that Elaine has evolved into Rosalie. So natural, in fact, that I am shocked that I have not foreseen the possibility all along.

Rosalie smiles and says that she is not surprised and is glad to see that I have found out at last. Of course, she speaks in code, and to more innocent ears, it sounds as if she has said, "The kites are all over next to the baseball bats." But she really hasn't.

I go to see her again the next week and then again the next, and each time we converse in the same manner, passing only briefly over the past, speculating only whimsically towards the present, never mentioning the future. Our early conversations are a reunion, a getting to know one another again like all old friends after long separations. We anchor ourselves firmly on the common ground in the bins and learn to play with our new names and faces. She tells me I used to be Simon, and although the name isn't the least bit familiar, I successfully relearn it by the time that she has come to know me in my new name. And all the time, the raincoat people passing by think that we are talking about toys. I complete the deception by always buying something—a sailboat, a fire engine, a kazoo.

During the third month of our reunion, I see a new paleness in her. She smiles less. There is an unmistakable bigness about her that catches me suddenly, by surprise. I stand in amazement while the raincoat people run by us, glancing at Rosalie over their shoulders as if she were a rain cloud and they were running for shelter.

"Are there any purple balloons?" I say to tell her I know that she is pregnant, and that I find it both serene and incredible.

"We are getting some in next week," she says to tell me that I must understand that she is both happy and sad; happy knowing that she can make her own decisions, yet sad that there was so little choice.

I leave to go to my apartment where I ponder her ambivalence. I, too, am happy and sad. I am familiar with these same feelings from other times and other places, and they never leave me. I carry them like sandwiches in a paper lunch sack. I am reminded daily of these emotions like a scarred man before a mirror. They flash back into my eyes and become a feature as necessary as my nose and eyes for recognition. Is it possible that these feelings are new for Rosalie? Is this her first time?

I resolve to protect her from the feelings, but I find myself uncertain of the possible alternatives. I make no judgments about advisability of desirability of an emotion. Only about Rosalie. She has told me in her own way that she needs me. I can offer her those choices that are open to me: a job at the office away from the dime store, a place to stay at my apartment. It seems to me that I have slept on the couch before, though I am not sure what the circumstances were. I will do it again. I return to the store to make my offer.

"No," she says, "we haven't any more stuffed toys," she tells me, and I know that the office is not her life. Still, there is the stare of the silent employees. I tell her to come live at my apartment, but she tells me that she prefers to stay at her own apartment. It is located on Lincoln Boulevard, the street that intersects First Street at the same corner where the five-and-ten stands. She describes her apartment, and it sounds like a depot where people sit and wait for trains that always run late. It sounds to anyone else listening as if she is telling me, "see you again next week."

But I don't see her then, or the next week, or for several months. I still go to the store hoping for her return, but she does not come back. I can find nothing new or interesting among the toys during those visits, and so I don't buy anything. The woman who substitutes for Rosalie tells me that nothing has changed, and so I suspect that I need someone knowledgeable to teach me how they work. Rosalie isn't there to do it, and so I buy nothing.

I become impatient for the first time in my life. The walk home fails to weary me, and the hours need filling like so many peg-less holes in a child's work bench. My apartment becomes crowded with discarded paper and boxes that were always there before, but had managed to stay out of the way until now.

I decide to move and find a place up near Wilson Circle. It is a long move, nearly a mile on the other side of the office. The new flat is clean and light. When I move, I take only the essentials, leaving most of what I have accumulated behind like a collection of clockbeats.

When I finally return to the five-and-ten, I don't go for myself. My secretary's son needs a skate key, and I remember that the ones sold on First Street were always first-rate. Rosalie is there in the store when I enter, waiting on a small child in a blue dress. No

longer pregnant, she is as smiling and patient as ever. She is as confident as before, perhaps more assured, and certainly much wiser. The picture she paints with every move is becoming to her, and I am in awe of every brush stroke, except for the demure resignation that has crept onto the bottom of the canvas. I recognize it but can't comprehend it. I've seen it before but never in a mirror.

I ask for the airplane model kits, wondering if he had arrived when she needed him and if all had gone well. "Third bin," she says. Yes, he was there, although she had not been certain up until the last minute. "And the glue," I ask, wondering if there had been a change in her that I thought I perceived. "Of course," she tells me, which is a phrase that means the exact same thing in our code. "Right next to the models," she says, telling me that she's heard that things are different with me, too.

And they are. Much has changed for me since my move. On my walk to work the first morning in my new apartment, I came upon a donut shop. It is called "Simon's." After the simple pieman of the fairy tale. I was astonished at first to find another riddle, but there are probably many others that I pass by without ever noticing. I have coffee there each morning and talk with the waitress who is friendly and smiling. Always the same each morning, and the coffee is warm. I am going to tell Rosalie, but I suspect she already knows.

"How much for all of this?" I ask so she knows that it is my final visit to the dime store. It is out of the way now that I have moved uptown.

"Two ninety-five," she assures me, and I suppose that I should have known that Rosalie would be aware all along.

"Can I give you a check for the amount?" I say finally. In code I am telling her that I am very glad that he came when she needed him. I am sorry that I couldn't help.

Rosalie says something quite sublime. She tells me that it was my assurance that he would come that made her wait, that our shared confidence had meant the difference after all. Although I don't remember having assured her so, I must have, for I have come to know that Rosalie always tells the truth.

In code, her admission is equally melodious and tranquil.

"Of course you may, sir. Have a fine evening. Good night."

VIRGINIA SHREVE

Three Moons

I am curling
up like some cold forgotten half-moon,
tacked against
a blackened hollow sky.
See how white
like bone like alabaster
I look,
flattened against the starless dark.

I am curling
up in my strange bed
warming a place
where you should be.
But the sheets make
icy mountains around me.
Am I, sunken in the silver valley,
too distant in this night?

I am curling
up around my stone-heavy heart,
trying to shield it from
the thousand grey thumbs of moonlight.
But see how small, hard and deep it has become,
embedded like a piece of coal in wax.

I am so tired of waiting
for that flaming dawn.



Clay Johnson

Poem Without A Number

The real artist is not home today
he took his Flair pens to San Francisco
to try to do something new with the
Golden Gate Bridge,
paints his own face (small)
from the reflection (big)
and writes home to mama artist saying
DIG THIS ME, Lov
not in any way caustic, you understand
just telling his tale,
like the Lindberghs when their child was
ransomed
the real artist doesn't give one shit
or even two
whether the U.S. Naval Fleet
spotted
(sea monster)
or not
he wants to know
who is laying with mama artist

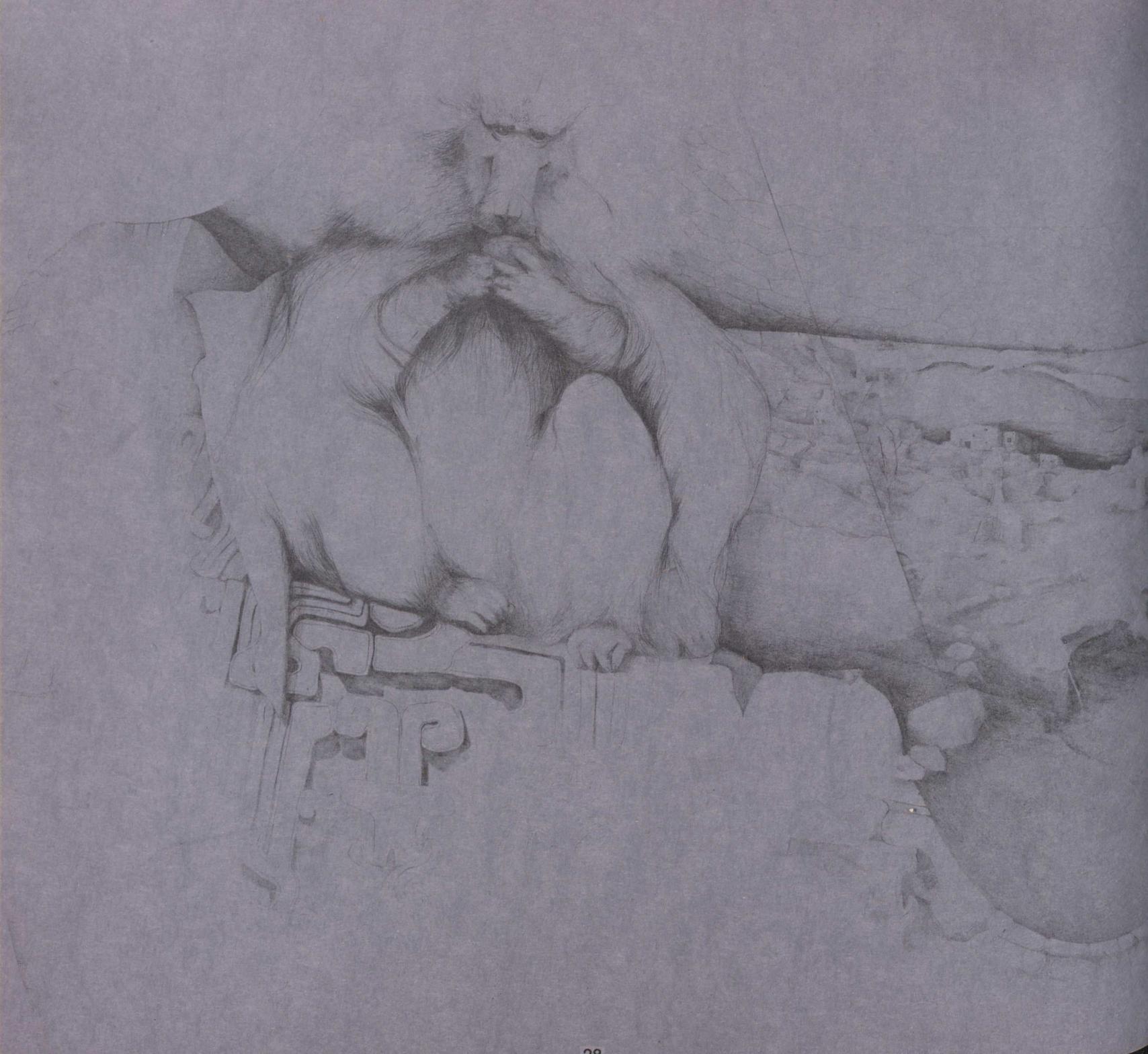
The Mediator

I
in phantasmagoria pass
sand trains
white cabooses full of eyeless soldiers
in purple suede jackets
holding rusty cartridges

II
she and I pass sea castles
serving a young boy's whim
I watch and wait for an answer
it is not near

III
that final white streak
is not here nor near is she
the summer Solstice has passed
and leaves a peaceful sea

ROBERT PROCHASKA



Camus' Promethean Christ: Hero of the Absurd

Graduate Award

Once man accepts the fact that the world is absurd, he is faced with the problem of reconciling himself to a life without meaning or justification, the life of an impotent, shackled slave. For man to continue living in such a state as a sane individual, he is forced to go beyond the concept of an absurd world and a seemingly unjustifiable existence. This Albert Camus does in his concept of man in revolt. Camus paints in his early works portraits of men struggling unconsciously against an absurd world, and he continues to develop the makeup of the conscious rebel in his later works. While the world Camus first creates for Meursault in *The Stranger* is in the same absurd condition for Clamence in *The Fall*, these two characters are vastly different in that the first realizes his condition and finds himself helpless, but the second realizes his condition and rebels against it. It is through rebellion only that Camus says man can effectively justify his existence. In his treatise *The Rebel*, he states that rebellion cannot be denied without denying life itself. "Its [rebellion's] purest outburst, on each occasion, gives birth to

existence."¹

The concept of the rebel is an obvious contradiction to the idea of an absurd universe without values, for when one rebels, "he demonstrates with obstinacy that there is something in him which is worthwhile."² Camus vehemently rejects the idea of the absurd as an end in itself and consciously goes beyond the pessimistic existential philosophy rampant in Europe during the 1940's. In his essay titled "Pessimism and Courage," he challenges the existential capability of men to cope with the absurd:

I do not have much liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and, to tell the truth, I think its conclusions false.

No, everything is not summed up in negation and absurdity.³

Man, Camus asserts, has the means to struggle against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is in the struggle itself, regardless of whether he finally triumphs, that man justifies his existence. The slave, in all instances the slave of an absurd universe controlled by an absurd God, will inevitably succeed because as Sisyphus says, "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."⁴ This element of the rebel, Camus says, is common to all men; "it found its first value on the whole human race," and it is the only link among men in a common struggle against the mass plague. The growing awareness of this potential for rebellion culminates in the realization that "I rebel—therefore we exist." In the rebellion of one, all men may find salvation.

In his *Notebooks*, Camus divides his writings into two definite periods. The first, which he calls Sisyphus: Cycle of Absurd, includes *The Stranger*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and *Caligula*. The second period, Prometheus: Cycle of Revolt, includes *The Plague*, *The Just Assassins*, *The Rebel*, *State of Siege*, and *Exile and the Kingdom*. The play *A Misunderstanding* is considered a link between the two periods by Germaine Bréje and a work of the first period by Thomas Hanna. *The Fall* transcends the second period with a definite resolution by Clamence, the judge-penitent. Because he believed his early theories of Sisyphus: Cycle of Absurd to be a pessimistic, unworkable philosophy of life, Camus formulated an alternative to the nihilism of twentieth century existentialists with Prometheus: Cycle of Revolt.

With Sisyphus he defined the problem of the Absurd; with Prometheus he suggests an answer. It is with this second period and the concept of the rebel as a Prometheus or a Christ that this discussion will deal.

Sisyphus was a victim of his situation. While he did defy the gods by putting Death in chains, he did so without realizing why or against whom he was rebelling. He was a mortal unjustly condemned by the gods he had tried to please. Prometheus, whose name means forethought, defied the gods and gave fire to mankind because he felt compassion for their miserable condition. He was chained to a rock and sentenced to perpetual torture by Zeus, because he knew and would not reveal who would dethrone the gods. In that he never revealed the secret, his body was bound, but his spirit was free. His suffering was unjust, but he refused to submit to cruelty and tyranny. He has stood throughout history as the great rebel against the injustice and the authority of power. It is obvious, then, why Camus would incorporate such a legend into a modern philosophy of revolt. Like Christ, the redeemer, Prometheus is the savior of mankind and their model for rebellion. While Prometheus is the namesake of Camus' philosophy of revolt, it is the image of Christ which he incorporates in his works as the hero of the absurd.

Camus' treatment of Christ is a process of stripping the myth from the man to expose the true relationship between man and Christ, whom Camus would call the greatest of all rebels. He justifies his interest in Christ as a rebel in the following passage:

The only thing that gives meaning to human protest is the idea of a personal god who created, and is therefore responsible for everything. So we can say, without being paradoxical, that in the Western World the history of rebellion is inseparable from the history of Christianity.⁵

Camus attacks the divinity and immortality of Christ and accentuates his suffering, the lot of mankind. His purpose is to present Christ as an innocent puppet of chance, another victim of the absurd. The Church, Camus says, has distorted the purpose of Christ's suffering, for it explains in that Christ had suffered voluntarily, suffering was no longer unjust and pain was necessary."⁶ What Camus suggests, however, is that Christ did not suffer voluntarily. He was the victim of his situation, a victim of the absurd. In

Gethsemane he cries out in desperation "to a god who turns a deaf ear." It is Christ's alienation from the divinity while suffering his experience of despair, that joins him with man in his absurd condition. Accepting the fate of man, he succumbed in desperation to the final inevitability of death. To be annexed to mankind by experiencing the depths of despair is to be alienated from God and to renounce divinity.

The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included, the agony of death. The agony would have been mild if it had been alleviated by hopes of eternity. For God to be man, he must despair.⁷

Like Prometheus, Christ has seen the men he suffered for turn against him. The rebel is ultimately alone in his struggle.

The long silence of Prometheus before the powers that overwhelmed him still cries out in protest. Crushed between human evil and destiny . . . all that remains to him is his power to rebel in order to save from murder him who can still be saved.⁸

Faced with the choice between two evils, human despair and the tyranny of divinity, Camus believes Christ chooses to cast his lot with humanity. Only in joining man in his fight "against the heavens" does Christ become the redeemer of mankind. Camus' reinterpretation of Christ as a desperate man condemned to an unjust death is one modern rebel's "unlimited campaign against the heavens for the purpose of bringing back a captive king who will first be dethroned and finally condemned to death."⁹ It is precisely in his voluntary abdication and in his joining the plight of the slave that the king finds his relevance to humanity.

Tarrou treats the problem of assimilating divinity and humanity and introduces briefly the concept of the true healer in *The Plague*. Tarrou equates the futile human condition with the plague, and "no one on earth is free from it." Once in contact with the plague, one loses his peace, and it is this peace which distinguishes the healer or saint. He categorizes the world of the absurd into three groups; the first is that of the pestilence—the oppressors and their agent Death; the second is that of the victims—defenseless men at the mercy of the

pestilence. The third category is that of the true healers about which Tarrou says:

But it's a fact one doesn't come across many of them, and anyhow it must be a hard vocation. That's why I decided to take, in every predicament, the victim's side, so as to reduce the damage done. Among them I can at least try to discover how one attains to the third category; in other words, to peace.¹⁰

Camus fails to define exactly the nature of the healers at this point. In failing to elaborate on their character, he accentuates the desperate helplessness of the victims. Emphasis is placed on the human condition, and any attempt to transcend its limits or to renounce one's place among the victims is considered an acquiescence to the absurd. Tarrou acknowledges that the more noble ambition is to condition the fight when Rieux states his feelings on becoming a saint or healer:

"I feel more fellowship with the defeated than with saints. Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me I imagine. What interests me is being a man."

"Yes, we're both after the same thing, but I'm less ambitious."¹¹

In the character of Tarrou, Camus has gone one step beyond Meursault in creating the personality of the rebel. In *The Stranger* the problem was stated, and with *The Plague* an answer is alluded to, although not fully developed.

Upon entering the plague-stricken world of the *State of Siege*, we encounter the character which Camus introduced but failed to develop in *The Plague*—that of the true healer. Here the Christ image emerges completely in the person of Diego, a young man training to become a doctor, the savior of Cadiz. The scene is a familiar one, a plague-infested city in Spain. The Plague, accompanied by his secretary, Death, enters the city and systematically and logically takes over the lives of the inhabitants. The victims are out en masse; "here we are gathered together . . . a happy band of victims waiting in the arena."¹² But all these elements are familiar with Camus; the new element is Diego. His derivation is obvious, for he sacrifices his own life to save the city of Cadiz from the Plague. The personality of Diego as the first fully developed rebel is interesting, not only for its novelty, but also for its obvious comparisons with the passion of Christ.

Diego is aghast at the ruthless efficiency of the

Secretary as she distributes and revokes at will her certificates of existence. It is interesting that the copies are made "one for the applicant and twelve for our files," a vague but noteworthy similarity to Christ and his disciples. Diego cries out helplessly in his own Gethsemane but despairs that only the wind will answer. It is the rising wind, however, the rising voice of rebellion, which will later deliver the people from the Plague. Diego realizes the power of revolt when he challenges the Secretary and meets Death face to face. Whether he dies is of no concern in the face of such appalling tyranny.

For there is in man—look at me and learn—an innate power that you will never vanquish, a gay madness born of mingled fear and courage, unreasoning yet victorious through all time.

One day this power will surge up and you will learn that all your glory is but dust before the wind.¹³

The Secretary laughs at the sight of one raging man among so many docile slaves, but she is forced to admit:

As far back as I can remember the machine has always shown a tendency to break down when a man conquers his fears and stands up to them. I won't say it stops completely. But it creaks, and sometimes, it actually begins to fold up.¹⁴

Diego's death is not a beautiful one, but like the "messy death of Christ," it is heroic in intent. The god of the absurd takes great delight in seeing the man who will vanquish him in Cadiz suffer in agony.

Good. Suffer a little before dying. That anyhow, I can insist on. When hatred flames up in me, the suffering of others is a healing dew. Groan a little, that does me good. And let me watch you suffering before I leave this city.¹⁵

The Secretary, although powerless to help, admits a compassion for man and recalls a time when she was not cursed by men but worked in harmony with them. Even Death stands in awe of the rebel, and in this is the rebel triumphant.

With Diego we are certainly dealing with the true healer of *The Plague*, the one who finds peace in death, the noble death of the rebel. Condemned to an unjust death by the God of Christ's passion and the Zeus of Prometheus' torture, Diego liberates his city because he dared to challenge the master on his own ground. He dared to "talk to God as an equal."¹⁶

After the appearance of *State of Siege*, the images of Christ as rebel are rich and elaborate in Camus'

fiction. In the short story "The Renegade," from *Exile and the Kingdom*, the rebel is a prisoner in the House of the Fetish. The setting is a marvelous, absurd creation, a stark white city of salt where the sun beats down unmercifully on people dressed in long black robes. The renegade recalls in monologue form his reasons for coming to the city and the cruel Sorcerer's treatment of him. They have beaten him and have torn out his tongue, yet another tongue seems to have grown in its place. Camus' heroes triumph even in the most oppressive situations, and the House of the Fetish is the most savage atmosphere created for any of his rebels. Even in the most desolate and desperate state, a wanted fugitive alone in the desert heat, his tongue torn out and his mouth filled with salt, the renegade has aspirations of rebellion. He rebels against an absurd existence with what, in this instance, is an absurd act, shooting the priest who precedes the European armies coming to liberate the city and to free him from the savages. The "soul of hatred," which he applauds, attacks those who oppressed him spiritually and intellectually by distorting the truth and those who oppress him physically by mutilating his body.

The allusions to the crucifixion are powerful parodies of the words of Christ from the cross.

O Fetish, why has thou forsaken me? All is over, I'm thirsty, my body is burning, a darker night fills my eyes.¹⁷

When the renegade addresses the Fetish as his god, the implications are that any absolute power, whether it is the silent God of the abandoned Christ or the mute, grotesque idol of the Sorcerer, is cruel and unjust. Recalling the Plague who felt the suffering of Diego as a refreshing dew, the slave will always be exposed to unjust suffering and inevitable death when he assumes the role of the rebel and challenges his master. These humiliations are also the common lot of man. But unlike the common man, the rebel makes his sufferings public in defiance of the tyrants who have the means to cope with masses of simpering slaves but not with the solitary rebel. The rebel says his pain is good and reaffirms his link with the suffering Christ. As the renegade came to the city as a priest, it can be assumed that Camus intended his character to be conscious of his spiritual proximity to the Passion.

Ah, the pain they cause me, their rage is good and on this cross-shaped warsaddle where they are

now quartering me, pity! I'm laughing, I love the blow that nails me down crucified.¹⁹

The renegade states the nature of his crime, "I was laughing, that's the offense," and he continues to laugh until the very end. What enables both Diego and the renegade to resist is the scorn of Sisyphus. In merely provoking the masters to the extent that they are forced to deal with him as an individual, apart from the mass of victims, he is victorious. It is to be expected that the masters would react with rage, and this suffering is the price the rebel pays for the peace of the true healer. His cynical reaction is not one of acquiescence, but of bitter scorn for an unjust system.

The short story "The Growing Stone" is an unusual approach to the Passion and man's reaction or duty towards a despairing Christ. The implications are subtle, but valid, nonetheless. It would seem to be the story of a Tarrou who has learned how to become a true healer without leaving his place among the victims. The story is set in a tropical country where a black ship's cook has come home to fulfill a pledge made during a storm at sea. He has promised to carry a hundred pound rock on his head during a certain religious procession in gratitude for his rescue. D'Arrast, a European captain, views the spectacle in a detached and slightly disgusted manner until the cook begins to stumble. The similarities between the faltering cook with his ridiculous rock and Christ carrying his cross are apparent in the following passages:

... an oily, dirty sweat covered his face, which had gone gray, his beard was full of threads of saliva; and a brown, dry froth glued his lips together. He tried to smile. But motionless under his load, his whole body was trembling except for the shoulders, where the muscles were obviously caught in a sort of cramp. "He already fell."

The man trembled; the saliva began to trickle from his mouth again, while the sweat literally spurted from all over his body. He tried to breathe deeply and stopped short. He started off again, took three steps, and tottered. And suddenly the stone slipped onto his shoulder, gashing it, and then forward onto the ground, while the cook toppled over on his side . . . the others took hold of the stone to load it on him again.¹⁹

Until this point, the cook has been alone in his suffering. But now the villagers and his family encourage him

to continue his absurd demonstration until the end. This image illustrates the passage cited earlier describing Prometheus and Christ caught between the evils of men and the power of destiny. A description of the cook and his brother as a pietà is perhaps an overindulgence on the theme by Camus, but the analogy is striking.

His brother suddenly appeared behind him, threw his arms around him, and the cook, weeping, collapsed against him, defeated, with his head thrown back.²⁰

When D'Arrast sees the village faithful encouraging the cook to continue his journey, he rushes to save him. The cook realizes his exhaustion, and despite his pledge, is unable to continue. Although a dedicated Prometheus laboring under his absurd stone, he is unable to meet its challenge alone.

He staggered toward the stone, which the others were raising a little. But he stopped, looked at the stone with a vacant stare, and shook his head. Huge tears flowed silently down his ravaged face. He wanted to speak, he was speaking, but his mouth hardly formed the syllables. "I promised," he was saying. And then: "Oh Captain! Oh Captain!"²¹

D'Arrast hoists the rock onto his own head and begins to finish the pilgrimage to the church. He changes direction and proceeds, despite shouts from the crowd, to the cook's own hut where he "hurled the stone onto the still glowing fire in the center of the room." There it remained, half buried in ashes and earth, as the villagers entered and squatted in silence around it. The brother, "half turning toward D'Arrast but without looking at him, pointed to the empty place and said: 'Sit down with us.'"²²

With the appearance of D'Arrast, we have the forerunner to the advent of a modern Christ. D'Arrast has finally fulfilled the wish of Tarrou, to experience the peace of the healer without leaving the ranks of the victims. He rescued the defeated cook from an absurd commitment to a God who demanded an unreasonable and pointless sacrifice. He rescued the cook, as Camus believed Christ should be rescued, from the abuse of exploitation. In a sense he is transferring the burden which Christ and Prometheus had borne for an age onto the shoulders of a new rebel. This new, somewhat reluctant rebel, embodies the concept of Camus' new Christ who defies God by refusing Him homage and by returning

the burden and mystery of rebellion to the people.

D'Arrast and the cook can be viewed as Camus' new image of an ancient rebel whose rebellion has been distorted and exploited by the Church and its agents. These agents he calls the Inquisitors. In his essay *The Rebel*, Camus draws heavily from Dostoevsky's allegory of "The Grand Inquisitor."

Others will appear, with more serious intentions, who on the basis of the same despairing nihilism, will insist on ruling the world. These are the Grand Inquisitors who imprison Christ and come to tell Him that His method is not correct, that the universal happiness cannot be achieved by the immediate freedom of choosing between good and evil, but by domination and unification of the world.²³

The Christ of "The Grand Inquisitor" is similar to the cook in "The Growing Stone" who finds himself unable to continue alone in silence. Similar to Prometheus, this Christ, the advocate of freedom and justice, listens in silence to the old man's logic, never once opposing the Inquisitor, perhaps aware of the disgusting truth in his words. Realizing the approach of an age of still more monstrous Inquisitors, this Christ remains silent in anticipation of one who can answer such new tyrants with a relevance that is no longer his.

In *The Fall* one such modern messiah emerges to refute all Inquisitors' pessimistic theories on the nature and destiny of man. This "poor stumbling Christ" of the twentieth century proposes to those who would advocate the Inquisitor's arguments that man, by his nature as a rebel, will always oppose tyranny and triumph over slavery. Camus' Christ-like figure, Clamence, the judge-penitent, accepts in himself the universal guilt of all men in order that he may judge men freely. His is the impossible task of bringing men to the realization and the acceptance of their part in the universal guilt. Clamence says "I read the melancholy of the common condition and the despair of not being able to escape it . . . I pity without absolving, I understand without forgiving."²⁴ This is the duty of the modern Christ. The awesome problems that confront modern man, Camus would suggest, necessitate the emergence of a new Christ, not the messiah of a neo-Christian theology, but rather one of a pre-Christian era.

This is not to say, however, that Camus believed himself or his narrator, Clamence, to be a counterpart to the Christian interpretation of Christ, but

rather he would propose that the attributes that describe such a redeemer are common to all men. Of himself as judge-penitent, Clamence says, "I construct a portrait which is the image of all and of no one. . . . But at the same time the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror."²⁵ In Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the confessor of *The Fall*, Camus has created a free man suffering under the inescapable burden of his freedom. He knows, as Christ in Gethsemane knew, that the price of freedom is the awful agony of complete personal responsibility, and it is on a dark bridge over the Pont Royal that Clamence experiences his own agony in the garden. He says, "we are all guilty before one another, all Christs in our mean manner, one by one crucified, and always without knowing."²⁶

The Fall is highly significant because it marks a change in Camus' philosophy regarding the religious problems implied in explaining the sources of revolt and in understanding the duty of the rebel. In this work Camus answers directly the most important point raised by Dostoevsky in "The Grand Inquisitor," the need to sacrifice freedom to establish justice. On all points of the argument, Camus never directly refutes the conclusions presented by the Inquisitor, but rather, with subtle, bitter irony he condemns all the old man says by a brilliant shifting of emphasis and use of satire. At first reading one might be inclined to believe that Clamence supports all the Inquisitor's arguments. Only in tone does Camus condemn the advocates of slavery.

Both authors admit to the unbearable weight of freedom. Dostoevsky writes of freedom that men "in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand," and also of "the great and terrible agony they now have to endure, supplying an individual answer."²⁷ Because feeble man cannot bear the weight of freedom, the world's Inquisitors have taken this burden on themselves. "The punishment for these sins we take upon ourselves," the old man declares self-righteously. In relieving man of his freedom, the Inquisitors hope to destroy Christ's romantic dreams of man's free will to accept or reject that which his own conscience dictates. By crushing such freedom, he can, for the good of mankind, establish "universal happiness." The opinion must be concluded, states D. H. Lawrence in his preface to "The Grand Inquisitor," that Christ and his freedom are inadequate, and his kiss is one of

acquiescence. So firmly did the Inquisitor believe what he proposed was right for men, he challenged Christ to find him guilty of inhumanity or insincerity on the day of Judgment. "I will stand up and point out to Thee the thousand million happy children who have known no sin." Men become happy children when they surrender their freedom to end the "confusion of free thought" and submit to the Inquisitor's plan for universal happiness.

Camus begins his statements on freedom with the painfully ironic admission that "once upon a time I was always talking of freedom. At breakfast I used to spread it on my toast, I used to chew it all day long."²⁸ He also writes that "freedom is too heavy to bear." But along with the realization of the agony of freedom, Camus would advocate that one accept this challenge, and in fact, he has no other choice but to continue with the burden. Realizing the torment involved in a truly free decision, Clamence writes "on the bridges of Paris, I, too, learned that I was afraid of freedom." Before this moment freedom had been a courtroom cliché. Before his fall to the realization of the responsibility of exercising freedom, Clamence was one of the thousand million happy babes in an Inquisitor's universal happiness. Camus vehemently disagrees with this belief in the impotent nature of man as rebel. Of a people that the Inquisitor says can never be free, "for they are weak, sinful, worthless, and rebellious," Camus says "the current motto for us can only be this: without giving anything on the plane of justice, yield nothing on the plane of freedom."²⁹

The burden of freedom defined in his earlier works has been transferred from the solitary, outspoken rebel to the silent victims. The responsibility of the rebel is now the responsibility of all men. Its agony can and must be experienced by all men. The age of a docile Prometheus, Sisyphus, or Christ has ended with the exposure of the true nature of these rebels. Theirs was not an accepted suffering, but instead, a violent protest against the absurd that demanded their endless sacrifice. If their rebellion can be accepted as relevant today, Camus says, it must be considered a cry for companionship in the struggle. If the system will tremble with the protest of a solitary rebel, its foundations might be exposed with the combined protests of the victims.

Having once defined Camus' position on the subject of the nature of the rebel, the brilliant use of ironic

humor in the final chapter of *The Fall* is apparent. Only in light of Camus' intense belief in the essentially noble nature of the rebel will the satire of the following passage become self-evident.

. . . I invite the good people to submit to authority and humbly to solicit the comforts of slavery. . . . But I am not being crazy; I am well aware that slavery is not immediately realizable. It will be one of the blessings of the future, that's all.³⁰

Thus Clamence, as a new Christ who breaks the silence of centuries to speak out in opposition to the Inquisitor, the Plague, and the Fetish in defense of freedom, struggles with a smile, just as Camus believes Sisyphus must be smiling.

NOTES

¹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, 1956), 304.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York, 1961), 58-9.

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other Essays* (New York, 1955), 90.

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York, 1948), 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹² Albert Camus, "State of Siege" from *Caligula and Three Other Plays* (New York, 1958), 215.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 25.

¹⁷ Albert Camus, "The Renegade" from *Exile and the Kingdom* (New York, 1957), 60.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹ Camus, "The Growing Stone" from *Exile and the Kingdom*, 207.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 209.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

²² *Ibid.*, 213.

²³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 60.

²⁴ Albert Camus, *The Fall* (New York, 1956), 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor" (New York, 1960), 136.

²⁸ Camus, *The Fall*, 132.

²⁹ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 93.

³⁰ Camus, *The Fall*, 137.



Angelika Wagar

Requiem for a Writer

What is left
poetic words
 now overused, cliché, hyper-sweet
music now seems superfluous

The writer grimaced
as he put down his pen
tore up the paper in front of him
and said
"This was all I had
there is
no more."

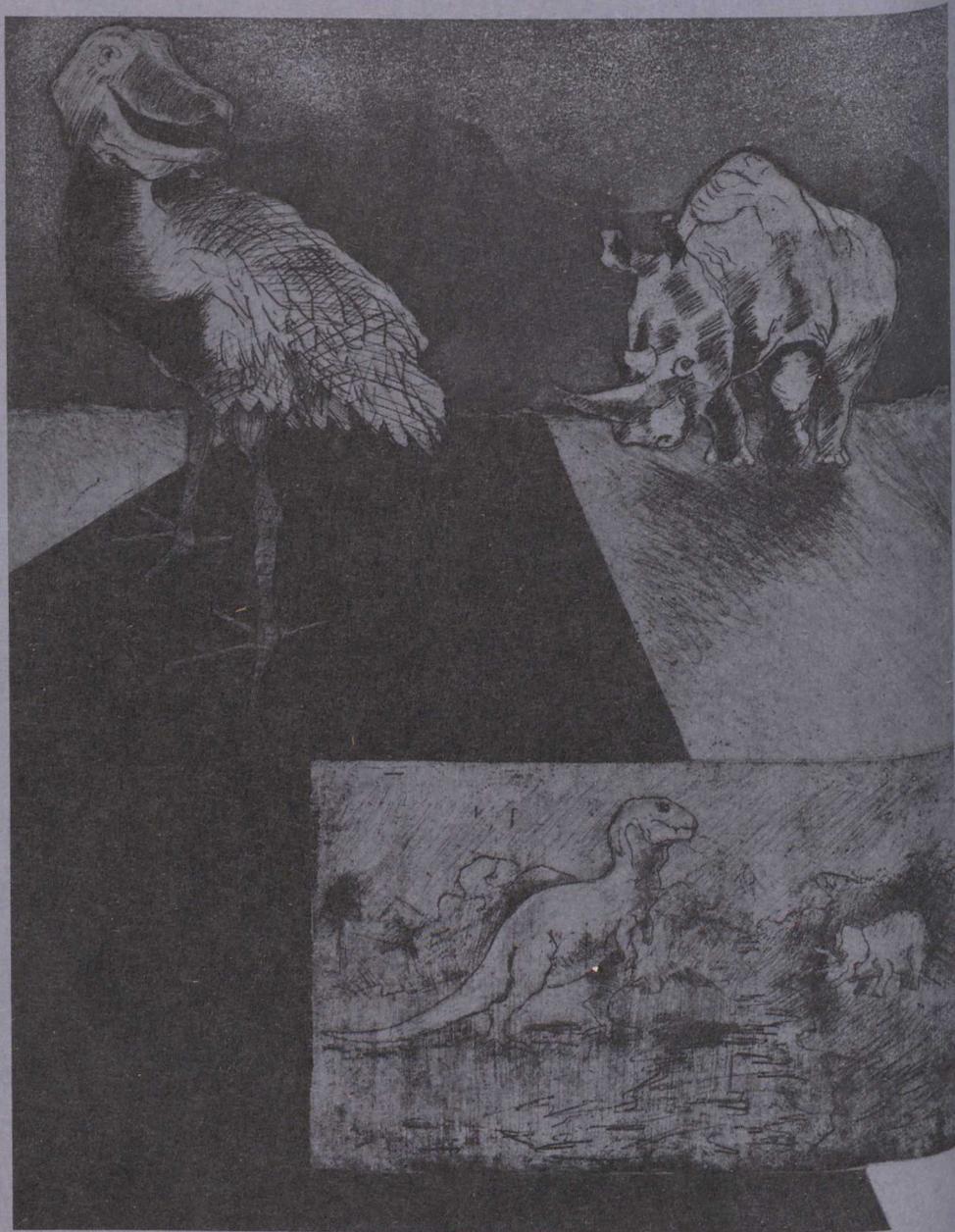
Writer I

My pen is the key to your troubled soul
And the exit
 when it is well

Writer II

I am wasting time penciling
s-p-r-i-n-g upon your toenails
And my initials upon your
eyeballs for I believe
love should read more legibly
than first grade scribble

Richard Hellman



The Living Carcass

The one-ton hunk of bison,
the protoplasmic tent of the prairies.
1843. A drifting sheepman,
bleeding from the multiple stabs of winter,
slit open the huge belly
and burrowed among sagging liver
and hot, emptying vessels,
wherein he hunched triumphant through the night.

The steel hound pants heavily,
billows fumes into December air;
the living carcass of the modern prairie
My heart is one with the engine's throb.

My fellow travellers have disappeared
as if their seats have descended into a cave.
From within my padded ribcage I watch the night,
and the scattered blotches of light
like chips of ice in the distance.

As the lights loom close,
a warm flash of window at Miles Per Hour:
within a moon-blessed farmhouse, the farmer and
his wife
smoke, and read of deaths and births.

The image flashes by, lights recede
and string out past the speeding steel,
gather in thousands on the horizon
and become tiny yellow buds in the soil,
the self-nourished crop of the land.

The interior brightens, and we ascend:
our eyes the slaking liquid pools of melted ice,
our flesh bright with recent blood,
as we depart the carcass
to warmly greet the winter night.

MICHAEL ANTMAN

Touch Football on Saturday Afternoon

The day after classes,
we intersected the schoolboard square of grass
with painfully precise angles, and deep-bit
mud-flung spirals.

But spines are calibrated
imprecisely, at best;
loping at last
towards a distant whiff of autumn's burning,
our angles became shaky parabolas,
and finally, the soft imprints
of the curving bows of turgid stems,
turning in the sun.

Near dusk,
I searched for the one meaningful speck
among the fluttering brown,
and like the errant stem of a cluster
of delicate carnivorous plants,
peeled away from my withering brothers,
and snapped triumphantly on the spiraling snack.

But the ball got lost in the grass.
We sat on our aching haunches,
hands dug into the mudmarks
of our confused interweavings,
and watched the sun overrun by countless grey dots
like the numbness that now spread through our arms.
(But my elbows only ached to take root.)
The clouds heaved over,
and I listened to their talk of
grim new pleasures
and the effects of fire on plants and flesh:
eventually, they abandoned their mudmarks
and I watched alone,
as they tumbled away into the breeze,
away into the blazing sundown.

MICHAEL ANTMAN



John Rogers

Nothing Is Mistaken Anymore

Holy Nights

you said:
(voice quavering,
hands empty)
"Am I ever
going to get
to hold you?"

and I laughed
and said
you looked
like a little boy
waiting for Christmas.

Ho, ho, ho.

Don't mistake me.
Nothing is mistaken anymore.
The universe is Apparent.

And then put aside.
Like a puzzle to be worked
Again and over again. . . .

oh
we are
bored

People amaze themselves
their eyes like dying stars

A bully would laugh
I would laugh

laugh out of sheer
desperation how can
you look at God with
those defiant eyes

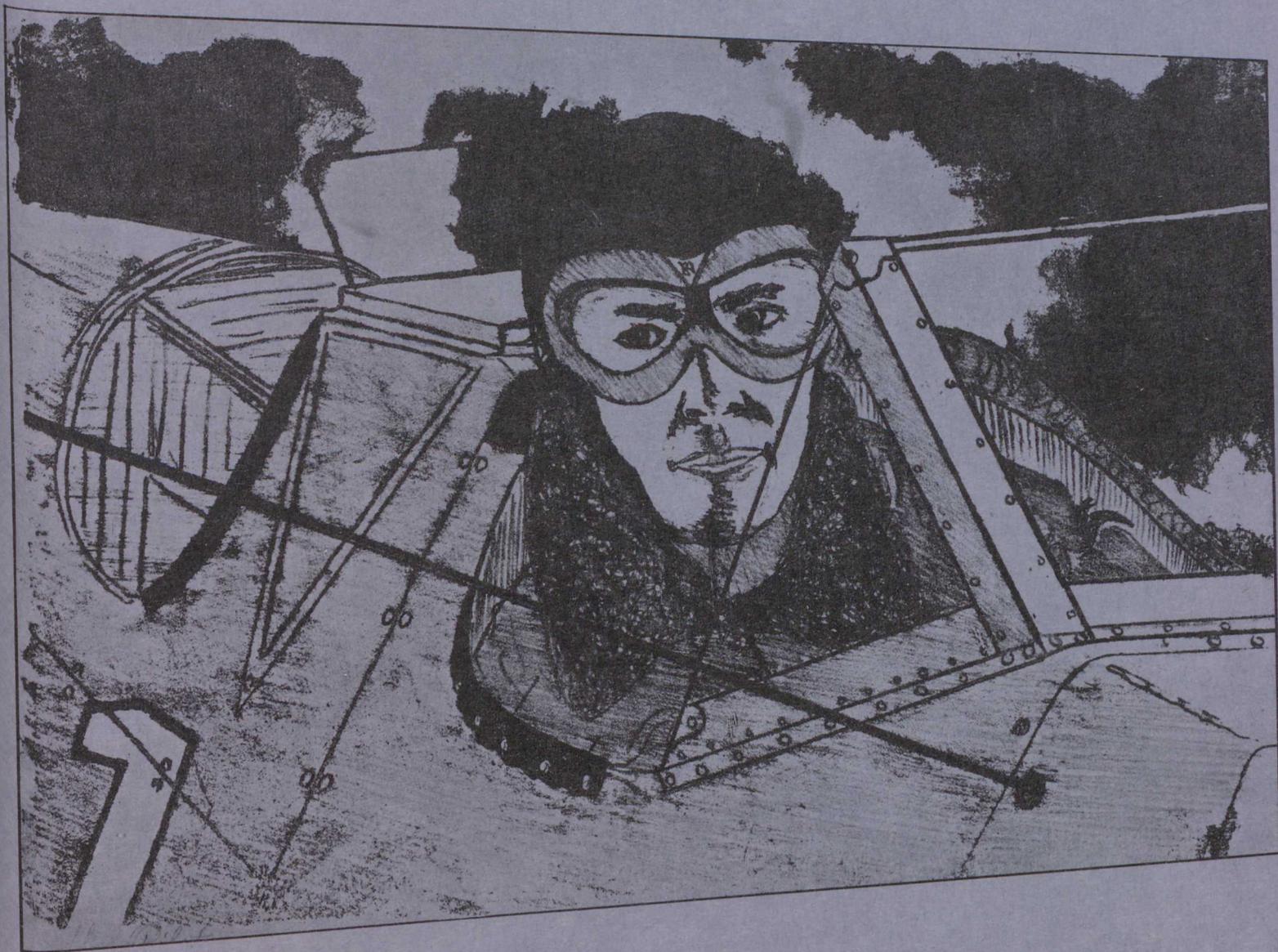
those savage,
defiant eyes
never making sense
never trying to

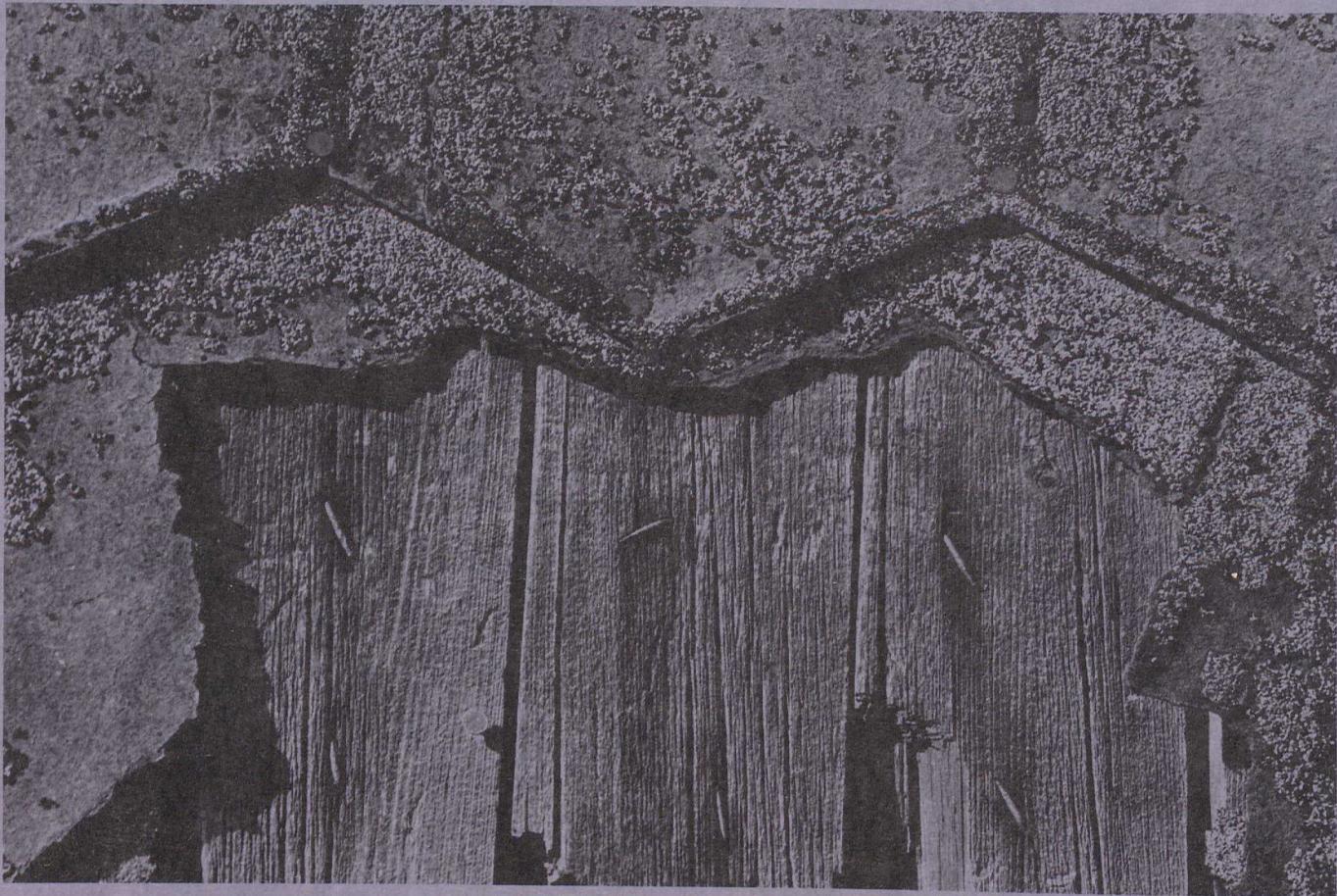
just flitting from
paragraph to paragraph

a wordless,
witless
wonder

scared as all hell.

DEIRDRE OFFEN





John Dzuryak

CATHY ARDEN

Ashes

Freshman Award

They can't touch me.

Because I know I'm here, and they don't.

If they ever realized their power . . . seventy-two of them against one of me and four plastic-coated walls and an elevator they can't use. . . .

Someone screams—or is it a someone else from a very dream of a stretched-out mind, stretched-out fear? My body tenses, my ears try to hear—then I think, maybe someone died, and I check under each wet nose for stale breath.

Verna lies sound asleep in her too-high bed. Her small, hunched body is wrapped in three too-big dresses, a mottled-brown sweater, stinking of sweat and mildew and vomit, and two thin blankets, both pulled snugly over her head. I gently pull down the covers and remove the sweater and two of the dresses, trying hard not to wake her, for she is weak and needs her rest; Verna never eats, just coffees and juices and milks, and she writes all over slips of paper strange letters that form no words but are her only communication; and, in a voice so small I can barely make out her words, she tells me that she must write so that people will understand her.

The silent masses of the syphilitic senile trying so hard not to be silent.

I go to answer the phone. When I come back, Verna's head is hidden beneath both covers; the dresses and the sweater have disappeared.

Sarah is standing in the hall, grinning a moldy, toothless, innocent grin. "Good morning, dear. How beautiful you are, shaneh maydeleh!"

Darling, it's the middle of the night.

"Oh, no, that can not be! I have slept so beautifully! I feel so well!"

Sarah, dear, you have shit running down your leg.

"Oh, no, no. Ha ha. That's fonny you should say soch a teeng."

Sweetheart, just look at your leg. Just take a whiff.

Sarah's face contorts in horror. Her hands, one of them also covered with her own excretion, fly to her face, cover her eyes. "Ai yi yi! Vey ish mere!" Then, to me, "Who could be so crazy to have put this on my leg?"

Scrub-a-dub-dub, Sarah's in the tub. The water, which was as clean as could be expected for the amount of work the housekeepers are willing to do for the pay they get (and besides they don't like to clean bathtubs much), turns into a muddy-brown, stinking mess. Sarah insists upon splashing the water, playfully, defeating, for me at least, the purpose of the bath.

"AAACCHH! Dun't toch mine arm!"

Why can't I touch your arm? I have to wash it, dear.

"You fool! Dun't you know that this arm is not mine? Can't you see it? It is not of my flesh . . . it does not do what I command it!"

Well, then, whose arm is it?

"It is the arm of . . . the arm of the Devil! AAACCHH! The Devil gave me this arm!" Sarah screams and begins crying out. "And he was DEAD, DEEEAAADDD when he gave it to me!"

I hold her dripping-wet, sagging flesh to me. Her entire body quivers and shakes, her tired breasts, no more than two wrinkled sheets of skin, hanging to her waist, swing from side to side. Suddenly:

"Mine eyes! Mine eyes! They took away mine eyes! Oy, gooten-heemel! Mine ears! Mine ears! They took away mine ears! Oy, God, they took mine eyes and mine ears! I have no eyes and no ears!"

I hold up two fingers. In a voice barely audible to my own ears, I ask Sarah how many fingers I am holding up.

"Of course two. Dun't you know anyteeng?"

I pick up what I hope is a clean Q-tip (the safety swab) and tell Sarah to stay still while I clean out her ears.

"Darling, there's no need to do that. I take them out every night and clean them myself."

I dust her with for-hospital-use-only baby powder. She smells sweet and fresh and clean, and I stink and I'm filth-drenched and I'm tired. And I'm smiling. She kisses me on the cheek, crying. "You're so good to me! God should bless you! God should bless you!"

Here comes Maier and the stink of his urine-drenched pants. Maier, Maier, Pants-on-fire!

I pin on the plastic smile they gave me and check to make sure there are clean towels. . . .

II

Come to dinner, blind Emil. Critchety-crotchety, crotch-rotchety, crotch rot mind, crotch rot eyes, Emil. Hold on to the hand rail with your broken hand, Devil's hand. Dead Devil's hand.

"This crazy board is always mixing me up. It seems as if I'm holding on to it, but, in reality, it is holding on to me. It is in control of my entire being. Right now it is taking me to dinner, but, you know, it is really time for breakfast. You see, it is constantly putting me twelve hours ahead of where I should be. When it should be six o'clock, it's six o'clock. It makes it very hard to order bakery goods."

At dinner Emil feeds his nose, chin, lap, chest—everything but his mouth—meager state-funded rations: a tablespoonful of cold, hard, yellowish green beans, butterless and unsalted; a grilled cheese sandwich, resting in the bean juice (the server forgot her slotted spoon), burnt black bubbles of cheese sticking out between two slices of toast, too hard for him, or anyone else, to chew; an eight-ounce styrofoam cup, half-full of cream of celery

soup, the cream resting in a quarter-inch thick layer on the top, the celery, non-existent; and a small dish of butterscotch pudding, blanketed by a hardened brown patch. "That was a good dinner, I thought," he said, as he says every night. "Good dessert—I thought."

I walk him back to his room. There is a special technique involved in walking a blind man. One must hold one or both of his hands and walk, backward, in front of him. This gives him the security and confidence he needs to walk.

"You are such a beautiful woman." After a pause, he laughs and says, "Oh, you didn't think I could see, did ya'? Ha ha! Sometimes I can see shadows, and sometimes a clear outline of a person or an object, and right now I can see you splendidly! I'll prove it to you: you have beautiful, long, flowing dark hair and such clear, beautiful eyes! Two rosebuds grow from your cheeks, and another has come to rest upon your mouth. What clear, glossy, beautiful skin you have! Teeth like pearls! And what a lovely dress you have on, though it seems far too beautiful to wear to a dinner such as we have just been to, though it was good, I thought. Such a rich color in a dress does you great justice."

At 8:30 I come to dress his bedsores and put him to bed.

"Come look at this. A picture of my wife and me on our anniversary—our (ahem) fiftieth wedding anniversary! Such a beautiful affair our children had for us."

(The A & D lotion mixes in with the blood of his open sores to form a light red near-liquid, like the syrup inside a chocolate-covered cherry.)

"Let's see now . . . oh, gosh, I must have at least six or seven. I don't know, that was my wife Martha's job, taking care of the kids and all. I never paid them much mind. I was a busy working man, no time for fool stuff like counting up kids and all. I'm originally from Kentucky, you know."

Yes, I think you told me that before.

"Hey, did you ever hear of 'Old Taylor's'? No?! Jeezus, what kids don't know today! 'Old Taylor's' just happens to be a whiskey, and a damn fine one, a damn famous one, at that! Sure you ain't never heard of it? . . . well . . . I used to go around with Old Taylor's daughter, yes, of course, THE Old Taylor! Fine old gentleman, rich, too, heh heh! And what a beautiful daughter he had. OOOH, such beautiful, long, dark, flowing . . . well, anyways, we two really had a

thing going. Her name was Elizabeth. Well, of course, THE Elizabeth Taylor. We used t'see each other every day. What a beautiful woman."

Well, whatever happened to her? You . . .

"Goddamn, you're nosy! Get out of here now, you cock-suckin', mother-fucking little bitch! You'll burn in Hell, I tell you. How dare you say such a thing to me, the great Caesar! OUT!"

I hurriedly tape up the dressing on his legs and arms and start to leave. I'm almost to the door, when:

"Oh, Nursie, before you go, I think I wet my bed a bit."

III

I had to go check Ethyl. She had suddenly been taken very ill last night; her family had been notified, but had neither come nor called since. She was ninety-two.

She didn't look too well; in fact, upon checking her pulse, I found her to be dead. Her skin was yellowish-blue; her eyes, wide open, staring at her forehead; her mouth, hanging open in a final good-bye. I took the I.V. out of her thin, veined arm already becoming stiff. I tried to remove the tape marks, but I didn't rub too hard and they stayed put. Tape marks can be very stubborn. I got a wet rag and washed off the rest of her body, removed her catheter, and pushed on her bladder to get out the rest of the urine.

The nurse made the routine phone call to Ethyl's family, said she had died and that she was sorry. The family said they hadn't had anything to do with her for years and weren't about to start now.

I pulled the sheet over her head. The orderly rolled her down to Dead Storage, which is a small room next to the laundry.

IV

THUMP! Roly-poly Charlotte fell down and made a boom-boom!

Charlotte, dear, you fell again.

"I tripped ovah my thoolaythe."

Let me help you up.

She closes her eyes in despair. She tries so hard to walk but always falls. Sometimes she gets hurt so bad that I have to lift her to a chair. Then, minutes later, Charlotte and the chair are on the floor.

Did you hurt yourself?

"No, dear, I'm awright now. I mutht uv tripped on my thoolaythe again. I'll be more careful, nex' time." After a short pause, she begins again, shyly.

"Honey, I know thith ith athkin' a lot, you hev a famby to take care uv and all, but I wath thinkin', well, mehbe layder you aren't bizzy?"

Why, dear, what did you have in mind?

"Well, I'm goin' home fur Chrithmith tomarrah and I hev'n't got a thing ta wear. I thought mehbe we two cud go shoppin'."

Well, I'd love to, but I don't think so, honey. I get off at midnight and most of the stores are closed.

She starts crying. Tears run down her chubby, lined face, over black-and-blue marks and thick patches of dried blood, mix with the gobs of mucous streaming from her nostrils, run over her mouth, into her mouth, and down her chin. I hold her to me and try to comfort her. I reach in my pocket, but there's no tissue, so I wipe off her face with my hands as best I can.

"Thweetheart, mehbe . . . mehbe yuh'd like ta come with me ta dinner . . . fur Chrithmith, you know. I'd love ta hev you, you are tho, tho good ta me!"

Charlotte, honey, don't cry. You know I have to work tomorrow, otherwise I'd come with you.

"Oh, I hev thoch a beeyouteefull home. In Canady! Oh, yuh'd love it! They's ackuth and ackuth uv land and pine treeth, and thoch a thweet thmell ta the whole plathe. Yuh'd love my cooking, too! Oh pleeth let me go! My huthband ith dead and my children nevuh write to me and we cud hev thoch a thwell time! PLEEEETH!

I must go see to the other patients. I start to walk away and Charlotte falls. She has reached out so far and for so long that she finally topples over, lying on the ground like a lit cigarette nobody smoked.

A smart tweed woman with beauty-shop hair and long-longer-longest lashes comes over to me. I hope she hasn't brought chocolates; we've gotten so many sweets this Christmas already.

Can I help you find someone?

She gives me a big kiss, on the mouth. "I'm glad I found you! I'm dead. Yes, stone cold dead. I died just a few hours ago. Those . . . those horrible people came at me with knives and they did this and sliced her and over here under the you-know and oh I can't go on! It's too horrible to think about."

Ashes, ashes.

We all

fall

down.



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