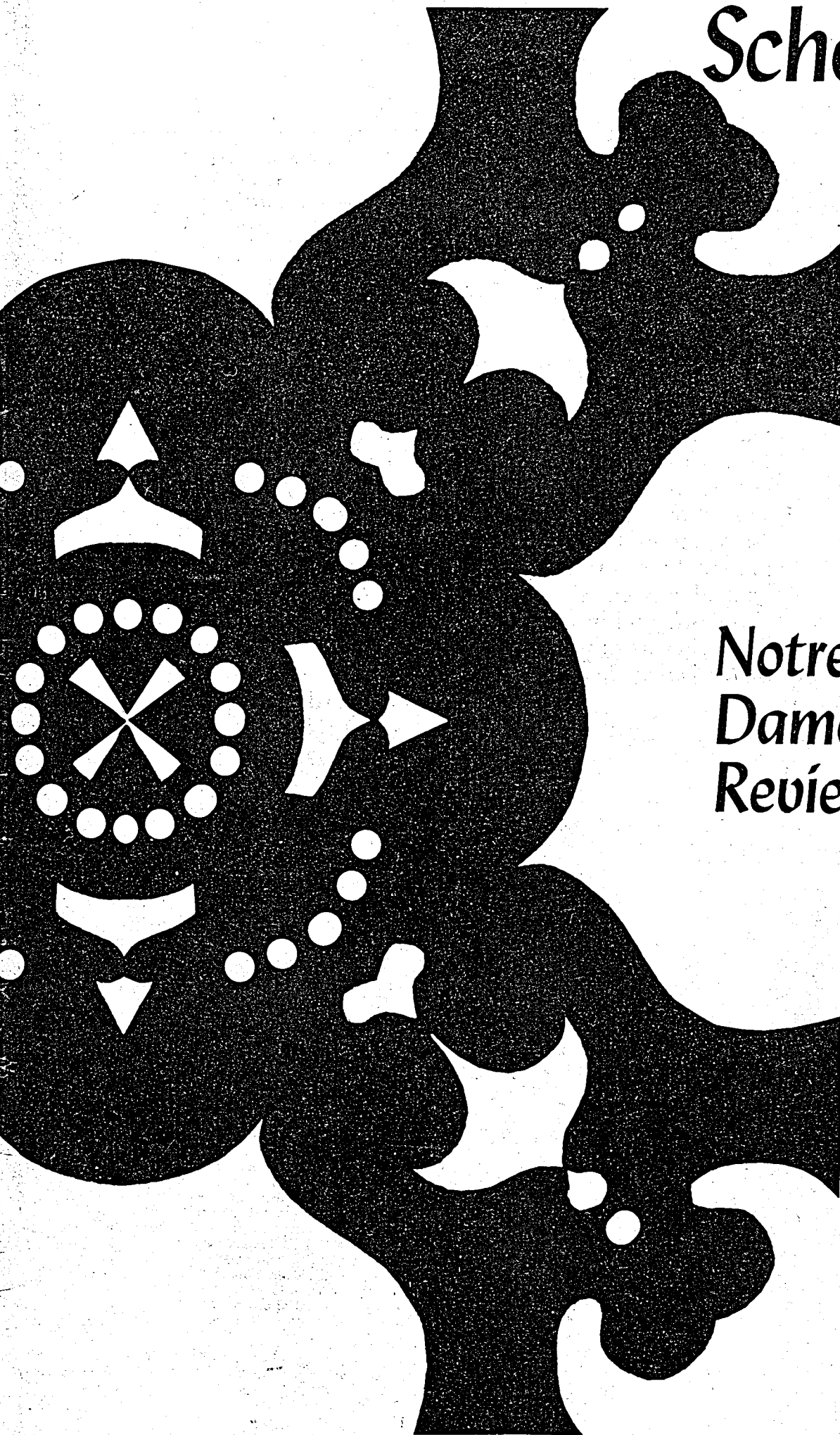


Scholastic

Special Issue
March 1, 1974

Notre Dame Review



To the Reader:

Literature, from its earliest moments, was intended to entertain, to distract, and to speak truly of the human condition. Recently, much of literature has become subject only to scholarship. Our purpose is not to ignore the scholarship, but rather to present literature and its scholarship to a general audience. We wish to thank the *Scholastic* and its editor Kerry McNamara for giving us this issue to give birth to the *Notre Dame Review*.

—The Editorial Board

Notre Dame Review

Francis J. O'Malley	At Christmas	4
Norman Mailer		
(with David Young)	An Interview	5
Sean Lucy	Incident on a Rail Journey	10
(with Sean O'Riada)	Liam O'Reilly	11
	Late Sleep	11
Ronald Weber	Seeing Signs	12
Bruce Jay Friedman	An Interview	16
Thomas Werge	Solzhenitsyn: His Book and His Readers	19
Diane Wakoski	To Harry Lewis . . .	22
Robert Slabey	John Cheever: The Swimming and His Readers	23
Ernest Sandeen	Posture	28
	Invitation	28
	Undone, Doing	28
T. C. Treanor	Images and Shadows of Divine Things	29
Sean Lucy	Visitation	39

Editor-in-Chief, Francis J. O'Malley
Student Editors, Joseph Runde and John Wenke

	Editorial Board	
Carvel Collins	Katherine Sullivan	Edward Vasta
Ernest Sandeen	Richard Sullivan	Ronald Weber

Art Director, James Purvis
Layout & Cover Design, Nan Smith

Acknowledgements

Kip Anderson
T. J. Clinton
Professor Donald Costello
Janet Cullen
Jean deSmet
Professor Joseph Evans
Ray Funk

Thomas Furlong
Professor John Garvick
James Gresser
Karen Kolber
Mark Luppino
Eileen MacKrell
Mrs. Connie Maher
John Murphy

John J. Niederman
James F. Pauer
John Phelan
Patrick Roach
Professor James Robinson
George Stratton
Gary Zebrun

Second-class postage paid at Notre Dame, Ind. 46556. The magazine is represented for national advertising by National Educational Advertising Services, 360 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. Published fortnightly during the school year except during vacation and examination periods, the SCHOLASTIC is printed at Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556. The subscription rate is \$5.00 a year and back numbers are available from the SCHOLASTIC. Please address all manuscripts to the SCHOLASTIC, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556. All unsolicited material becomes the property of the SCHOLASTIC.

copyright © 1974 Scholastic / all rights reserved / none of the contents may be reproduced without permission

Scholastic

Volume 115, No. 10

March 1, 1974

Notre Dame, Indiana
Kerry S. McNamara, Editor

Francis J. O'Malley

At Christmas

Let the Christbrand burst!
Let the Christbrand blazon!
Dartle whitely under the hearth-fire,
Unwind the wind, turn the thunderer,
And never, never thinning,
Forfend fear.
Flare up smartly, fix, flex, bless, inspire,
Instar the time, sear the sorcerer,
And never, never sparing,
Save all year.
Let the Christbrand burst!
Let the Christbrand blazon!

A Section of An Interview Between Norman Mailer and David Young

David Young is a painter who lives in New York City, and is a long time friend of Norman Mailer.

Interviewer: Well perhaps the best thing we can do as artists now is to persist in making that notion available. For example, a lot of the movements, ecological, et cetera, are spreading and are, I think, positive, but there seems to be a lack of a coherent vision going on when you think of all the different groups which are trying to make the different changes. I think that lack of vision is fundamentally a religious one, I mean the lack of the religious notion. The whole notion of God has become suspect, I think partly because so many of the church systems have degenerated into bureaucracies. The Catholic church is very guilty of that, even though they do it with great flourish and pomp, et cetera.

Mailer: Except that the Catholic church has these enterprising ministries. The Berrigan brothers with their enormous influence on young Catholics. While there are many more radicals among the Protestants, such intensity of thinking among devout Catholics has to be impressive because the Church is so structured. Since Catholicism is also closer to magic than Protestantism, profound changes in the power-structure of the Catholic church are exciting. Given the Church's extraordinary ability to pass down all the rapids of history, it may end by leading people out of ecological disasters.

Interviewer: Of course the worst thing about Protestantism is it eliminated magic.

Mailer: Yes, it eliminated magic.

Interviewer: Church in the 15th Century was a pretty lively place. It was a place where everybody connected. All deals were made all kinds of—it was a big catch-all. And there was the center of life and celebration involved. In present day times you find that in voodoo in Haiti—not voodoo in any of the mumbojumbo, but a voodoo session. It's a

gathering. It's a Saturday night party and it's profoundly religious and a tremendous amount of leg pulling being put on as music, dancing, this eroticism, this healing—it's an all around bag. And it's the only experience I ever had directly that I would ever consider profoundly religious and extremely human. It made me think back on the nearest thing we had to it years ago in places like the Land Ho Bar in Orleans. And it seems to me that what's happening here now, with God is Dead and all such stuff is that there has been an incredible decline, co-incidentally or not, an incredible decline in feeling itself. And I say that in terms of ordinary people-to-people contact, not in a broad sense. But that's what I've noticed in, for example, bars, which used to be I can remember 10 years ago much warmer places to be, much more fun, much more social intercourse going on and a lot of gaiety, and there would be fights and all of that sort of thing too but more vitality. Seems to me now

Mailer: Yes. Ten years ago, particularly in New York, one could feel we were moving toward an exciting world because we knew more about a good life than we saw in our society. And we were beginning to have a glimmer of the possible success of that life. I think the magic of the Kennedy years was precisely the feeling that, yes, we're getting into an interesting world where the government is going to be not that far away from us. We're going to be working in the same direction. We used to use words like expanding, and all too many spoke (badly) of getting into human possibilities; or enjoying the richness of an interesting relationship. So on. I think we were getting rid of that old dead traditional Fifties baggage, absolutely dead. What's happened of course is that as this liberation began to develop, the drug revolution came along and completely accelerated us out of any natural orbit between man and his government, and flung us into some extraordinary place where nothing is related to anything else any more. Not by measure, morals, or proportion. So nobody has the faintest confidence today that they contain knowledge, or at

least nobody I know has the confidence they have knowledge which is necessarily going to improve the world. Of course, there are any number of revolutionaries, black revolutionaries and women revolutionaries who feel they have an experience which will prevail. But there's something in the character and style of their arguments which doesn't give us this confidence. They're so harsh and angry. The tone is nihilistic rather than revolutionary. Still we listen. For nihilism is speaking to the fundamental suspicion that there's too much human material on earth. It may still be a valid revolution but for reasons other than the revolutionaries are arguing. The future real function of such a revolution might be that it cleaned a lot of people out of there. Too many people around, too many products, too much pollution. In fact we reach a real cure for some of our ecological diseases by wiping out nine tenths of the people on earth. It may be easier for the earth to rid itself of nuclear wastes from an absolutely disastrous war than for it to go on suffering in our over-labored, poisonous system of economy and technology. So one of the things one begins to question in many revolutionary movements is whether their collectively unconscious intent is not to rid the earth of excess. That's one reason we're respectful of these movements. It may also be why one doesn't feel any great urge to cry out, "They're evil." We've lost entirely the notion that we have some idea of who the good and evil are, or who even the funny people are. At least in the Fifties we used to have a feeling that Eisenhower was funny and there was warmth in the underground, that much we knew. A lot of America didn't know it, but they were going to find out.

Interviewer: All of the black humor came out of that period, Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, and those guys. The violence of those various revolutionary groups now would indicate to me an eruption of despair.

Mailer: Well, we feel that we've lost any idea that we might be of use to the world, that our ideas are good, and the real problem is to get our ideas out to people. I mean now, whenever we have a new idea,

the first thing we say to ourselves, is "My God, should we send this out? Wouldn't it be better to avoid polluting the intellectual waters?" It's as if we've become part of the plague. And yet for years I've been writing that a plague is coming. Of course it's more than a metaphor, but still the metaphor I use is cancer. Cancer is the disease which transcends other diseases. I've even argued that other diseases are solutions. When you get into a chronic psychic imbalance, when the ways in which your body and mind are collaborating are warped and out of tune, then the local disease comes along literally as your friend. It stops you. It makes you face your own reality.

Interviewer: I think you're right.

Mailer: Of course, what's happened with antibiotics and with the technology of medicine, is that we keep evading such a confrontation. I've always felt the main reason cancer keeps increasing in spite of all the money, and research, that goes into it, is we've gotten so much better at destroying the old diseases that we keep displacing measles and scarlet fever into unlocatable viruses. Finally we get to that one disease we can't displace, because, by God, it's there. Cancer. The body has revolted against the mind; the body is now developing its own cells, body cells free from mental organization, going off into some biological future which nobody can begin to comprehend. Well I think you can say one of the comparable things happening socially is all sorts of metastasis in the body social, all sorts of ideas which would have been considered straight-out nihilism a hundred years ago (of the sort that Dostoevski was always attacking with such accurate paranoid fire) are now viewed with dignity. Is it because of this feeling that the world as we know it has to be destroyed? Has to because we've lost the way, and the only route to find that way again—so goes the unspoken argument of the nihilist—is to see what survives?

Interviewer: Don't you feel that there is one thing we can do now, I mean improve education for children? That's a way of seeing what survives.

Mailer: I don't know if it's possible. The gulf is in the tap root. For instance, we can't even begin to teach arithmetic until we are able to abstract the object we're looking at. That means we have to divorce ourself from any intimate notion of its presence. The reason many sensitive children (black children particularly!) have a terrible time with numbers or arithmetic is because they're giving up a vital faculty of perception about the time they come to say that three apples and four apples make seven apples, and three horses and four horses make seven horses. What they have had to do is alienate themselves from the presence of the apples and the horses. Which is to say, ignore objects that are communicating to them. Seven horses in a meadow speak of many more vital matters to a child than numbers.

So if the faculty of measure in science is a species of communication, existential communication had to be destroyed in order for scientific measure to begin. Natural communication destroyed to provide mechanical communication. The false assumption that's been made by society was that mechanical communication (which is, by now, ubiquitously, electronic communication) was an addition to all other forms of communication. It's not. It's at the expense of other forms. The ability to measure comes out of the fact that we have destroyed those faculties which once gave a more acute sense of measure. To primitive man, it wasn't of first importance whether there were seven horses or five horses in a field. More important was the communication that he got off that tribe of horses. That herd. Five horses in a powerful and dangerous mood are obviously much more meaningful to him than seven horses placidly eating. Again, the mood. That was the only kind of measure to primitive man and it was a true measure I would think because it was a non-psychotic evaluation of the field of environment before him. Number cleaves the brain and encourages psychosis. If we are to talk of teaching children, the present permissive notions of instruction by which children learn have something, I think, fatal in them. Fatally dull. For example, you were talking to me earlier, while we were not recording, about some friend of yours who had

studied with Lamas, and how the Lamas would beat the students with bamboo rods if they weren't learning the lesson. I was pondering that, and it seemed to me, of course! that was indispensable. The modern pedagogue would exclaim, "What an awful way to instruct; these people are learning in fear." And the students will of course be in fear, will have a certain, let's say, ugly incentive to learn as well as a fine incentive. That may come closer to matching the dualities of the student's nature. Perhaps beating with rods is also done for the instructors because, well these instructors are trying to instruct students in spiritual matters of the utmost delicacy. There's nothing will destroy everybody's delicacy more than deadening the teacher. A teacher who's determined to be kind and tolerant and humane to his pupils at any cost to himself, while certainly a lady or a gentleman, is not necessarily refining his own qualities.

Interviewer: By not communicating, in effect.

Mailer: By not communicating the rage a pupil arouses in him at an inability to learn. It may be a purification rite for the teacher to whip those students. Think of the way in which an artist turns on himself or turns on others when they fail to embody his vision, or how most theatrical stage directors or movie directors are sadistic to their artists when they fail to deliver the work. Perhaps the master is entitled to whip his students. At least let the question remain open. I don't think we're going to be able to teach children a great many things so long as we have notions of letting them advance at their own rate in a gentle atmosphere, advance in the confidence that whatever expression issues from them is going to be a happy expression, and that all expressions are equal. Perhaps the most intense expression of education is to go through the experience of being afraid of a teacher, dominated by a teacher, fascinated by a teacher, and yet be able to transcend that teacher ultimately. It may be the only true education is through transcendence. Parents can bring every good to their children, can try to teach them in the tenderest way. But it isn't necessarily incumbent on the educational system to also present children with

tenderness, because to bring up a child in an atmosphere of vastly greater geniality than exists in the world is a dubious venture. You wouldn't send armies into battle without having given them rigorous training. I think the direction for future education may be for the disagreeable aspects of school to emerge more than they do today. Let kids show what it is to wrestle with a closed system. To have that closed system killing things in them literally, so that they have to fight back, develop powers of adaptation to cope with a repressive and difficult system. In compensation, let's have other parts of the educational system freer than today. We need a sense of opposites. I don't trust any concept of education which assumes there is a way to teach children better than all other ways.

Interviewer: I think children have to be taught to be agile, to be able to keep their wits, and learn to preserve that center of their being, allow it to flourish. The education of our future is possibly the one thing that is going to allow a future to be.

Mailer: I have a different notion about a viable future. I repeat: I think we've lost the way. I suspect we're only going to find out what works by allowing more variety to the notion of society than any previous civilization has even begun to conceive.

Interviewer: A hundred different life styles.

Mailer: Yes, but not embodied in sects and clans and groups and secret societies. Rather, have open societies founded on other notions than the political and the economic. That was the idea with which Breslin and I were working when I ran for mayor in the Democratic primary. The only way New York could begin to save itself, we argued, was to let people have a little power over their immediate environment. Indeed that's the only way you ever learn. I think one reason why artists sometimes live to an old age and are rather nice looking old men is because they are able to try an idea and see the result of it. A man who doesn't have the life of an artist lives in this—it seems to me—almost unutterable anguish, in an almost implacable

hostility toward any idea that's new because of the fact that he, poor ribbon clerk or hard hat, has had no chance whatsoever to test out his own ideas.

I mean, the closest an ordinary man can come to such verification is if he gambles, which is one reason for a passion for gambling. If you think a team is better than another, the only way you're likely to remember your perception is if you win or lose money that day. Well I think if we could get to a point where people could gamble on the kind of society they think might work, I think we might begin to see some way of opening new possibilities. For example, why can't people who think their children should be brought up strictly have that right in their schools just as people who want a permissive system of education should be able to create their schools from the bottom up. People who believe that policing city streets is a voluntary activity ought to be entitled to live in a particular community where they can do that, where they each serve a certain number of hours a week as policemen on a voluntary basis. Other people who think that a slight schizophrenic element to modern life is healthy, and they don't want to see the dirty work, could hire the best or the cheapest police force that they want, or even the worst gang of bullies they want. If they prevail where societies founded upon more idealistic impulses don't work, that's interesting too. At least we'll know that much. Because we don't know anything now.

Interviewer: In other words, allow more possibilities. . . .

Mailer: It's not a matter of allowing it. You know, one of the notions we could never get across in this mayoralty campaign is that if we had ever won, it isn't as if we then would have sat down with twenty brain-trusters and parceled up New York, here a little plot for such an idea and this nice terrain for that cause. New York would have become, in the notion we had, the 51st state—at that point various groups of people might have chosen to incorporate themselves as hamlets, towns, sees, or compounds. But the people in these places would have had to come together and decide what was the common denominator for their enclave. These particular towns, hamlets, principalities, whatever you want

to call them, would have come into existence only by people forging them, choosing to create them out of hard work. So it would have been a pioneer endeavor in a highly developed urban environment. To the extent people didn't do it, to the extent that people were apathetic, New York would just have changed over from being a city to being a state and would still be administered from the top. In other words, as groups of people came together and decided that they wanted something for themselves, wanted a society in which they could live within a larger society, so we would have relinquished power to them. But it wouldn't automatically have been conferred upon them.

Interviewer: In other words you would set a lot of forces in motion presently stalemated and stagnant.

Mailer: Forces now in statis would have been able to crystallize. Black people by the way often loved our idea. "Give us the power. We'll show you what we can do." I heard that over and over again. Of course the big argument liberals always advanced against us was that we'll just have black ghettos again. Well, we wouldn't be a white authority setting up the black ghettos. Black people would be choosing to have territories in that city which were theirs, where they would run things their way. When it was pointed out that of course there would be white areas which would make it very hard for a black man to enter, they would laugh. Because, they would say, we don't get onto that turf anyway. Of course there would be probably a great majority in the city to sit on the sidelines and say, "Hey, look, I work hard all day. When I come home at night I don't want to get involved in local government. Give me an apartment, a nice big anonymous building; let me do what I want my own way." And they would. These crystallizations into self-elected power would possibly occur very slowly in the beginning. If the notion worked. It would grow only if people began to believe that these societies forced by men and/or women having one collective notion on which they could agree, or even just one collective compromise on which they could agree, were working more interestingly than a lot of anonymous societies.

Interviewer: Because they were creating a kindred sense and thereby an enthusiasm? Perhaps the beginnings of a spell?

Mailer: Well just suppose for example that you have a community which decided that police were too expensive, and they wanted to have their own voluntary police system. They had nothing terribly valuable to protect in the area. But they wanted security out on the streets. So they had their own volunteer—their own vigilante system, if you will. Suppose what happens is these guys discover they have to put in one night a week working as a cop after work. They go out and they're scared stiff and they work, and they come back, and they're feeling pretty good. Let us say that night their sex with their wife is a little better. Because the guy feels a little closer to a western range rider. Now that might begin to illumine a community. Maybe you can measure a good society by the number of sweet fucks that take place on a given night. Science wants to measure society, do it that way. It's as good a measure as money. Of course you could also argue that a lot of these vigilantes might go in for freaky or corrupt activity. At least a professional cop, corrupt as he may be, has his professional standards, no matter how tarnished they have become. And you say what is the answer—I say I don't know the answer. I'm not going to sit here and claim vigilante cops are going to be better than professional cops. I don't know. It may be that it won't work and people will find they have to hire professionals again. If it does however work, what we will have learned will be incomparable. And if it doesn't, the police, at least, will be honored with a bit more value.

Interviewer: It would also force people a little more into their own resources. . . .

Mailer: Of course, that can not only be healthy but killing. People who have been living a lethargic life for too long can be wrecked by becoming too energetic. That's why apathetic people sometimes cling to apathy with the last passion left in them. They hate the whole idea that you want to make them run in the street.

Sean Lucy

Incident on a Rail Journey

He lay in straw and smell
Stretched on his side
One eye to a crack in the thundering cattle-truck,
To see the world again before he died.

Around him his companions in the purge
Sighed, cursed, prayed and cried
In desolation, clouds of misery,
Crowds of fear with stiff eyes wide.

But he watched blue plains under a milky moon
Swing far through ripples of posts,
Distant lights gentle as moist stars
And lines of leafy trees marching like cloudy ghosts.

"Content," he thought, "it is as still as love.
Pain is a pilgrim. Silence a waiting friend.
Content. Even my pity must be quiet.
I will be quiet now in this until the end."

And so it was. And in that grace he later died,
Comforting many in the slaughterplace.
Salute him armies,
He held on to peace.

Lying in straw,
With loving eye,
Watching through shaking boards,
To see the world again before he came to die.

Liam O'Reilly

You remember that day then
With the streets full of horsemen
Of priests and of friars
On the way to my wedding;
The fiddle at the table,
And the harp's stimulation,
And a threesome of fair women
To bring my love to his bed.

A widow and a virgin
I am left still so young,
And go say to my people
That my treasure was drowned;
Had I been in the boat then
And my two hands on the sheet
Take my word, Mrs. O'Reilly,
I'd have cured all your grief.

No wonder it's a bitter story
For your mother and for your father
And the nurse of the white breasts
Who would tell of your childhood;
Not to speak of your own wife
Who never made your bed, my own,
You went shoreward that same day.

The eels have your eyes
And the crabs have your mouth
Your two shining white arms
Under sway of the salmon;
I'd give five pounds to anyone
Who would lighten my sorrow,
A sad solitary woman
Poor bright Nelly Sheridan.

Translated from the Irish by
Sean O'Riada and Sean Lucy

Late Sleep

Lying at random on a wide bed,
In a late morning,
In a pink room,
His back is coiled in loops of ease,
His hands are slack,
His feet are stone.

All a warm log he lies in folds,
And still the fallow of his brain
Lies snoozy in a dozy swoon,
His sleep is sweet with lazy sighs
His eyes are darkly down as wells,
His ears are hum with busy far,
His nose is soft with morning air,
His feel is peace where the sheet swells.

Incredibly, deep in his dark
His action loaded like a gun
To rouse him where he lies,
So like a tiger it will come
And raise him in three minutes time
And with these feet walk on the sun
And with these hands pull down the skies.

Seeing Signs

Ronald Weber

A modest knocking at first, then a powerful rap. He thinks at once: Kittleson. He looks at his watch and though the light in the room is brilliant, golden, moments pass before he decodes the message: six forty-five.

Again the solid banging at the door and he thinks: Kittleson, the fat fairy, is on his way to Mass. I'm not up to it—neither he nor Mass. He remains quiet, motionless, fearing the creaking of bed springs, imagining Kittleson outside the door, dressed in jogging clothes, heaving for breath, emitting oily sweat.

When the knocking ends he turns cautiously on his side, falls into heavy sleep.

When Brother Worden next examines his watch the morning is gone and it's afternoon. He has missed breakfast and lunch, to say nothing of Mass and Miles Letterman's workshop. Disgusted with himself, he sits up quickly, is nearly felled by blistering pain at the top of his head. He steadies his head in his hands, waits for the pain to subside, awed by the realization that he's suffering an authentic hangover. For the first time in a not-young life.

Despite the misery and the wasted morning it has to be counted a good sign. A sign of progress, of joining the human community. Beginning to. But at the moment he can't think seriously about it, truly inspect the sign, for fear his head will shatter again. Save it for later on.

Shaving with deliberate care, holding himself stiffly erect, he decides he's fit for one thing only. The beach. Lying very still, soaking up sun, he can get himself back together. The hangover may be an encouraging sign but he can't endure long in such tender state.

At the snack bar in the dining hall he downs two cups of black coffee, proceeds to the campus book store, the Book Nook, for a pair of sunglasses. There's no mirror available so he tries imagining how the glasses will look on him. He doesn't want an enormous pair—a style for the young or those pretending to be; but he doesn't want something that looks skimpy on a large head either. When he catches a view of himself in a plate-glass window of the store he's pleased enough with what he finally settles on, a wrap-around pair with thick plastic rims.

He checks the campus map to get his bearings, sets out for the lake, walking slowly to avoid jarring movements. The day is bright, warm, high sun in a cloudless sky; sprinklers arch through the air, the spray violet through his new glasses; birds sing, nuns pass, lovely smiles for him, even a word now and then; tacked to a tree a cardboard sign: Coffee Hour Every Afternoon—Come Meet Your Fellow Man. But to all, though moved, he gives scant consideration. Not up to it. Can't muster a response, to beauty or anything. Badly in need of the serenity of the beach, a broiling sun to wring out the remains of several martinis. He may be on the right track at Hennipen College but a price is being exacted—a head racked with pain.

* * *

The bath house is open, a life guard perched on an elevated chair at the end of the dock, skin brown as tree bark. Few bathers about. The conference members where they should be, attending afternoon lectures and discussions, while he's here preparing to sun himself. Can't be helped. One of the things to do at the beach, if and when his head stabilizes, is reflect on the article requirement in Miles Letterman's workshop. Give thought to something he might do.

In the bath house Brother Worden pulls on his trunks, a faded green pair, boxer style, that have seen better days. When he gets the rest of his wardrobe in hand he'll have to get something new. A little more modern styling. And probably in white. For some reason.

He spreads a towel on a piece of beach where the sand gives way to a tangle of bushes, eases onto his stomach, gently works his toes into the sand, adjusts his face to the sun. Drowsiness comes on at once, bearing him down through waves of dry heat. He thinks briefly of Sister Grace and Father Finewine — an attractive couple, if that's what they are—drops off to sleep.

* * *

"Leonard! Hi there!"

Less than fifty feet away, maybe a hundred, not far, are Sister Grace and Sister Dorothea. Brother Worden pushes the sunglasses onto his forehead to make sure. Yes, on the beach. Sunning themselves. In bathing suits. Waving at him.

"Leonard!"

Brother Worden rapidly calculates whether

he should go over to the nuns, extend greetings. For their part they don't seem inclined to move from comfortable positions. Propped on their elbows, sharing a blanket. Smiling, waving, but content to stay where they are.

"Hello over there!" he calls out, and lowers his chin to his folded arms, able from there to see the nuns through a corner of his sunglasses. They must have come to the beach while he was dozing. Have they been watching him? Their greeting seemed spontaneous, as if they just discovered him. He hopes so. Unsettling to think they might have observed him for some time, sprawled in the sand, badly hung over.

On the other hand, how about them? He didn't keep track but the nuns drank nearly as much as he did—and it wasn't likely (is it?) they were more used to it than he. Brother Worden glances across the sand for hangover signs, instead is struck by the fine figures of the nuns. How lovely! Sister Grace wears a two-piece bathing suit, a bikini nearly; a bit plump—nothing serious, hardly a major defect—yet a striking woman. Thin legs and enormous bosom, as he has observed before, but both accentuated by the bikini. Though no grounds for thinking so, he decides Sister Grace has recently lost weight, possibly a good deal. To his inexperienced eye she's a woman who was once larger. Not so Sister Dorothea. Long and thin in a one-piece suit that appears a shade old-fashioned; in fact about the same vintage as Brother Worden's. Delicate bones, long straight girlish legs, very white skin, sharp-featured face turned to the sun, eyes clenched shut—an attractive woman too, more so than he thought last evening. The opposite of Sister Grace . . . but attractive nonetheless.

He gives up spying on the nuns, tries to slip back into drowsiness. But the sun is fiercely hot on his back and he has the uneasy feeling the nuns may be watching *him*, noticing his disordered state. He considers taking a swim, but with his delicate head is he up to the exertion? Regrets about his bathing suit too. Loose and floppy about the legs, even worse when wet. He turns over on the blanket, face to the sun, tries to lose himself in thought. What should he think about? The article for Miles Letterman, for one thing. He doubts there's time to write anything—and write about what? He hasn't a single thought. And even if he did, could he afford the time and effort when he has more important things on his mind? He didn't come to Hennepin College to write articles; it's just the other way—he came to get away from the ones already written. But that gives him an idea. He could submit to Miles Letterman one of his old printed pieces. Brother Thorne might send him one in time—or he might see if the Book Nook has a copy of his book.

Depressing idea. Maybe the hint of a bad sign as well. The articles and the book are behind him. (*Lord, grant that they are!*) To show past work to Miles Letterman would mean hauling out all his foolish mistakes, his blindness . . . hauling it out for a stranger and revealing himself for what he has been, fraud, deceiver, hollowing-sounding gong. His germinating hope would never withstand the shock.

Brother Worden rouses himself, makes for the water. Unflattering trunks or not, bad head or not, he's getting baked by the sun. The sand burns his feet as he hurries across it. He prefers to test the water with a foot but instead, conscious of the nuns behind him, marches boldly in, dives through the green surface.

* * *

"How is it, Leonard?"

It takes him a moment, standing at the water's edge, to locate the nuns in the carpeting of sunbathers. The beach is crowded. Radios play, the odor of sun-tan lotion laces the hot air . . . he marvels at the beauty of it. Bodies open to the sun, open to each other, free, relaxed. Living. . . . Yes, maybe this is what it's like.

Sister Dorothea calls again, "Is it cold?"

The nuns, pushed forward on their elbows, shielding their eyes with flattened hands, gazing expectantly toward him. Lovely sight.

"Just right! Perfect!"

He should go up to them, thread his way across the sand, talk a bit—after all, they spoke to him, spoke first, and given Father Boyle's party last night they're certainly more than casual acquaintances. But his wet trunks sag from his hips, water drains on his feet, and his head hasn't been improved by the swim. All things considered, he still isn't in proper condition.

"Just perfect!" he says again, smiles broadly, heads off to find his towel.

* * *

The Book Nook is deserted. Everyone at the beach or lectures. A good thing; if others were around he wouldn't have the nerve to look.

Paperbacks arranged by author. In the religion section Brother Worden locates the M's and proceeds slowly, lingering over a title here and there, heading cautiously for the W's. He's certain the book won't be here, silly to even bother. Gone the way of missals, holy cards, scapulars—swept away by the tide of renewal, returned to publishers, burnt. Good riddance to bad rubbish. On the other hand, his eye hits on titles, not exactly *avant-garde*, that have somehow been spared—something about the Catholic Student Mission Crusade, an autobiography of Monsignor Thomas Courtney Rourke, a tour guide to Fatima. More of this hanging around than he knew. Maybe they don't know what to do with it, can't

bring themselves to let it go. His mother was never able to get rid of funeral crucifixes that accumulated in the family, let them pile up, complicated sliding crucifixes with candles and holy water inside, let them pile up until you couldn't open an old box without finding one. What will happen to them? Will they ever decay, return to the blessed anonymous dust? Will his book?

By the time he reaches the W's Brother Worden is convinced his book will be there. He can feel it, a strong premonition. Yet when he finds it—and not one copy but two—he's struck with surprise. There it is, familiar glossy cover, his book, but who can believe it would find its way here, to a college book store? More surprising, remain after all this time? Incredible!

If he has ever been in the presence of a sign, this is one. His hands are wet with perspiration, legs rubbery. Does he have the strength to take the book off the shelf, confront the balding, self-satisfied figure on the jacket? But what the sign means, means exactly, eludes him. In one sense it suggests, suggests strongly, that he'll never be able to flee his mistaken past, never get the book and all it implies, his whole empty self, never get it completely behind him. Melancholy thought, dark and tempting. Yet it can't compete with a new interpretation, rising abruptly into clarity. Brother Worden thinks: Appearance to the contrary, I'm no longer the man pictured on the book jacket. A man can change his life, he can stop living a false life, and I'm doing that now. Beginning to. All I have to do is look at the photograph, observe the eyes closely, and I'll feel the measure of the change that is already taking place. That's the meaning of the sign. It's meant to give me courage. Resolutely, Brother Worden reaches for the book.

"Father!"

His hand recoils, crowds into a pocket with his tobacco pouch. The elderly nun with the black briefcase, the one from the lake, has materialized beside him. She smiles up from below, flashing brown eyes set in a dough-colored face. Hoping she hasn't noticed the book he's after, Brother Worden turns so that he's blocking her view of the W section—a movement he knows is silly as soon as he makes it. The nun doesn't even know his name. She doesn't know anything about him.

"I'll bet you thought I wouldn't remember you. Now didn't you, Father?" Brother Worden returns an affable smile but gives the nun no encouragement. She's obviously the kind who'll talk your leg off if you give her half a chance. "I knew you the minute I saw you. Tall man of sturdy bone."

"I beg your pardon?"

"That's what I call you in my poem. Tall man of sturdy bone."

Brother Worden doesn't respond but the nun lowers her briefcase to the floor, provides an explanation whether he wants it or not. "It was so lovely the way you threw that stone . . . such strength and authority . . . that I had to write a poem about it. I get most of my inspiration while I'm out walking. I sat down on a stump and wrote the poem straight out."

When Brother Worden still doesn't respond the nun cocks her head to the side, looks up at him quizzically. "I hope you don't mind, Father. I didn't mean to invade your privacy."

"Not at all," he says quickly, feeling he's behaving foolishly. He doesn't have to encourage the nun but it can't hurt to humor her. He asks if she's in the poetry workshop.

She is. All her life she had been a second-grade teacher, but when she retired she decided to take up a hobby and chose poetry. She has come to Hennepin College for six summers in a row to study under Justin John Smith. "Are you acquainted with him, Father?"

"I'm afraid not," Brother Worden says, and explains that he's new to the conference.

"Oh, I knew that. I'd have noticed you before." The nun takes a step back, examines him for a moment with a professional eye, then draws close, confides to him, "If you don't mind my saying so, Father, you cut a distinguished figure."

Brother Worden denies it but the nun insists. "Very distinguished. You have wonderful things ahead of you."

"If you say so."

"I do."

To change the subject Brother Worden asks about Justin John Smith.

"A glorious man. He has written fourteen volumes of poetry." The nun draws even closer, touches Brother Worden's chest with a pointed corner of her head dress, says in a confessional tone, "I don't mind telling you, Father, he has changed my life. He has brought me to see the world in a new way. When I was younger I would have passed you by at the lake without a second thought. I just wasn't aware of the beauty and wonder in the world."

"Hmmm," Brother Worden muses.

"Justin John Smith is helping me put together a book. My first one."

Brother Worden studies the nun carefully. At her age making the discovery of the world . . . a figure of hope if ever he has encountered one. Yet strangely he feels no hope. Maybe it's his book hidden behind him, his awareness of it. The knowledge of futility. If one confidence deserved another he should take his book from the shelf, say to the nun, Look, I wrote a book once and it was the biggest mistake of my life. You have nothing to look forward to but regret.

"Would you like to see it, Father? The poem I wrote about you?"

He can hardly decline.

The nun searches her briefcase, removes a looseleaf notebook with the name Hennepin College embossed in gold lettering. She explains she keeps notes and jottings in the notebook plus drafts of poems done in the field. She finds the page, hands him the book. The poem is carefully lettered in purple ink.

Tall man of sturdy bone
Searching the weed-strewn path alone
Finding at last his child's desire:
Speckl'd, smooth, well-shaped stone.

He rises to dignified height
Sends the missile on skipping flight
Flat across a mirror-blue surface:
Bless'd man-child in my sight.

Brother Worden reads the poem twice, passes the notebook back.

"You see the idea I'm working with?"

"I'm not sure."

"Of course it needs more work. It's only a first draft."

Brother Worden explains he's a poor judge of poetry. Of most other things too, he could just as well add.

The nun closes the briefcase, fastens the thick straps. She's late for a poetry reading by Justin John Smith in Gilley Hall of Fine Arts. Would Brother Worden like to join her?

Again he summons a smile. "I'll pass this time."

"You'd love it, Father."

"I'll keep it in mind."

"That's a promise now."

* * *

It didn't seem very good, the poem, though Justin John Smith would know more about that than he. What he wonders is what it means. Means for him. It isn't every day that someone picks you out as subject for a poem, someone you don't even know and who doesn't know you (he should have told her at once he wasn't a priest; now it would only embarrass her); it's the sort of thing you have to give serious thought to. You have to inspect it . . . for a sign. But not just now. Not in his present condition. Best to leave it alone until he's back to normal. As for his book, best to leave that alone too. He knows where there's a copy if he decides to show an article to Miles Letterman. Even if he doesn't he can come to the book store just to look at the photograph of the balding fellow on the jacket . . . just to prove to himself he's making progress. If that's what it is.

* * *

In his room, slid under the door, a letter. He knows the handwriting at once as Brother

Thorne's.

Dear Len,

Just want to say hello (hello!) and tell you all goes well back at the shop. Election still set for Monday a.m. God, you should see the campaigning! One thing you have to say about our colleagues: their bad taste is consistent.

Brother Harold and Sister Mary Alma—heavy-set one, in Social Studies—have been named poll watchers. They can be trusted.

How goes Hennepin? Isn't it everything I said? I envy you being surrounded with truly creative people. Take advantage!

Yours in John Bosco,
J. T.

P.S.: Brother Maurice hangs on. Strong as a bull. The doctors say he should have been gone two weeks ago.

Sighing deeply, Brother Worden lowers the window shade, removes clothing down to his shorts, eases himself into bed, folds a damp cloth over his eyes. The room is hot but the best place to recuperate; he shouldn't have left it in the first place. Good of Brother Thorne to write; a true friend. But the letter seems as remote as if it came from Mars—sent from another life, at least a different one than the one he's trying to live. Is living. Again he sighs, adjusts himself to the bed. If and when he has to write to Brother Thorne, write him the truth, explain everything, it's going to be the hardest thing he has ever done.

* * *

"Dinner time, Brother. You in there?"

He lifts an edge of the wash cloth, orange-gold light still burning against the shade, recognizes Kittleson's voice beyond the door.

"Brother?"

Still limp with sleep, he takes cautious stock of his situation. Head better but skin flushed, in fact fiery, and a hint of nausea on his stomach. New symptoms. Would the martinis ever drain from his system? With delicate care he turns the cloth over, seeks a lingering coolness.

"Brother Worden?"

Silently he composes a prayer: *In your mercy, Lord, send that man away.*

Later, the room pitch dark, there's another rap at the door, Father Boyle calls in to him, "You there, Leonard?" Brother Worden holds his breath and the priest, getting no response, has the good sense to give it up at once.

This is a segment of a longer work of fiction with the same title.

An Interview

Bruce Jay Friedman

Notre Dame Review interviewed Bruce Jay Friedman during his appearance at the 1974 Sophomore Literary Festival at Notre Dame.

Notre Dame Review: With regard to *Steambath*, where do you place yourself in the tradition of American drama?

Friedman: I don't know. I don't pay very much attention to traditions. That was simply the next play I had to write. I don't see a tremendous amount of theater. I don't feel required to answer that. For example, that's one of those questions that's just too grand to answer. Can you ask it another way?

NDR: Why *Steambath* as a play instead of a novel?

Friedman: Well, I have to wind the clock back a bit. I'm essentially a prose writer. My first love is prose. I got involved in theater quite accidentally. I wrote a play called *Scuba Duba*. It took place over one evening. It seemed to have a single dramatic conflict, and it seemed to work out best with dialogue. It took place in one room. All that sounded like a play. So, I just took a run at it. I wrote it very, very quickly, and it was produced modestly. My wildest ambition was to have it run for a couple of months. And, I had this shattering experience. I had no idea that it would have that kind of impact. It had a long run, and I began to think more in terms of theater. I've found that, in working as a playwright, I can hold certain delicate issues at arm's length, whereas working in prose, working in the novel form, there is a requirement to dig down very much deeper.

NDR: You talk about the novel, and there's talk today that the novel is dead or dying. As a novelist, how do you feel about this?

Friedman: Well, you have to be some kind of weird person to closet yourself away for two years or however long it takes to write a book. You have a minimum amount of social contact and you have to live totally within the atmosphere of a serious novel. It puts great pressure on your personal life. There are just more jobs today that are available to the writer;

more jobs that give you more instant gratification, more instant financial reward. I think that's one of the problems. But, there are people who believe that the theater is dying until Jason Miller writes *That Championship Season*; the novel is dying until Mario Puzo writes *The Godfather*. If the novel is dying, I'm going down with the ship, because that's still my first love. I don't think I've mastered that form at all. I have a novel being published in May, and I'm groping my way into another one. I would just like to give one example of the power of the novel, the first one that comes to mind. Recently, I read a book by a woman named Ruth Jhabvala, an English woman who lives in India. It's called *Travelers*, and it seemed to me when I finished that novel that I had the clearest argument as to how a single book can capture the spirit and essence of an entire country and the sensibility of that country. In other words, that single novel totally outweighs in importance five John Gunther guidebooks plus a hundred New Journalism approaches to India.

NDR: So you see the novel as something that can put a whole age into a very few pages?

Friedman: When it's right, there's nothing to surpass it in my view. I think there have been occasional plays that were able to do this throughout the years; but I'm a snob, and I still feel that when the novelist is working in high gear, he's doing a job that no one else can do.

NDR: What novelists have influenced you?

Friedman: When I was a young man, I went through school without paying very much attention to literature. When I was in the Air Force, I ran into a commanding officer who touted me on to three books that turned me around on a dime, and made me feel what a wonderful thing it would be to be a writer. I don't know whether they would affect me if I read them today, or if I'd care to read them again. One was *Catcher in the Rye*. Another was *From Here to Eternity*. Another was a Thomas Wolfe novel. I was 21 and my ambitions at that time were to be a newspaper reporter, and I saw these three monumental

efforts, and I was never the same after reading those books. Now, I usually think of influence in terms of taking courage from someone else rather than being stylistically influenced. I think my influences are more social, geographical, familial, film, early-radio oriented. When a book influences me, it's generally a matter of having seen a writer take a chance and come back alive and well. I take courage from that.

NDR: When he was here, Norman Mailer made a statement about how he sees the new age of the novel coming because the governmental structures are bearing down. He feels this is going to make more writers go into themselves and come up with the great American novel. Do you see that as a viable idea?

Friedman: Well, I don't think American novelists have to be driven into themselves because I believe the foremost American novelists begin by being too internal, too claustrophobic in their world. Unfortunately, when we get a social and political cataclysm, a Watergate, it's the third-rate novelist who takes on that subject. Serious contemporary American writers never seem to work on that Tolstoian scale. We haven't had any. It would be nice to think that the situation in high government would produce a turnaround. But if we go along the way we've been going, I'd say the Watergate novel or the Nixon Administration novel, when it's written, will be written by the Jacqueline Susanns. It would be nice if Mailer took that on. He may be someone with enough size and enough vision. I think the key American novelists, normally, in this situation, would tend to work on a small scale, to wait for the appropriate Watergate metaphor.

NDR: Who do you think are the foremost novelists?

Friedman: I pay attention to the same people you pay attention to. I'm always interested in what Philip Roth has to say, Bernard Malamud, and Nabokov, and I think right now you have a man here whom I consider a giant — Isaac Singer, whose worth, unfortunately — I hope I'm wrong — but it's almost as though he's one of those fellows who has to be gone before we appreciate his size. He's someone who speaks to me.

I think right now the people I pay most attention to, rather peculiarly, are the women. The most interesting drift I see in fiction right now is in the female area. It's not the attacking and abrasive quality I'm talking about, but there are a number of young writers who are potentially important that I've been sort of paying attention to. They don't have majestic names as of now, but one healthy spin-off of the so-called women's movement is probably the release of these voices, so that you're finally getting a look at the real female sensibility. I don't mean the Germaine Greer-Kate Millet axis. I'm speaking about people like Joy Williams, particularly. *Esquire* recently published an anthology called "Secret Life of Our Times," and it's twenty-five short pieces of fiction published in recent years in *Esquire*. The most fascinating pieces to me were the ones that were written by the women.

NDR: Singer primarily tells a story. But there's a drive now to move away from that type of thing and get into more of an aesthetic mode.

Friedman: Well, I think Singer combines both. To me, the ideal writer, the quintessential writer, must strike that midpoint between the animal and the intellectual, between the story-teller, if you will, and the thinker. Of all the writers I can think of, he gets closest to that center. He jumps in and tells his "simple" story which turns out to be not that simple. At the same time he has all these currents of myth and legend and intellect bubbling through his work. I can think of some writers who are too intellectual for my taste and some who are too close to the instinctive and the primal.

The most attractive thing that's ever been said about me was said by Nelson Algren, who said that I'm dangerously effective because I don't know what I'm doing. The truth is that I know more than I let on, and I know less than I'd like to.

NDR: Earlier you mentioned influences, such as radio and TV and film. Do you see these in any way as alternatives to writing?

Friedman: Well, I was rather rigid on this subject, but television, for example, is something which you absolutely must pay attention to. It's just too all-consuming to close your eye to. Now commercial television is, no matter what they say about "stepping on the gas" and getting into adult themes, still twenty years behind the other media. But I think they'll be brought, kicking and screaming, abreast with film and the print media. And the reason I have to take something like television seriously — I never have before — is that on a single night, in Los Angeles County alone, at one showing of *Steambath* on educational television, more people, that is maybe a million one hundred thousand people, saw *Steambath*, which is by far more people than saw it in its run in the theater. And so the presentation on television pretty much becomes *Steambath*, in many ways. Now, of course, that was educational television, and in normal theater terms this was not an especially shocking play, but it produced almost calamitous results when it was shown on television. It was a writer's dream. You divided the audience in half; you had half of them marching on the station, wanting to burn it down, and the other half saying it was refreshing, or whatever.

NDR: How do you think you're going to get the American people to move into bringing forth *Steambath* and other similar things that will make television march forward?

Friedman: I don't feel any sense of responsibility to do that. The only responsibility I feel is to work honestly and well and continue working. I don't know how that's going to be done. In my own case I've made a couple of passes at commercial television, because I've been encouraged to do so, and I've been paid for my efforts, and that was the last that was

ever heard of the work. I have faith that when you do good work, and important work, work that rings a bell, strikes a chord, that it will win out somehow. For example, I've had two full-length plays that were actually produced. One was *Scuba Duba*, which had a long, healthy, prosperous run, and disappeared. *Steambath* had a much bumpier time in New York, and we kind of limped along for a while. The audiences down there seemed to like it very much, but it was a struggle. And yet that play, which seems to have something in it that strikes that chord that I'm talking about, just keeps bobbing to the surface, and won't go away. And that play, with a much more modest run, is performed all over the place, because there's something in there, for all of its imperfections, that speaks to people, whereas the other play had that effect temporarily, but addressed itself to a particular time, and the issues in it no longer seem to be germane.

NDR: Well, what do you think is that central core, as the father of that play?

Friedman: I think it's a play that struggles with the central question of existence. John F. Kennedy made a speech to the Military Academy before he died, and he said, "Life is unfair." And that's what this play addresses itself to. You have a situation in American cities, America generally, where violence is usually senseless, nameless, committed without cause. It's impossible to understand. A character in the play says to God: "Well, you know I've turned my life inside out. I've done this wonderful job on myself, and here I am, dead. It's wrong, it's unfair." And the entire play is a struggle to come to grips with that. It has a comedic overlay, but to me it's a very serious play. It tends to have ferocious impact on people who've had some unexplainable loss, who absolutely can't deal with it. This is my attempt to wrestle with that question.

NDR: My response was that it moved something between man and God which can't be lost, and which is hard to do for a human — to give a human being something to plug into, for meditation, some way of explaining. That's what the play did to me. It made me laugh, too, which is good, and I guess that is the effect you were shooting at.

Friedman: I never feel particularly funny. I never think of myself necessarily as a comic writer. It's just that my way of looking at the world strikes people as funny, makes them laugh. But, if that were the be-all and end-all of the work, I wouldn't feel as if I were doing my job. I'm usually after some game or other.

NDR: I felt sort of strange reading all the press that preceded you here which referred to you as a "black comic." I couldn't figure out what that might be. Black humor is something that means practically nothing.

Friedman: Well, it was a tag, that's all. I don't know whether it was a mistake or what. I guess I don't

really regret it. It came about this way. I became editor of an anthology many years back called *Black Humor*. It wasn't my idea. It was an excuse, an opportunity, really, to read some writers I hadn't read. I did find some echo going from one to the other of a certain rage against social imbalance, which was treated in a somewhat harsh comedic way. That part of it, I think, still holds. I work that way sometimes. In other words, sometimes I take a cold-blooded look at some ridiculous aspect of society, and use a short story form, or short play form, to take it to its ultimate lengths, and show its ridiculousness. I still do that. But the main thread of my work is, I think, or I would like to think, in the formal tradition, it would seem to me, of telling a story, using my particular view, my own voice, in the traditional framework.

NDR: To change the subject, there has been an unusual strain on this Festival week, with the happenings in the USSR. As a writer, how do you feel about the way Solzhenitsyn has been treated? How do you compare your situation in this country to his there?

Friedman: I read the press accounts — here are people using words like "deplorable." It makes me aware of the inadequacies of language. It's almost as if you said, "What do you think of the elimination of six million Jews in World War II?" and I answered, "I think it was deplorable." It seems to me that language becomes obscene in that case, and it makes us regret all the times we've said "great" and "terrific" and used language casually. To me, we have no language to deal with the incomprehensible idea of a man being unable to do his work. It would be like stopping his breathing apparatus. It's totally unthinkable. So that's how I feel on the one hand, and I'd feel idiotic if I were to say I find it very "unattractive." That's the same as saying when it rains, everybody gets wet. On the other hand, I don't feel smug, and I don't think any of us here should feel smug about it, because there are other ways to stifle, to imprison. We shouldn't say "naughty, naughty" to the Soviet Union, where we have a situation in which we now know an administration takes writers with unfriendly views and looks at their tax returns with an eye towards crippling them economically. That's another form of imprisonment. We don't know at this moment what the real story is on Abbie Hoffman, for example, awaiting trial on drugs. If it were to come out at the trial that he was set up . . . That would have been a paranoid thought in the Sixties, but we now have the record before us. It's almost logical to assume on the basis of daily evidence in the press that he's been set up by the narcotics people. That represents another form of imprisonment. I'm not feeling very smug, at the moment. I don't feel like saying "Russia's bad — we're good." We're not so terrific either. One other thing I'd like to say, one thrilling thing is the idea that a writer can more or less bring a country to its knees. There would be no equivalent in this country. If someone calls Nixon and Ford homosexual lovers, he is patted on the head, and given an assistant professorship at some university. What it shows in a curious way is that they have more respect for writers

in the Soviet Union than we do here. Here we have a tendency to co-opt writers, to pull out their teeth by somehow absorbing them. Tom Hayden's not a writer, but you find him now lecturing politely before senatorial committees. We do that to radical politicians and we do that to writers. That's one reason why I myself would be leery of involving myself with foundation grants or whatever. In my own way, I try to be as independent as possible, which is not so possible.

NDR: Well, this is a question getting back to courage and Solzhenitsyn, regarding his image of courage rather than of America's deplorableness. The way I see it, and I'd like to have your response, the response of America is deplorable insofar as it takes something like that to make a country like America free to see the work of a writer capable of bringing a country to its knees. It's almost absurd to think that could happen here. Do you win a sense of courage from Solzhenitsyn's plight? What can Solzhenitsyn mean to a writer? If tomorrow you find yourself in that situation, would you have the courage to write, to say your truth?

Friedman: I'd like to feel I could. But you never know what you're going to do until you're tested.

I like to think that it will be unthinkable, incomprehensible, to have to live within certain restrictions. In professional writing you do have certain restrictions that you have to pay attention to in order to survive. You have to pay some attention, whether you like it or not, to the nature of the various publications, et cetera, et cetera. You do have an editorial check. There are the requirements of certain magazines that you have to keep an eye on in order to function. But, in the fictional world, the purely creative world, once again it's very easy to sit here at the Morris Inn and be brave. No one knows what he'd do under the gun, when the ante goes up, and the personal stakes become excruciating. You'd like to think that you simply couldn't look at yourself in the mirror if you changed as much as a semicolon in deference to some outside authority in a purely creative work. I know that in the few instances I can think of where I've altered my work, and once again I put fiction and a purely creative work in a somewhat different category, but in those few instances where I've literally altered a single word to placate some standard which I considered outlandish, I've paid a heavy, heavy price, and I lost something as a result — lost sleep, self-respect — and became less of a man in those few instances.

Solzhenitsyn: His Book and His Readers

Thomas Werge

"The idea of making the century's great crime[s] look dull is not banal. Politically, psychologically, [it was] an idea of genius. The banality was only camouflage. What better way to get the curse out of murder than to make it look ordinary, boring, or trite? With horrible political insight they found a way to disguise the thing. Intellectuals do not understand. . . . Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience. In such a project trivial? Only if human life is trivial." —Mr. Sammler, replying to the glib use of Hannah Arendt's phrase, "the banality of evil," in Bellow's Mr. Sammler's Planet.

"Few people, having read The Gulag Archipelago, will be the same as when they began the first page. In this respect, it seems to me that nothing in Russian and world literature can compare with Solzhenitsyn's book." —Roy Medvedev

The sales staff of Harper and Row, we learn from *Time*, is busy "drumming up" advance orders for the first volume of the English translation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*. To be sure, Solzhenitsyn wishes his revelations to affect as many readers as possible. But *Time*'s phrase locates the reality: books are commodities, readers are consumers. The pitches are endless: instant liberation; instant mental health; instant sexual ecstasy; instant demonism, exorcism, salvation. They are hawked like pennants at a ball game.

The suffering and the soul of *Gulag* may meet the same end. Medvedev's claim will not be wondered at as profound and astonishing; it will be a useful blurb. It is not exaggerating to suppose that the ad man's dream would be to "book" Solzhenitsyn, who is now a "personality," even a "hot property," on the talk shows. He might be sandwiched between Venerable Comedian and Newest

Starlet. "Heeere's Alex . . ."

What makes the scenario grotesque is that Solzhenitsyn has been willing to suffer and even to die for the words we cheapen. He has said that the Soviet destruction of the manuscripts he left behind would be "spiritual murder." He has "declared" the present regime in Russia to be illegitimate and a mockery. Our talk shows — hideous phrase, when one thinks on it — babble forever; ads shriek; print is everywhere, the banal rhetoric of this week's performer inescapable: Riggs, Ali, Ervin, Simon, Baker, Buzhardt, Steinem, Whoever. "Personalities," wrote T. S. Eliot, "succeed one another in interest. It is difficult to conceive of any age (of many ages) when human beings cared . . . about the salvation of the 'soul,' but not about each other as 'personalities.'" The media as barkers, reality as medicine show.

Solzhenitsyn's words, like Dostoyevsky's, are written to "save" others, and, again like Dostoyevsky's words, they almost killed their author. Dostoyevsky was to be shot for three crimes: knowing of plans to set up a printing press; conversing secretly about the censorship; and reading a letter declared to be treasonous. Solzhenitsyn spent eleven years in prison camps for a single phrase. In a letter, he called Stalin "the man with the moustache." Eleven years for a sardonic phrase. At least one of Solzhenitsyn's friends committed suicide when discovered by the KGB as she was reading the manuscript of *Gulag*. Several others may have been executed or incarcerated in insane asylums for the same crime. His words were born in pain and redeemed in suffering. They have meaning and value. When Solzhenitsyn says in his Nobel speech that "one word of truth shall outweigh the whole world," he means it. To us, it may seem abstract; to him it is, as we sometimes say, a matter of life and death.

The power of the word remains for Solzhenitsyn as awesome as it was for the prophets. Whether we hear his voice is another question. We are in a hurry, and the din and speed of our time are tremendous. "The characteristic discovery of the age," writes Kierkegaard, "is felt everywhere: the speed of the printing press; it is even noticeable in the . . . form of reflection into which this age has fallen, as a result of which its expressions are always being limited and in the end mean nothing." Solzhenitsyn's image of his oppressors, "standing on their lies behind a fortress of newsprint," poses the problem. Newsprint as propaganda, personalities as momentary soporifics deceive and are gone. How then locate the truth in the midst of the lies? How forget, and discard the personalities even while seeing, remembering, and keep-

ing the soul?

Solzhenitsyn would have his readers begin by presupposing the existence of the truth and the soul. Orwell once remarked that the twentieth century frightened him not so much because it found it difficult to write the truth about history, but because it assumed that there were no such things as truth and history. Solzhenitsyn's vision, like Dostoyevsky's, is rooted in the soul and in the soul's struggle to see the truth of its world. Virginia Woolf rightly says that the soul is the main character in Russian literature, and that this precise fact often makes Russian literature alien to us. The soul is not a statistic. It cannot be bought, sold, peddled. Its utterances are speech rather than prattle, religious and not slick. Its suffering does not respond to glib cures. But Solzhenitsyn's knowledge of its reality anchors his insistence that history, or the story of literal souls in a literal past, is as real as the souls who comprise it. Truth is equally real. Dictators may dismiss them as fictions and commit the greatest obscenities on the grounds that they are fictions, but, as Solzhenitsyn has shown, their substance and reality will not be denied.

In these days, the corruption of language and meaning, and the corruption of man are synonymous. Our malaise runs far deeper than such symptoms as the infamous "inoperative." But seeing Solzhenitsyn's work as the result of his act of faith may allow us to recover some sense of what "the word" once meant and what it still may mean, for him and for us. His book would become a revelation rather than an item. It would be a real truth uttered by an equally real voice and soul.

The presence of Solzhenitsyn seems to be a realization of the first and hopeful part of Kierkegaard's earlier statement on the disjointed speed of our age and the dominance of print rather than "word": "We shall hope for the appearance of strongly armed men who will win back the lost power and meaning of words, just as Luther won back the concept of faith for his age." His analogy is significant. The act of writing or speaking necessitates a faith that one's words possess some degree of significance; to lose all faith in language is not a semantic but a religious crisis. Conversely, Solzhenitsyn sees the act of writing as a religious act, an act of faith. He is "strongly armed."

In the nineteenth century, the Russian and American souls were close. They still have strong and profound affinities, including their mystical and ambivalent sense of their nation, and their deepest consciousness of man as a religious and suffering creature whose salvation or destruction

is bound up with the spirit and not with the political state. It would be altogether appropriate, if miraculous, if America were to read Solzhenitsyn with the insight, recognition, and ultimate concern his book demands.

There is no denying the difficulty of individual Americans committing themselves to such an act of faith. "Our America," writes Emerson, "has a bad name for superficialness. Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it." Solzhenitsyn ends *The First Circle* with a fatuous observation by a Westerner in Russia. He sees a meat truck and notes that provisions in Moscow must be excellent. The "meat truck" in fact is loaded with people who are destined, like cattle, for the slaughter or for a slow madness in one of Stalin's prison camps in the vast "archipelago" of Stalinist terror and death.

Yet Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn indict their own land in the same way Emerson indicts America. The enemy consists of those who will not see the clear and hidden terrors of life as well as those whose tyrannies are satanic. In the framework of seeing and blindness, we ought to anticipate the English publication of *The Gulag Archipelago* not as a financial coup for an American publishing house or as a literary "occasion," narrowly defined, but as a kind of religious event. It is a large but just claim. It would also be a large but just claim to suggest that our right reading of Solzhenitsyn would join us to him in a dialectic of recognition. In recognizing and thereby overcoming the corruptions of relative political languages, we would be affirming once again an absolute and universal moral language.

Our physical risk, of course, will be less than Solzhenitsyn's has been and continues to be, and less than that of his sympathetic readers in Russia, for whom the act of reading is a crime against the state. But if his own faith is to be even partially vindicated on earth, it will be no less important. Solzhenitsyn in a real sense has resurrected in his words all of those Stalin had killed and buried. He has said that he has fulfilled his obligation to the dead. Yet for the living to fail to hear Solzhenitsyn, and, through him, the dead, would be a greater betrayal and torture than any the Soviet state could inflict on him. The state, at least, knows and fears the potential power of Solzhenitsyn's word and book. It has been as vicious in attacking Solzhenitsyn as our government, and all governments, who do not risk their interests to speak for individuals, has been mute in defending and praising him. In seeking to crush or to discredit his book — and him — the state acknowledges that

power. It views and fears its publication not as a literary game but as an apocalyptic event. The Soviet state takes words seriously as vehicles of propaganda whose only meanings are those assigned them by the Party. It takes words even more seriously when they are written and spoken by one who believes that writing is an act of religious rather than socialist faith, that words are moral, and that they are given their deepest significance when they are made to serve the truth.

The Soviet government, however, has no premium on the use of language to obscure and to deceive. In the same way, neither the terrifying nor the redemptive quality of Solzhenitsyn's "one word of truth" may be restricted to a narrowly polemical or political interpretation. This does not excuse or minimize the monstrous sins of Stalinism. It was to reveal those sins that Solzhenitsyn wrote *Gulag*.

Yet the ultimate revelation goes deeper still. The oppressions and terrors of moral blindness and deliberate evil are inner and universal. They are embodied in certain political regimes as assumptions and as conscious policies. In Stalinist Russia, those policies of terror and evil brought about suffering and death on an unimaginable scale. Solzhenitsyn asserts that the evils of Czarist Russia did not begin to compare to Stalin's systematic murders, acts of terror, and devastating programs whose victims were selected by Stalin's caprice alone.

If Solzhenitsyn's vision of hell begins and ends with a particular political state, however, his vision is not itself limited to political forms. Solzhenitsyn's great and continuing theme is the struggle between demonic evil and goodness, falsehood and truth, in the human heart and in the manifestations of the human heart in history. The "god and devil" within man's nature struggle for dominance. The political structures man creates reflect the dominance of one or the other of those forces, or, indeed, reflect a precarious balancing of the two. The structures themselves may and do intensify man's inclination to good or evil. But they do not impose or create his polarities, his capacity for goodness and malevolence, and his inner conflicts. These forces are in Solzhenitsyn, as they are in Dostoyevsky, the elements of the soul, the battleground, where good and evil wage their war for supremacy.

Solzhenitsyn's theme pervades our own tradition. His preoccupation with the soul echoes our literary and religious history and his teacher, Dostoyevsky. To hear Solzhenitsyn's voice and to see his vision may be to recover our own memory as well as the Russian past. To hear it will be to rediscover — or to discover — our own souls.

TO HARRY LEWIS WHO SAID,
"Art cannot ask for indulgence.
It must in fact be an attack on that very thing."

begging the indulgence of
Ted Enslin who invented this form

Have you,
by the way,
looked up the meaning of that word, Harry?
"indulgence"?

something which is granted out of generosity or compassion
a pardon
leeway or tolerance

And what can art ask for?
(As much as the artist needs?)

Yes, you are right. I am twisting your words.
Deliberately.

For you have deliberately
misrepresented mine.

Chosen to ignore
what is really there,
if words are facts
and ideas are landscapes.
You have chosen an easy,
shall we say

"indulgent"

way
of looking at me.

But would it be fair to deny you?

No,
of course.

And I am indulgent.

You have said so yourself.

Not examining, perhaps, as most poets would
the roots of your words,
their literal meanings.

Adopting a pose as serious researcher
looking for

OBJECTIVE TRUTH.

Well, sorry old man,
poetry doesn't have any to offer.
But I will indulge in the most decent way I can. . .
Responding to your
accusations
which are either too sweet or too sour,
like home-made wine.

Where I live right now,
one only mentions the weather when it isn't raining.
And you always smile and say hello to someone you've met,
even when he is your neighbor
and you know he beats his wife,
or is a thief.

Diane Wakoski

John Cheever: The Swimming of America

Robert Slabey

"... the story of *Rip Van Winkle* has never been finished, and still awaits a final imaginative re-creation."—Constance Rourke

"Indeed, the central fact about America in 1970 is the discrepancy between the realities of our society and our beliefs about them. The gap is even greater in terms of our failure to understand the possibilities and potential of American life."—Charles A. Reich

I

More than a century after Washington Irving described the Catskills as "fairy mountains" with "magical hues" produced by seasonal and diurnal atmospheric changes, John Cheever has taken that enchanted vicinity as the locale for some of his best fiction. In this continuation of Hudson River mythology, Cheever's territory, like Irving's, is somewhere between fact and fantasy, the mundane and the marvelous, "modern" life and ancient legend. And while both writers mix comedy and sadness, Irving's vision gravitates towards the first pole, Cheever's towards the second. They are both in the company of American writers who find "reality" at the crossroads of actuality and myth. In addition, Cheever's magical transformations have cultural roots in Ovid and Cotton Mather as well as in American Romanticism. Like Irving—Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Faulkner—Cheever has taken a region and a time and, without diminishing their importance, has made them stand for the larger meanings of American reality. His basic exploration has been into the depths of the American experience; he can see the meaning of the country in the way ordinary people live their daily lives.

In a career spanning more than four decades, Cheever has published over one hundred short stories (most of them in *The New Yorker*), six story collections, and three novels. A conscious craftsman and a brilliant stylist, he has encountered substantial success but only spare attention by academic critics. "The Swimmer," a fifteen-page tale which will be the focus of the present study, is, according to its author, the product of two months' work and 150 pages of notes. He is, I think, probably the most underestimated — and sometimes misunderstood — of contemporary fictionists. Cheever's mastery of art and theme places his best work in

touch with basic forms of existence as well as in the center of our culture. He charts the peregrinations of American life — from town to city to the suburbs to Europe to "America." His special theatre, however, is suburbia where the metamorphosis is not of Irving's sleepy Dutch into busy Americans but of workaday city businessmen into weekend "country gentlemen."

On one level, Cheever's fictions are comedies of manners recording the objects and occasions of suburban life: supermarkets, swimming pools, commuter trains, thruways, cocktail parties. Behavioral nuances function as in manners fiction; for example, a "loss of social esteem" can be discerned when a hired bartender gives rude service at a party. In spite of satiric possibilities too numerous to be resisted, Cheever's primary impulse is not to ridicule the silly surfaces. He suggests and sometimes depicts loneliness and despair as well as mysterious and sinister realities. Suburbia is built over the abyss from which the powers of darkness occasionally emerge. Recall the strange accident in *Bullet Park* when a commuter waiting on a station platform is sucked under the wheels of the Chicago express; Cheever's reality here and elsewhere is closer to Kafka than O'Hara. He exposes the nightmare behind Norman Rockwell's *Saturday Evening Post* "America." Though Cheever's allegiance is to the tradition of Romance, his vision (though not his style) resembles William Dean Howells' depiction of the troubled day-to-day existence of the middle class: those who live on the thin surface hiding terror and violence and pain in their endlessly renewed attempts to plug along with honor in a chaotic world. Cheever depicts the "more smiling aspects of life," which (according to Howells) were the more American — and sometimes the more terrifying.

Cheever's people are ordinary, weak, foolish, shallow; for the most part lonely, sad, disappointed, inarticulate, they muddle through after barely avoiding disaster. But since they have a capacity for love and goodness, to their creator their lives are, finally, worth saving. In Cheever's view Good and Evil are both powerful forces. Life, he writes, is "a perilous moral journey." The freaks along the way are those who have fallen from grace. William Peden calls Cheever "a wry observer of manners and mores [who] is more saddened than amused by the foibles he depicts with understanding and grace." Cheever attempts to

define "the quality of American life" or "How We Live Now." His stories, according to Alfred Kazin, are "a demonstration of the amazing sadness, futility, and evanescence of life among the settled, moneyed, seemingly altogether domesticated people in [Suburbia]." Cheever's people, latter-day neighbors of Irving's and Wharton's, in class and consciousness closer to Howells' and Lewis' are revealed in the mode of Hawthorne with the insight of Fitzgerald.

II

One of Cheever's most famous, most striking, and most original stories "The Swimmer" elucidates his characteristic artistry as well as his version of American existence. The basic situation is well known: Neddy Merrill's decision to swim eight miles home via a series of pools. But by the time he is finished, years have passed and his house is empty. Neddy's arrival home is an example of Cheever's suburbanite, here falling through the surface into the abyss over which his life has been precariously structured, while others undergo magical transformations. Neddy makes the once-in-a-lifetime discovery that he has won the race but lost his "life." He is the seemingly self-confident conformist whose life-style is identified with his environment; he is a thorough creature of his culture. Neddy is, moreover, athletic, with "the especial slenderness of youth. . . . He might have been compared to a summer day, particularly the last hours of one, and while he lacked a tennis racket or a sail bag the impression was definitely one of youth, sport, and clement weather." The purpose of his swim is to enhance the beauty of the summer day, but his experience turns out to be closer to Houseman's Athlete Dying Young than to Shakespeare's young man. His newly discovered route home will be named the Lucinda River (to honor his wife), but it is actually to be a celebration of his own fading youth and an expansion of diminished possibilities.

The narrative begins on "one of those mid-summer Sundays when everyone sits around saying: 'I drank too much last night.'" And like "Rip Van Winkle" there is a description of "magical hues": "It was a fine day. In the West there was a massive stand of cumulus cloud so like a city seen from a distance — from the bow of an approaching ship — that it might have a name. Lisbon. Hackensack." Cheever's protagonist, along with Rip, is an avatar of the amiable good fellow, the shallow American who drinks too much and "lives" too little. Neddy Merrill is not the lazy dropout, but he is an escapist and a dreamer (and part-time "pool bum"). Ned has material abundance, but that, he finds, is not enough; he shares with many of Cheever's protagonists a vague discontent. His escape from cares and responsibilities and from time is similar to Rip's, the cocktail party Ned's equivalent for Rip's pub. Rip's dream of a perpetual men's club has its correspondence in Ned's dream of a permanent poolside party. Both go on to have extraordinary experiences in the "enchanted mountains," in a dream-world of the past,

the unconscious, and the imagination. Both men meet regional "natives" there whose "hospitable customs and traditions . . . have to be handled with diplomacy." Rip's overnight sleep covers twenty years, Ned's long day's journey compresses several years. The Big Sleep becomes the Big Hangover, each signifying the central hollowness of each man's middle years, the American emptiness between the Pepsi generation and the Geritol set.

Rip's encounter and sleep and Neddy's suburban swim are mythic experiences that have indexes in both psychology and reality. On one level, Rip's afternoon in the mountains and Neddy's swimsaga epitomize their lives, each experience significantly initiated with drinking. For Cheever every suburban Sunday is the same, duplicating the sameness of every business day in the city. While Rip has an aversion to all profitable work, Ned represses all unpleasant facts from his consciousness. Both time-travellers escape because of similar psychological inability to face adult responsibilities and to commit themselves to dull actuality. They want to leave behind everyday existence, domestic troubles, loneliness, advancing age. Like generations of Americans they have taken to the woods — to hunt, to fish, to camp out, to contemplate the wilderness, and/or to find the "real America." Neddy's swim is obviously just a more domesticated form of woodcraft. He leaves Technopolis for Arcadia, history for pastoral; but now the machine has been set up in the garden (in the form of the pool filter).

Irving's storied Hudson is replaced by the fantasied Lucinda, a "river" of swimming pools. Both "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Swimmer" contain mythic thunderstorms and cyclic seasonal imagery. For Ned the starting point in a fine midsummer day at the Westerhazys'. Cheever, like Irving, manages subtle and skillful shifts from actual time and place to the world of Nature, myth and the imagination, time measured by sun and season instead of clocks and commuter trains. But the key to meaning in Nature's rhythms and rituals is lost to Ned as it had been to Rip. At the first pool where the apple trees are in bloom, Ned has already gone back even further than spring — to Eden, which had been a "world of apples." From here he progresses to the Bunkers' party where he is welcomed, to the Levys' where the party is over and the maple leaves are red and yellow, to the Lindleys' riding ring overgrown with grass. Then the Welchers' pool is dry, the bathhouse locked, and the house "for sale," prefiguring the end of his journey. Ned's most difficult portage is the highway where the motorists harass and ridicule him, but by then he has reached the point of no return. His desire for a drink is mocked when he is assailed by an empty beer can. To mobile Americans (as H. L. Mencken prophesied) Nature has become a place to toss beer cans on Sunday afternoons. But all those cars on the Turnpike are — if we believe Paul Simon — looking "for America."

At the crowded, regimented Recreation Center the pool reeks of chlorine (in contrast with the pure waters of private pools) and Ned is subjected to the lifeguard's rebukes. America's natural resources have become crowded, polluted, and "collectivized," troutstreams cut up and sold by the yard (as at Brautigan's Cleveland Wrecking Company). Next, at the Hallorans', the beech hedge is yellow; Ned is cold, tired, depressed, and his trunks feel loose. It is definitely autumn with falling leaves and woodsmoke. At the Sachs' he barely finishes his swim and, desperately needing a drink, he heads for the Binswangers.' The Merrills had always refused their invitations, but now Ned finds that he is the one to be snubbed at the party. In addition, the dark water of the pool has a "wintry gleam." Then after his former mistress refuses his request for a drink, he is exhausted and for the first time he has to use the ladder getting out of a pool. The flowers and constellations are unmistakably those of autumn. He is unable to dive into the last pools. Miserable, cold, exhausted, bewildered, he weeps. He has been "immersed too long." The temporal drift is ever downward, with summer, the time of physicality and material prosperity, giving way to the season of decline and decay. During his odyssey Ned loses a sense of time just as "his gift for concealing painful facts let him forget that he had sold his house, that his children were in trouble, and that his friend [Eric Sachs] had been ill." His affair with Shirley Adams had been terminated "last week, last month, last year. He couldn't remember."

During Neddy's swim, he loses everything — wife, children, home, friends, mistress, job, investments, youth, hopes, dreams, self. At the end he "had done what he wanted, he had swum the country," but his house is dark, locked, and empty, recalling Rip who discovered his house abandoned and in decay and found himself alone in the world, puzzled by "such enormous lapses of time." The Lucinda River, like the Hudson, represents time and change; the waterway of "light" and new beginnings becomes the river of darkness and despair. Cheever has carried the identityless, which Irving ultimately averted, to its finale. The constituents of actuality have slipped away. All that he thought he had is lost; all relationships have come to naught. He is left with emptiness. "Everything" was never enough: now it is nothing. While Irving's tale ranks not only as a classic but as a national resource for cultural reference, "The Swimmer" is no less rich and includes areas beyond Irving's attention.

Neddy is the depthless dreamer and organization man, but he also acts out the frontier myth of exploration, independence, individualism, endurance, and self-reliance. He even sees himself "as a legendary figure." "Making his way home by an uncommon route gave him the feeling that he was a pilgrim, an explorer, a man with a destiny." Another Columbus, he has only imaginary charts to follow. A pioneer, he confronts the challenge of nature alone. And as a pilgrim, his

journey recalls Bunyan's archetype ubiquitous in American literature. Neddy, however, faces not the primitive forces of the wilderness but pools, gardens, and highways. His pool expedition is a Madison Avenue packaging of Emerson's call to "enjoy an original relation to the universe," his naturism just as ersatz as the nudist Hallorans reading the *Times*. By the 1960's the Frontier is something not lived but read about, a vision enriched by memory. Ned's desire is to go back in time and space, to move outward and inward, while an onerous world moves forward and downward.

Cheever omits the final movement of the archetype (Rip's reconciliation with the new life of the town), but he plays out the full, darker implications. The everyday world, re-established at the conclusion of "Rip Van Winkle," is irretrievably lost at the end of "The Swimmer." Irving created a legendary past (based on European myths) to enrich the texture of a raw, new present. Cheever imagined a mythic alternate to explode an unreal present. Irving's dream-world is, finally, not believed in, while for Cheever myth, dream, and the unconscious are more "real" than objective existence. After 140 years, Cheever has replaced history, Irving's primary allegiance, with mystery. According to Richard Poirier the most interesting American writings are an image of the creation of America itself: "They are bathed in the myths of American history; they carry the metaphoric burden of a great dream of freedom — of the expansion of national consciousness into the vast spaces of a continent and the absorption of those spaces into ourselves." By taking his protagonist outside of society and by moving his fiction into myth, Cheever has secured a place in the major tradition of American literature with its minority, counter-culture vision of society. Through action, image, and allusion he creates a literary, mythic, and cultural context. The Hudson, Concord, Mississippi, Thames, Nile, and Ganges mingle in the creative consciousness.

III

In his fiction Cheever presents the symptoms of contemporary anxiety and ennui but only implies the causes. His men suffer from that American inability to make sense out of life that derives from a failure to recognize the unreality of their lives. They are, however, evidently tired of an existence that does not fulfill, of living without imagination. They have been working and residing and playing in artificiality, regimentation, in a plastic "unreality." All of their life-pursuits — success, status, sex—ignore reality and are in fact fantasies. Freedom, happiness, achievement are illusions. Substance is frittered away through absorption in detail. The suburbanite, above all, dwells in cultural deprivation, in a synthetic environment, with "neither the beauty and serenity of the countryside, the stimulation of the city, nor the stability and sense of community of the small town." Ned has the civilized man's psychic need to rebel against his plastic surroundings and the organized

world of logic, reason, and technology. He seeks adventure, freedom, and peace in nature. Filled with euphoria and wanderlust, a need to expend energy and experience, a richer mode of response, he wants to re-establish contact with life. His attempt at renewal is analogous to mythologized sex, "the supreme elixir, the painkiller, the brightly colored pill that would put the spring back into his step, the joy of life in his heart." His swim, moreover, expresses an artistic impulse, the attempt to do something unusual, to create an alternate reality. It illustrates the subconscious knowledge Cheever described in "The Seaside Houses": "... we are, as in our dreams we have always known ourselves to be, migrants and wanderers." Neddy's swimming the "quasi-subterranean stream that curved across the county," seems like a movement through the womb-like unconscious.

There is also nostalgia for an old innocence and for the "green breast of the new world." Ned wants to start again, to make a new beginning and would swim nude if he could. His epic swim, like his morning slide down the bannister, is an attempt to slow down the encroachment of age. Youth is, after all, the best time — the brightest and most blessed. He wants neither to grow old nor to grow up; he regrets lost youth and fading *machismo*. His athletic prowess is his last valuable possession. A return to nature ("In the woods is perpetual youth," according to Emerson) also betokens a return to the "childhood" of America and to a simpler, more "real" existence, the evolution of the race encapsulated within American history. Neddy feels the need to believe in the myth of a Golden Age, a legend accepted as fact, and has the optimist's faith that all problems have solutions. Similarly the Lucinda River, like the Northwest Passage, exists, and all he has to do is swim it to make it real. "America" itself was named before it was explored.

In "The Swimmer" the American Dream is the creation of one's own reality — the dream of living out one's imagination. Americans, in their minds, are still en route to the Promised Land. In the present the only way to start anew is via the imagination. The mythic America that never existed is now lost; the good old days have only led to the bad times. With the closing of the Frontier, the dreamer-explorer is left with nowhere to go except "passage to more than India," no guide to follow except the Transcendentalist injunction: "Build therefore your own world." Ned shuts exterior malice out of his personal wonderland — a neighborhood Disney-world sufficient to satisfy a middle-class "capacity for wonder." He creates a myth of private satisfaction to counter a public despair (a situation recent surveys have found characteristic of contemporary Americans). Ecology again gets

converted into ego-logy.

Cheever's story, probably the most important use of the swimming pool in American literature, is an imaginative vision of American reality in the interplay of person and object. (To Cheever's people, of course, the pool is an index to affluence and status.) In Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* the swimming pool is also connected with the protagonist's character and quest. Gatsby and Neddy are the lustrous but naive American fools doomed by time, mortality, and history. Both wish to achieve the transcendent moment when dream and reality are one. But both attempts at transcendence are foiled by transience, water in the pools symbolizing flux and mutability. All quests for El Dorado, like DeSoto's, end at the grave. The whole world is insular, only an island in time. Neddy's swim, like Gatsby's final plunge, is an encounter with that new world, but one already fallen. The dreamer is betrayed by reality and by his own dream. "The Swimmer" like *Gatsby* ends with a deserted house in a Paradise garden overgrown with weeds. Gatsby's mansion is not only the millionaire's palace with an obscenity scrawled on the steps but also an epitome of Western European culture. Neddy's, on the other hand, is the family domicile; it is revelatory to recall that his swim included parties, neighbors, friends, and a mistress, but only casual references to his family, with whom his concern had been as shallow as Rip's with his. Like Fitzgerald—Faulkner, Hawthorne, Irving—Cheever believed and proved that the real history of America, not yet recorded in history books, is in our literature. "The Swimmer" is an elegy not, as Mark Schorer suggested "for Sundays in Suburbia" but for America and for life.

Neddy's personal dilemma has both psychological and cultural roots. His crisis of consciousness is shared by his culture. "The Swimmer" probes a trauma deep in the national character. The story of the American is, like the many adaptations of "Rip Van Winkle," an "unfinished" story still awaiting its 'final imaginative re-creation.' "The Swimmer" is neither rewriting nor updating of "Rip," any more than "The Enormous Radio" is a modernization of "Young Goodman Brown"; both stories are re-visions of archetypal Americans and situations which link the destiny of characters with the meaning of American history. Like Irving's classic, Cheever's tale endures in the reader's memory with its artistry, its psychological implications, its cultural resonance, and its penetration of the currents of existence. Cheever, moreover, gives the reader many of the rewards of traditional fiction along with the peculiar pleasures of contemporary metafiction. There is probably more in this story about "How We Live Now" than in any other work of comparable length. Swimming has become

a new metaphor for the westering impulse as walking, floating, running, riding, and driving had served other writers. The quest for the real America (if one exists) is again an exploration of inward shores. Neddy's westward swim is into the eternal country of the imagination.

IV

Cheever's aesthetic credo requires that he present not the facts but "the truth"; his role is not that of the historian but that of the storyteller recapitulating "the verities." His novels and stories are, therefore, less a depiction than an expression of his time. The fictions in *Some People, Places, and Things That Will Not Appear in My Next Novel* explicitly concern the writer's problem in rendering modern life in fiction:

... Fiction is art and art is the triumph over chaos (no less) and we can accomplish this only by the most vigilant exercise of choice, but in a world that changes more swiftly than we can perceive there is always the danger that our powers of selection will be mistaken and that the vision we serve will come to nothing. We admire decency and we despise death but even the mountains seem to shift in the space of a night and perhaps the exhibitionist at the corner of Chestnut and Elm Streets is more significant than the lovely women with a bar of sunshine in her hair, putting a fresh piece of cuttlebone in the nightingale's cage. Just let me give you an example of chaos and if you disbelieve me look honestly into your own past and see if you can't find a comparable experience.

The absurd events which he narrates in "The Death of Justina," Cheever claims, could "only have happened in America today." "The Brigadier and the Golf Widow," the first and titular story in the volume containing "The Swimmer," begins: "I would not want to be one of those writers who begin each morning by exclaiming, O Gogol, O Chekhov, O Thackeray and Dickens, what would you have made of a bomb shelter ornamented with four plaster-of-Paris ducks, a birdbath, and three composition gnomes with long beards and red mobcaps?"

"A Miscellany of Characters That Will Not Appear" in his next novel includes, as examples, the pretty girl at the Princeton-Dartmouth Rugby game, all parts for Marlon Brando, all homosexuals, and all alcoholics: "Out they go, male and female, all the luses; they throw so little true light on the way we live." The narrator of "A Vision of the World," who finds that the externals of life have

"the quality of a dream" while his reveries have the "literalness of double-entry bookkeeping," wants "to identify . . . not a chain of facts but an essence . . . to grant [his] dreams, in so incoherent a world, their legitimacy." He finally accepts the world in which he lives as a dream and the dream he has as real. In Cheever's view fiction is that intersection of "reality" and the imagination.

With increasing frequency he has commented on the challenges that the American fictionist faces today, suggesting that the "trumped-up" stories of generations of storytellers can never "hope to celebrate a world that lies spread out around us like a bewildering and stupendous dream." In his later work the discernible progress is into more innovative techniques and a bleaker vision. He has moved deeper into the darkness of the American funhouse. Many of his best later stories are self-conscious, reflective, metafictional. Prose narrative forms, which date from about the same time as explorations of the New World, have always been journeys of discovery: new worlds and new modes of perception and new forms. Fiction is, as Lionel Trilling has said, "a perpetual quest for reality." And for the postmodernist writer Reality itself is the theme.

John Cheever follows in the line of fabulist and mythopoeic writers, participating in the chief business of American fiction: the creation of American Reality. America — and Reality — are composed of change, flux, chaos, contradiction. Reality sometimes seems like a comedy of the Absurd. The American experience has been an existential encounter with the dark territory of a continent, with history, and with the self. America itself is an absurd creation: Is it a place? a people? a fact? a faith? a disease? a nightmare? an idea? a moral condition? To Fitzgerald, France was a land, England a people, America an idea. Richard Brautigan, who like Cheever always writes about "America," suggests that it is "often only a place in the mind," echoing Emerson's America: "a poem in our eyes." At the conclusion of "Boy in Rome" Cheever has his young American, whose planned return home has been foiled, remembering an old lady in Naples "so long ago, shouting across the water [to a departing ship], 'Blessed are you, blessed are you, you will see America, you will see the New World,' and I knew that large cars and frozen food and hot water were not what she meant. 'Blessed are you, blessed are you,' she kept shouting across the water and I knew that she thought of a place where there are no police with swords and no greedy nobility and no dishonesty and no bribes and no delays and no fear of cold and hunger and war and if all that she imagined was not true, it was a noble idea and that was the main thing."

Ernest Sandeen

Posture

He hammers his tambourine
against his ankles, "not abjectly,"
he says, "but serenely,

risking what my posture
may confess
that I don't know."

His look just shy of pride,
he bangs his rhythms
inside the dance,

he stoops among those bodies
vertical, aswirl, those
upright leapers, snatchers at stars.

The bones of his spirit
he bends down. "The many
mouths of God," he says,

"must breathe along this floor
where feet are twinkling."

Invitation

Murderer, I welcome you.
I read of your exploits every day.
I save the clippings. I know
you are always at large
taking your joy.

Why then do you deny me?

I keep my doors carefully
unlocked. The dark night darkens
with my desire. I offer my blood
free. I'm unarmed, I'm naked,
I'll be asleep. Please come
and enjoy yourself.

Undone, Doing

When he helped her carefully undo
her dress, she would not admit
of any but minor creatures scurrying,
would contend how kittens swirled
to hide their eyes in paws of small fur.

When he kissed, lightly of course,
each nakedness unleaving one by one,
she still felt only in miniatures
as if to define a shrill of crickets
warming into nooks of an autumn house.

And she allowed gladly,
still in praise of little scamperings,
when he folded the whole body
of love (he called it) completely
over her, fantasy to foot.

She would have argued then
to remember the first-year squirrels,
that they circled grass and bark
and kept balance, twig to branch.
Her mind, bulging with body, fingered

the hard-shelled meats pouched in their jowls.
And some of these (as she lay playing)
she guessed the tiny claws would bury
and forget so that solemn-rooted trunks
might grow to the shade of hickory or of oak.

Images and Shadows of Divine Things

T.C. Treanor

I am Edward T. Lattimore, archaeologist and historian. I am thirty-four years old.

We have reached lande this mourning, through the vertue and grace of Almightye GOD. We bowed downe upon a colde and rockie shore, and there gave thankes.

I have recently been employed by the University of Pennsylvania, as an assistant professor of history. I have done work for *National Geographic*, and have been published by several scholarly magazines (*American Historical Review*, *Journal of the American Archeologist*, *Scientific American*). My specialty is colonial North America.

Barlie a thirde is left of our partie, and we have been seperated for three monthes from our syster shyppe. Yet our safe landyng at thys desolate place must surlie meane that GOD's holie plan is moving along its inexorable pathe.

I am fourteen years married, to the former Kathrine Johannes. We have two children—Melissa, ten, and Sean, eight.

Upon the termination, of our worshyppe, we began to gather sticks for a fyre, that we myght be warmed.

There is a legend, now given some credence by the scientific community, that those Puritans who escaped from England left in not one but two ships—the famous *Mayflower*, and her doomed sister ship, the *Veritie*. According to the legend, the *Veritie* was blown even more off course than the *Mayflower*, and was driven to the southern lip of the Hudson Bay—where a colony established itself, prospered, sickened, and perished inexplicably—all within the space of a year.

We have beene on thys lande, that GOD gave us, for three monthes now. The lande is riche in vergin forrest; and the stronge backs and younge arms of thys communitie have lashed together

logges, that we myght have shelter. Nor have we beene pestered by the Salvages, thate otheres have made so mucche of. Once my sonne thought he saw a salvage hiding in the bushes, but we gathered some men together, and marched out there, and saw nothing.

This, then, was my assignment—to seek out the convoluted waterways of the southern lip of the Hudson Bay, and to search for the signs of past civilization. It was easily the most exciting assignment of my career—a chance to definitely and definitively prove or lay to rest this long-standing rumor. My recent work had kept me out of touch with my family, so I took them all with me for a working vacation.

At this point I think I should try to tell you something about myself—why I am what I am. I'm an archaeologist because—I don't know. I'm not certain. I'm an archaeologist because . . . it's a distraction. I don't know what I'm distracted from. It's just that when I have my hands on some artifacts I can think about *them*. Just *them*. It's the closest thing to purity I've ever experienced. I guess that's why I'm an archaeologist.

My wife is a puffy beauty, with artificial rosy cheeks and chemical black hair. The cheeks have little valleys in them, marks of tear-erosion, flesh erosion, and of the barren soil in the valleys.

Her lips are puffy, too, and plastic-red. There is a blind gleam to her eyes—I forget what color they are. She's plump, and loud, and smells like a powder factory. She used to be prettier.

She rode in the front seat with me, and sing-songed my life's instructions: turn right at the intersection; Melissa shut up; Ed you're going too fast; I think they should go to the bathroom now. And so on.

I come now to my personal narrative, wherein I explain how it is that I set out into thys wilderness, and submitted myselfe to the great GOD

I set out wyth my wyfe, my lyfe's helpmate, and my two smalle childeren, a fulle year ago. We were torne asunder from alle that we kened; our lande, and our homes, and our families. My Kathrine had teares in her eyes when she left her aged parents, for she knewe that she would never see them again in this worlde. Yet gladlie did she suffer to go with me, and meeklie did she subject herselfe to the wille of the Father of us alle. So too did my two childeren, Jonathan and Melissa, sturdilie meet theire fate, saying good-bie to theire childe-ish friends and to all the thyngs of theire childe-hood, for they knew that it was time to put on the thyngs of an adult.

We were about 150 miles into Canada when I pulled over to the curb and lost my temper. I don't like to talk about it now, but I was really angry, and the combination of bad conditions and bad company drove me to action. I pulled Melissa out of the car, and warmed her backside. Since she had hit me on the back of the head with a block, I figured it was an even trade, but Kathrine kept a stone quiet sulk on for a hundred miles—a mixed blessing—I missed two turnpike connections . . .

I founde, that the journie into the wildernesse had drawn us alle together. Where, priorly, I hadde thought of my wyfe onlie as my helpmate; I could see she was the beloved of GOD as much as I. And as for my childeren, they, seeing my obedience to the Father, were obedient unto me. Thus we all shared in the Father's love.

Kids can be a pain in the ass, sometimes, and Melissa certainly was this time out. While her mother was mercifully silent, she sang television commercials, asked to eat every two hundred feet, taunted Sean who God-love-him ignored her, and generally made herself a candidate for execution. How many more miles? and: What time is it? and: What time is Captain Wilmo on? and: Can we see him in Canada?

She was getting fat. She looked like her mother, but with none of her mother's saving sexuality. She was a lump of plastic, with loudspeakers set in the middle of her head and no volume control. She was one big want, one black-haired candy-smelly pug-nosed whelp, and I helped whelp her. She was a radio set at the wrong station, and I would have preferred to listen to static.

God knows I had tried to do all I could with her. I had taken time off from work to play with her, I had read to her, I had tried to plumb every possible hidden recess of her mind for merit. I even took her to a 'shrink' once. But it didn't work. All there was to Melissa was jabber-jabber-

jabber!

Sean was a different matter, I think. Sean was—diffident, a little, and—gentle, a little . . . he . . . this is difficult to put down . . . he surprised me, and . . . he comforted me, sometimes, in ways I'd never expect and never be able to thank him for. It was like—his eyes were fixed on something distant, that I couldn't see, and whenever conditions seemed intolerable, he'd just put his eyes on that thing and draw all his strength and gentleness in and all the bitterness out. Nothing ever excited him much, or shocked him; all the stuff that sent Kathrine and Melissa into frenzies were just—part of everything for him. He—I don't know what to describe here; I'm an archaeologist, not a psychiatrist or a poet or anything.

I don't think there was anything dark about him. It was as though he took all the oil in his hair and in his eyes and in his skin and gave it to Melissa. His eyes were just God's blue, and his hair was almost white. It was the same for fat. It wasn't there: before he was born he said to Kathy and Melissa: Here mom. Here sister. Take all this stuff. *I'm not going to need it!*

I would lyke to descrybe the special relation-ship I developed on the days of the journie, wyth my sonne. He, even above other members of my owne familie, won my special love with the bynding love of his owne. While the childeren of the journie struggled with theire scriptures, he absorbed them as theough he were the prickley-bush, and they water. He grew fat with God's word, and wyth His love. When the other childeren played games amoung themselves, he would speake in a quiet corner wyth me, and aske me of the great Father of us Alle. I would answer those questions as best I could, alle the while thynking: Fair-haired childe of love, I am well pleased wyth thee.

We hit our destination—a backwater town called Backwater—at 4:56. It took us 10 hours and 43 minutes from Philadelphia, and I was bushed. Melissa had to go to the bathroom, so we stopped at a gas station. Sean went into the garage, and picked up a comic book—THE MAGNIFICENT HULK. But the things he could see—that we *all* could see—never seemed to hold his attention for very long, and thus he put it down after a few seconds. He stood up, stretched, zipped his fly, turned around, and walked into the janitor's moppail, knocking the mop and himself over.

"Edward," Kathy said, breaking a two-hour silence, "what's *wrong* with Sean?"

We had done this before. "Nothing's wrong

with Sean."

"Normal boys," whispered urgency in her voice (that's how it's done in soap operas) "don't walk into pails. Normal boys don't sit silent for hours at a stretch . . ."

"No, you're getting mixed up. For you to sit for hours at a stretch and not talk—that's not normal. Sean, however, has picked up the absurd notion that if one has nothing to say, one says nothing."

"Sean," she shrilled. "Come over to your mother."

Sean was picking himself leisurely from the cement. He wasn't hurt, wasn't distressed. He was vaguely—distracted.

"Sean," she said, crossing her arms protectively around his shoulders when he arrived, "why didn't you say anything on our ride? Were you sulking?"

"No, mother," he said, respectfully removing her arms, "no."

"Then why didn't you say anything in the car?" She was hurt, but it would take her a while to understand why she was hurt.

"I was thinking."

"Thinking! About what?"

"About," he formed his words slowly, and suddenly I realized: *he doesn't think in words*, and that's why he spoke so cautiously, "moving."

"Moving?"

"Moving. When you're dead. Daddy," he said decisively, and asked, "do you move—on the inside—when you're dead?"

"I . . . what do you think?" I asked weakly. I glanced at Kathy, who glared back at me, and then I closed my eyes.

"I think you don't. 'Cause if you're in heaven you're just at the place you're the happiest, and if you move, you move, you go out of that place, you know? And if you're in hell, it's the same thing, only it's the *unhappiest*."

I opened my eyes. I was full of the day's sweat, and sick with the smell of the highway. But he seemed as clean and as dry as he was when we left at six this morning.

"That—makes sense, Sean. We'll talk about it later. You get candy for all of us—here's half a dollar."

When he had gone Kathrine turned to me, really frightened. "Ed, that boy needs *help*."

I shook my head ruefully. "We wanted him to take his religion seriously," I joked weakly.

"Not so that he becomes morbid," she spat, "not until he's thinking about death for hours on end. Not . . ." and then she made some inarticulate squawks: *pluph quick shizzle*. She had run

MARCH 1, 1974

out of words.

At that precise moment, Melissa came back from the john. We did not have a pleasant ride to our motel.

Our supplie of the fruities of the ground wille soon give out, and we must raise a goodlie crop of short-season vegetables. Elseways, there wille be scurvie—and I do not want that. I saw the dread scurvie in my youth, when I sailed on HMS the Sir Francis Drake, and it was not prettie. The victim growes great red blotches underneathe his skin, and the blotches grow unto each other, untill he is a masse of red, at whiche pointe, he expires.

These days are the most difficult: I have mentioned them before, and I summeryze them here: we landed, made campe, made worshyppe, and settled.

I have been able to make some observations about the fauna of thys, our new home. Thursday last my sonne and I travelled downe to a swamplande, to finde food. Whyle we were so travelling, we chanced upon a cat-lyke creature, consuming an herbivore. My minde thought, "how can the goode GOD permit such disorder." My sonne, though, rebuffed my unspake thought, saying, "How lyke ourselves does this animal kill to eate! I lower myselfe before the Lord's nature!"

We repaired to John Haggerty's for a drink, which I, for one, needed. The kids soon disappeared with John's trio, and Kathy and I joined John and his new girlfriend, Paula somebody, in his living room.

They were playing Rachmaninoff. I hate Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff is waiting in a living room while your dinner is being cooked. The smell is coming in and you're saying *hungry hungry hungry* but the food is always cooking, never ready. Rachmaninoff is waking from a dream just as you are about to make love to Racquel Welch.

Anyway, the Rachmaninoff. And the seven-and-sevens. And John. John was, and is, my neighbor in Philadelphia, a forty-seven-year-old two-time divorcé. He's like the aerosol pine scent you put on aluminum Christmas trees. He has the Cadillac hearse dealership for Eastern Pennsylvania, and he's richer than hell. He's always giving parties for people who aren't as rich as he is, and showing off one new thing or another: an addition to his art collection (his taste is horrible), a new stereo, a new car, a new woman. He's the sort of person who doesn't surprise you when you find out that he wears a toupee—but you're certain that he bought it at the best place. Looking at him, I wasn't sure that his moustache

was real, or that his gold tooth wasn't actually plastic.

Gold tooth: his two ex-wives should have been recalled before they were issued. Either of them, with a little practice, would have been a very good vacuum tube. They were doomed with the advent of transistors. At that point they were both floating along on John's alimony, waiting for someone to subsidize them.

John has three of the scariest kids I ever met. None of them actually talk. The oldest kid has a case of terminal acne. I don't think she's worn shoes in three years. I keep looking for hair between her teeth, but she never opens her mouth long enough for me to look—except when she's eating, and then looking wouldn't be polite.

If she is a Coolidge, her two half-brothers are worse. I've visited John at his home, looked at them stretched-out staring into space on his den floor, visited with John for an hour and a half, and seen them in exactly the same positions when I left. Now, Sean is quiet, too, but when he isn't doing something active he's *thinking*. I don't think these kids think at all. I don't think they do *anything*. They certainly don't do anything I did when I was nine or seven. There's no innocence there. There's no . . .

"A T-group!" Kathy gushed. "What about that, Ed? How very interesting!"

People were expecting me to say something. For the first time that afternoon I brought the room into focus. There, beyond John's and Paula's anxious peering faces, beyond the fatuous red couch, was the plastic panelling that looked just like real wood. Somewhere, vague in the air, was the smell of aerosol pine. The Rachmaninoff was over. The ice had melted in my seven-and-seven, making it watery and impotent.

"I say, old man," John said uneasily in enforced limey, "you seem to have gone off into one of your academic trances."

"No. No. I'm sorry," I said, reddening for Kathy's benefit. "Really. I was just looking at your—view. Please tell me about your tea group."

"You were thinking about your grand project," John said slyly. "Or about some wench you're keeping on the side." He leered at Kathy.

"I'm reasonably certain it's not a wench," Kathy pronounced dryly.

"Well, then, tell us about those investigations," John said, while Paula looked anxiously, first at John, then at me, as though the words we exchanged would have any bearing upon her career as a groupie for quasi-millionaires.

So I told them the legend of the *Veritie*: how it set off with the *Mayflower* . . . and that was quite enough for Kathy, thank you, with all those Puritan *oppressions* and *repressions*. She, God love the child of Freud, wanted to hear more

about the tea groups.

Which we did. John and Paula, having demonstrated enough social grace to listen to my obsession, returned to their own. The tea group, it turned out, had nothing to do with tea at all. Instead, it was a meeting of people who had undergone psychoanalysis. They sat around, as near as I could understand, discussing each other's neuroses. It struck me that receiving advice from a man who was no more stable than you was no better than receiving no advice at all, but instead of giving voice to that objection, I excused myself to fix another seven-and-seven.

These past several days, I have thought often, that alle we see is but an image or a shadow of a Divine thing. Thate is, God, who is in alle places, makes Himselfe manifest by each thyng whiche He creates. Therefore, I have applied myselfe to the seeing of GOD, not only in my sonne and in the rest of my familie, but in His most humble creations—the rocke, the shrub, and the toad. Trulie, as the philosopher says, there are "sermones in stones, and bookes in running brookes."

I was forcible reminded of thys Truthe, as was usuall, by my sonne. Thys mourning, when the aire was heavie withe the wette, he entreatieth me to joine him in a walke about the valley. I upbraided him on account of the wette, but he reproached me, saying, "Father, out there the hand of GOD wil be palpable upon us, for the wette is just one aspect of His greate selfe."

Aye, my sonne. And you are the chieftest aspect.

John keeps his liquor in the kitchen, so that you have to be fairly ostentatious about helping yourself to seconds. He usually has only one drink, which he nurses over an intolerable length of time. That is—he only has one drink at *his* house, when he's buying.

I was surprised to see Sean at the kitchen table, puzzling over a chessboard. I had taught him how to play two years ago, but he quickly reached a stage where beating me is no real big thing—if it ever was. He had just the introspective personality that was perfectly suited for chess—or for art, for that matter.

"Sean! Why aren't you with the others?"

"I didn't want to have any."

"Any what? Who's winning?"

"Bobby Fischer." Fischer was always white, Spassky black, as they played an eternal series in this boy's mysterious mind. He looked up. "I didn't want to have any pot."

I have been stricke, during our lyfe on thys rockie shore, bie how much we have all growen to truste and to love one another. I meane not onlie the charitie whiche GOD has commanded eache to have to the other, but an agapé. I have come to relie upon, but not take for granted, my

fellow-pilgrims to this Cytte Upon a Hille. And not once has one of them betrayed me, or I them. We have had differences, but we eache know that the others onlie carie is for our wearie groupe. We, like our brother reformers, knowe that we have been sent to found a communitie of love, so that some day all Europe will stare to the west, and say, "these, surely, are GOD's chosen people."

These past several weeks I have gone to bed late so that I would not have to have sex with Kathy, and so that I would be spared the indignity of allowing her to see me lose grips on my consciousness. I had fallen so deeply out of love with her that my sexual performance had been affected. So she had bought a manual. *"The male-superior and female-superior positions are hardly the only ones which have given couples satisfaction over the years,"* it said, *"some couples have been satisfied by sex standing up, with one partner's wrists lashed to the shower nozzle. Others report their extreme delight with what we call the "whiplash" position, in which the male squats on the floor with his back to the bed, and the female wraps herself around his thighs, buttocks, and genitals like a boa constrictor."* Kathy had turned our bedroom, thus, into gymnasium. Well, if she wanted sex like that, she could go lay Batman.

And I didn't want to have any more children. Ever.

A kid ten years old is too young to smoke marijuana. Period. No matter what John Haggerty and Paula whatshername from the psychotic group has to say. No matter, even, what my own wife has to say.

I was livid when I broke into their den. I called John loudly enough for him to hear me in Alberta. And he—to his everlasting credit—put on a good show, coldly silencing them and sending them to their rooms.

I dragged Melissa into the car, and hardly thinking, locked her in. She could have gotten out, I suppose, but what would have been the point? She knew we were going to leave, and she must have gathered that there would be little solace for her at Haggerty's.

"We had better go, John," I huffed when I returned to his summer-home. "And I'm sorry about blowing up like that just now."

"That's all right, fella," he said, doing an unconscious parody of Nelson Rockefeller. "I was pretty upset the first time I caught my kids doing it."

"This isn't the first time?" I said uneasily.

"Hell, no," he boomed, "but what are you going to do? It's the current thing, I guess. Everybody's smoking it, everybody's turning on. To tell the truth," he lowered his voice confidentially,

"I even tried it once."

"Indeed?" I said, hoping to sound dry. Kathy was wide-eyed. She had never seen a grown-up as adventuresome as John. "What was it like?"

"Frankly, it didn't do a thing for me," he said, and he looked genuinely baffled. It *didn't* do a thing for him, and it was supposed to. Then his face brightened. "But hey! If I—a respectable businessman—can . . ."

"John, you're not ten years old," I interrupted impatiently. "If you were, and if you were my child, I'd be plenty mad."

Paula's tennis-match eyes were following us again, but Kathy, surprisingly, spoke next.

"It seems like . . . such hypocrisy—you know, for us to drink, and to deny them . . ."

"Dammit, Kathy, if Melissa was drinking at age ten I'd be just as angry. When you're ten years old you're supposed to be . . ." but I looked up and saw Kathy and John and Paula Psycho-drama staring at me, and I concluded that my lecture on ten-year-old innocence would have to wait for a less strenuous moment.

"Let's go," I said in a weary voice, and turned my back.

"Don't go away mad," John said anxiously.

I forced a smile. "I'm not," I said. "I'll get in touch with you later this week."

We rode home in silence.

I have just finished reading Jonathan Edward's essay, *Images and Shadows of Divine Things*, in which he attempts to find the hand of God in everything he sees in the world—an echo of Augustine's "sermons in stones, and books in running brooks." But the hand of God is not in the broken rocks and the plastic plasma paradises we see around us. Maybe the hand of the devil is. More likely, the hand of indifference, of wholly random series not amenable to any attempt—human or divine—to put it in order. Not sermons in stones, and books in running brooks, but stockholders in sorrow, and dialectics in dying eclectics.

What was it in these early Puritans that gave them such great faith? Why did they so believe in their God, and in themselves? What made them believe that they were about to find a City Upon the Hill, that the America for which they lay the groundwork would someday be a moral beacon? Where could they find such a will, to fight the evil and keep the faith?

Oh, Pilgrims, if you could see your America now! If you could see hard Cleveland and oily Detroit; bilious Chicago and vacant Los Angeles, and the nightmare vistas of New York! Where, then, would your "image" be, and your shadow? And your faith—what would happen to that? A shadow? All of America is in a shadow! It is in

the shadow of a transparency; the shadow of television and business and hundred-thousand-dollar summer cabins; it is in the shadow of *distractions*; booze, pot, academics, romance, optimism; it is in the shadow of the invisible mist of an aerosol pine can.

Puritans, how could you have faith?

I would, I thought with grim resolve, stake myself upon this mystery, staying with it until either it or I am broken: not just the mystery of the *Veritie*, but the mystery of faith.

So resolving, I went to bed.

Watching her sleep, I remembered all the things that had drawn me to Kathy. The moonlight streamed across her face, touching her long black hair and streaming with it to the edge of the bed. Her face—ivory-white in the moonlight—was unlined. Her lips parted in thick half-opened innocence. I knew that she was naked underneath the covers. Her stated dislike of clothes—any clothes—had excited me beyond measure fifteen years ago, and the fact that she wore the legal minimum in any situation kept me in a state of constant agitation. Long after I knew that part of her to be an artifice, I knew that beneath all the contrivance was a sort of caramel loveliness. Impulsively I bent down to kiss the mother of my children.

But just at that moment she let out the most malodorous fart I have ever experienced, and it set me bolt upright. So noxious were the fumes that I was obliged to open the window before I went to sleep.

We are all doomed.

We learned of our fate this mourning, at a counsell meeting. Mr. BROCKINGTON, who had served as captain's mate while we were braving the Atlantic, tolde us that our holdes had no short-season vegetables. Some-one on the May-flower, in order to assure that boate of safe passage, had taken our seedes.

Withoute seedes, and withoute vegetables, we wille surelie die. Thys is as fnall as anything that hath been writ. Thys is as fnall as judgements. The scurvie shall triumph over thys bande of pilgrims.

Never in my lyfe have I felt closer to despair.

We moved into a cabin three days after our arrival in Backwater—and four days after our arrival we had a party. The party was Kathy's idea—implicitly, to make up for my behavior. John and Paula were invited, of course, and almost everyone else who was to come was their friend, since we knew hardly anyone in the community.

I say hardly anybody—I knew somebody.

Ebenezer Dalton Mourningstar, town derelict. I met him as I walked to the town's general store to pick up a copy of the *Toronto Star*.

He had a corrugated, desiccated face and a waxy, flaxen beard, white sparse hair and craven blue eyes. His mind was more suited for bridge than for chess, so eager was it to grasp at first impulsive utterances, so disdainful was it of the mental convolutions of reflection. He sat on a three-legged stool, blank-faced. He was dead drunk.

As I walked past him, he stood up like a supermarket door opening. His face lit up in automatic animation, and, putting out his hand like a Disney creation, he said, "Hi! Wanna spit on the ground for Gillette?"

"What?"

"I'd like you to help me show our appreciation for Gibby Gillette, star of stage, screen, and television. I'd like to . . ." suddenly he spat on the ground.

I grinned. "Old-timer, you look like you haven't seen Gibby Gillette for several years."

He laughed uproariously. He put his hands on my shoulders, and was barely able to stand. "Seen him?" he choked, "*Seen him?*" and suddenly his hand tightened around my shoulders; he stood bolt upright and glared full furious into my face. "*I haven't been able to escape him for twenty-seven years!*"

Then, just as suddenly, he sat down and stared straight ahead, as though someone had unplugged the drain on his energy. He was a Lincoln model after the show, all empty.

I backed away uneasily, walked into the General Store, bought a *Star* and a cup of coffee. I spent the rest of the morning finding out about Mr. Mourningstar.

And what was that? Not much. I reviewed it as I drove back home; he used to be a Classics professor at an Ivy League university, he had written a glittery best-selling novel, and had, through a long chain of events, ended up in Backwater. For a wild moment, I thought of inviting him to the party (!) what an impression that would be—a retired Ivy League Classics professor (!)—on John and his friends. But I gave up the idea as too precarious—given the state of things between Kathy and me.

For me, the day passed in desultory fashion. Kathy busied herself with makework projects. Melissa practiced screaming. I read my abstracts, formulated a plan of attack, mentally ran down the list of locals who I knew had archaeological experience. And Sean . . . Sean seemed to be thinking harder than ever that day, staring over the stiff cliff that fronted our cabin, staring across the clear and fresh water that flowed gently in front of us, staring across it as it mirrored the sun

in a thousand different, crisscross patterns, staring across it, sweet and fresh. He stared across the air, the naked air, the invisible substance, that love of God which cast no shadow; stared across the sweetness of the air, the hickory smell of growing things, the sugar coldness of the air. Stared underneath the blue cloudless sky, stared beneath the unhindered sun, stared beneath the sky of strength, of pure blue and yellow, of real blue and yellow, stared across to clumps of green; tiny islands of real and unhindered life, strong and fresh and good. Stared there, and beyond. Stared. All day. Stared.

When the darkness came, when the glittery moon arose, when our first guests arrived, Sean and Melissa had already gone to bed. They were going to stay awake in their rooms instead of downstairs where they would be in the way.

John Haggerty and Paula were the first to arrive, along with a dry-goods operator and his wife. Those two looked like toadstools with glasses, and smelled like bad cheese.

They were followed, in their turn, by somebody who did Alka-Seltzer advertisements for television, an insurance executive, a professional artist and critic, another insurance executive, and an undertaker. And wives, wives, wives—pushy, determined women armed with gush, swinging the gush around like pillows at a slumber party. Kathy, with much wasted motion, got them all drinks and gushed right back at them.

They weren't doing anything, and I was afraid that John was going to start a party game, so I broke right in and told them about Ebenezer Mourningstar.

It worked. In order to avoid talking with me, they started a little conversation among themselves—and thus saved us all, for the nonce, from John's inane games.

Meanwhile, Kathy had let five or so more guests in, and I got them drinks. They were all pasteboards from the shadows of Philadelphia, apologetic and crude, obnoxious and bubbling, full of stupid questions: ("Well, how are you liking this temperature we're having?" My response: "Are we voting on it this year?" my real response: "Why, it's lovely! Is it like this all summer?"), vaguely stupid themselves. The unloveliest from unlovely America, sitting semi-live on my living-room couch.

It had grown noticeably hotter, and I had taken off my sports coat. The glasses were precipitating little water bulbs on their exteriors. Kathy was in the corner with John and the undertaker's wife. They were laughing loudly and sweating.

More people came. Another undertaker. A contract engineer. An interior decorator. Wives.

A hairdresser. Another hairdresser. Drinks. Drinks. Drinks. It was hotter. I gave Kathy another highball—and noticed three empties next to her. She was intent on John; ignoring me.

More people. More drinks. More heat. Over near the window, someone was trying to get a songfest started.

My wild Irish Rose,

The sweetest Rose I know . . .

More people. My head hurt. The room smelled like an underarm factory. Haze from stale cigarettes obscured my vision, but I thought that the corner Kathy and John had been in was now unoccupied. An insurance executive grabbed me by the arm.

"You the host? Great little party you have here!"

"Thanks. Thanks. I'm glad you like it."

"Yep." He patted himself expansively. "Sure is good to get into the great outdoors and smell that fresh air. Sure is good to get out of the city. You from Philadelphia, too?"

"Um—yeah." When it became apparent that more would be required, I said, "Philly, born and raised."

"Me, too. City you love to hate. C'mon—where would we be without Philadelphia? Got my start with Metropolitan Life there—workin' on the ol' actuary tables. . . ."

I strained to see the center of the room. The artist—a huge Russian bear of a man, with wild eyes and wild hair and carelessly beautiful features—was booming out a story. I could catch it—fragmented, and within the framework of the other man's history.

"Right. In America, there are artists and there are artists. But as far as I know, there was only one *real* artist. . . ."

". . . used to have to update the actuaries every day in '62. They don't train you for that in the Universities! 'Course, I have nothing against higher education. . . ."

". . . he used to paint horses and carriages. They were beautiful horses, and beautiful carriages. If anyone ever got the horse down to its most essential form, he did. . . ."

". . . can you *imagine* anyone doing that? Cheat—the actuaries—by trying to fix 'em. Of course, if they—hey, do you mind if I have another drink?"

The haze grew thicker.

"Here. Finish mine."

"Thanks. Hey, you look kind of pale. . . ."

"Beg pardon?"

"I say, you look kind of pale. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah."

". . . but eventually, people got tired of looking at horses drawing carriages. Besides, the auto-

mobile was coming into common use, and . . ."

" . . . no kidding, I've seen people—perfectly healthy—feel a little sick at a party or dinner or something, and excuse themselves, and a few minutes later—bingo! they're dead!"

" . . . consequently his sales fell off. Sensitive man that he was, he vowed to go into seclusion until he had created the 'finest work of art America has ever seen.' Which he did . . ."

" . . . listen, buddy, how old are you? I'd be able to tell you from the actuaries how many years you should have left. I memorized them myself. Watch. I'm fifty. A man born in 1934 should have a 54.8% chance of reaching age seventy at this point in time. Same guy, y'know—he should have a 53.3% chance of making the age of seventy-one, 51.9% of making seventy-two, 49.1% of hitting seventy-three, providin' he lives right—look, give me a year, any year . . ."

" . . . he went into seclusion for three years, and when he finally came out, he had invented something completely original. A beautiful carriage, driven by a delightful young boy, and . . ."

" . . . are you sure you're all right, buddy? Listen, can I get you a drink? Where's the host . . ."

"I'm the host."

"You are? Well, listen, mind if I have a drink?"

" . . . drawn by two huge *sheep*! Two of the biggest, horsiest . . ."

I tore myself from the grip of the artist and the actuary tables; tore myself from the haze and the heat and the humanity, tore myself to the back of my cabin, to my own room, for air, for comfort, for rest.

I staggered into my room, closer to death than I've ever been. Blindly I opened the door, swirled around, and, once in the room, leaned it closed. Then I turned to face the room.

John and Kathy, half-naked, writhed on the bed.

John saw me first, and had the decency to take her breast out of his mouth. Kathy was ardently giving his ear a sponge bath with her tongue, whispering unintelligible nonsense.

John shoved her upright, not gently. "Good evening," I said, dazed.

"I hope we can be civilized about this, Ed-die," John said uneasily. Good old John! Even with his shirt off and his pants looking like a puppet, he managed to sound like he was in the House of Lords.

Kathy was drunk but very quick. "Ed, I want a divorce," she said with finality.

"An appropriate statement, under the circumstances," I said, still dazed. We stared, fragmented, across the room at each other. Then I

said, "Excuse me," and left.

I would get back to the living room, I thought, before the hurt hit, and drink more than I ever drank before. I would get wild drunk. I would get so drunk that I would dance around the room stupidly, propositioning forty-year-old women and being John Haggerty's friend.

A scotch-and-water. And another. Now a shot of scotch. Somebody left a seven-and-seven in front of me. That goes down the great lobotomy pit. And another—I think. I'm not sure.

The guy who wanted to start the song has finally won his way. Three or four—undertakers, insurance executives, I don't know, are standing together, singing

*Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
Come out tonight
Come out tonight
Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
And dance by the light of the moon.*

I bound across the room, embrace one of the singers, and caterwaul again

*Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
Come out tonight*

Come out tonight

They hesitate—they are confused—they don't know who the hell I am. But they soon join in . . . they don't care who the hell I am.

*Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
And dance by the light of the moon.*

We are an infection, spreading. We link arms. We reach around the room, grabbing everyone. Buffalo gals, come on. Nobody escapes. One by one they straggle into our little circle, one by one they join in the song.

*Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
Come out tonight
Come out tonight
Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
And dance by the light of the moon.*

We are dancing, a sort of mad shuffle. Faster and faster. Click shuffle shuffle Buffalo gals. Click shuffle shuffle . . . *crash!*

"Don't worry," I shout, "*It's my house!*"
Click shuffle shuffle Buffalo gals. Click shuffle shuffle . . .

*Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
Come out tonight
Come out tonight* and then another crash.

Stupid Buffalo women, I think, and then I see Kathy, hair disheveled, blouse half off, making frantic hand signals.

*"Don't worry," I shout, "It's my wife!"
Buffalo gals won't you come out tonight
And dance by the light of the moon.*

"Ed!" she screamed. "Ed! Ed!"

Something primal made me stop, and in a strong voice I shouted, "Quiet, please!"

Curiously enough, everything stopped.

Sweat and tears flew from her as she shook her head wildly. "Ed! Ed! Ed!" she cried, as though I still couldn't hear her, "*Sean's missing!*"

Somebody let the air out of the room, and we all collapsed.

Archaeologists don't describe being alive on the pages of a nightmare. And I am an archaeologist, nothing more. I remember fragments, remembrances, dreams. I remember sitting wide-eyed and drunk on the side of a motorboat, crying out for my lost child. Every few minutes the motorboat operator would turn down the motor so that I could hear the answering cry. Very considerate of him. There was no answering cry.

It was only much later that I learned that I was the operator of that motorboat.

I remember driving wildly to the town, to police headquarters. The police were—*closed!* for God's sake! They were closed for the night. And I banged and I banged on the door, until I heard a familiar wild laughter behind me.

"Spit! Spit!" said Ebenezer Dalton Mourningstar. "Spit on Gibby Gillette!"

Suddenly I was off after him, certain in some visceral way that he knew what had happened to my son. But the old derelict seemed amazingly quick and agile, racing just a few feet in front of me.

"Spit! Spit! Spit at Gibby Gillette!" laughed Ebenezer Mourningstar.

I chased him up streets and around corners, down alleys and side streets until once he stepped somewhere and . . . was gone. Was completely gone. Was tracelessly gone.

I got back empty to review an empty living room. Empty, that is, of anything except human excretions; crashed tables on the floor, empty glasses, empty bottles, ice pails half filled with dirty water.

"Disgorge Sean," I said calmly.

Nothing happened. Nothing happened. Things were mute, and silent, and inscrutable.

I picked up a glass, vacant of anything recognizable. "Disgorge Sean, please," I told it.

It did nothing. So, casually, I tossed it toward

the middle of the living room, where it described a parabola, broke towards the floor at arc's end, and smashed on the hard surface, obeying the natural law.

I put my head in my hands.

When I took it out, I couldn't believe what my eyes clearly told me was true. Somehow, everything—vacant glasses, empty bottles, sloshing pails—had grown little legs which were taking them into a closed formation. Little mouths twisted and curdled on each one of them. Tiny arms stuck out on each side, and with fingers pointed in the air, they tilted to forty-five degrees, the pails spilling water on the floor.

And they sang, *Buffalo Gals*.

Except it wasn't *Buffalo Gals*. The music was *Buffalo Gals*, but the lyrics were something different—ghastly.

*We all obey the Natural Law
Natural Law
Natural Law
We all obey the Natural Law
So stick it up your fucking craw*

I reached for a stick with which to smash them. But I was still in a state of shock, and they began again almost immediately, a horrible tenor cocktail glass taking the lead

*And we don't truck with you my friend
You my friend
You my friend
And we don't truck with you my friend
So Go—Get—Bent*

I staggered back to a chair, but it had moved, and joined the others. A disagreeable baritone balefully bellowed from an ice pail, anticipating me just as my mouth formed a wordless prayer

*And we don't traffic with the Holy Ghost
Holy Ghost
Holy Ghost
We don't traffic with the Holy Ghost
So stick it where it hurts the most.*

And once again, in perfect harmony:

*We all obey the Natural Law
Natural Law
Natural Law
We all obey the Natural Law
So stick it up your fucking craw.*

And so I grabbed my eyes, and . . .

*I humbly prostrate myself before GOD, and
confess my synfullnesse. I have beene tempted,*

and I have surrendered to that temptation. Our communities hath beene tempted, and it, also, has surrendered to the devil. Since we have knowen, that our brothers on the Mayflower tooke our seedes, we have given ourselves up to asperitie and despair. I am likewyse guilty of those syns. I have spent days trying to forgyve those on our syster shyppe, and I have failed. At nyghte, I cursed the darknesse, I cursed the Mayflower, and—have mercy!—I cursed GOD.

Likeways hath our communitie delivered itselfe into the hands of dread Satin. When we were fyrste tolde, that we hadde no vegetables, manie helde forth in their faithe, proclaming: "GOD will stand by us, and preserve us from dread scurvie, untill we growe more vegetables." I, however, had seen how fast the scurvie works, and was less sanguine.

As time progressed, and as scurvie stricke downe our townespeople, including manie children — blameless infants, rotund lyttle ones healthie just hours before—faithe slowlie left our groupe. Manie women — my owne Kathrine amoung them—also died, and wythe them died muche of the gentle-nesse and spyryt of forgyvenesse that had so marked our communitie in earlier, happier days. We begane to trade re-criminations, and our mistruste of eache other made the cooperation we needed to survive impossible. . . . There is a sort of bog nearbie, which sucked downe anythyng thrown into it. In our lassitude and despair, this is where we bury our dead, so that none may know they had ever seen the lught of day. It was shortly after my wyfe died—and shortly before Melissa contracted the scurvie—that my sonne Jonathan approacheth me.

"Father," he sayeth, "myghte it be true, as was spake earlier, that some Salvages are in this area?"

"Trulie, it myghte," I sayeth, shaking my head wearilie, "but how doth that helpe us, in our present condition?"

Wyth those wordes his features spreadeth wyth joy. "See you not the sweetness of the planne of GOD, father? Surelie he has sent us thys scurvie, so that we myghte push out of our lyttle fort, and go and meete the Salvages. For, in so doing, we can teache them the true faithe. If we are to be a Cytte on a Hille, every one of us must be a lyttle beacon. Lette us go down to the valley, and exchange our faithe with the Salvages for their vegetables!"

I then embraced him, saying, "Surely Jonathan, you must be beloved of God to thynk of such a thing. But who amoung us can undertake such an enterprise? Manie are sicke, and those of us left are either too younge or busy with the ill."

Calmly he replied, "I shall go, Father."

I protested that he was too younge, but he reminded me that Our LORD was but two years older when He taught at the Temple. Then he asked for my blessing, but I said that it was he who should bless me. Thys he did, saying, "Remember, Father, that howevere evyl thynges appear, GOD's approval makes them goode. Forgyve the trees and forgyve the bushes; forgyve those on the Mayflower and forgyve our enemies in England, and perhaps GOD will forgyve thee."

I shall so forgyve, my sonne—if thou wilt forgyve me for bringing thee into thys worlde.

"The cut worm forgives the plow."

William Blake: Proverbs of Hell

Stories. I could tell you how we ranged into the night; I could tell you of the sacrifices we made that week. I could tell you of days of asperity and nights of despair, of endless re-criminations, of shady days beneath the grey of the clouds. I could tell you of futile energy, of convoluted waterways tortuously and then tediously explored, of grasslands walked fresh and stale, of forests punctured and penetrated and sucked dry, of the horrible possibilities of a quicksand swamp we found, and of caves. Yes, I could tell you about the caves. Yes, I could tell you about the caves.

Stories. I could tell you of the aftermath; of our divorce, of Melissa growing every day more alien, of my drinking, of the tenure denial—of my loss of reputation, of my advancing dereliction, of my progress toward the station of Ebenezer Mourningstar, of my approach toward death. But what would be the point?

No one ever found Sean. Anywhere. No one found a trace of him, except—but I'll tell that later, or not at all. They found—caves and meadows that hadn't been explored before. And they found—God help us!—some tenuous remains of a City upon a Hill, which had once existed. . . .

Caves. What could I tell you, about the caves of our little Xanadu? There was no beauty there, no craft. A cave can challenge the imagination with its strangeness, but this one challenged my sanity with its sameness. And darkness. And thickness. The lights we brought illuminated only that which was directly in front of us. Nothing else. Nothing . . .

Illumination: shall I tell you what we found? We found a thing. The thing was wearing the clothes of my son Sean. The thing was . . . there, a desiccated skeleton of a human being Sean's size . . . but with a hideous grin of the long dead . . . and a dried asparagus stalk in its hand. . . . God help me, it had been dead for at least two hundred years. . . .

Sean Lucy


Visitation

Small feet you go
In night wind suddenly
And move in leaves.

The mastery of a moment.

Clouds blown away from moon at nearly full,
The mastery of a moment
Moves in the lime tree
Black against the window

And goes
Leaving the stillness
Of the dark air.



Bruce Jay Friedman
Sean Lucy
Norman Mailer
Francis J. O'Malley
Ernest Sandeen
Robert Slabey
T.C. Treanor
Diane Wakoski
Ronald Weber
Thomas Werge