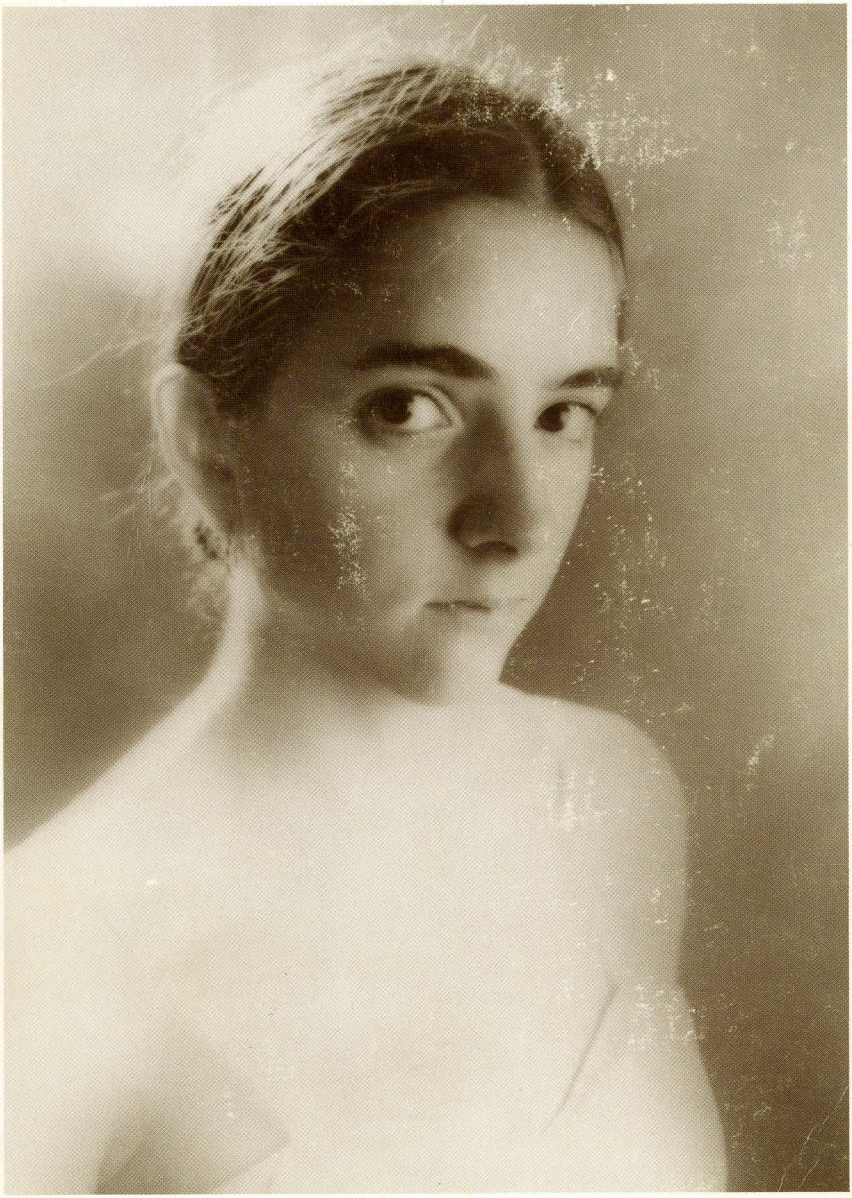
THE CAPILANO REVIEW



By the time the fool has learned to play the game,
the players have dispersed.

— ASHANTI PROVERB

The predominantly rationalistic European finds much that is human alien to him, and he prides himself on this without realizing that his rationality is won at the expense of his vitality, and that the primitive part of his personality is consequently condemned to a more or less underground existence.

— CARL JUNG, from *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*

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THE CAPILANO REVIEW

No. 7 SPRING 1975

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PREFACE

Things are cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots.

— ERNEST FENELLOSA

The obsession is the shapeliness of each day.

— ROY KIYOOKA

And so *The Capilano Review*: each issue a thing, an action, a snapshot, a cross-section of the particular energies coming into it, passing through it, moving from it: each issue concerned with the shapeliness of those energies together. Sometimes the picture isn't perfectly focussed, sometimes the image is blurred: that isn't important. What is important is that the magazine, like Vancouver itself, be a place of energy, which it seeks, shapes, and offers for use. To do that, the magazine must take its ground in the renewed creative activities now taking place in Vancouver, and in a renewed alertness to like energies elsewhere.

In that spirit, *The Capilano Review* has been working with a group of Québec writers and artists for over a year to develop a special issue on Québec Art & Literature. This issue, given the necessary financial support, will be Issue No. 8, to appear in Fall 1975. Bilingual throughout, it will offer some 300 pages of work: a snapshot of current Québec creativity. The magazine also proposes to follow-up the Québec Issue with a special bilingual issue on West Coast Art & Literature for Fall 1976. We hope these issues will mark the beginnings of an intimate exchange, not previously seen in Canada, between English and French speaking artists.

The magazine is working in other directions as well. In conjunction with the 1974-1975 Poetry Reading Series at Capilano College, it has been conducting interviews with those writers who have come to read. Two of these interviews have already appeared in the magazine: the one with Victor Coleman, and the one with Audrey Thomas in this issue. To begin *The Capilano Review Press* series of books, an anthology of interviews with those writers — Victor Coleman,

bp Nichol, John Newlove, Robin Blaser, Audrey Thomas, Stan Persky, Sheila Watson, Margaret Atwood, and Michael Ondaatje — is scheduled to appear in Fall 1975, again given the necessary financial support. This anthology will include selections of the writers' work and bibliographies to accompany the interviews. The magazine also intends to make audiotapes and videotapes of the readings at Capilano College available for purchase in the near future.

Now the magazine is moving into a new stage, I would like to acknowledge how fortunate *The Capilano Review* is in its friends and supporters. I wish to thank the following people: all those contributors, who trust us with their work, and whose work makes the magazine what it is; Frances Burstein and Bill Schermbrucker, whose early and strong support ensured the magazine's existence; Reid Gilbert, Doug Jardine, and Peter Spratt, who always listen to me patiently, and always come through for the magazine in the end; The Canada Council and the Capilano College Student Society, who give generous financial assistance; John Renforth and his student technicians, who have worked so hard, under difficult conditions, to tape the Poetry Reading Series; and of course, the students and faculty who worked on the magazine in the past, and especially those on the current editorial board who give so much of their time and skills to it. Daphne Marlatt, Janice Harris, Bill Schermbrucker, Wendy Pickell, Ann Rosenberg, Steve Harris, Alice Ratzlaff, Penny Connell, and Gladys Hindmarch: all are responsible, through their care, energy, and intelligence, for the quality of the magazine. And finally, for their continuing encouragement and criticism: Warren Tallman, Gerry Gilbert, George Bowering, Stan Persky, and Robin Blaser.

For myself, I wish to thank both Daphne and Bill, who, though they rarely agree with one another, and thereby keep the magazine lively, never fail to give me the warmth of their friendship and intelligent advice: they continue to see me through.

Pierre Coupey
March 1975

Zonko / A PAIR OF ACES

She loved it when I took off my clothes and there was my Superman costume. After that first mistake, it got so I couldn't satisfy her unless I wore the whole outfit. Sometimes she just laid there for two hours clinging to the cape, biting the cape, chewing the cape, scratching the cape, jabbing the cape with her spiked heels. There were other times we'd meet in the hotel lounge and she'd have her panties off before we got outside to the taxi and mine off almost the minute she slammed the door and said, "Just drive." Actually that was just once. And that was before I knew her. In a biblical sense too. She'd planned the rape months in advance. She had all the angles covered. The doorman was her uncle. And the hack was her brother in a brand new hat. I raped her back, in a telephone booth, on the way home.

She didn't go for the Captain America suit as much. But the shield always got a real animal response. She forced me to take pictures of her acrobatic contortions wearing only the Batman hood, a smile and the shield. She got angry when I couldn't make any progress in the attempt to master Reed Richards' stretch routine. She chided me for being a waste of her time when I spun a web from her belly button to the base of her spine on a fire escape in Flushing, New York. I held her like a diamond pendant her sweat sparkling in the sun above the traffic on Jewel Avenue for a minute and a half suspended only by this same web clasped between my thumb and my forefinger and she was a whimpering porridge when I brought her back through the window.

The minute she hit it, the bed was transformed into an ocean of passion, the waves of sex sweeping me back into the jumble of one thousand empty cologne bottles on the dresser.

The man we dispossessed was terrified, but I could tell in his eyes he was going for his gun. I broke a chair over his head and he was out cold, better than in the movies. And it was a good thing too because when I got back to him I discovered it was none other than eight finger Louie, and he must have thought I was the real thing. He held a grudge against Spidee for getting his brother arrested on that museum heist. That was the time I decided to give up the costumes and Lois, both. It was starting to get too close for comfort. I didn't want to reveal my true identity just yet.

* * *

As usual, the reincarnation of the Marquis de Sade had dinner alone in his cell, smoked a gargantuan clippie and retired to the television lounge. After using up two hours of his eyeballs, he rose and smashed the steel-tipped toe of his boot through the screen. There was no one else in the room he was much chagrined to discover. "Those mother fuckers are lying to my imagination. I can't stand it," he muttered to himself as he stalked off to join the card game on the next level.

There were no cards in this game. It was actually group dream analysis therapy, but it was called the card game because the session usually started off with someone saying I dreamed I was playing strip poker with Kim Novak or Vera Ellen or Cloris Leachman. And everybody wanted to know what happened next.

Michael Ondaatje /
PURE MEMORY / CHRIS DEWDNEY

"Listen, it was so savage and brutal and powerful that even though it happened out of the blue I knew there was nothing arbitrary about it"

Christopher Dewdney

1.

On a B.C. radio show the man asked me, the coffee half way up to his mouth, what are the books you've liked recently? Christopher Dewdney's *A Palaeozoic Geology of London Ontario*. Only I didn't say that, I started stumbling on the word Palaeozoic . . . Paleo . . . Polio . . . and then it happened on Geology too until it seemed a disease. I sounded like an idiot and Chris Dewdney must have sounded like an idiot too. Meanwhile I was watching the man's silent gulps. The professional silent gulping of coffee an inch or two away from the microphone. Unconcerned with my sinking "live" all over the province.

2.

I can't remember where I first met him. Somewhere I became aware of this giggle. Tan hair, tan face, tan shirt and a giggle-snort as his head staggered back. His arms somewhere.

3.

The baby. He shows me the revolving globe in the 4 month old kid's crib. Only it has been unscrewed and the globe turned upside down and rescrewed in that way so Africa and Asia all swivel upside down. This way he says she'll have to come to terms with the shapes all over again when she grows up.

4.

He comes to dinner, steps out of the car and transforms the 10 year old suburban garden into ancient history. Is on his knees pointing out the age and race and character of rocks and earth. He loves the Norfolk Pine. I give him a piece of wood 120 million years old from the tar sands and he smokes a bit of it. Recently he claims the rest of the piece is going white.

5.

When he was a kid and his parents had guests and he was eventually told to get to bed he liked to embarrass them by running under a table and screaming out Don't hit me Don't hit me.

6.

His most embarrassing moment. A poetry reading in Toronto. He was sitting in the front row and he realized that he hated the poetry. He looked around discreetly for the exit but it was a long way away. Then to the right, quite near him he saw another door. As a poem ended he got up and officially walked to the door quickly opened it went out and closed it behind him. He found himself in a dark cupboard about 2 feet by 3 feet. It contained nothing. He waited there a while, then he started to laugh and giggle. He giggled for 5 minutes and he thinks the audience could probably hear him. When he had collected himself he opened the door, came out, walked to his seat and sat down again.

7.

Coach House, December 1974. I haven't seen him for a long time. His face is tough. Something has left his face. It is not that he is thinner but the face has lost something distinct and it seems like flesh. But he is not thinner. He is busy working on his new book *Fovea Centralis* and I watch him as he sits in the empty back room upstairs all alone with a computer typesetting terminal. Has taught himself to use it and

tries to teach me but I don't understand a word and nod and ask how he is. I can't get over his face. It is "tight", as if a stocking were over it and he about to perform a robbery. He plucks at the keys and talks down into the machine. I am relieved when he starts giggling at something. I tell him I'm coming down to London in a week and he says he will show me his butterflies, he has bought two mounted butterflies for a very good price. If I don't tell anyone he will let me know where I could get one. A Chinaman in London Ontario sells them. I start to laugh. He doesn't. This is serious information, important rare information like the history of rocks — these frail wings of almost powder have their genealogies too.

8.

His favourite movie is *Earthquake*. He stands in the middle of his apartment very excited telling me all the details. He shows me his beautiful fossils, the white that is on the 120 million year old wood, a small poster of James Dean hitting his brother in *East of Eden*, and the two very impressive mounted butterflies.

9.

On the bus going back to Toronto I have a drawing of him by Bob Fones. Wrapped in brown paper it lies above me on the luggage rack. When the bus swerves I put my arm out into the dark aisle ready to catch it if it falls. It is a strange drawing of him in his cane chair with a plant to the side of him, reading Frank O'Hara with very oriental eyes. It was done in 1973, before the flesh left his face.

10.

His wife's brain haemorrhage. I could not cope with that. He is 23 years old. He does. Africa Asia Australia upside down. Earthquake.

John Bentley Mays /

UNDER THE WATERFALL

Some years ago, in order to amuse and distract myself while confined to a psychiatric ward, I invented a book by Martin Holzgruber entitled *Folktales of Bavaria*. This book, published in Berlin in 1873 and translated by Emily Klein in 1922, represents the life's work of the famous antiquarian and philologist and contains many stories of unparalleled charm and interest.

One of these tales concerns a lovely wight who had fallen in love with a troll-prince. The prince, who had become very rich by charging exorbitant tolls at his bridge, was impervious to the wight's every plea for him to leave his business and join her beneath the waterfall which was her home. Join me, then! said the troll — but the unfortunate wight could not bring herself to leave the deep forest silences and become the busy wife of a rising entrepreneur. At last, in the desperation of her impossible love, the wight bribed a sorcerer to dry up the stream which flowed beneath the troll-prince's bridge in the hope that, once men found another route across the dry river-bed, the troll would be plunged into poverty and then be more easily persuaded to share with her the subtler riches of solitude and beauty.

Little did the wight know, however, that the flood which ran beneath the bridge was fed by a spring high in the mountains — the same spring alas! that fed the stream which fell like a silver curtain over the entrance of the wight's cavern. In vain she cried out for the sorcerer to reverse his enchantment as the waterfall shrank to a trickle and disappeared, in vain she wailed as she, too, evaporated into the dry mountain air. In the end she perished, the victim of passion, whereas the troll-prince found work and a jolly troll-wife under a bridge not far away and eventually came into wealth greater than ever.

Mutatis mutandis, the wight reappeared in 1934 on the cover of a National Socialist tract called *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*. Clothed in a diaphanous gown embroidered with hammers and sickles, her face a grotesque Jewish caricature, the wight squats beneath her waterfall. She slobbers Hebrew characters and obscenities in German against the People's Will and Party. In the text, Holzgruber's story is retold as part of an hysterical diatribe againt the "bourgeois intellectual Jewish swine" whose "sole aim" is the disruption of "the German renaissance of national pride and industry." On the last page of the booklet, the wight appears once more, being strangled by a brown-shirted troll-*führer* who shouts in red *Fraktur*: DEATH TO ALL BOLSHEVIKS AND JEWS!

I found this little book while ransacking the room of an elderly gentleman who had arrived in the hospital after smashing all the windows in the show-room of his highly successful Volkswagen dealership.

We are not all without histories! In my search for money, I discovered beneath a stack of the old man's shirts a worn leather box. A Pandora's box of history! These are things contained in the box: a copy of *Bolshevism from Moses to Lenin*, water-stained and dog-eared; a Nazi Party pin and an Iron Cross; a letter from Oberstürmbannführer SS Werner Heyde commending the future Volkswagen-dealer for his part in the round-up of some dangerous Jewish snipers in Warsaw; a photograph of the old man, much younger, dressed in a handsome SS uniform; a pen-knife with an ivory handle, wrapped in a scrap of paper on which was written in a boy's sure hand: "Für meine liebe Rebekka. Vergiss nicht dein Bruder ISAAK!"

There were several other photos in the box. One of these depicted six naked girls, hands crossed over their crotches, ringed by smiling SS officers with machine-guns. One was a snapshot of a railway platform littered with baggage and boxes, and Jews of every age and station. Another, which looked as though it had been taken for the benefit of the Red Cross, showed a barracks lined with cots on each of which sat a thin little girl. Another snapshot, tilted and blurred as though it had been taken furtively, showed a row of nude corpses laid in the prison-yard as neatly as a row of cots. Each corpse was that of a little girl.

I quickly went back through all the photographs and discovered that one person — a girl — appeared in each. Could that child have been Rebekka? Could Rebekka have been one of the children in each brown snapshot?

The questions seemed to tear my brain loose from its moorings and send it careening down the sides of history into the theatre where the newsreels eternally grind through projectors in the dark hearts of things, and I saw the brown van moving slowly up the street between the canyon wall of tenements. I saw the van stop and disgorge a platoon of police armed with machine-guns and truncheons.

The future Volkswagen dealer awakens the *Portier* of the designated building and gives him his instructions and the warning that the Reich can take no responsibility for violence if he and the tenants do not strictly comply with orders.

In moments there are faces looking down at the dingy foyer from every landing of the winding stair. The officer-in-charge, whose possessions I handled that day in the hospital, reads the deportation order in Polish and in Yiddish. The tenants are told what they may and may not take with them, are told that it is the will of the Reich that this removal be executed with as little discomfort as possible, are lectured in the consequences should any attempt to resist the orderly execution of the decree. When he has finished and the last syllable has echoed up the coil of darkness, the faces disappear one by one from the stairwell, like lights winking off in windows at midnight.

In order to make certain that everything is going properly, the SS officer and some of his men ascend the stair and walk from door to door inspecting the progress of each family. Though slightly nauseated by the stale odors of boiled chicken and renderings, the leader smiles politely at old women folding shawls into suitcases and men whispering to their sons.

One door, he finds closed. He knocks, but there is no answer. He knocks again, sharply this time, but still there is no sound within. He pushes the door open with his boot and steps over the threshold.

The room's walls are invisible behind shelf after sagging shelf of books and papers. A desk, over which hangs a bare electric bulb (the room's only illumination), is likewise piled high with dusty volumes and sheets of paper covered with lines of tiny Hebrew characters. In the centre of the room sits an old rabbi with a violin resting on his lap. A little girl, with long russet pigtails, is seated on the floor; her head rests on the rabbi's knee. The yellow stars stitched on their sleeves glow like fragments of sunset in the dull electric light.

The old man looks up.

"Do not take Rebekka," he says in Yiddish. "I have no-one now but Rebekka."

The SS officer replies in fluent Yiddish that he and the girl will not be separated if they comply fully with regulations.

Without speaking, the girl rises, takes the violin from the rabbi and puts it into its case. She then goes to the bureau and begins laying the old man's suits on the bed.

"Rebekka is a good girl, and very strong. My wife is dead ten years now. Rebekka has been with me since last winter. She is a very good girl and a fine cook."

The girl turns to him and motions for him to be silent. He slowly pulls himself from the chair.

"Be sure to pack bread and eggs and milk. My wife would never allow me to go on a journey without a basket of food."

"Can she speak?" asked the SS officer.

"No. Never a word from her. But she can read and understand, and she is a strong girl. She will make a good wife. Will there be Jews in the place we are going? I want her to marry a fine young man and have many sons."

Despite the old man's words, the girl seems to hear and understand nothing. She quickly packs the bags, neglecting to include any food, then leads the old man into the hallway. The officer and the girl pause on the landing while the old man fumbles in his overcoat for a huge key, locks the door, and hands the key to Rebekka.

"You must give this to the *Portier*. He will see that my books are sent ahead. Ah! I am too old for long journeys. Do as I say."

The trio descend the winding stair, and the girl and the old man join the tenants huddled on the sidewalk. The officer-in-charge gives orders for the loading of the van.

We notice here the disobediences of the Jewish child; we notice here her respect for history: a little girl silences a rabbi; she packs no food; she slips the old man's key into a sack full of tumbled hosiery and keepsakes and not into the hand of the *Portier*.

But it is not before the moment that she climbs into the van without so much as a glance at the tenement or the old man — without so much as a gesture of compassion for the old rabbi trying to manage his books and suitcases — that the SS officer falls in love with her. No, it is *now* that the thought burns into his mind: how perfectly she obeys her history — as perfectly, indeed, as he himself. He sees in her yielding to the long descent into nothing a mirror of his own, and is raptured.

Throughout the months that follow, he watches her descent, marking each inch with a photograph. He orders pictures and documents — anything that has to do with her — sent to him on the flimsiest of pretexts. He orders her confiscated possessions sent to his office, where they will remain fetishes of veneration until Allied bombs destroy everything except a pen-knife he always carries on his person. He makes sure he is present on the day the SS nurses give green and red balloons to each child. He waits for a miracle of song to break out among the balloons, he waits for one word of protest to shatter the unity of his love for her — but no, the camp-guards seize her from behind, the nurse injects phenol into her heart, and in an instant she passes from the silence as deep as his own into the nothingness toward which he yearns with all his soul.

Frailty! Frailty and self-regard in a knight of the Master Race! Frailty, I screamed over the leather box of memories.

Without warning the door opened and the maniac car-salesman stepped over the threshold.

"You are in my room," he said softly.

Frailty! I screamed the word for days and days, and nothing my keepers could do or inject into me was able to quench my amazement at having discovered this flaw in the century's pure and violent consistency.

Margaret Atwood /
MARRYING THE HANGMAN

She has been condemned to death by hanging. A man may escape this death by becoming the hangman, a woman by marrying the hangman. But at the present time there is no hangman; thus there is no escape. There is only a death, indefinitely postponed. This is not fantasy, it is history.

•

To live in prison is to live without mirrors. To live without mirrors is to live without the self. She is living selflessly, she finds a hole in the stone wall and on the other side of the wall, a voice. The voice comes through darkness and has no face. This voice becomes her mirror.

•

In order to avoid her death, her particular death, with wrung neck and swollen tongue, she must marry the hangman. But there is no hangman, first she must create him, she must persuade this man at the end of the voice, this voice she has never seen and which has never seen her, this darkness, she must persuade him to renounce his face, exchange it for the impersonal mask of death, of official death which has eyes but no mouth, this mask of a dark leper. She must transform his hands so they will be willing to twist the rope around throats that have been singled out as hers was, throats other than hers. She must marry the hangman or no one, but that is not so bad. Who else is there to marry?

•

You wonder about her crime. She was condemned to death for stealing clothes from her employer, from the wife of her employer. She wished to make herself more beautiful. This desire in servants was not legal.

•

She uses her voice like a hand, her voice reaches through the wall, stroking and touching. What could she possibly have said that would convince him? He was not condemned to death, freedom awaited him. What was the temptation, the one that worked? Perhaps he wanted to live with a woman whose life he had saved, who had seen down into the earth but had nevertheless followed him back up to life. It was his only chance to be a hero, to one person at least, for the others would now despise him. He was in prison for wounding another man, on one finger of the right hand, with a sword. This too is history.

•

My friends, who are both women, tell me their stories, which cannot be believed and which are true. They are horror stories and they have not happened to me, they have not yet happened to me, they have happened to me but we are detached, we watch our unbelief with horror. Such things cannot happen to us, it is afternoon and these things do not happen in the afternoon. The trouble was, she said, I didn't have time to put my glasses on and without them I'm blind as a bat, I couldn't even see who it was. These things happen and we sit at a table and tell stories about them so we can finally believe. This is not fantasy, it is history, there is more than one hangman and because of this some of them are unemployed.

•

He said: the end of walls, the end of ropes, the opening of doors, a field, the wind, a house, the sun, a table, an apple.

She said: nipple, arms, lips, wine, belly, hair, bread, thighs, eyes, eyes.

They both kept their promises.

•

The hangman is not such a bad fellow. Afterwards he goes to the refrigerator and cleans up the leftovers, though he does not wipe up what he accidentally spills. He wants only the simple things: a chair, someone to pull off his shoes, someone to watch him while he talks, with admiration and fear, gratitude if possible, someone in whom to

plunge himself for rest and renewal. These things can best be had by marrying a woman who has been condemned to death by other men for wishing to be beautiful. There is a wide choice.

•

Everyone said he was a fool.
Everyone said she was a clever woman.
They used the word *ensnare*.

•

What did they say the first time they were alone together in the same room? What did he say when she had removed her veil and he could see that she was not a voice but a body and therefore finite? What did she say when she discovered that she had left one locked room for another? They talked of love, naturally, though that did not keep them busy forever.

•

The fact is there are no stories I can tell my friends that will make them feel better. History cannot be erased, although we can soothe ourselves by speculating about it. At that time there were no female hangmen. Perhaps there have never been any, and thus no man could save his life by marriage. Though a woman could, according to the law.

•

He said: foot, boot, order, city, fist, roads, time, knife.

She said: water, night, willow, rope hair, earth belly, cave, meat, open, blood.

They both kept their promises.

•

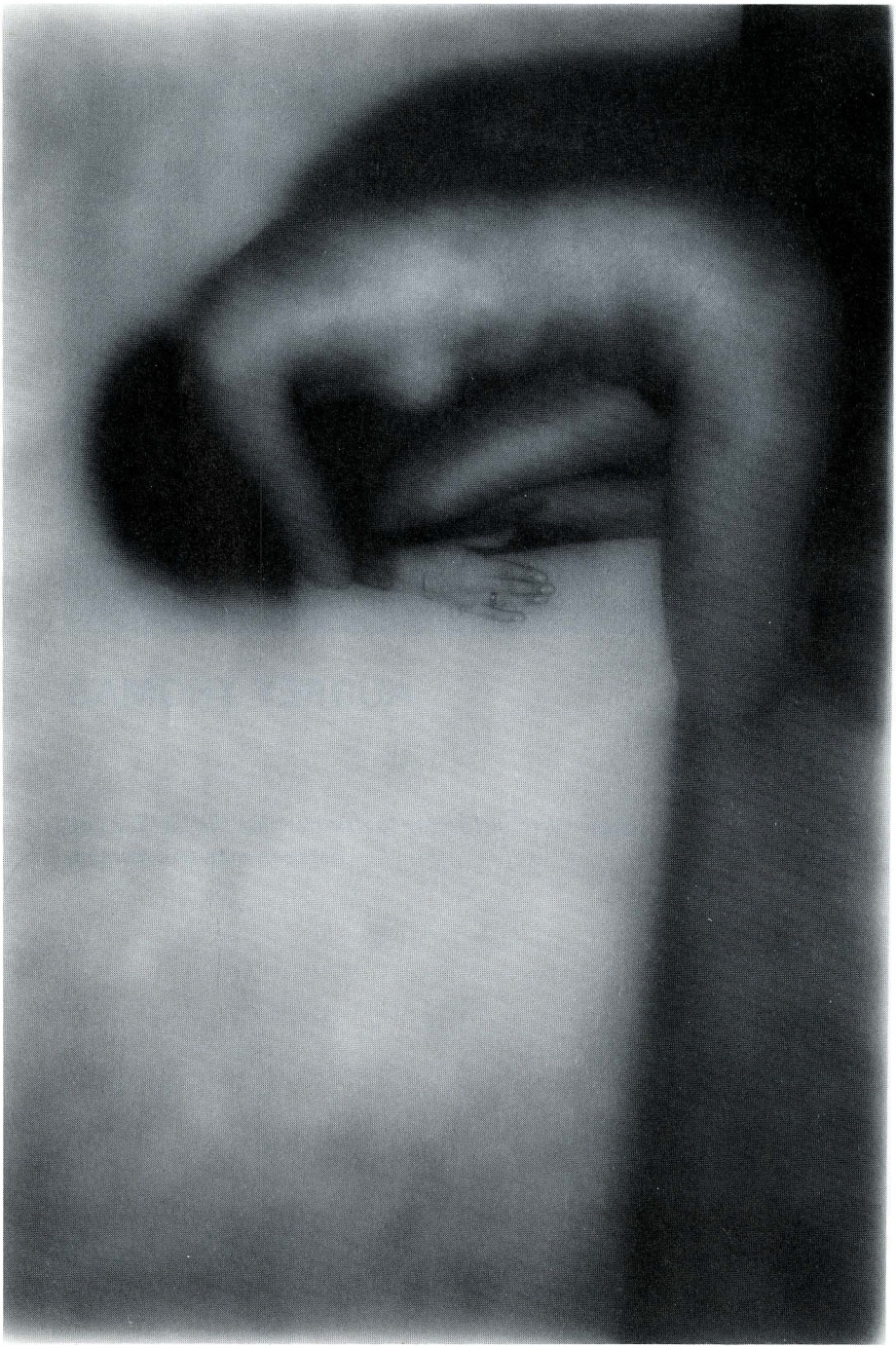
*After 29 April 1792, all trace of him and his wife is lost.**

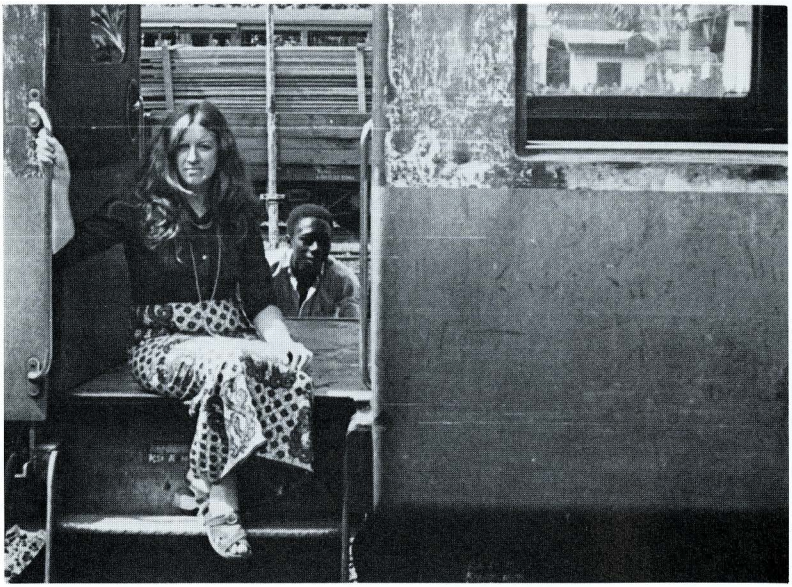
•

**The Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. III.*

Mike Maxwell, Dale Drewery

TWO PHOTOGRAPHERS





AUDREY THOMAS

Maybe I'm just trying to demonstrate the terrible gap between men and women.

A MONDAY DREAM AT ALAMEDA PARK

Coming down to Mexico had been the best thing they could have done. Laura was afraid of nothing, nothing, and her strength was infectious. Although he did not have her youth or her cast-iron stomach (perhaps the two went hand in hand) and his minor attack of *turista,* became in San Miguel, cramps and diarrhoea of such intensity that he took himself off to the hospital, not surprised at all to hear it was somehow, in spite of all precautions, dysentery. He had not taken all precautions no indeed. His old self would have taken all precautions — his wife would have seen to that. It was as though after that first lack of caution or precaution which led to her pregnancy and later to their marriage (a miserable affair in a Registry office) she had settled down to make sure that nothing would ever happen by chance again. Laura came to the hospital with great bunches of flowers, sat on his bed and held his hand and he forgot to be afraid. He was ashamed of his sickness — losing control of his bowels — there was something very humiliating about that. As though the neat bandage of skin which so tightly binds in all the necessary nastiness of the human body had suddenly slipped and revealed things that are best kept hidden.

Laura did not spend all day at the hospital — oh no. She was her own person (they had made a pact before they left Vancouver) and besides, he wouldn't have expected it. He read Octavio Paz and Oscar Lewis and slept — the sickness had taken a lot out of him. At five o'clock the bells would begin to ring and the roosters to crow. It was the first time he had slept away from Laura since their marriage.

He thought of her waking up in the pension, her long naked body stretching and turning and settling down again. When she walked down the street with him he understood for the first time the sense of pride a man can feel at the side of a beautiful woman. Yet knew she would be displeased if he told her that and knew himself it was not an acceptable (any more) way to feel. If men brushed against her she grew angry and cold. Not frightened but contemptuous.

He was the one who had wanted marriage — he told her it gave him some protection, some security, although he wasn't even sure what he meant by that. The bells rang, the roosters began to crow — he imagined his wife turning over in the double bed.

Last year she had taken acid with her younger sister and a friend. And masturbated. Had her first masturbation orgasm. She told him this with the same frankness she told him everything. He and his first wife had been so shy, so horribly reticent about their bodies. It had nearly killed him. It would, in the end, have killed him. She had written him long, hysterical letters, proclaiming her love, her unhappiness, her desire to try again. Or presenting him with past hurts like unpaid bills.

He had never loved her, that was the worst discovery of all.

"Fourteen years as vegetables," he said. "What are you crying about?"

When Laura made love to him she made sounds, very low at first and then louder, louder, never words, just a strange babble or tide of sounds, crooning to him and touching him all over with her long restless fingers, igniting him, giving him life.

She was the first woman who had ever caressed his nipples; he loved it.

And she loved him — in spite of the dysentery stains on his trousers.

For twenty years he had been a teacher — at first young and eager and with ideas as fluffy and tentative as the hair on a new-born chick. Student-graduate student-lecturer-assistant professor and so on. His mind toughening, reaching out. He had chosen the Metaphysicals because of their intelligence and acrobatics. He loved teaching them — it still, after twenty years, amazed him that anyone should pay him for what he liked doing best. But where had his body been during all that time?

His wife said, "It was dope that turned you on, not Laura."
"That may very well be," he replied. "But why couldn't you?"

Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse

With all his degrees and metaphysics he had never known before what it actually felt like to be his foot. His foot in his sock in his shoe. At first he was frightened, but the dark-haired girl sitting opposite him smiled and leaned over and touched his face. Over the weeks everything hard and cold within him began breaking up, like winter ice. He wrote a letter to his wife.

"The real meaning of Easter, it now seems to me, is that resurrection is a possibility for us all." He applied for a leave and got it.

On the fourth day the doctor said he could go home. That is to say, back to the pension. They celebrated by having a drink at *La Cucaracha* although the noise made him feel a little dizzy. Laura began talking to a woman who had been a nurse in World War Two. She was at the *Instituto* taking a course in batik. She was telling Laura about S.I.F., "Self-Inflicted Wounds."

"You could always tell the S.I.F.'s," she said.

"How"

"They always shot themselves between the first and second toe."

"To get out of the fighting?"

"To get out of the fighting."

They strolled arm in arm across the street and into the *jardin*. Everywhere was the sound of birds and bells.

"The first night you were in the hospital," she said. "I was feeling a bit lost so I came here to sit for a while. There was an American lady on one of the benches. Dowdy, late middle-age. Sitting there and trying not to cry. Every so often she would put her head down and dab at her face and then sit up straight again. Finally I went over and asked her if I could help. She was ill, she said, with high blood pressure and was going home the next day. She's been coming to the *Instituto* for six years, ever since her husband died. She said her blood pressure attack

came on because someone "tampered" with a package — that was her word, "tampered." It contained her dead husband's stone-working tools. 'I can replace tools,' she said, 'but I can't replace *his* tools.' Now she hates Mexico and doesn't think she'll ever be coming back."

"I can understand that," he said.

"I'm trying to," she said.

They decided they were glad to have seen San Miguel but it was time to move on. Laura had put flowers everywhere in the bedroom. And had scented the sheets with some sweet, pungent herb. They had to get up with the roosters if they wanted to catch the early bus.

"This afternoon in the church by the market I saw this sign," she said.

"It was written on a blackboard and I copied it out for you —

Misas Rezadas:
Una por María de los Angeles Rodriguez
Otra por Crescenciano Rivera
Otra por Victoriano Muñoz
Otra por Soledad Ortiz
Otra por Julian Zalasar
Otra por Felepa Soto
Tres misas Rezadas por todas las ánimas apuntadas.

"Three masses for all the damned souls. Is that right?"

"I think so. It reminded me of Lowry's virgin for them who have nobody with."

He thought briefly of his first wife. No. Souls damned themselves. And saw himself once again as a man miraculously saved. As though he had been literally held down or held under. And then had somehow broken free and swum away. Must he now light candles for the ones who didn't make it? For "*todas las ánimas apuntadas?*" Let the dead bury the dead. He handed her back the piece of paper.

"I'm glad I have 'somebody with' "

But it still seemed a strange thing to copy down.

That was a week ago. And they were beginning to find out, to their surprise, that they liked Mexico City, in spite of itself, in spite of that first sight of it, coming in on the bus, terrifying — a haze over the city as though it had been bombed about a week before and the dust was just beginning to settle. One expected to hear faint cries for help from underneath the rubble. And the traffic! He was glad again that they had decided to leave their car back in Canada. They found a little hotel within walking distance of the Anthropological Museum and after a day or two began to settle in. They got up late and went down together to the cafe connected with the hotel. Orange juice and rolls and coffee. His insides were still not quite right and Laura would count him out the *Lomatil* "how do I love thee, let me count the ways." Teasing him, but not maliciously. Often they did not meet again until late afternoon or evening. He had to take things more slowly because he had been ill, and besides they were very liberated, very liberal, in their attitude to one another. What was the point in their always being together.

Some mornings he simply walked to the Anthropology Museum, taking his lunch with him in a basket — bread tortillas, yogurt, cheese, an avocado, a tin of juice — ate outside in the courtyard and then walked home again. He would take a nap (somehow he never mentioned this to Laura), setting the alarm so that he would be up and washed and downstairs in the cafe sipping a chocolate when she breezed in. She loved the markets and loved bargaining — bought cloth and ceramic flutes and spinning tops and papier maché masks for her nieces and nephews. Her Spanish was minimal but she always made herself understood, got where she wanted to go, had only positive adventures. She assumed that people would like her and so of course they did. In the evenings they wandered around hand in hand until they found a place to eat, then went to a movie and home to bed.

One night they met some people in a bar and were invited to a party. Americans and Mexicans and he and Laura sat in the back of a taxi with a Mexican they called "the pole." The pole kept going on and on about mushrooms. When they arrived at the party no one was there but a boy and a girl making love in an old brass bed. Their new friends said it didn't matter, wrong address and offered the lovers some beer and some tequila. They all got stoned and slightly drunk and he kept telling Laura that this was a far cry from the Museum of Anthropology. But the next day his guts were very bad and he felt the whole thing wasn't worth it. He began to envy Laura's energy and good health. She was thinking of staying on in Mexico for a while — he had to go back in two more weeks and see his sons. He tried not to be hurt that she might stay on — after all, that had been the agreement, they were both free to come and go. He met a girl in the bank that afternoon and invited her to a movie that night. She was from Chile and very beautiful.

"I can practice my Spanish," he said and Laura smiled and nodded.

"If I were your wife," Inez said "I wouldn't allow you out of my sight."

"That's ridiculous," he said, and then looked up and saw she was teasing him. She was a psychologist at the Institute for drug research. She would introduce him to her boyfriend, Rosario, who was doing workshops with LSD. Donne and Marvell seemed very far away.

Laura wasn't too sure about going — "maybe I'm jealous," she said.

"Do you think so?" He couldn't help feeling pleased. "She says her boyfriend will be there." They were all to meet at Inez' apartment and then go out for a drink.

Rosario was small but beautifully made. Inez had on white jeans and a tiny crocheted top. Her apartment was large and full of rugs and soft furniture. She kissed Laura and offered drinks. It was the apartment of a wealthy woman — she said she lived alone except for the maid. "A Chilean refugee." Rosario was running a marathon acid session at the Institute beginning Saturday morning. There would be participants and attendants and observers. People were coming from as far away as Harvard, would they like to come? Inez put her arm around Laura. "Your skin is incredible." They were all a little drunk.

"What about this movie," he said.

"Oh!" said Inez. "Do we really want to go to a movie. We cannot talk in a movie and we are all just getting to be friends." There were white curtains of some beautiful thin gauzey stuff and brilliant woven cushions on the sofa. Rosario smiled at him and began to talk about the expanding consciousness. Inez got up and offered to show Laura the bedroom.

"All of us," she said, "let us all go and see the bedroom."

It was the biggest bed he had ever seen. A coarse-woven cloth and more bright pillows, dozens of them. Who suggested it? Rosario? Inez? That they should all make love together. Rosario sat on the edge of the bed and rolled a joint. Inez put her arms around Laura and kissed her. He had never seen one woman kiss another like that before and it excited him. But Laura pushed away. Why?

"I don't want to stay."

"I'd like to"

"That's fine."

"You don't mind?"

Inez looked from one to the other. How old was she? Thirty? Thirty-five? It was hard to tell. She was small, like Rosario, and had to reach up to kiss Laura. Had reached up and pulled her head down, a gesture both childlike and erotic.

"But Laura, it will be great fun. We will all become really acquainted, really friends."

Laura shook her head.

"I'm sorry."

Inez shrugged and turned away, dismissing her.

"And you?"

Laura had told him he must always be honest.

"I want to stay."

Laura came over and kissed him on the cheek and then was gone. He told himself he felt no guilt, she was a big girl and that if she'd wanted him to come she would have said so.

They took off their clothes and Inez lay down on the bed between the two men. They just lay there smoking, nothing happening, until suddenly she pulled him over on top of her. Rosario began caressing his back and his buttocks, harder and harder so that when he finally came he wasn't sure whether it was because of Rosario or Inez and that frightened him a little. Rosario and Inez both began to masturbate, with their eyes shut and then he was pushing her hands away and licking her while Rosario got down behind and began licking him. He was totally out of his senses, totally. It was just pure sensation and violence, too. And nothing loving about it at all. Inez screamed and pushed him away and Rosario rolled over on top of her. The sight of Rosario fucking Inez excited him again and he felt lost, left-out and frustrated. Inez came and then asked whether he wanted her or Rosario to suck him off. He said "both" so they took turns.

"Now we are very close," she said, "very close. I am sorry your wife wouldn't stay. She has a beautiful body, beautiful skin."

He arranged to meet Rosario for the acid marathon and went out into the street. He did not feel close to those people at all and was terrified by his response to Rosario. Things would have been different if Laura had stayed.

She was sitting up in bed waiting for him when he got back. He told her everything.

"That's why I left," she said. "I felt we were somehow being set up for their amusement. They're cruel people, sophisticated and cruel."

"I was frightened," she said. "When I got to Reforma I began to run — it was ridiculous. I just didn't want you to come after me and drag me back there. I went into one of the hotels, I don't know which one. There was a mariachi band and all the tourists were whooping it up. I met a man, older, who'd been sitting in that hotel for four days afraid to go out. His brother was supposed to join him and was delayed. He hadn't been *outside* of the hotel."

They wept in one another's arms.

"Were you attracted to Inez?" he asked.

"No, because I felt I was being manipulated."

"Have you ever made love with a woman?"

"Yes," she said. "Once, but it was someone I loved. I don't think I could make love with a strange woman."

"Yet I was turned on by Rosario."

"You were being very carefully manipulated."

"*Todo el mundo es loco loco.*"

"What?"

"It's a movie sign I saw today, with Ethel Merman."

"I love you," she said, "even if you are loco loco."

He began to cry again.

"Let go of it," she said. "Let it go."

The next day he felt very tired and convalescent. He decided to go back to the Anthropology museum once more and she would go to the Museum of Modern Art. They agreed to meet for a picnic lunch at two. The walk seemed very long and the broad avenue of Reforma crowded and unpleasant. "Let's take a bus," he said, "I still feel a bit woozy."

They stood at the bus stop together and she leaned up against him.

"I feel very close to you," she said. "I just wanted you to know." It came over him that if he died right then, that instant, he would have known more happiness in his few months with this girl than he had in all the years of his former life. What about never going back? What about staying down here and finding a little village somewhere. All for love and the world well lost. Laura got off at her stop and blew him a kiss.

"Two o'clock."

"I won't forget."

She asked nothing of him except that he be himself. If he weren't there at two she would not be jealous or hurt (although he would like to think she might be a little concerned). She would assume that something had caught his interest and he couldn't make it. "Loving," she had said to him, "is letting go, of yourself and of the other person, the 'beloved' as your old poet-pals might put it."

It was not a lesson he learned easily. For if she stood him up??

And then of course his museum was closed. Monday. Why hadn't he noticed that before. He stood there at a loss. It was only eleven and the Museum of Modern Art would not excite him a second time around. However, he began to wander back in that direction — to find Laura. To tell her he was going on to something else. A man and a woman were setting up a little stall of glass figurines outside the children's playground. He smiled and bought a fragile giraffe and three babies which were carefully wrapped in grey lint. They were not very expert examples of glass-blowing but they pleased him all the same. Laura was sitting on a bench in the children's playground watching two monkeys feed a bird.

"Hey Señorita." She didn't turn around. "Laura!" Turned and saw who it was and waved. There was a high fence between them.

"How did you get in?"

"Keep going. Around the other side."

Her museum was closed too. Maybe everything? He wanted to see the stuff at the Palace of Fine Arts, she was easy, didn't really care. They walked back towards the entrance to the park and found a phone booth. Someone assured him the Palace of Fine Arts was open.

"Let's go."

Then just as they were about to cross the boulevard she saw a balloon man.

"Wait a minute, I want to buy a balloon."

"What colour? I'll treat you to one."

"Red," she said, "yellow, I don't care."

In a sudden rush of delight he bought them all. Eighteen, twenty, he wasn't sure how many. The balloon seller thought he was crazy. Loco loco. He went away shrugging his shoulders.

"Here," he said, embarrassed now. "A special bouquet."

"You will become a legend in some small street in this city. The crazy gringo who bought up all the balloons."

They crossed over and began a slow leisurely walk along the boulevard, Carlotta's boulevard, arm in arm, the balloons bobbing in the air above them. Why had he thought the street unfriendly, cold? Laura gave a balloon to every child, to old people, to a laughing policeman. She did not expect to be snubbed and no one snubbed her. They walked like this for about three miles, slowly, ceremoniously, arm in arm. Laura had on a long dull-red skirt and a black tee-shirt. He wanted to photograph her but did not have his camera. She was colour and life and delight. When they reached Alameda Park it was afternoon and they sat amongst the statues and shoe-shine boys and ate their lunch. Laura tied a balloon to the bench where they had sat. He felt quite dizzy when he stood up to go and thought for a minute of his usual afternoon siesta. He could go back now, Laura wouldn't care. No. It was just the late night and the dope and drink and of course the altitude. The altitude slowed almost everybody down.

A boy came up to them, carrying his brass-decorated shoe-shine stand.

"Shine your shoes, Señor?"

He held out his sandalled foot and laughed. The boy laughed too.

"Cut your toenails??" Laura gave him the last balloon but one.

The Palace of Fine Arts was closed — only the office (with the phone) was open. He was terribly tired. The secretary suggested the Rivera murals at the Ministry of Education. They walked round and round. His head ached, his back ached, his whole body ached. Yet still he felt the power of Rivera's vision.

"I read somewhere," Laura said, "that at one time they wanted him for President of the Republic."

His people were as solid as mountains. The calves of the peasant women bulged. Freedom. The women handed out machine guns. Liberty. Everything was made simple. The truth shall make you free. His back ached horribly.

"There's one more place I'd like to go while we're down in this area," she said.

"Where's that?"

"It's a hotel with a big Rivera mural. The Hotel del Prado."

"Do you know where it is?"

"I know it's near the Alameda Park — where we ate lunch."

They went back the way they had come. Laura had kept one balloon, a red one, and now, because he was tired and felt ill because he really didn't give a damn about seeing another mural, because all he wanted to do was go back to the hotel and go to bed, it seemed to him that people were laughing at her — stupid American woman carrying a balloon. He wished it would break before they got to the Hotel del Prado, but of course it didn't.

They had walked all the way around the park before they found out where the mural was. Across the street, the traffic snarling and pouncing, up some stairs and into the lounge. It was "Happy Hour," a sign said, they could have two drinks for the price of one. He ordered two gin and tonics and when the girl came she put the drinks down and then stood with her hand out. He paid for the drinks and still she stood.

"What d'you want?" He hadn't meant his voice to come out so loud.

"You have to tip me Señor."

"What do you mean, I *have* to tip you."

"It is the custom."

He shrugged and gave her a few pesos. She looked at him with contempt, put the money down by his drink and walked away. "Stupid bitch."

"Shh. It's beginning."

A small man with a pointer came out of nowhere and began to explain the mural. It was huge — the history of modern Mexico set in Alameda Park. That was the name of the mural — "A Sunday Dream in Alameda Park." Rivera had painted himself in the center, a small boy with a frog and snake in his pocket. On one side of him a woman, a skeleton in a long dress. The Plumed Serpent was a feather boa around her neck.

The gin had made him feel a little better, but the mural danced like a landscape in the water and he couldn't pay attention to the little man with the pointer. General Zapata. Madero. Rivera's first wife, Guadalupe, his daughter Ruth, his second wife Freda in maroon with a yin/yang symbol in her hand. The landscape was divided into three parts. In the Colonization Period everything was smokey and unclear "because our nation was not independent." Then balloons like Laura's balloons — strength — "everythin' is shiny bright — the win' is not even blowin'." When was that? After Juárez presumably. Then the winds began to blow amongst the trees in Alameda Park — There will be a revolution — "leaves begin to get sick."

He tried to follow. Which revolution? What was the man talking about? Laura was taking notes. Good. He could ask her later.

Phrases stuck in his mind. "Forty years late on." "Lil boy" "Consider him par of the family." *Tierra y Libertad. "El Sueño de un domingo en la Alameda."*

The lecturer announced that he was Facundo Vásquez and that contributions will be accepted.

Laura put her notebook away and hunted for some change. She went up and stood chatting with the man. He wondered if he would faint if he stood up.

A Sunday dream. A Monday dream. Rosario and Inez. Had we but world enough and time. How old was Freda when Rivera married her? In ten years Laura would be thirty-two and he would be sixty.

She came up to him as he was moving towards the door.

"Leaving without me?"

"I just wanted to get some fresh air."

They took a taxi back to the hotel. There was no elevator and the stairs seemed endless. Left foot. Right foot. He took off his sandals and fell across the bed.

"Got to have a little sleep. Very tired."

She smiled and shed her clothes. Stood there naked and unselfconscious in the middle of the room and he felt nothing, nothing at all. Sleep. The soft lap of sleep. The caress of sleep. The last thing he heard was the sound of the shower.

She came out towelling her hair, and looked at her sleeping husband. She kissed him gently and covered him up with a light blanket. Then she put on a dress and her sandals and checked that she had money and her keys. It was not that she didn't love him, for she did. But all around her the lights of Mexico City had come on, in the fountains, the circles, the parks, the bars, the boulevards. She tied her balloon to the arm of the single chair and quietly let herself out.

In Alameda Park the lovers walked with their arms around one another's shoulders. But let him sleep.

INITRAM

(for Bob Amussen)

Writers are terrible liars. There are nicer names for it, of course but liars will do. They will take a small incident and blow it up, like a balloon — puff puff — and the out-of-work man who comes to ask if he can cut the grass ends up in their story as an out-of-control grey-faced, desperate creature who hurls himself through the garden gate and by his sheer presence wrecks a carefully arranged afternoon between a married woman and her impending lover.

The truth is I was reading the manuscript of an old friend. The truth is I thought the man hadn't gone but was lurking in the back lane just beyond the blackberry bushes.

The truth is I only thought I saw him there — flashes of a red-plaid shirt beyond the green. (Writers also lie to themselves.)

The truth is that when the police came and I was asked to describe this man I was overcome with shame and embarrassment to suddenly notice him, half a block away, moving a neighbour's lawn mower up and down in regular and practical stripes.

The truth is I still insisted (to myself, after the grinning policeman had gone) that the man had been sinister, menacing, unpleasant. And of course he is, in my story.

But what do writers do with the big events in life — births and broken hearts and deaths — the great archetypal situations that need no real enhancement or "touching up." Surely they simply *tell* these, acting as mediums through which the great truths filter. Not at all — or not usually or maybe sometimes when they happen to other people.

That is why I decided to call Lydia when my marriage broke up. I was living on an island — felt I needed a wider audience, an audience that would understand and accept my exaggerations for what they were. It had to be a fellow writer, preferably a woman. I called her up long-distance. One of her daughters answered and said she wasn't there could I leave my number? I put the phone down, already planning the ferry-trip, the excitement of the telling of my terrible news. Lydia was perfect. Yes. I couldn't wait for her to call me back.

I didn't, in fact, know her very well. I had done a review of her first published book and then later, when I went to visit her city, had on a sudden whim called from a phone booth and identified myself. She had told me to come right over. I had my husband and three kids with me. That seemed too much of an imposition on anyone we didn't know so I took the littlest and he agreed to take the others to the Wax Museum. We drove up a very classy road, with huge houses — some were really what we used to call mansions — on either side. I began to get cold feet.

I had visions of a patrician face and perfect fingernails — drinking tea from her grandmother's bone china cups. We would talk about Proust and Virginia Woolf with a few casual remarks about *Nightwood* and the diaries of Anaïs Nin.

As we drove up to the front door of a big, imposing, mock-tudor residence I thought of "Our Gal Sunday" a soap-opera I had loved when I was a kid. It always began with a question as to whether a beautiful young girl from a small mining town in the West could find happiness as the wife of England's most wealthy and titled lord, Lord Henry Brinthrop.

It was her stories, you see. They were about life in rural Ontario — about farms and poverty (both spiritual and material) and, very often, a young girl's struggle against those things. Yet here was this house, on this road and a statue in the garden.

"Wait for me," I said to my husband, "If a butler or maid answers, I'm not going in."

But Lydia answered — in black slacks and an old black sweater and no shoes. She gave me a hug and I went in with my littlest child and didn't look back.

Through the hall in to the sitting room, then the dining room (an impression of a piano and lots of books, of a big antique dining table covered with clutter generally now that I think back on it. Somewhere upstairs a small child was screaming) through another narrow hall and into a big kitchen. She asked if my little girl wanted some orange juice. She wouldn't answer so I answered for her as mothers do on such occasions.

"Yes please."

When Lydia opened the refrigerator door a great pile of things fell out on the kitchen floor. Frozen pizzas, a dish of left over mashed potatoes, the bottle of juice, something unidentifiable in a glass jar. We looked at each other and began to laugh.

"The house," I said, "I was terrified."

" I *hate* this house," she said. "I hate it."

Then talked and talked while our two little girls (we each had three, extraordinary!, we each had the same dinner set bought on special at the Hudson's Bay Company years before "cherry thieves" it was called — she used one of the saucers for an ash tray) played something or other upstairs.

She was older than I was (but not much) and incredibly beautiful with dark curly chaotic hair and the kind of white skin that gives off the radiance a candle does when it has burnt down at the core and the sides are still intact. Her book had brought her fame (if not fortune) but she was having trouble with her second one, a novel.

She hated the house and couldn't keep it up. Her husband was a professor — he loved it. It was miserably cold in the winter — sometimes the furnace stopped all together. What did I think of Doris Lessing, of Joyce Carol Oates, of *The Edible Woman*? Her daughter had made a scene in the supermarket and called her a "fucking bitch." Did that kind of thing happen to me? Her neighbour was a perfect housewife, perfect. She was always sending over cakes and preserves. One day she took one of her neighbour's cheese cakes and stamped all over it with her bare feet, she said. An aging Canadian writer (male) had told her drunkenly, "Well, I might read ya but I'd never fuck ya." Did I think it was all right to send a kid to day care when she was only three?

And even while I was talking with her, marvelling at her, helping her mop up the floor, I kept wondering why she didn't write about all this, why she had stopped at twenty years ago and written nothing about her marriage or this house or her child who had been still-born and how the doctor (male) and her husband couldn't understand why it took her so long to get over it. I wondered about her husband but he was off somewhere practicing with a chamber-music group. He liked old instruments, old houses, things with a patina of history and culture. His family accepted her now that she'd won awards.

I only saw her a few times after that — we lived in different cities and there was a boat ride between us. But we wrote (occasionally); she had large round handwriting, like a child's.

Her novel was not going well — it kept turning itself into stories — she was going to Ireland with her husband for a holiday. How was I? Not literary letters: we were both too busy, too involved in our own affairs. Just little notes, like little squeezes or hugs which said, "Sister, I am here."

We read once, at a Women's Week, or rather I read, with two others while Lydia sat on the blue-carpeted floor with a Spanish cape over her head and let somebody else read for her. She and I were both scared and had gotten drunk before we went — by not reading I felt she had somehow let me down. We four ladies all had dinner together and talked about what it was like to be woman and writer and egged each other on to new witticisms and maybe a few new insights but I did not feel close to Lydia that evening. I was still sore about the way she'd plonked herself down on the carpet and pulled her shawl over her head and let somebody else read for her. It was very clever, I thought to myself, and very dramatic. For there was Lydia's story, unrolling out of the mouth of another woman (whose story it was not) and there was the author herself sitting like an abandoned doll, on the floor beside the reader. The audience loved it and sent out sympatheic vibrations to her. I thought it was a con. And almost said to her, "Lydia, I think that was a very clever con," but didn't because I realized that maybe I wished I had thought of it first and why not store it away for some future date — it was a nice piece of dramatic business.

And once we had lunch in her city — at a medieval place — where we swept in in our capes (I had a cape too by then) and ate and drank our way through a rainy West Coast afternoon. I wasn't staying overnight so I still hadn't met her husband. Her novel was out and she was winning awards. I was a little jealous. My books came out and vanished into the well of oblivion. She just went up and up and up. "I've been writing for twenty years," she said, "don't forget that. Two books in twenty years."

She had used to pretend she was making the sitting room curtains when her neighbours invited her over for coffee. She always worked in a basement room. Now her secret was well and truly out.

"How does your husband feel about it all?"

"Oh, I never write about *him*," she said. She lit a cigarette.

"He's probably my biggest fan."

Now I waited for her to call me back. My husband (correction, my ex-husband) was coming over to be with his children. I had a whole day and a night off. Whether I wanted it or not I had to leave this place. And I wanted to, I really wanted to. What was the point in hanging around while he was here, crying over spilt milk, locking empty, horseless barn doors, trying to pick up nine stitches, or mopping up all the water under the goddamn bridge. I baked bread and cleaned the cabin and got supper for the kids and still she hadn't called. My ex-husband called, however, and said in his new strained, estranged voice, was it all set for tomorrow and I said sure but began to feel really sorry for myself because there was really no place I wanted to go except this one place — Lydia's and I'd got it into my head that if I couldn't go there I couldn't go anywhere and would have to end up going back to the city I had left behind and getting a room in some cheap hotel down near Hastings street, and drink myself into oblivion with cheap red wine. Or going back and forth all day on the ferry, ending up at midnight on one of the neighbouring islands, getting a room at the inn. A stranger in a brown wool cape. Going into the public room and ordering a drink. Did they have a public room. Would there be local characters sitting around and playing darts — a handsome stranger whose sailing boat was tied up because of the storm? There was not even a small craft warning out but never mind — the weather was almost as fickle as friendship — it was not inconceivable that a sailboat-disabling storm could blow up by tomorrow night —

"I'll always care what happens to you," he said.

We were teasing wool on the floor in front of the pot-belly stove, the three of us — the youngest child was asleep. There was only the oil lamp on and the CBC was broadcasting a documentary about Casals. "The quality of a man's life is as important as the quality of his art," the old man said. Our hands were soft and oily from the lanolin in the wool. We touched each other's faces with our new, soft, hands. Yes. I thought, yes. And maybe I'll be all right after all. The fleece had been bought by my husband's lover, my ex-best friend. It was from New Zealand, the finest wool in the world. I paid for it, the wool. I had left a cheque on the table the last time I was in town. On the phone my ex-husband mentioned it wasn't enough, she'd mistaken the price or the price had been incorrectly quoted. But it was all right, he'd make up the difference.

"I bet you will," I said.

I was seeing everything symbolically. Lydia phoned and I said, "Just a minute I have to light a candle." The room with the phone in it was in darkness. I stuck the candle in the window and picked up the phone again with my soft lanolin-soaked hands.

"Hello," I said, "Can I come and visit you tomorrow and stay overnight?" Her voice sounded a bit funny but that could be the line which was notoriously bad.

"Sure," she said, "of course. But I'll be out until suppertime. Can you find something to do until suppertime?"

"Can I come a little before? I want to talk to you."

"Come around four," she said. She sounded as though she had a cold.

"I'll bring a bottle," I said.

"Fine."

I had to be away on the first ferry — what would I do all day? I rubbed lanolin into my face. Sheep shed their old coats and went on living. Snakes too. I could hear Casals' child laughing in the

background. Someone had lent us a spinner and it stood in the corner of the front room. Not a fairytale spinner which would turn straw into gold. Very solid and unromantic — an Indian spinner without even the big wheel. Nothing for a Sleeping Beauty to prick her finger on — It worked like an old treadle sewing machine but I didn't have the hang of it yet — my wool always broke. Whirr Whirr. There was something nice about just pressing down on the treadle.

I took the candle into the kitchen and wrapped my bread in clean tea towels. I put out a jar of blackberry jam and two poems folded underneath the jar. That would have to do.

When I got to Lydia's house she was frying chicken in the kitchen. Same black slacks and old black sweater. Same bare feet and clutter. There were two enormous frying pans full of chicken wings both hissing and spitting away and Lydia had a long two-prong kitchen fork in her hand.

I took off my cape and sat down, unwrapping the bottle.

"Good," she said, "pour us a glass." Her voice didn't sound as though she had a cold any more, it sounded harsh and a little loud, as though she were talking to someone slightly deaf. She was jabbing the chicken wings as though they were sausages in need of pricking. She couldn't leave those chicken wings alone and after my second glass I began.

"Listen," I said, "I've got something I want to tell you."

"I've got something I want to tell you too," she said, and then, rather absent-mindedly, "did you only buy one bottle?"

"Sorry. But have some more, it doesn't matter."

"It's all right," she said, "we'll drink the dinner wine. Tony will just have to bring some more."

I was anxious to begin. I wanted to make it funny and witty and brave — to get rid of the pain or to immortalize it and fix it — which? I don't know, I never know. I took another drink of my sherry and wished she'd stop poking at those chicken wings.

"I don't actually live here any more," she said, waving the long-handled fork. "I only come back to cook the dinners."

"You what??"

Turning all the chicken wings over one more time, she lowered the heat under the pans and came to sit down next to me. She kept her fork with her, however, and laid it on the tablecloth where it left a greasy two-pronged stain.

"I've left him," she said, "the bastard." Her voice was very harsh, very tough. I felt she'd put something over on me, just as I'd felt the day of the reading when she sat on the floor and pulled her cape over her head.

"I wish you'd told me over the phone."

"I couldn't. It's too complicated. Besides, I come back here every day in any case."

It was both moving and bizarre. He had been supposed to move out, she had even found him an apartment only a few minutes away. But at the last minute he panicked, said he couldn't live in an apartment, talked about his piano, his collection of old instruments, the upheaval. He suggested she move out instead.

"But what about the children?"

"That's the trouble of course. I have to pick Ellen up from school — he can't do it of course and so I just stay on and make the dinners. The other two are all right, it's only the little one who still needs to be looked after."

"But that's crazy."

"Is it? what would you do?"

I admitted that I didn't know.

"But how can you all eat together — how can you stand it?"

"I can't," she admitted, "but he won't move out and finding a house big enough for me and the girls is going to take time." She got up and rummaged in the pantry. Came back with a bottle of wine.

"I think we'd better start on this," she said. I undid the cork while she got up to turn the chicken wings.

"He brought her right to the house," she said. "When I was on that reading tour. Brought her right here and the children were here too."

The name of the wine was *Sangre de Toro*.

"At least she wasn't your best friend," I said.

"I knew her, I knew her, she's one of his students. I used to think she was mousey. I encouraged her to do something with herself. Ha. And I think the lady next door too," she said.

"The one who bakes cakes."

"That's the one. The perfect mother."

"Maybe you're just being paranoid."

"Maybe."

We began the *Sangre de Toro*.

"What's your big news," she said.

The two older girls were out somewhere for the evening so there was just the youngest child, who must have been six or seven, Lydia, her husband and myself. She and I were pretty drunk by the time we finished the *Sangre de Toro* but she had insisted I call her husband at the University and ask him to bring home another bottle.

"Tell him specifically what you want," she yelled at me from the kitchen. "Otherwise he'll bring home Calona Red."

I told him. Now he sat opposite me with two huge plates of chicken wings between us. I didn't want to look at his baffled eyes, his embarrassed smile.

"He still wears a white handkerchief in his breast pocket," she had said. "Irons them himself."

The vegetable was frozen peas and there was bread on the table because Lydia had forgotten all about the potatoes. The child was raucous and unpleasant. I wondered what happened when she woke up in the night with a bad dream and whether he went in to her or whether her teen-age sisters did. I wondered if she had been the one to tell about the student. Kids will do things like that and not always out of innocence.

Lydia ate one chicken wing after another. We were all going out as soon as the dishes were done and the baby-sitter came. My real self didn't want to go but my drunken self thought what the hell it's better than staying here with these three miserable people.

While Tony was doing the dishes Lydia hauled me upstairs, pulled me up after her like an older sister a younger, or a mother a reluctant child. I understood the fierce energy of her anger. It was like someone who is hurt during an exciting game. While the excitement is there the pain is simply not felt. She hurled me into their bedroom.

"Look," she said.

I don't know what I expected to see. Stained sheets piled up in a corner or the student stark naked and manacled to the bed or what. But everything seemed all right. No shattered mirrors or blood-stained bedspreads, just an ordinary pleasant-looking bedroom.

"I don't see."

"Look." She was pointing to the walk-in closet.

"I've left all my shoes here except one pair. Crazy isn't it. I just can't seem to take my shoes away."

"Maybe you don't really want to go."

"Oh no, I want to go. I have to go. Or he does. One of us anyway. It isn't just the girl."

"It never is."

On his side of the closet the tweed jackets and neatly pressed trousers were hung with military precision. On her side there were only empty hangers and a large heap of shoes piled any which way. Was that significant, the order/disorder? Was it an attempt to break through this orderly self that made him bring his student to this bed? Or had he just been lonely. I didn't want to think about that for after all, wasn't he the enemy?

We went back downstairs.

The baby sitter came and we went out. Lydia had put on a filthy white crocheted wool poncho. Tony objected mildly. "Are you going out in that? It's dirty."

"That's tough," Lydia said.

They were playing to me, an audience of one. Maybe that's why we were going out — to gain a larger audience. I panicked — what if I had too much to drink and began to cry? Lydia looked witchy and wicked with her uncombed hair and dirty poncho — I felt she was quite capable of doing something terrible to her husband — mocking him or humiliating him in some way and I was to be her accomplice. He had a heavy projector in his hand.

"We had arranged to show some slides," he said, "before we knew you were coming."

"Slides of our European trip," Lydia said. "One of Tony's colleagues is going this summer — he wanted to see them."

I thought it was strange they didn't invite him over here but maybe Lydia had refused to actually entertain. I found the whole thing strange — sitting between them in the car following them up the steps of their friend's house, saying hello and taking off my cape, patting my face to keep the smile in place, the way some women pat their hair before they go into a room. Our host was shy and pale and had a club foot — there didn't seem to be any hostess. But there were two other people in the sitting room, a tall, lean man in a bright blue shirt, string tie and cowboy boots and a plump woman in a black creepy dress black pointy fifties shoes and a rhinestone brooch. Both the man and the woman had nice faces, expectant faces, as though they expected that whoever walked through the next door was bound to be cheerful and interesting and good. Innocent faces, almost the faces of small children. We were introduced and asked what we would like to drink and Tony began to set up the projector.

Lydia was talking to Tony's colleague in her strange new brassy tough-gal voice, flirting with him, making him smile. "Does he know?" I wondered. He had introduced her as Tony's wife. I sat down next to the man in the blue shirt.

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I'm a bee-keeper," he said.

"You might say he's a bee-baron," said his brother. I could see they were brothers in their smiles and something to do with their ears, a strange extra little fold where the ear joined the head. Other than that they didn't really look alike, the one small and dark and with the pallor of the academic, the other tall and fair and with what we call a "weathered" skin.

"A swarm of bees in May," said Lydia, "is worth a load of hay. I remember hearing farmers say that when I was a kid. I grew up on a farm," she said and flashed a smile at the bee-keeper's wife.

"Do you like it," I asked, "keeping bees?" I had thought of buying one or two hives for the island. I already had hens and a fleece for spinning and would have my nine bean rows in the spring. Lydia had laughed when I told her my real dream was to have a little farm.

"Ha. Only city people yearn to live on a farm. I hated it."

"Why?"

"I'm not even sure why any more. The constant work — the catastrophes — the exhaustion — the women always in the kitchen — something always being butchered beheaded or skinned or pickled or preserved."

"Maybe it doesn't have to be that way?"

"It has to be that way. If you really live off the land you live off the land. Nothing can be put off or wasted or ignored. I always felt the kitchen smelled of blood or sugar or vinegar or manure or all of these. I felt I went to school stinking of all of it."

"Those are good smells. Honest smells. I worked in an asylum once — I got that smell on me. I used carbolic soap and tried to get it off."

She shook her head and changed the subject, only adding, "They weren't good smells when I was going to school."

Had she been teased, then? Had the boys pulled chicken feathers out of her dark curly hair — had her dresses been too long — were her hands all wrinkled from washwater? I realized how little I actually knew about her except through her stories. I guess this conversation took place before her novel came out.

Tony asked in his apologetic manner if we were ready to see the slides. Lydia and the bee-keeper's wife were sitting in easy chairs on the other side of the room, where the screen had been set up so they had to move. Lydia came and sat cross-legged on the floor by my feet. The bee-keeper and I were on the couch and we shoved over to make room for the bee-keeper's wife. Tony was next to me, behind the projector and his friend was next to him on a kitchen chair. He got up and after offering us another drink (only Lydia and I accepted) turned out all the lights.

I don't remember much about the slide show. Tony projected and Lydia commented. Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales and then across the Channel into France and down through Spain. They were all "views" — that is to say they told me nothing about the two people who had taken that trip. Alone. Without the children. Was that when

they first suspected they had nothing to say to one another. Had they set off with high hopes and become more and more disenchanted? What had finally driven that orderly controlled man to introduce that student into his bedroom? Not secretly but openly, "In front of the children." From where I was sitting I could see that his hands shook every time he put in another slide.

"You've got that one in backwards," Lydia said. We all came to attention and studied the screen — it was a bull fight scene and looked perfectly all right to me.

"I don't think — " Tony began.

"Look for yourself. Look at it. Can't you see it's back to front?"

"I sure don't see anything funny," said the bee-keeper.

" 'Initram'," Lydia said in her bold brassy voice. "Look at the advertisements and tell me what kind of a drink is Initram."

"Oh," he said. "Sorry."

"Ha."

His hands shook a little more as he carefully pried out the offending slide and turned it around.

"There," he said. "Is that better?"

"Oh God," said Lydia. "You've done it again." And sure enough he had. There was 'Initram' being advertised again.

"I'd like another drink," said Lydia, "Initram on the rocks."

Tony switched the projector off and for a minute we were in a complete tension-filled darkness before his friend had enough presence of mind to reach up and switch on the lights.

"That's all folks," he said, trying to sound like Woody Woodpecker, trying to be funny.

"Don't you want to show the rest of the slides?" Lydia said.

"No, I think that's enough."

"Well, tell us about bees then," she said, turning around and facing the sofa, backing away a little bit so she could gaze up at the bee-keeper, her pretty head cocked on one side.

"What do you want to know," he said, smiling. But uncomfortable too for he was not so dumb or naive that he didn't see what she was doing to her husband.

"Oh. Everything. Everything." She waved her hand. "Their mating habits for instance. Do they really only mate once? The queens, I mean."

"No, they can mate more than once, maybe two, three times. But usually only once. It's funny," he said, "when you stop to think of it. From a human point of view the drone that wins is the loser really."

"I don't follow you," I said. I really know nothing about bees. Whereas I had a funny feeling about Lydia. Would a kid who had a grandfather who kept bees — ? or maybe she never did have such a grandfather. Maybe her grandfather just said that whenever he saw a swarm — the way my father used to say, "Red sky at night, sailor's delight" when he'd never been near the ocean.

"Fun, frolic and death," he said, "fun, frolic and death. Those drones are the laziest devils you'd like to see. Waited on hand and foot by their sisters — don't have to do nothing except eat and lie around and take the occasional look see outside. Then one day the queen just zooms up into the blue with hundreds of those drones dashin' after her. A fantastic sight — fantastic."

"And the race is to the swift," said Lydia, taking a long sip of her drink as though it were some strange nectar, then parting her lips and looking up at the bee-keeper with her new bold look.

"The strongest and swiftest catches her," he said. "Sometimes she even zooms back towards 'em, because she wants to be caught you know. That's all part of it."

"She wants to be caught," repeated Lydia. "She has to be caught." She took another long sip of her drink. The bee-keeper's wife just sat back against the cushions and smiled.

"She has to be caught — it's her nature."

"So she is caught."

"And then?"

"And then he clasps her to him, face to face — there's a little explosion as all his male organs pop out and they fly together like that face to face, while he fertilizes her."

"Then he dies?" I asked.

"Then he dies. You see, they fall to the ground together, outside the home hive of the queen, and when she tries to pull away, he's stuck so fast to her she pulls most of his abdomen away."

"Ab-do-men," said Lydia, lightly mocking him. But not in the way she said, 'Initram'.

"My brother probably knows more about bees than any man in North America," said the man with the club foot. "He could write a book about them."

"It's my job," he said simply.

"Oh don't," cried Lydia. "Don't ever write a book about them." She gave a mock shudder. "I wonder what it feels like," she said. "To fly out like that after the darkness of the hive into the blue sky and the green trees and to feel the sunshine on her back. To know that her destiny is about to be fulfilled." Then she turned towards the bee-keeper's wife. "And you. Is it your life too? Bees?"

She nodded her head, serene in her black dress and rhinestones. She had a strong Southern accent.

"It's my life too."

Then the bee-keeper did a beautiful thing. He just reached over and put his lean brown hand over hers.

"We try to study the bees," he said. "We try to do what they do."

"Fun, frolic and death?" said Lydia, flirting, slyly mocking.

"No," he said, but not angrily. He didn't swat at her any more than he might swat at a bee who flew a little too close to his ear.

"They are true communists — the bees. No one works for any profit to himself. Everything is done only for the good of the colony. If we could live like that — "

"Ah yes, Utopia." Lydia sighed. "Perhaps if we all ate more honey?" She was mocking him again, circling back. She smiled at the three men in the room. All she needed was a yellow sweater.

"Who knows. That's where our word honeymoon comes from, you know — The old belief in the magical powers of honey. Germany I think it was, or Austria. The newly married couple would drink mead for a month after the wedding."

"What was it supposed to do for them?"

"Now that I'm not sure of. Make 'em happy and industrious I guess."

"Is it true," said Lydia, "that the queen can sting over and over — that she doesn't die when she stings? I read that somewhere I think. Tony, do you remember reading that somewhere or somebody telling us that the queen could sting over and over?"

"I don't remember."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" She appealed to the bee-keeper.

"It's true. She has to defend herself. It's her nature."

"There, you see Tony, I was right. It's her nature."

"There is usually only one queen," said the bee-keeper, "she kills off all the others."

"Why not?" Lydia said, "it's natural."

Then we were all leaving — I can't remember who stood up first. We said good-bye to the bee-keeper and his wife. I wrote down the name of a supply house where I could get supers and bee suits. I wrote down the names of two books. He (the bee-keeper) went out to his van and came back with a little jar of honey for each of us. Alfalfa honey, clear and thick and golden.

"Jim Ritchie and Sons," it said, "Abbotsford, B.C." and "Unpasteurized" underneath. "Mary Beth designed the labels," he said proudly.

I slept downstairs in a little parlour with a fireplace. They had coal and started a fire for me. Made up the Hide-A-Bed and went off upstairs together. I lay in the darkness under Lydia's grandmother's Star of Bethlehem quilt and smelled the smell of the coal fire and was back fourteen years under a quilt in a big double-bed in Scotland. On my honeymoon. The maid had come in with a stone hot water bottle but we were already warm from drinking a strange mixture in the public bar — something called Athol Bross and now that I thought of it, I seemed to remember that it was made of porridge and honey. Or maybe I just had honey on the brain.

What had happened to us? What had happened to us all? I began to cry while Lydia made noisy love upstairs. I heard her — she wanted me to hear her. It was the last line in the last paragraph of the story she'd been writing all evening. I wondered if she'd come down the next morning with Tony's abdomen irrevocably stuck to her front.

We don't see each other very much any more. She lives in a distant city. But once a year we meet, at the Writers Union annual general meeting and compare children and lovers and ideas for stories, usually in that order. We flirt, we get drunk, we congratulate ourselves that somehow miraculously we have survived another year, that we each have money and a room of one's own and are writing fiction. This year I told her (lying) that I was thinking of writing a story about her.

"I'm calling it 'Chicken Wings'," I said.

"Chicken Wings?"

"The night I came to see you, and you and Tony had just split up."

"And you wanted to tell me about your break-up."

"*Sangre de Toro*," I said. We began to laugh.

"Do you remember the bee-keeper and his wife?"

"Of course, they're in the story."

"Fun, frolic and death — Oh God."

We laughed until we cried.

"What name d'you want?" I said. "You can choose your own name."

"Lydia," she said. "I always wanted to be called Lydia."

"All right," I said. "You can be Lydia."

"But I don't like your title," she said. "I think you'll have to change it."

AFRICAN JOURNAL ENTRIES

JOE APPIAH'S STORY OF THE TRO-TRO DRIVER

During Nkrumah's reign a tro-tro driver was arrested by the Special Brigade because he had painted "Ghana Hard-O" on his lorry. Charged with Treason, I guess (ask Joe) and his case was brought to court. Prosecution wanted to make an example of him — defaming the government and all that.

His lawyer was advised to say that what he really meant was Ghana Very Strong-O, that he was an illiterate man and had gone to a sign painter and asked for a good slogan saying that. (First the lawyer had tried agreeing that times were hard, etc., but judge didn't like that very much.)

Man got off with a small fine — because he pleaded his case so well. "Your honour, I be solely an illiterate man," and was told he must paint out that sign and put something else. He went immediately out of the court and bought some paint and came back to report that he had done this and had painted a brand new slogan.

"And what is that?" asked the judge.

"All Shall Pass."

He was arrested again.

CAPE COAST CASTLE

The next morning I went in for breakfast and then back to the chalet, ostensibly to work, and I had chair and table taken out on the little verandah. But I was hoping John would come and offer to take me to Cape Coast Castle right away. I was remembering being at Elmina with Ian and the girls and was just feeling so lonely and depressed I couldn't see how I was going to manage the rest of the

trip. So I went for a sit-down on the beach but even at 8 a.m. the sun was terribly hot and in less than an hour I came back to the chalet. No sign of my "guide" so I started writing down some really self-pitying thoughts about my unresolved anger towards Ian and it turned into an address from me to him so I thought what the hell and began a very depressed letter to him (which I have not mailed). But at eleven o'clock I felt I would go mad if I didn't get out of that chalet and plucked up my courage to go to John's office.

He was there and seemed very cool. "Oh hello, I was wondering where you had got yourself." (Rather accusingly.) Said he had been going over his files all morning and I said oh well, I've been writing all morning, which was only true in a sense other than the one I wanted him to take it in. He said unfortunately he had to go to Sekondi for a supply of beer so we'd have to go to Cape Coast right away and he wouldn't have time to take me to any other place that day. Then I said all right, I just want to finish a letter (I'm not sure why I said that) and will be right back.

Came back and he said he had decided to give me his car and a driver as otherwise I might not have enough time to see the town and castle properly.

I was really hurt by his attitude and couldn't imagine anything more lonely — particularly in my depressed state — than "doing" Cape Coast with a car and driver.

"A car and driver," I repeated after him and maybe I really looked distressed because he went and called some things in the vernacular to a voice which replied in the same and then he said: "I think I will have to take you myself, the driver has not finished his meal and does not want to come now. If you want to see the man at the Methodist Book Depot we will have to go now."

I'm sure Jackie would have said, "Well don't do any favors for me," and been really defensive and angry; but I just felt relief that I wouldn't have to go with the driver and didn't really care what John felt about it/me/anything.

So off we went. Mr. Mathieson was in Accra so we couldn't see him (it seemed to fit in with my general bad luck) and so we went to the castle. The guide was eating his lunch (of course) but he did agree to come down and arrived with a large battery-flashlight and said he would start at the dungeon. (We were standing in front of a wooden

door — or possibly metal — with thick bars in it and a very heavy old padlock.) Guide starts by saying padlock is 300 years old — it had "Major" incised in it but I couldn't figure out if that was the officer's name or his rank (but isn't Major an American rank, not British?). I was very nervous, staring through the bars at the darkness beyond. Guide said 1,500 slaves were kept in a space 13′ x 20′ (could that possibly be right?) and later he showed us a place up the stairs near the chapel where a slave sat all day — a slave who could speak five dialects and listened for any plotting. This was a spot where every sound travelled upwards. I wonder what sort of men these "stool pigeons" were and 1) whether they ever reported anything or 2) what special privileges they received.

Another nice thing the slave traders did was to *hang up* any particularly strong-looking specimens with weights (I think cannon-balls tied to their arms and legs). This ensured that they would be too weak to try and escape as they were marched out of the fort to the sea.

When the guide opened the door I know I couldn't go down that sandy slope and into the darkness, torch or no torch.

"Please. Are you afraid?"

"Yes," I said, "but not of you — of being shut in." He misunderstood me and thought I meant he might shut me in the dungeon. "Ho. You do not need to be afraid of me. And your friend (this was John) will be with you." I explained again that I was claustrophobic and small dark places terrified me. I was trying to will myself to go in — wanted the *experience* of being down in there in the darkness, trapped, but I couldn't do it. I felt dizzy and faint and kept shaking my head. (John just looked bored.)

The guide understood. In fact, in a way I think he was quite pleased. "Some ladies *do* faint down in that place," he said with satisfaction. I was ashamed of my weakness — as I always am — and relieved when we moved on. (See letter to Ian and booklet on castles for information about the castle itself.)

In the visitors' book I wrote "Excellent guide" under "Remarks" and turned back to see what Jackie had written when she visited there. "No one can fail to be moved by the suffering which has taken place in this castle." And she would write it because she meant it, not to impress.

JOE APPIAH'S STORY ABOUT THE MAN WHO CONDEMNED HIMSELF TO DEATH

Man was from a small village and was on trial for murdering his wife and trying to murder his mother-in-law. Joe told him *not* to go in the witness box (where he could be cross-examined by the prosecuting attorney) but to say he would remain in the dock (where he could not be cross-examined).

Joe thought the man had agreed, but when the judge asked the accused if he wished to swear on oath and go in the witness stand he said "yes."

Joe: "No. No. You must not do that."

"Your honour, Mr. Appiah does not want me to take the witness stand — he wants to save my life. I am grateful to him but I want to tell the world what really happened."

He and wife lived in two separate villages. Hears rumours that she is carrying on. Tries seven times to catch her (in English law and Ashanti custom, a man who catches his wife and lover is legally justified in killing them). Asked mother-in-law who denied it — swore it wasn't true — he believed her for awhile but rumours came to him again and this time he believed them. Asked wife and mother-in-law to come early to his village. They waited under a tree in the yard. He came out in his hunting dress, holding the gun behind him. When he thought he was in easy range he quickly held up gun and shot. His wife died instantly. He shot again but missed killing mother-in-law and only broke her jaw. Her screams attracted the villagers and the accused was taken into custody. (He did not try to resist.) "I am only sorry for one thing. That I missed that old devil, her mother."

Joe with head in hands.

Judge: "Mr. Joe Appiah, I am very sorry for you."

Did he hang? Yes. Every day asked, "when is my time coming?" Red Warrant. Hymns. Special food or drink. Peace with your mother.

Brave? No. He only wanted to get to the other side to shoot her all over again!

TO THE YEJI FERRY

More and more lorries arrived. We saw two particularly good names: "Boy Sinbad" and "Two Shadows." The driver had assured us the ferry would leave at 8 a.m. but at 8:30 when we walked down to the end of the jetty, there was just grey water and dead trees and the vague outline of the other side. Some people had taken their headloads down to the water's edge and were sitting beside them. Up above, on the slope, an old Moslem man, his back to the ferry sign and his head protected by an umbrella, sat chanting his prayers. (He stayed like this, always chanting in a strange, surreal voice — aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa — until the ferry actually came in.) Peggy says the people here live only half in reality and certainly their ability to wait for hours (not just Moslems at prayer — that's a religious "escape" if you will) must be partly due to an ability to either transcend or maybe just tune out the factual reality of their discomfort.

STORE CUPBOARD WOMAN

Peggy told me that once they discovered a woman in the store cupboard downstairs (the servants sleep downstairs in this house). No ventilation in this room at all — nothing but darkness.

The nightwatchman, who officially does not have a room here (seeing as how he only comes at night), uses the store cupboard as his unofficial room.

I said, "How did you discover her?" P. said, "Well, the children are up and down and anyway she had a very bad infection — of the leg I think — and she smelled."

ON THE BOAT BACK TO ENGLAND, Dec. 1971

Mr. M. — from Tyneside. Daughter Vivian. Wondered if his daughter was a virgin. Talks to his wife about it. "I mean, I know she isn't in the puddin' club, but I just wondered."

The girl has quite good relationship with "Our Dad." Has been having a ball in Nigeria and doesn't really want to go back home to that "bloody dump."

When he tells her she's not been able to stick at anything and God knows what she's going to do with her life, she says, "Well, that's my problem, isn't it?"

He accuses her of staying out till 4 a.m. on school nights and she says: "There's nowhere to go in that bloody dump on a week night." Very pretty with good figure and long hair but a used, slightly sulky face.

We have a long talk about mixing the races and he tells me the story of his cousin who married an A-rab and only four people turned up for the wedding. Vivian thinks Omar Shariff is "ever so handsome," and Father says, "Well he's nothing but an A-rab isn't he?" Says mixed marriages aren't really fair on the children, but it really turns out that he doesn't want to be grandfather to a mixed-race child.

And girl, it appears, may like Omar Shariff (she keeps calling him — "a Persian, is he?") but when asked about the Africans on the boat she says, "Who them? I wouldn't *look* at one of *them*." I say, do you mean because of the facial characteristics? "Yes," she says, "they don't appeal to me, they don't."

THE PEOPLE SAY

"Oh . . . Fine."
"Donmentionit."
"Please . . . I beg you."
"Aaaah." and "Sah."
"Oh . . . Sorry."
"Finish." }
"One time." } these said mostly by whites

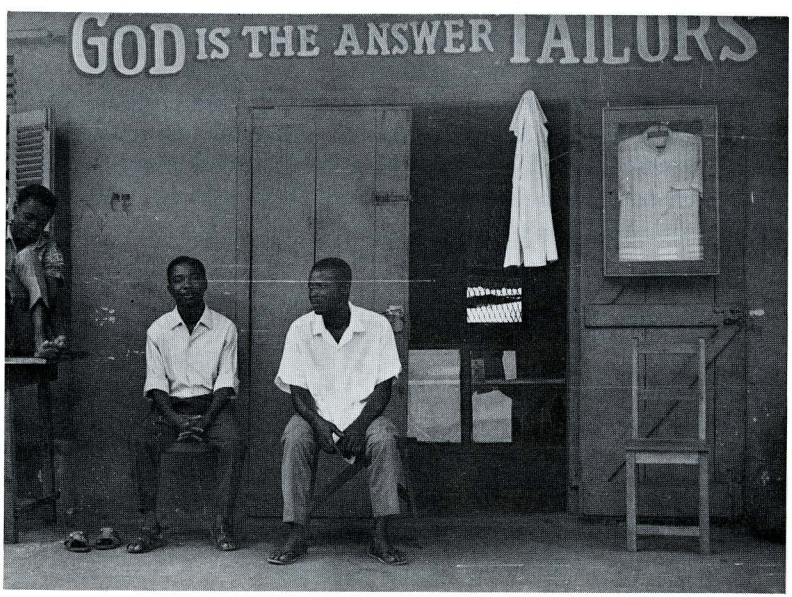
SIGNS

Don't Mind Your Wife — chop bar outside Kumasi
Dunkirk Rest Stop
Tarzan Transport
Sam's Cold Store
Chellerams
Hollywood Hairdressing Saloon (Ladies and Gents)
Mars Trading Company
Joseph and his Brothers Tailors
Hotel de Bull
Atomic Paradise Niteclub

P. says there used to be a place called *The Wayfaries Inn* but Nkrumah, embarrassed by this evidence of semi-literacy, had it changed.

The VC-10 Café

Family Planning
Better Life
Ask About It
Think About It
Talk About It



TWO IN THE BUSH: An African Story

Ten years ago I went to Ghana and spent two years there with my husband and two small children. Five years after my return to Canada I had a chance to go back for a few months and gather material for a proposed novel. I decided to visit some of the neighbouring countries as well, and this story is something that came out of my visit to the former French protectorate of the Ivory Coast. Some of the names may be confusing: Kwame Nkrumah, or "Osaygefo" (oh-say-je-foh) as he preferred to be called (the name means "Redeemer" or "Saviour") was head of State when we arrived in Ghana in 1964. He was deposed in February 1966 and since then there have been several "coups" or takeovers.

Busia was head of government when I returned. He was overthrown shortly after my visit. The President of the Ivory Coast is M. Felix Houphouet-Boigny or, as he is referred to in the story, "the man from Yamoussoukro." So far as I know he is still in office. He was very fond of referring to himself as a "peasant" although he is, in fact, a tribal chief.

— A.T.

"So," said Mr. Owusu-Banahene, "you are off to meet the man from Yamoussoukro." He inclined a half-smile in my direction, then picked up a small bone and sucked it thoughtfully. Five of us had gone to the City Hotel for Sunday lunch. Now we sat, stuffed and lethargic, around a small metal table on the verandah. The table was littered with beer bottles and the remains of chicken curry. I had just announced my plans to visit the Ivory Coast.

"You make him sound," I replied, "like the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. But," and here I too picked up a bone and sucked it, "the wizard turned out to be a fake."

"Did he indeed? Are you so sure? Oz was a happy place; he gave the people what they wanted."

"At any rate," I said, "I doubt that I shall meet him. I don't travel in such exalted circles." He shrugged. "It's not impossible. Do you know what he is always sayin'? 'I am only a peasant.' 'I am only a peasant'! The foreign reporters eat it up." His handsome aristocrat's face expressed disdain.

"Perhaps you will meet him in the market. Perhaps you will see him haulin' nets or pickin' cocoa. 'I am only a peasant'!" He ground the remains of bone between strong teeth.

"They say he has accomplished miracles," I offered, in the pause that followed. The other three at the table watched with interest. Two of them, husband and wife, were friends from long ago. One was a dull botanist named Les who wore a yellow and black striped jersey and had black, fuzzy, close-cropped hair. He looked like a wasp and had contributed nothing to the conversation except a long and boring tale about his defective Omega watch. He had been brought along to keep me company I guess. Jimmie Owusu-Banahene I had known since Nkrumah's time and then after the coup and now again after five years and how many coups (was it two more?) in-between? Not one of Busia's men. His own man. There were rumours, now, of yet another plot. I wondered what he knew.

"Miracles!" he said. "You'll see miracles, no blinkin' fear."

"Oh don't let's talk politics any more!" said Mollie in her shrill, rather affected, English voice. I agreed, nodding.

"You're wasting your time on me. I'm not political." Jimmie laughed, then raised his voice a little so that people at the other tables stopped talking.

"Not political! Nobody in this world is not political. When you are born you commit a political act, changin' the census in your village, town or state. When you die you do the same. Two unavoidable political acts and many more political acts in-between. For some" (his voice went louder still, took on his best courtroom manner) "even curry lunch at the City Hotel is a political act." He waved his arm at the manager of Barclay's Bank DCO, at the new Secretary of the Town Council, at a fat black priest surrounded by a tableful of female parishioners. He broke into loud, happy laughter, then wiped his forehead with a dazzling white handkerchief.

"Listen," he said softly. "Busia is a sick man. His wife goes everywhere with him to give him his injections. And the country is sick too — sick proper! In the north they are callin' for Osaygefo again — the price of yams is terrible. Everyone steals and I don't blame them. So perhaps we too will have a peasant again as president." He laughed. "Do you know, just before the coup, whenever Nkumah made one of his rare public appearances the vans would go ahead of him with loudspeakers: 'when Osaygefo appears, the crowd will cheer and applaud.' "

"Do you think he will come back?"

Jimmie shook his head. "No. Never."

"Ah," said Mollie, her eyes sparkling, (she loved to be "in on things") "Jimmie knows something." She was wearing an olive-green jersey with a sergeant's stripe on the sleeve and a cartridge belt around her middle. Across the chest had been printed, in black ink, "Let's go US Army" and an eagle. She told me she had bought it in London on her last leave. It was the "latest thing" there and she had wanted something "right up to date." I thought it was terrible. She leaned forward on her plump white arms.

"Tell us what you know!"

"Go to the market and ask the market-women. It is the women who decide."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Of course."

"But it is the men who will act."

"It is the men who will act. But only with the power of the women behind them. We have a sayin' here. 'The hen too knows that it is dawn, but she leaves it to the cock to announce it.' " He got up. "You must excuse me." Paused for a minute by my chair.

"When do you go?"

"On Saturday. By lorry." He nodded. "But of course. You too want to be known as a peasant."

I ignored this.

"Can I bring you something?"

"A bottle of good French wine. A pound of butter. A miracle."

Several heads on the verandah turned carefully to watch him walk away. Did he know something? What? They watched his stride. They looked for tiny, infinitesimal signs of nervousness or elation. Something was up. It was in the air, along with the terrible heat and the lingering smell of spices from the abandoned buffet table.

"There goes the most attractive man in the country." Mollie gave a dreamy sigh.

"Jimmie told me," said John, "that one reason Nkrumah was so successful in the beginning was that he used as his ministers and officials men who were the sons of slaves and had a grudge against society."

"Oh *don't*. Please. No more politics." Mollie was restless: she had seen and been seen and was ready to go. Les, who had come with them, would, I hoped, return the same way he had come. I had had enough and wanted to be alone. Which was very ungrateful because they were treating me to lunch. All around us there was talk and laughter. We sat on in a little island of silence — it was as though Jimmie had taken the talk and the laughter with him. Then Mollie said suddenly,

"Darling, how would you feel if I went along with Isobel? Felicity could see to the children — I could do with a little holiday." Mollie ran a small catering service from their bungalow — incredible English birthday cakes and fancy hors d'oeuvres and petits fours. These were much in demand at the fashionable birthdays and weddings in the town. She had just catered an enormous reception for the Star Brewery — a huge success. John was an artist who taught design at the university. A small quiet man who had at least one African mistress. I looked at him in despair.

"Maybe Isobel wants to go alone."

"Nonsense darling. It's much more fun to have a companion. You don't want to go alone, do you?" All three looked at me. I knew I should say yes, that's exactly what I want to do. Yet this would be, at best, misinterpreted; at worst an insult to Mollie who had, after all, been so kind to me since my return. Jimmie's words came back to mock me: "Every act is political." Or politic at least. I contemplated the American eagle. It would be Mollie's trip. But after all, why not? She was already going on about how she knew someone who knew someone who knew someone who knew a Peugeot taxi. She would find out when it was going to Abidjan. It would all be arranged; we would simply go to the lorry park and get in.

"It sounds good," I said. "Come and let me know this week what you find out." My chair made a nasty scraping noise on the concrete floor of the verandah.

"I'll need a visa," Mollie was saying. "Darling I'll have to pop down to Accra."

Outside I walked past the boys selling Pioneer Biscuits and wrapped sweets, past a stout woman in an incredible pale blue chiffon dress and pale blue chiffon cartwheel hat. The doorman, in white gloves, was handing her into a taxi. High up in the sun-faded sky two vultures circled lazily, like scraps of black paper or bits of soot. A big Mercedes full of musicians and their instruments came fast and arrogant down the long semi-circular drive. Later on there would be an acrobat from the capitol and dancing to Afro-Beat, the latest craze.

"Who's Makin' Love/To Your Old Lady/While/You're/ Out/Makin' Love/" The number one hit song across the nation.

And yet in the *Graphic* this morning: "a five-inch baby alligator is alleged to be haunting the lives of an Accra market-woman and her family." The woman was receiving spiritual treatment from the Prophet Tawiah. "I believe this reptile to be the work of a witch." What was it Blake said? "Without contraries there is no progression." Perhaps so. Jimmie Owusu-Banahene with his beautiful Ashanti face and beautiful Oxford accent; John with his Cape Coast mistress; Mollie with her funky jersey; the vultures wheeling up above the most fashionable hotel in the city. I wanted to find Africa. Was this it? Was this the real Africa? Maybe it will be different in the Ivory Coast, I thought. I was depressed and out of sorts. A chain of small children formed behind me. " Hey Bronie Bronie Bronie, you give me pesewa!" Five years before the same children — or their brothers — had danced behind me to only a slightly different tune: 'Hey Bronie Bronie Bronie you give me penny-o." I gave up and hailed a taxi. The children laughed and waved as I went past. One of them stuck his tongue out; I stuck my tongue out back.

The *Hotel Ivoire* was called the "Pearl of the Lagoon." Outside a smooth symmetry of concrete, steel, and glass with a tall unfinished tower growing at one side.

We had gone there to find a man — an Angolan Freedom Fighter whose name I had been given in London. Marques Kakumba, B.P. 388, Phone 37-40-99. Which I did. A woman's voice, speaking rapid French, assured me that he either lived (or worked) at the *Hotel Ivoire*. We had spent the night at a brothel in the Adjamé district. The man Les had given the address to Mollie — he was either a simpleton or a practical joker. The *Hotel Humanité*. At one o'clock in the morning, stumbling through the darkness. No one had heard of it. "Hey, Madame!" "Hey, Madame!" But we had found it on a side street — Rue des Ecries — the proprietor most unhappy to see us. In the tiny lounge there was a very beautiful old-fashioned wall clock with roman numerals and filigree hands and a large sepia etching of a Perseus type wrestling with a hairy monster, Humanité herself perhaps. We had been misinformed. There were no rooms. A young woman in a torn red velvet dress came in on the arm of a fat, drunk, middle-aged man. They did not even stop at the desk but headed on down the narrow corridor. I looked at the proprietor; he looked at me.

"Nothing?" I asked. "*Rien*? We are very tired." I handed him a two-dollar Canadian bill. He put it in the drawer and sighed.

"You will have to lock your door. And there is only one bed. *Non-climatisée* you understand." We said we understood.

The room was tiny and the mosquito netting over the single window had large three-cornered tears. The wardrobe was full of mops and buckets and on top of the wardrobe a sign said "hotel," only back to front — ".ƎTOH." Another sign over the exposed and dirty toilet said "*Defense d'uriner dans la salle de bains*." As there wasn't one this seemed gratuitous. I spent the night holding myself away from Mollie's plump, hot, sticky body. The mattress sagged terribly in the middle. In the night there was several times the sound of laughter and once the sound of someone retching in the next room. The proprietor informed us proudly the next morning that he had sat on a chair outside our door all night. "*Vos protegées*" I said and made him laugh. I wanted to burn everything I had on and scrub myself with something powerful and antiseptic. Cockroaches were scampering across my feet when I awoke. Mollie, undaunted, looked at the addresses I had and charmed the proprietor into lending us a few thousand francs until we could cash a cheque. We left our suitcases as security; he was most upset to think we might return. Obviously the protection of the virtue of two white women was not an honour he took lightly or easily. He hoped we would find something on the Plateau. He recommended the Hotel du Parc. We embarrassed him — perhaps we even threatened him. What if something happened? He sent out his eldest son, a ragged boy of about eight, to find us a taxi.

"*Hotel Ivoire*," I said to the driver grandly.

"Eh! Madame!" He grinned at me in the mirror.

"*Hotel Ivoire*."

He laughed and laughed and started the meter ticking. There was a small crowd gathered on the pavement.

"*Hotel Ivoire*!" they shouted back. "Bye-bye." We drove off in a cloud of thick red dust.

At lunch over the pool we sat and ate smörgasbord and drank white wine and looked at the flat bellies of the young men who, wearing only the tiniest of bikinis and espadrilles and perhaps but not always a smart terry-towelling jacket, helped themselves to cold beef and cold pork, salads, sausage rolls, hot rolls and fresh fruit.

"Good," said Mollie. "But not that good." She flicked a sausage roll with her finger. "D'you think he works here?" I said. Mollie had unbuttoned the top two buttons of her blouse and her eyes darted like goldfish around the terrace.

"What? D'you think so?" The wine was going to her head. "*Garçon*," she called. "*Garçon*." A waiter appeared. She explained about our *ami*. He thought he had heard of him. *Kakumba*. Yes. He had heard of him. Kakumba, did he work here? A beautiful young Frenchman blew us a kiss. *Oui. Absolutement*. He worked here. Kakumba. We wrote out yet another note. "Dear Joao, you don't know us but we're friends of Grethe's, in London. . . . " Gave it to the waiter, who put it in his pocket. Our money was almost gone and it was Sunday.

"*Excusez-moi*," I said to the waiter. "Where can we cash *les travellers cheques*?" But the desk was not interested. Unfortunately, we were not staying at the *Hotel Ivoire*. If, on the other hand, we knew a guest . . .I felt we couldn't mention Joao Kakumba in case he turned out to be a waiter. "Let's go and ask in the *Tour Ivoire*."

They knew him, by god. He was a guest — he lived there. Room *trois cent quatre*. We left another note. "We have enough for a drink," Mollie said. "Let's sit and wait awhile and then give up." A small dark man was standing at the other end of the corridor. "Excuse me," he said, in heavily-accented English. "You would like to see something *intéressant* perhaps?" He placed a small white box on the marble counter.

"What is it?" I asked. The small man held up a hand.

"Wait." He took off the cover very slowly. Mollie and I and the desk clerk leaned forward to peer into the box. A huge black beetle was there. Black and highly lacquered — like a child's pull toy.

"Cochineal," he said. "I found it."

"I thought cochineal were very small," I said.

"African cochineal," he said. The insect gave off an angry clicking sound. "I will sell it," he said, replacing the cover. "Very rare." Even with the cover on the angry clicking noise could be heard. "I have other things," he said.

"*Très intéressant.*" He pinched my elbow. "You would like to see?"

"No," I said. "No thank you. No."

He shrugged and tied up the box with green waxed ribbon — like florists' ribbon. Mollie and I looked at each other and moved off down the long, thick-carpeted corridor that connected the main body of the hotel with the almost-completed tower. She suggested we have a drink and wait around to see if Joao would come back and find our note.

"I don't think he exists," I said. "The waiter thought he was a waiter — the desk clerk thinks he's a guest. He doesn't exist and I'm not sure I want to hang around here."

A man in a white tropical suit and an incredible red tie was passing as I said this. He turned around.

"Say, are you girls American!" He was very excited.

"English," said Mollie in her most English voice.

"One-time American," I said. "From Canada."

"That's just swell. Would you like to join me in a drink?" I hadn't heard anyone say "swell" in years. We explained about the fugitive Angolan; he said it didn't matter; he'd be pleased to keep us company for a while. Mollie did not seem too keen. Perhaps she thought he would cramp our style. She wanted a no-hipped French boy, maybe, not a rather sad-looking middle-aged American. She suggested we find the ladies' room and then join him. It was as I expected. "We don't want to get stuck with that man!"

"There's no reason why we should."

"Just one drink."

"That's fine with me. No drink would be fine too. Why don't we walk around the city for a while."

But the *Hotel Ivoire* obviously had its charms. Pouting her lips at the gilt-framed mirror she applied a thin glaze of lipstick and then, quite unself-consciously, placed her hands under her breasts and pushed them up and out. She wore only the best French bras and fancied herself quite sexy.

I wanted to take a bath — the smell of the *Hotel Humanité* seemed to have followed me here and while I was smoothing out my long skirt a cockroach fell out and skittered away into the corner. Only Mollie and I were in the powder room and she hadn't noticed. I imagined some wealthy lady from the States sitting in her cubicle when the cockroach hurried in. If there was one — ! I knew I should probably look for it — the repercussions could be incredible. And such disgusting creatures, even to one not unacquainted with them. Years before, when I lived out here, I had picked up a big and seldom-used coffee pot off the topmost shelf in the kitchen. We were packing up to go home and I stood there with the thing in my hand, debating whether I would ever serve sixteen simultaneous cups of coffee back in Canada. Then I became conscious of a movement and opened the lid. It was full to the top with cockroaches. Maybe dozens of them. The big old coffee pot, high up on the warm shelf, must have seemed a castle to the breeding insects. Probably the first two came down the spout. I flung the thing across the room and cockroaches exploded everywhere. Later I put the coffee pot back and left it there — I knew I could never use it again. What if "my" cockroach — or the cockroach of the *Hotel Humanité* — had been pregnant? Why were they so disgusting — for they were. I shook out the folds of my skirt again — I wanted to rip it off, to strip completely and take a bath in one of the delicate marble washbasins. Wondered if the American man had a room with a bath and would he mind?

"Let's go," I said. Mollie was dabbing Countess Somebody-or-other's perfume behind her ears. I was afraid some elegant ladies would come in — the cockroach would be discovered and we would be accused. A cochineal in a florist's box was merely eccentric. A cockroach, on the other hand . . .

"And where might you two young ladies be staying?" Looking up our "hotel" in the tourist map.

"Pardon, Madame. It appears there is no such place." Hauled off for seditius behaviour.

"But they came into this country by road, by bush taxi. A most unusual thing, your honour, for two white women to travel thus. Unusual — and, I might suggest, suspicious?" The *Hotel Ivoire* abandoned — deserted. The huge tropical plants in the pillared lobby are left unpruned and untended. In their search for water they grow and grow, push blindly at the heavy glass windows, crash through into the swimming pool, their tendrils waving.

The pretty French boys, the fat politicians, the beautiful women — the rich Americans — all desert the most luxurious hotel in West Africa. The government falls. And all because of a single insect.

"Let's go," I said again.

We joined Arnie in the *Rendez-Vous Bar*. It was still rather early and we were the only customers. We sat in big leather armchairs and sipped gin-tonics. Arnie had been doing some enquiring.

"Your friend is real all right. He lives in the tower and comes in here nearly every evening." After his second drink he began to tell us the story of his life. It was sad and too intimate and too painful. He owned a fleet of tuna-fishing boats; three were docked in the canal right now.

"Hell," he said. "You could anchor half the world's ships here and still have room to spare." Tomorrow we would have to come and see one of the boats, have lunch on board. The cook was terrific. We'd love it. Arnie's wife didn't love him. Her name was Lilian. She'd gone off sex completely about two years ago. "It's just terrible to lie there and watch her undress." He went to all sorts of doctors. Wondered if he had body odour or bad breath. She even tried to set him up with her best friend.

For Christmas he gave her a Mustang done up in red ribbon. The next day she went out and bought herself an XKE. We'd have to come to lunch on one of the boats. He was a millionaire but what difference did it make. Without love there was nothing. She said she loved him but she didn't want sex any more. I decided not to ask if he had a bathtub in his room.

The boy behind the bar came over with a note.

"I am sitting in the corner. Joao." I read it aloud. Nothing was going to surprise me any more. We turned around and looked across the room. Two men were sitting at a table. They both

waved and got up. One was around thirty-eight with a brown handsome face and shaved head. The other was fat and about sixty, vaguely Levantine or Egyptian. Both had on immaculate and very expensive tropical suits. The young and handsome one was dressed in grey, the fat man was, like Arnie, in tropical white. Only Arnie's suit was rumpled — the other two could have stepped from the window of some exclusive men's shop.

"Arnie Freitas," said Arnie, then added, "tuna fish."

"Joao Marques Kakumba" said the handsome one, then added softly, "guns."

The third man handed me a card, reciting at the same time;

"Mr. S. M. A. Alamoody
Vice-President
African Development Bank
Abidjan (Ivory Coast) Telephone 2256 - 60/69
P.O. Box 1387."

He smiled as he sat down. "Tuna-fish," he said. "Guns . . . And money."

Arnie ordered more drinks and Mr. Alamoody fished out a handsome crocodile wallet and attempted to pay the boy. Arnie, who was on his fifth whiskey, shook his head.

"Naw. Put your money away Mr. Alamoody. Nobody pays when Arnie's around."

The man with the cochineal came in; he set the white box down on the bar, waving at Mollie and me.

"You know that fellow?" Arnie said. "You want to invite him over?"

"No," I said. "He showed us his beetle. That's what he's got in that box."

"How extraordinary," said Joao. Underneath the table his strong well-tailored leg pressed mine.

"Where are you staying?" he said. "At the Hotel here?"

"No — at a small hotel in the Adjamé district — a very small hotel."

The drinks had made Mollie pink-cheeked and talkative. The whole story was told. Stumbling through the hot darkness, the only hotel we knew of that was near the lorry park. The proprietor who sat outside our door all night. I wanted to add the bit about the cockroach but wasn't sure.

Arnie was horrified.

"Why you girls shouldn't stay in a place like that!" He offered us the use of his suite on the twenty-second floor. He'd sleep on the boat. It wasn't right. "Funny things happen in this city — I could tell you things."

"But of course," said Joao, laughing a gold-tipped laugh. "We must come to your rescue."

"First we will all go to one of the truly native places and then we will bring you back here to Mr. Freitas' suite. It is very simple." Mollie was gazing wistfully around at the other people in the bar. She was not attracted to black men and somehow Arnie, although in a photograph, say, would pass for a not-unattractive man, somehow exuded unattractiveness in person. Perhaps that's what living with Lilian had done to him. All around her at other tables were beautiful Frenchmen.

"I don't think . . ." she said — . I agreed, but for other reasons. I did not like to be so "arranged" by these three strangers.

"We are too tired this evening," I said. "And I think we must return to the *Humanité* because our bags are there. And once there, we may as well stay another night."

Mr. Alamoody offered to go and get our bags. His car was just outside.

"You'll never find it," I said. "I'm not sure we will even find it."

"I will take you," said the Angolan. The pressure of his leg was unmistakable this time. "My car, too, is just outside. We will return here. Mr. Alamoody and Mr. Arnie will entertain your friend."

It was like the buddy system when I learned to swim. Stay with your partner at all times. Yet I don't think Mollie would have minded if all three had gone with me and she were left alone, plump-armed and pink-cheeked, waiting. I almost suggested it but it would sound too crazy. Finally I reached over and took Arnie's hand and spoke the truth.

"Arnie, I don't want to stay at the *Hotel Ivoire*. It's beautiful but it's not where I want to stay. I'm terrified of heights as well and would never sleep on the twenty-second floor of anything. I would like to come to the fishboat for lunch and appreciate your kindness. Could we meet you tomorrow somewhere?" It was a very formal speech and he didn't argue. It was arranged that we would all meet in the bar at noon except for Mr. Alamoody who had a director's meeting — he would take us home now, accompanied by Joao — I can't remember why but it seemed reasonable at the time. When I stood up I realized I was drunk.

It seemed very funny as we said goodnight to tunafish and went off with money and guns. Tunafish was ordering another whiskey. I wondered what he would do with the rest of his evening.

Mr. Alamoody drove a handsome car — something very dark green and smelling of real leather. I supposed he dismissed his driver at night. The car purred through the parking lot, down the hill and across the bridge. Joao sat in back with me, running his hand up and down my arm. If I had remembered the buddy system when they suggested to split up, I remembered now twenty years before and the back seats of a hundred up-to-now forgotten cars. I was surprised — the Angolan seemed incredibly sophisticated, not just his dress but his manner — to want to feel me up in the back seat of a Citroen. Slick bastard, I thought. And then, "Well, don't forget, you looked him up." I didn't know much about Angola except it was Portuguese and oppressed. He had been recommended as a freedom-fighter and a charming person. It didn't fit; I never figured it out.

The paving ended and we bumped, in Mr. Alamoody's beautiful car, along narrow unlighted streets. We got lost.

"I'm sorry," I said. "It seems a shame to subject such a fine car to such treatment."

"It is nothing," said Mr. Alamoody, gripping the steering wheel. He slowed down at the sight of a robed figure, rolled down the window and shouted out something in French. The reply was derisive but included some accurate directions.

In another five minutes we pulled up in front of the grimy stoop of the hotel.

"It's horrible," I said. "We can't invite you in." Even at this late hour a crowd of children and loungers had gathered around Mr. Alamoody's handsome car. He was chivalrous, concerned. Joao was kissing my knuckles one by one. We made our *adieus*. The proprietor had been very worried about us.

"Oh my god," I said, "we never cashed any money."

"We can still go to the American Embassy," Mollie said. "There's always a marine on duty, isn't there? I mean, don't they have to help you?"

The proprietor, shaking his head, sent a small boy to find us a taxi. We said we'd be back very soon.

The marine's name was Sgt. Lee Lillie and he had been asleep. He had on a white tee shirt and cotton trousers and a dog-tag. He wasn't supposed to cash our checks but he did. Twenty-one maybe, with a crew cut and a dog-tag around his neck. He was as unreal as the rest of them. He invited us to come the next day and meet his buddies. There were four of them and they took turns. On Fridays they had a TGIF party. If we wanted a cheap hotel why didn't we try Treichville. He pronounced it "Trashville." It was in the African, or "old" quarter. Lots of good dancin' places there.

It was two o'clock in the morning when we got back to the *Humanité*. Cockroaches, disinfectant, would-be customers; I didn't care. We fell into bed and I, at least, was asleep almost immediately.

Just as I went off I heard drums start up somewhere quite far away. Someone had been born, or had died. Something was being celebrated or mourned. Was that Africa? Was Mr. Alamoody Africa or Joao Kakumba or even Sgt. Lee Lillie or Arnie the tunafish king? I didn't dream — why should I? Africa was a dream.

Mollie was a rather unhappy lump on the other edge of the dirty mattress. Da Da Da Da Da Da / Da Da Da Da Da Da — the drums didn't care about us. "Who Are You?" a drunken young man had shouted at the doorman as we left the Hotel. The doorman was barring his way. "Who Are You?" I fell asleep.

Lunch was fresh shrimp with pasta and garlic, asparagus, fresh bread; fresh pineapple and wine. Arnie wasn't in the bar to meet us — only Joao. Arnie was at a meeting and would come down later. Joao was once again immaculately dressed. His skin shone with good health and a good diet. His fingernails were incredible, as perfect as Gatsby's shirts. He drove very fast and confidently. Mollie sat between us.

"You held his hand," she had said accusingly. "I was quite surprised."

"He held my hand." He had stuck his tongue between each of my fingers. It was very pleasant.

"You didn't pull away."

"No, I didn't pull away."

"Well I was surprised, that's all." Mollie, whose eyes had darted to all the pretty Frenchmen.

The boat was big — I don't know what I expected. The captain was Joseph Goais, very young and handsome, a Portuguese-American with a moustache and a gold chain around his neck.

"I lie awake nights worrying," he told me. We were all in the captain's cabin waiting for Arnie before we had lunch. Two buyers had appeared — an Italian named Borghe, heavy-set in a hot-looking blue suit and Pete, a French-Canadian who worked for one of the big companies in the States.

"They follow him everywhere," Joseph said. "We've made a big haul."

"Why do you come to Africa to fish?"

"Why not?"

His brother John, also handsome, also young, was talking to Mollie who was rapidly more cheerful. She was really after a Frenchman but a handsome Portuguese-American might be a pleasant stop-gap. Pete had found a guitar and was playing the Green, Green, Grass of Home. "Hair of gold and lips like cherries." The fridge was stocked with beer and ice. Bottles of spirits lined the shelves of the bookcase. Joseph, Mollie, John and I were sitting on the oversize bunk. There were two other men in the room besides Pete and Borghe — Joao, who said nothing and stood by the door, his eyes half-shut, (but waiting I felt, waiting, and sizing things up) and a man called John, a senior member of the crew. He'd been married to the same woman for twenty-six years, god bless her.

"Come all you young maidens," sang Pete, "and listen to me." Everybody laughed.

Arnie had saved young John's life. That's why Arnie had a limp. Something had fallen and Arnie had seen it falling, pushed John, who was just a kid, out of the way. As Joseph talked Arnie took on new dimensions.

"Are you married, Joseph?"

"No! Not me. I nearly was once though. The boss's daughter, just like in the movies. We got half-way to Las Vegas and I changed my mind. Got cold feet or something. She was crying and yelling 'I hate you, I hate you' and I said 'half an hour ago you were saying I love you.' That's the closest I ever got."

"You?" he said.

"Yes."

Drunken John, the older John, picked up on this.

"Are you faithful to your husbands, girls? Tell me, are you faithful to your husbands? I been married twenty-six years and never cheated on the wife, god bless her."

"Arnie's been really good to us," Joseph said. "When we were just little kids our old lady took us both to Portugal. I was thirteen and John was eleven when we came back. We couldn't speak any English. The kids at school were terrible to us — terrible. Beat us up, called us 'wetbacks,' laughed at our pronunciation." He got up and grabbed my hand. "C'mon, I want to show you somethin'."

We went out to laughter and whistles. Up some stairs to the deck above. Joseph opened a little concealed door in the ship's frame. Inside a tiny cupboard space was a triptych of Mary and the Baby and two saints. A small velvet cushion was placed in front of this tiny altar and there was also a votive candle and a fresh hibiscus flower, voluptuous and blood-coloured, floating in a clear glass bowl.

"Every day I thank Our Lady for sending Arnie into my life." He crossed himself and closed the door. "I'm the youngest tuna-boat captain of a registered ship," he said. "Pretty good for a wetback, hey?" He showed me the great tank where the fish were kept alive and then, in port, dynamited to the surface and caught up with a gaff. He was sure-footed and sure-brained, full of technical knowledge.

"Arnie started out as nothin'," he said, "same as us. Now we're a team."

"Do you know his wife — Lilian?"

"That bitch." He spat and made no further comment.

As we came back up, Arnie was coming down.

"Seen everything? After lunch I'll show you the bridge and the engine room." Joseph put his hand on Arnie's arm. "How're ya doing, sport?" The three of us went in to lunch. Joao had disappeared.

We moved to a new hotel, in Treichville. Lebanese, and the proprietor owned the restaurant next door. We were supposed to meet Joao and Mr. Alamoody in the *Rendez-Vous Bar* at nine p.m. Our new room had two beds and a shower and was clean. The proprieor of the *Humanité* was not sorry to see us go although it was obvious he liked us. He warned us to stay away from sailors and take only taxis with meters. In the courtyard behind the hotel his wife was pounding fou-fou with a long pole. A small child sat at her feet and reached her hand in quickly between strokes, to turn the soft glutinous mass. Then the pole came down again. Thud. Pause. Thud. Pause. Thud. Like a great heart beating. Later they would dip the soft balls of yam into a communal pot of ground-nut or palm-nut soup while the elegant ladies in the *Rendez-Vous Bar* sucked thoughtfully at the imported olives in the bottom of their glasses.

"Why not," I thought. "Why not just stay on here?" I was romanticizing, of course, but the life of the woman in the courtyard seemed as simple and as regular as the thud of her fou-fou pounder. Mr. Owusu-Banahene had told me another of his people's sayings — "The Sky-God pounds fou-fou for the one who has no arms." Could that really be true? What about for the one who has no yams?

In the Treichville market I bought cloth and cowries and beautiful shirts. Everywhere was colour and bargaining and laughter. I wished we had asked Arnie to come with us. Just as the proprietor had warned us against sailors so had I warned him, for no real reason, just a feeling, against Joao Marques Kakumba. Arnie had arranged to meet him and Mr. Alamoody one hour before we were supposed to show up.

"Suppose," I said, "he wants the *Cape St. Vincent* to carry guns?" We were up on the bridge and Arnie was signalling to other ships — a small boy showing off. Mollie was very drunk and had gone off somewhere with John.

Arnie was busy at the transmitter. He was unconcerned.

"He better not forget he's dealin' with a pro!"

"There's something about him. His eyes maybe."

"Hello," he said. "Hello. *Cape St. Vincent* to *Tana Maru. Cape St. Vincent* to *Tana Maru.*"

I gave up. I was not political. It was none of my business anyway. Yet these people had a kind of innocence or naiveté. Joao and Mr. Alamoody looked at me with disillusioned eyes, what James saw, nearly a century before, in the eyes of Europeans. Now it included the new African politicians, the Lebanese, the Egyptians. Someone like Arnie could be a godsend. And Joseph, although younger and more cynical, would do anything Arnie asked him to.

A woman selling manioc from huge plastic garbage bins snapped two palm leaves together to make a parcel. She scooped up the exact amount of meal and snapped the palm leaves shut. The market women were professionals too. I would pay five times as much for whatever I wanted — the price of my white skin. And bad French too. Maybe six times as much.

Mollie was upset because she had screwed with John and she wasn't on the pill.

"Why did you do it then?"

"I got carried away. He took advantage of me." It was like a Victorian novel. We had gone to a chemists and asked for a douche. I wondered if I would sleep with Joao that night and what it would be like. I had decided I didn't like him but he interested me.

A freedom fighter with perfect fingernails. Perhaps he would try. He was smart enough to see my sympathy for Arnie. Perhaps I would end up a headless corpse in the lagoon. That such things didn't happen was nonsense. The veneer of civilization is never more than a few inches thick. Jimmie Owusu-Banahene had told me about the murder of the new secretary of the town council six months before (he'd been stealing funds). Found with a nail driven through his head. Rushed to hospital but he died. The nail had been removed, apparently, before he ever got to the hospital and it was given out that he died of cerebral hemorrage. The first week I was here, so many long years ago, I had seen the picture of a severed female head in *Drum* magazine. It had been placed at a cross-roads and no-one came forward to claim it. If Joao wanted me to sleep with him I would. A political act. Or so I would call it later.

But he never appeared, nor did Mr. Alamoody nor Arnie. We sat in the *Rendez-Vous Bar* and accepted drinks from Frenchmen and Americans and rich Lebanese. It was my birthday, only nobody knew but me. Mollie disappeared with a young Lebanese boy, no more than eighteen or nineteen, who wanted to take her dancing. She obviously didn't believe in the buddy system. I was too drunk to be surprised when Joseph and all of the crew of the *Cape St. Vincent* suddenly appeared. Joseph sat down at my table and the others pushed a number of tables together and sat a few yards from us.

"You didn't say you were coming here," he said.

"We were supposed to meet Joao and Mr. Alamoody, a banker. It's my birthday," I said, sounding like Mr. Toad.

"Happy birthday."

"Thanks."

He was not as attractive in his American floral sports shirt as he had been in his old grey shirt on the *Cape St. Vincent*.

A girl came in and sat down at the big table. She was very pretty and wholesome-looking in a white lace blouse and long skirt. She could have been on a tourist poster.

"Ghanaian." Joseph said. "She's a whore." He pronounced it 'hoor.' "All the best prostitutes here are Ghanaian."

"Why's that?"

"God knows. But they come here by the hundreds. D'you want to know something else? Have you seen all the highrises on the Plateau?"

"Yes."

"Pretty, eh? Very modern and smart, like this place, eh? But the Africans will only live on the ground floors, they're too used to living in huts."

"Is that so?"

"Absolutely so. There's 300,000 people in this crazy city and 200,000 of them are foreigners." He shook his head. "Is this Africa? I ask you, is this Africa?"

"I don't know Joseph. Probably. It's France too. And Portugal too and everything that's gone before."

The girl got up and went out and one by one the men followed her. They came back tucking in their shirts.

"Four thousand CFA a time," said Joseph.

"Don't let me stop you," I said. He shook his head.

"They use Arnie's suite. She's really cool, that one. D'you know what her name is?"

"What?"

"Comfort." He looked miserable.

"Listen," I said. "Why don't I go?"

"No. Please. Let's go to the Casino. It's your birthday, I'll buy you a pass."

"I don't like gambling."

"Never mind." We got up and left. Back down the long corridor where we'd first met Arnie and through a door. Down a sort of outside arbour and into the *Elephant D'Or* — "No Ivoirians allowed," said Joseph.

I have the card still: *Carte d'admission valoble trois jours*
Du Saison 71-72
Elephant D'Or Casino

Joseph told me what to do. Pete and Borghe were there, Pete's eyes reptilian when he gambled. I won 3,000 dollars in half an hour at

twenty-one. An Indian boy no older than eighteen, with silver bangles and a silver ring in his ear, blew me a kiss whenever I won. I thought how much Mollie would have liked him. Pete, Borghe, the Indian, the pretty Frenchmen, everybody was watching me.

"Joseph," I said, "I'm going home." He tried to get me to keep the money but I couldn't. The bored, intense faces of the players had defeated me.

"Will you come back to the ship with me?" he said.

"No. You're beautiful but no." He got me a taxi.

"Joseph Goais you've come a long way. I like you." And added as an afterthought,

"Take care of Arnie."

The hotel room was locked. I walked through the narrow streets of Treichville. Bought a chicken wing and pepper brochette from an old woman in an alley. I ignored the sailors who followed me. I was thirty-five years old — happy birthday to me — and knew nothing, nothing at all. And where was Joao? And Mr. Alamoody. And Arnie? I curled up in a doorway and put my cloth over my head and tried to sleep. Africans are night people — it wasn't easy.

The next day Mollie apologized for locking the door. She got carried away. She had thought I'd be with Joao. I took a shower and told her it was time I went back to Ghana.

"Really? We've seen nothing." I said I didn't care what she did, I was going back. Finally she said she'd come with me — petulantly; she didn't want to stay alone.

We went to find Arnie at the *Hotel Ivoire*. He invited us for lunch and seemed preoccupied. We all had club sandwiches stuck together with nasty little cellophane-decorated toothpicks.

Across the room an incredibly skinny, incredibly beautiful African girl was feeding bits of a fruit salad to her lover. He would open his mouth and she would pop in a bit of paw-paw or pineapple and then run her finger around his lips. They were oblivious of everyone else.

"We've had some good times," said Arnie.

"Sure we have Arnie."

He gave us each a card and thought it would be swell if we ever got together in Sausolito. The sugar cubes were wrapped in papers marked like dice.

"D'you know what we do?" he said. "We play craps for who's going to pay for dinner. With the sugar cubes."

We laughed appreciatively.

He said nothing about Joao or Mr. Alamoody (Joao had phoned and said he'd been tied up by business) and I decided to let the matter drop. If Arnie ran guns that was his affair.

"Goodbye," we said, shaking hands.

"Goodbye Arnie." He saw us to a taxi.

On the trip back we were stopped first by a health van (on the Ivory Coast side) and made to line up one by one and have our necks felt. The man who did this gave no explanations, simply felt our necks and motioned us to go. There was a nasty-looking syringe in some alcohol and a thermometer in alcohol and dirty cotton wool.

"What is he looking for?" I asked Mollie.

"God knows." We were very frightened.

Later on, across the border, a jeep drew up and blocked our way. Five young army officers got out and threw down all the luggage. The driver argued with them while eight of us stood in the heat, waiting. I was eating a piece of bread and one of the officers came up — he had his cap on backwards — and whipped out a knife. He pressed it through the thin fabric of my blouse.

"Give me a piece of your bread," he said. It happened too fast to be frightened. The knife was there, had always been there, pointed just below my ribs.

"Feed me," he said. "Bronie woman." He spat at the roadside. I fed him the rest of my bread. The driver paid some money and we were let go. There was a tiny hole in my blouse and a scratch just below my ribs. Busia's men. Crazy. Or bored. I began to shake.

The next day I came around the corner by Barclay's Bank and ran into Jimmie Owusu-Banahene. He was dressed in an English morning suit, very correct, and with a rose in his buttonhole.

"Hello!" he said. "So you are back."

"Yes."

"And what did you bring me?"

"A bottle of good wine; a pound of sweet butter. They're at the resthouse."

"And the miracle?" The boys outside the post office were watching us carefully. I shook my head.

"No miracles."

"And did you meet the man?"

"If I did, I didn't recognize him." He put his hands on my shoulders.

"Did you commit any political acts?"

I smiled. "I released a cockroach in the *Hotel Ivoire*."

He smiled too. And then I added, "I know nothing about Africa, nothing."

With his broad thumb he traced a line on my cheek — like a tribal mark. "That's a beginning," he said. "A good beginning." Then he added, "We have another sayin' that might interest you."

"Yes?"

"Once you have stepped in the river," he said, "there is no more time to think of measuring its depth."

INTERVIEW / AUDREY THOMAS

The interview took place at Audrey Thomas' house in Vancouver, on February 1, 1975. Those present (indicated by initials in the text) were Pierre Coupey, Gladys Hindmarch, Wendy Pickell and Bill Schermbrucker. The interview was pre-structured by the Fiction Editors on four topics: Africa; the writing process; Audrey's particular works; the politics of writing and of being a woman writer. The selection here contains about one third of the tape transcript, and reflects all the main points which were discussed. It is mostly verbatim, especially Audrey's statements, but we did some editing and reordering, for clarity and continuity. The original transcript is preserved along with the tapes in The Capilano Review *archives.*

BS Obviously language fascinates you — names, words. And you have your etymological dictionary.

AT I have almost total . . . oral recall? It's like having a photographic memory. I've had it ever since I was a child. It would allow me to lie in bed all night, going through everything I had seen all day, and heard all day, and watching for puns — I was very interested in puns, like my grandfather (the Harry of *Songs*), who I'm sure had a great influence on me in that respect. He encouraged me to find out the meanings of the words; he wouldn't name anything for me, which used to irritate me when I would ask him the names of trees and things like that. He would demand that I find an appropriate name for them.

BS Okay. I want to get to Africa. You went there, and you had a really bad experience which led to *Mrs. Blood*, and then you went back five years later, why?

AT Because I wanted to write about it and see what it looked like from a healthy person's point of view, physically healthy. I don't think *Mrs. Blood* is particularly healthy, it is a very confined book, with Africa only as a peripheral. There is much more of Africa in my novel (*Blown Figures*).

BS What is it that attracts you about Africa?

AT The rhythm, and the fascination with words, which is something the Africans have too. The violence of the colours, the violence of the landscape.

BS Do you find Africa a less threatening environment than Canada though?

AT Oh yeah, sure.

BS Your Heart of Darkness is Canada?

AT I think so. Yes.

BS In Africa you encounter forces and can write about the encounter in a way that is not demolishing to you?

AT Yes I think so. Jung went to Africa and he wasn't sure why. He went back, he went twice, and he says some really interesting things in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. One of the things he says about India, which is equally true about Africa is:

> India affected me like a dream, for I was and remained in search of myself, of the truth peculiar to myself.

But about Africa he says:

> What is going to happen to Jung the psychologist in the wilds of Africa? This was a question I had constantly sought to evade, in spite of my intellectual intention to study the European's reaction to primitive conditions. It became clear to me that this study had been not so much an objective scientific project as an intensely personal one, and that any attempt to go deeper into it touched every possible sore spot in my own psychology. I had to admit to myself that it was scarcely the Wembley Exhibition which had begotten my desire to travel, but rather the fact that the atmosphere had become too highly charged for me in Europe.

I hadn't read Jung before I wrote *Blown Figures*, and then all of a sudden last summer I pick up all this stuff! He talked at one point of how Africa smelled like blood.

BS Do you think in a way Africa is a more human context than North America?

AT That's partly true, because we've done away with all the signs and rituals. If anything overwhelming happens in North America, we ignore it or hide it, or put it in some institution. We're not supposed to grieve, we're not supposed to raise our voices, and we are not supposed to do anything excessive. They have very little prostitution in Ghana, because women screw right up until they're eighty, they really love it. This kind of thing would be considered really disgusting here. When you mourn in Ghana, you have the forty days, and then another fifty days, until you go through a whole year of cleansing and rituals and dancing and drummings and parties. We don't mourn for anything — we are not supposed to.

GH That's our equivalent of going to the shrink — therapy or something like that.

AT One of the closest equivalents that North Americans have found is drugs. And we're taught to ingest things, to put things into our mouths, this is part of our culture.

WP What about this whole trend in the last while of Jesus Freaks, and occultism?

GH There have been a lot of religions in B.C. — I don't know, twelve or two hundred — but in terms of moving towards ecstasy or ceremony, in terms of anger or mourning or grief, that is not a large part of it.

AT They are not archetypes. This is the thing: that the Africans do fit in with the archetypes, so you know you have something to lean on when something overwhelming happens to you. I've written about it in *Blown Figures*, in the whole last section where she is trying to exorcise what she has done. She actually goes to the fetish priest to have it done. Only she's left it too late, and she's a European. Probably it's because she's a European that they can't do anything for her.

BS I notice in "Two in the Bush" that she is never afraid. There is very much an Alice-in-Wonderland sense there, about Africa. Here's this woman in the hotel, and a guy makes an approach to her. In North America it would be very clear what was going on, it would be a sexual thing. But this guy has a beetle, a cochineal beetle in a box, and he wants to show it to her. She is not afraid.

AT No, I'm never afraid in Africa. I was never afraid until I got sick, and I gradually got some perspective on that. Can I read you the rest of this from Jung?

> In travelling to Africa to find a psychic observation post outside of the European, I unconsciously wanted to find that part of my personality which had become invisible under the influence and the pressure of being European. This part stands in unconscious opposition to myself, and indeed I attempt to suppress it. In keeping with its nature, it wishes to make me unconscious (force me under water) so as to kill me; but my aim is, through insight, to make it more conscious, so that we can find a common modus vivendi.

I think that's beautiful! And then he says:

The predominantly rationalistic European finds much that is human alien to him, and he prides himself on this without realizing that his rationality is won at the expense of his vitality, and that the primitive part of his personality is consequently condemned to a more or less underground existence.

I think the thing about going to Africa is that you can let it out. Peggy Appiah said that for the Ashantis — the Akans, which is where I lived — that for them dreams are the only reality. I really like that. They are very much in touch with their dreams. No matter how educated they may have been in Europe, and come back, they are very much in touch with superstition, with ancestors, the whole necklace of time.

BS "Dreams are the only reality." What about nightmares?

AT For sure, there is that too. David Godfrey said to someone else that Audrey doesn't write African novels, and I sent him back a message that those are the only kind there are. What I meant there was the sense of the other, the dark side of ourselves, the nightmare side of ourselves, where everything is too big, or too bright, or too beautiful, or too overwhelming. When lizards are *this big*, and when snakes sit in the trees and spit at you, you are in a whole other world. The only thing Ian was ever afraid of was snakes, the only thing in the world. So they warned him there were snakes on the road down to this sacred lake, Lake Bosomtwe, and you go down this steep cliff, narrow narrow path. When he came back up they said, "Did you see any snakes?" "No," he said, "I stamped my feet the whole time." And they said, "Oh, but you stupid man! They are in the trees!" *Snakes* don't sit in *trees*, Cheshire cats do. That's why the Alice thing is very real, that's why in all my African books there are allusions to *Alice in Wonderland*. That's very much the way I felt when I was there. Rhinoceros beetles that can peel a banana with their nose — an incredible thing to see one just clicking along the road.

BS Are there two private Africas for you then, the fearsome one and the child's world of discovery and surprise?

AT Yeah, and they are the same of course. When I went back and wasn't threatened in any way, I could see the other one. Is that a time change or . . . ?

GH I think it's like a dream — the quote about dreams being the only reality and all that. It's not a time change, it's that what your psychic physical reality it at one time is incredibly different from what it is at another. And it's essential that you return there and be in that place with a different — the same but different — body, and a different psychic reality.

AT When I went back I went *alone*, too, and that seemed to be a very good thing. I think I do better alone, which is a very sad statement about me, than I do when I travel with other people. Sometimes I really have to force myself to go down the rabbit hole when I'm alone. When there is someone there who speaks your language, you really don't have to make much of an effort to go outside yourself, you know.

BS Has it been relevant for us to begin by talking about Africa?

AT I suppose so. It was in Africa that I sold my first story. Africa gave me the time also, to write. I read African writers, I correspond with friends from Africa.

BS What is this thing about Africa for Canadian writers?

AT George Woodcock's idea was that you step back, that's what he said in his article in *Maclean's*, in order to view your own country. I'm not sure it's as simple as that. I think that maybe it's that we get so riled up and in such turmoil, by going there, that it sets free all kinds of things.

PC Why are the prose writers going to Africa, why aren't any poets going? This does not surface in poetry.

BS Dorothy Livesay has been to Africa and written about it.

AT A lot of British poets. Earle Birney went to India and also to Africa.

PC But that's more travel colour than the kind of searching for what is essential. I don't know the answer but it suddenly occurred to me that poets aren't doing that.

GH Prose writers need more space.

AT Yeah.

PC One of the things I pick up on is that you feel terrified about Canada, that in spite of its space it is a very constricting culture.

AT *Very* constricting. It's like being in a large room with no windows.

GH Indwelling, as opposed to a psychic, social expansiveness.

PC Indwelling, yeah. I think of Olson's *Call Me Ishmael* whenever this notion of space comes up. The continent being a vast ocean that has to be explored, in that sense Africa becomes a metaphor for the exploration of Canada.

AT Or for the exploration of the unconscious. I think that Africa *is* a metaphor, and I certainly agree with you that it is for me, in my writing.

BS Well, we've talked about Africa and writing about Africa, and that leads me to ask if you feel, as a writer, that you belong with any particular group.

AT No, unless I belong with other women. Women are writing for other women at the moment, I don't know what men are doing.

BS Men are writing for other women too.

AT If I belong anywhere I suppose it's in connection with other women.

BS Has that always been true?

AT Yeah, I think that probably has.

BS I don't believe it.

AT You don't believe it. Well, editors are mostly men, so I don't know. The first story I ever got published was a story about my miscarriage, and I certainly didn't write it for any man. I probably just wrote it for myself. But if anyone could understand it, it would be another woman. I was very surprised when it was a man that finally accepted it. A lot of women have read it since, in *Ten Green Bottles*. So many women have had miscarriages, and this is another thing that people haven't talked about.

PC Audrey, do you think that's a positive thing in writing right now, this writing for women?

AT As long as it doesn't become a cult it is a *very* positive thing. As long as you don't feel that you *have* to do it. I think women are excited to finally be talking to women.

BS As a writer, what has your drive been towards or for?

AT To try and put down on paper the changes I was going through, for me, but also for Ideal Reader or Constant Reader, who is another woman I would think. When I was a child I really wanted to be A Writer, I wanted to be *known* and all those things. Then when I started to write again, it was because I had to. I had to somehow put down what was happening to me, and words were the only thing I knew. I didn't know how to play any instrument, I didn't know how to knit or crochet or anything. Words were all I had, the only weapons if you like, that I had. So I started writing.

BS The language you just used suggests competitive or aggressive writing.

WP No, it doesn't sound aggressive, it sounds defensive.

AT Thank you Wendy. A defense against being a Scorpio housewife, I mean the second time I began to write. The first drive was to be a "writer." My stories were always read out in class. I was twenty when the second drive began.

GH I'm interested in the first drive. What was the image at that time?

AT Well, I was small and shy and unconfident. Somehow I thought that if I wrote something I would be large, non-shy and confident. The second time I started, in any big way, I was really trying to make some kind of order out of the chaos that my life was. I came to Canada, and I was twenty-three and had one child, and I went to graduate school. I was very lost at graduate school. People were using words that I had never heard before, and then another child, and I began to teach, and got really turned on to words again of course, and met a lot of interesting people, and started putting down words on paper again. One part of me is really happy to stay at home and have kids, and really be the traditional housewife, but this other side of me says no, that isn't enough. I think that's what I was trying to deal with in my writing, the two different sides of me.

GH It's to create some kind of order that goes out into the world, that this is me.

AT Yeah, that this is me, I'm not really lost. This is me, and this is how I'm dealing with this thing or that thing. I remember the first time I fell in love with a man other than my husband, and having to deal with that somehow. And then he died. And having to deal with that. All these strange things that kept happening to me, and I would write them down and try to work them out that way. And then realizing after I'd written them down that they weren't so earth-shattering after all; or they were, but you'd organized the horror and could go on from there. I suppose it's a defensive mechanism. Mind you I was very secret about it. I had the office right next to *Tish*, I would keep it very secret, because I felt if those guys found out, those *poets* Pierre, I would be ruined. I wouldn't have a chance if those poets found out what I was trying to do.

BS Let's take the times when you just decide it's time to write. What is it you're trying to do when you write a story?

AT Well, I'm writing a Mexican story at the minute right? "A Monday Dream at Alameda Park." What I'm trying to do in that story is bring together about four or five men that I know who have a strange but understandable desire to remain forever young. And I'm setting it in Mexico because I kept meeting people down there like that, with their second or third wives or whatever, you know, who would sit in the bars and tell me how they'd lost their children. I like to set things in alien cultures because they're that much starker. I don't presume to write about people who are not North Americans — I think it's difficult enough to do that. I would never write about an African woman, anyone like that, I don't think I have that kind of total empathy where I could ever do that with any degree of success. So this is a story that I just feel I want to write because I kept bumping into all these men who were having a new life — Malamud's book — but they weren't doing it too well.

GH I think there's something about the process that starts something off. I want to ask about that process. Okay, she's in that circumstance, she went to Mexico — you're afraid of planes too aren't you?

AT Yes. I took the bus and the trains.

GH You took the bus and the trains, to Mexico. At this point Ian's with the children. So you're not trudging down with four others, you're trudging down alone again, single, but the couples you're meeting, the male of the couple —

AT — is usually an older man with a younger woman, and I was really fascinated by this. Of course I always start from an actual incident. I have very little imagination in me, in the sense of making things up totally in my head. So it was an actual incident where I spent some time with one of these husbands due to a fluke and the fact that we didn't know that everything is closed in Mexico City on Monday. That's what really started the whole thing off. It was his suggestion to write the story about it.

BS Well then, as a writer, are you simply trying to record what happened to you?

AT No, not at all, because he is not the man in the story, but he gave me the idea for it.

GH Okay, let's hear about that day with that person first, then get the process.

AT Alright. He was on his second wife. He was the same age I was. He was very attractive, very learned, and really going to Mexico with a lot of positive things, like he was reading Octavio Paz, he was reading Oscar Lewis, he hadn't just gone down there to soak in the sun, although that was another reason he'd gone down there. He'd also gone down there because his marriage was very shakey with his second wife, who was about twenty-four, and he was thirty-eight. And we spent the day together. He prided himself on not spending the day with her. They were totally liberated, right, so they'd never spend their days together, they would go off in different directions. And I went to the Museum of Fine Arts, and he went to the Anthropological Museum, and we were going to meet for lunch. Only I had the only knife, and my museum was closed, so I didn't know him very well, and I thought now what do you do, what do you do? You've got the knife, he's bought all this stuff, do you try and find him, or do you just think oh fuck it and go off and find something else to do? And while I was trying to figure that out I went to the children's park, in the big park, and was watching two monkeys feed a bird, which I'd never seen before. And that was so delightful, to see these two monkeys with crusts of bread feeding this bird, and I was sitting there laughing when this man started yelling at me. I thought he was Mexican so I didn't turn around, and it was Craig, and he yelled my name. We then set off together, cause his museum was closed of course, and we went all over Mexico City together looking for something that was open, and that was the basis of the story, to try and find something that was open. But in the story the man is about fifty-one, and the girl is about twenty-three or twenty-four, and

he cannot keep up with her. You're also a mile up, right, so there's an oxygen problem — you know, if you run around Mexico City you're bound to get tired. So the story is not really about Craig, although he was the man I spent the day with, it's about somebody else who is trying to keep up with a young wife, tripping from place to place trying to find *some* place that's open, where they can find culture, right?

WP Rather than talk to each other.

AT Well, yes and no. The woman comes off best in this story, because she just accepts the fact that the museums are closed, but he can't, because he's a professor. He's a professor of Metaphysical poetry, and he can't accept anything at all.

PC Is that a congenital defect of men?

WP/GH/BS/AT Just professors!

AT He's been going home and having sleeps, then pretending that he just got in when the girl comes back. She's with him this day, so he doesn't get his little nap in the afternoon that she knows nothing about.

GH What a bound-in freedom, eh?

AT But can you imagine a man so afraid of his virility that he goes and takes a nap and doesn't tell his wife about it?

GH Yes I certainly can! I can imagine how dirty it was.

BS Why didn't you just live that and pass on, what's the point of writing a story about that?

AT To show how we all delude one another.

BS What, you want to *teach* people?

AT Well maybe I just want to demonstrate the terrible gap between men and women.

PC Do you have any particular kind of programme or intent that is conscious, that you want to see as a result of what you do write?

AT I didn't go down to write any stories. I went down for a holiday. But it's very hard to stay away from situations, you know. I've written two stories about Mexico, and the other one is about mummies. In this cemetery where they exhibit mummies they had the littlest mummy in the world, *la más pequeña momia del mundo*. Terrible. Sad little face. About twelve inches high, in a little dress. So I've written a story about that too, that I doubt I will *ever* publish, cause it's such a painful story that brought back horrible memories about this kid of mine that died. You know, where do you get *la más pequeña momia*? It had to be a stillborn child.

GH Mm-hmm.

AT And that just totally wiped me out when I went into this mummy museum and saw this, this . . . thing.

PC Do you cry when you write?

AT Sure. And I get upset and I leave it, and I come back and I tear things up.

PC Did you cry when you wrote that particular story?

AT

BS Well is writing a sexual surrogate, is it a sexual activity?

AT It's sensual. I don't see it as sexual, except that when you know it's really good (of course that means that the next day when you read it it's shit, right?), at the time when you're writing it, when you feel it's really good, it *is* kind of sexual, there's that orgasmic feeling that something is really happening, something really good is happening. I'm a skater, the skater I never was, just zooming along. Once it's done, I find it hard to go back and revise it in any way. It's a block, you know? When it's finished, it's finished. That doesn't mean I don't change every day. If I'm writing a *novel*, I throw away every day what I don't

like. Throw it away! Burn it! I don't even keep it. But once it's done, that's it, you know? There may be horrible mistakes in it, but I don't change it. And I've been very lucky to have editors who never changed one word. Bob Amussen, David Robinson. Not one word, only corrected my spelling

GH I'm interested in this process where in each stage of writing, the next day you can just throw away, burn, destroy, you're sort of rid of that without the ritualistic . . . it just *goes*. In any way does that connect with how you're living your life?

AT I wish it did! Patrick White said writing was like shitting, and I think there's a great deal of truth in that.

PC Lawrence Durrell said it was like going out and chopping wood for forty-eight hours a day.

AT Lawrence Durrell wouldn't even know what he was talking about. I've been reading him, I really dig him, but I can't imagine him chopping wood. I can't imagine him doing anything more than saying "Waiter!"

PC But he was talking about hard work, and I remember you talking about the literal process of writing that you go through, a great many hours, every day, regularly, a discipline.

AT I'm a very disciplined person. I consider it a job, it really is, and I go to it as a job. I get very irritated, *very* irritated, if people call me up during my writing time.

GH You let all your friends and acquaintances know what those times are?

AT Absolutely clear to everyone. The only time I sort of allow it is if I've got a book coming out with Talon and I know that David is going to get in touch with me. But here's the old mother again: I daren't take the phone off the hook, because my kids might fall on their heads and cut their heads open at school.

BS I want to ask you about your books, Audrey. As I looked at the titles today, it occurred to me that between number one and number five, which is *Ten Green Bottles* and *Blown Figures*, that the first exhibits a fear of the bottle breaking whereas *Blown Figures* is a delight in the melting of the bottle.

AT Oh that's *very* nice Bill. I see *Songs* and *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures* as a continuity. I'm not sure I see *Munchmeyer & Prospero* in a continuity. And *Ten Green Bottles* was just five-finger exercises, though a lot of those things are going to become novels — already two, maybe three, have become novels. "If One Green Bottle" became *Mrs. Blood*, but so did "A Winter's Tale." And then "Salon Des Refusés" became the second part of *Songs*.

BS Are *Munchmeyer & Prospero* important to you?

AT They're tentative efforts, particularly *Munchmeyer*, to write as a man, to try and be a man. I don't know how successful that was, but I wanted to try and write from the point of view of another sex. I don't think *Prospero* was all that hard of a thing.

BS I've always pressured you to get beyond therapeutic writing, to constructs. How do you feel about that whole thing now?

AT That would be terrific, but I doubt if I can do it.

BS Well go back to *Ten Green Bottles*, Herman in "The Albatross," there you've really created a person without expressing yourself as the dominant focus.

AT Yeah, but I'm not sure I could do it for a novel. Again, that's an ethnic thing too, like it's all very well to do that as a story, and I knew that man, I knew him very well, but I don't think I could do it as a novel. Because I wasn't in the war, I wasn't in Austria, I wasn't put in prison camp — how on earth could I write a novel from his point of view? Impossible! I don't have that kind of imagination. I can only write about myself in the end. Unless I meet someone as fascinating as he is, in which case he becomes a short story, but not a novel.

BS Everything of Gladys' that I've read is also right out of herself.

AT Well what's wrong with that? I mean what do you object to about that?

BS I don't know. I'm exploring.

AT I wrote to Patrick White the other day and said "no man has a right to know as much about women as you do." But after I wrote it, I thought he only knows about women of that certain age, he never writes about young women really.

GH In a little essay in *Ms.* magazine, Erica Jong talks about the problem of women writers taking on a male identity and then not finishing the work because it's just impossible, though I think it is possible in some sense. The other thing that occurred to me recently, in class I said well, damn it, you get a writer, say Lawrence, Faulkner, James, they may create anywhere from fifty to a hundred characters, but basically have got seven or eight characters going, and it's a matter of how close they get each time.

AT Uh-huh.

GH In some sense we're always doing that, you create your own drama in the world as you like to see it, at that instant in time, which of course has got to relate to very earlier and other dramas in some very important way for you, whether you recognize it or not. Of course there's going to be times when you think it *doesn't* work, it *doesn't* come, and then times when it totally does. I don't know *how* I can connect these two points! I'll make some attempt. Because it seems to me one of the delights of being a fiction writer is that you *can* enter the identity and the physical body of someone else. I think it's mort important the physical body, and the things you got into tonight. One of the aspirations is to enter another so totally that you know *exactly* what it's like.

AT Right.

GH Someone once said to me, "If you had three wishes and you were going to die right after, what would you do?" And I thought, yes, I would like to be a man, now what moment would I like to be a man? Would I like to be a man at the point of coming, is that the most important, the critical? I know the men present said they'd like to give birth, but then the other one said, "No, no, no, no! I don't want to go through that process!" So one of the delights is that you can enter the body of, and perceive through those people, characters, configurations, male *or* female, in a way that you can't in your life. The thing Erica Jong was proposing may indeed be wrong, it may be right in terms of not completing things, but wrong in terms of not expressing the range of delight say of writing *Munchmeyer*. There must have been some delight in you, in terms of hoping you were close?

AT Oh yeah.

GH And that would be the real range of writing.

AT That was one of the few books that I thoroughly enjoyed writing. Men have told me where I've made mistakes, where I've said things that men probably wouldn't say. But to try and see things from a man's point of view was really interesting and really instructive. You know? When you realize that they too have their troubles.

BS You used to tell me I could *not* write dialogue. Then I realized you were trying to improve your own writing of dialogue, especially men.

AT I think my writing of dialogue now is pretty good.

BS So do I.

GH It's fine.

AT This is again this thing of having this strange ear which can remember syntactical patterns of the way people speak, so that once I have those I can invent enormous pieces, like that

German guy Herman in "The Albatross." I just invented that from listening to him talk. Once you got his syntactical pattern you couldn't go wrong. Once you realized what he was doing with English, you could say anything and it would come out alright. Same with "Two in the Bush." Once you found out that Arnie was from Fresno or wherever, that Joe was Portuguese American, that Joao Kakumba was from Angola, and you listened, you heard all these differences in the way that they talked. I don't think I have trouble with dialogue any more, but I did have at one time, before I stopped listening to my own voice and started listening to other people's.

BS In *Munchmeyer & Prospero* you attempted very powerfully to come to terms with individual people who were living their lives, not yours; and that links up with some things in *Ten Green Bottles*. Do you intend to go on in that direction?

AT I don't know where I intend to go. Now that *Blown Figures* is finished I don't think I'll write anything for a long time. I can't imagine where I can go from there.

BS Is the difference for you between a story and a novel this matter of endurance in the perspective of the character?

AT I think maybe. One of the things Ian said about my play *Submarine Cable* is that it's totally from my point of view, and why don't I try it from his point of view, which I don't think I can do. He'll have to write that.

WP That's exactly why I didn't like the play. It was like leaning against something that kept giving way, you had nothing from the other point of view to support you at all.

GH That would really be a problem for you to do, to try to enter *his* point of view.

AT I thought his point of view is expressed quite well, but he doesn't think so, and neither does anybody else.

BS I'm interested in knowing how you perceive the changes that came about in the revision of *Songs* in 1971 or whenever.

AT Well the publisher liked it and said he would publish it if I would "make it a little stronger here and there." Now what does *that* mean? I put it in a drawer and said the hell with it. Then when I came back to it, when I came back from Ghana the second time, is was so mild compared to what I wanted to say, that it really got condensed into the first six chapters and I added the whole asylum stuff, which wasn't in the original. The violence, the madness, the sense that she really is alone, things I had kind of glossed over.

BS Is it more honest, naked, open?

AT Who knows what those words mean? I distrust those words. I just didn't *care* any more what anybody thought. That's all I can say.

BS More courageous?

AT I just didn't care. I just *did not* care. And so when I rewrote it I was more *free*, alright. It hadn't anything to do with courage. I was *more free*. I felt less hampered by my past, less committed to being the nice girl, the nice person. You know my mother always wanted me to write animal stories, children's stories. And I didn't care any more.

BS Okay. Well now is *Blown Figures* a rewrite of *Mrs. Blood*?

AT No. It's a sequel, the end of a sequence. There may be a part three in the sense that I think there's going to be a book about Richard, who's the guy in *Mrs. Blood*. Richard would be first, *Mrs. Blood* second, *Blown Figures* third. *Blown Figures* is a very difficult book. I think it's going to get panned, laughed at, spat upon. I don't really care, again. I'm in a very fortunate position because I need very little money to live. Those people, reviewers or whatever, can't hurt me.

PC They can only hurt your ego.

AT I really don't care. It's going to get a lot of criticism because it's got all these blank pages. It's a good adventure story, it's a really good adventure story!

BS Okay. In "Two in the Bush" the guy says everything is a political act. Is writing a political act?

AT My publishing is a political act. Why would I publish with Talonbooks if it weren't? I lose $500 every time I publish with a Canadian publisher, but it was something I wanted to do. I certainly am going to become a Canadian citizen.

BS Is your writing an escape or an engagement with the political realities?

AT Well you know what our friend Patrick White said: "If man is a political animal, then I do not exist." I'm inclined to feel that way about myself. It isn't something you can add like vanilla, you either are political or you're not. I greatly admire people like Barbara Coward and Steve, and what's happening at New Star Press. I think that's very good, but I'm not part of that.

BS How do you, as a writer, engage with the political realities of Vancouver, of B.C., of Canada, of the world, of women?

AT I don't.

BS Women? You don't engage?

AT Well I would be in the tuna fishing plants interviewing them, right?

BS No, you're a novelist.

WP No, that's not the same thing.

AT How can one engage politically with women unless you want to change their lot for the better?

WP One of the biggest things that women are having a problem with is their awareness of themselves as women, and a sense of communication.

AT Well that's probably the only thing I can offer. It's amazing the women who've read my books, of all kinds of ages and literacies, who say yeah, you're talking about me, and I lost this kid, and nobody cared, and said it was like just garbage, and so on. In that way I can help.

WP That may be the only political statement to be made, as far as women are concerned in that kind of situation.

AT Well I think that women have to know that they can fight, that they don't have to stay on welfare.

WP But they have to be together before they can really fight. We've known that we can fight, literally as human beings, for years. But as a minority group we haven't known that we can fight, because we've never been together before, and we have to get together now. Your writing is really giving us that kind of sense, as many other women writers are giving it.

AT I can only give women a sense of their bodies. As far as their minds are concerned, I guess they'll have to do that for themselves.

PC I think we make mistakes when we use these words as categories. We get buffaloed by what we think these words mean. "Politics."

GH The questions Audrey answered very quickly tonight had to do with politics. I would like to find out from her what she thinks "politics" means.

AT A political act is an act of defiance, an act that says who you are at the time, in the place where you are, and that's why I said my publishing was a political act, because I lose money by publishing in Canada.

PC I would normally agree with Audrey that politics implies an act of defiance, against convention, against establishment, against the kinds of rules that we have been accustomed to, or that we are led to believe that we have to become accustomed to, but I disagree with the definition of politics as exclusively an act of defiance. I would say that, in Blaser's terms, it is a ***real*** articulation of your experience of the real, and that's where it comes into your experience as a woman, and that's why it reaches the experience of other women.

AT I hope.

PC You don't have to hope, that's a fact.

AT You don't ever know.

PC But I think it also comes to the experience of men in themselves as women.

AT Oh, and that's very important!

PC I think so. I think that's where it's not just politics as an act of defiance, but politics (or whatever it is) as an illumination of our experience.

AT Until men accept themselves as women it's very hard to —

GH No no! I think until men accept themselves as men, not as they've been defined until now, and until women accept themselves as women, and men as men . . . like at this point we're in a state where women are attempting more readily than men to accept themselves as women and question things. My sense of politics is a sense of the whole. When you responded to Bill's questions it was a way that I've heard myself previously, just the word itself turned me off, I just wanted to deny *it all*, and say I'm an individual outside of all that. And it's not true at all. It's to do with how you see yourself in relation to the whole, that is society. Everything a writer writes says something about him or herself and the society at that time.

AT Sure, but I don't *add* it. I can't be conscious of it while I'm doing it.

PC The thing that links politics with the whole formal concern of a novelist or poet, the whole technical concern, is that both of them imply a will to transform. To get into another character, another persona, outside yourself.

AT Yes.

PC We all want paradise through writing.

AT Or whatever.

GH That's not paradise, that's just connection with the whole.

PC It's another word for connection with the whole. When you say that you get a very sensual feeling from being in another person's skin, that gives you a sense of the whole. Which brings us back to Blake, to our misunderstanding of Blake, who is one of the few people who have achieved a unity of desire and experience.

AT I only feel I have failed, if I feel no ear will understand or listen to what I'm saying. But you know when you've done that. I can't really worry about questions of what's political and what isn't.

BS For the past two years you have been all over the country to writer's conferences. Why do you do that?

AT I love it, I have a marvellous time! There are all these other people that call themselves writers. We're all struggling along together, and we're all lost together, it's like a whole pen of sheep. And I vote for the things I believe in. I am trying to change the status of writers in Canada.

WP Just getting back to the matter of women: you've said you write for women, but I can't really accept that, because you turned it around and said you write for yourself.

AT Well, I write for myself, and I happen to be a woman, and I have a vague idea in my head that the people who most understand my writing are women. A lot of men admire what I'm doing, but more women than men.

WP I don't think it's women we should be writing to, but men, at this point.

AT We should be writing for ourselves.

Audrey Thomas / BIBLIOGRAPHY

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NORTH END, SPANISH HILLS

We asked for Valhalla
but ended up
among the trees, Madrona

(arbutus by any other
chance) naming as in the dream:

I am cat, mouse, rat, toad
(& snake in some other self)

& audrey says, the toad-prince,
who is ugly
& must be loved for himself,
warts & all that dress of slime,
whom the lady accepts in threes—

first,
a place at her table, next
to eat from her bowl, third
to share her bed, but last
her kiss

this makes him into the prince
who is unendingly handsome & needs
no more mirrors
& they all live happily
ever after:

but in her laughter
is an unhappy sound madrona
There's too much pain here
to bear dreamily
though we do. She herself becomes
the toad who devours Me.
Unhappily.

It's silly to say
I pray my kiss becomes
her other self
who is beautiful
beyond her words
& needs no such worship.

We wake into the storm of this day,
the wind in the waters
stirring
madrona
the sacred tree
that sheds its skin
unendingly

for Audrey,
love
P.

Brian Fisher / NEW DRAWINGS

Formerly, what I think I was trying to define in my paintings was the notion that life could be seen from every angle, or at least that I wanted to see life from every angle, and at the convergence of all those angles was a Something, an Awareness, which made the world understandable.

In trying to clarify that notion, I put together a geometry — a kind of psychic blueprint because I trusted geometry to get there, its practice being, so I thought, outside the reaches of Ego.

When I finally saw through that convolution, it became evident that Mystery was not to be uncovered in the predictable, a not very profound idea after all. I was crestfallen. There didn't seem to be any place left for my will as an artist, never mind my heart, which I had long since given to that discipline.

Out of the desperation of that position have come these drawings, which have to do more with layers than with angles, and I find myself now happily engaged in a different and most unpredictable geometry, a geometry of the non-rational.

They said that I should not be afraid and that I had long powerful fibres, which were not there to protect me, for there was nothing to protect, or to be protected from . . .
They told me that my fibres were all around me, that through them I could perceive everything at once, and that one single fibre was enough for a leap from the rock into the ravine, or up from the ravine to the rock.
He said, time and again that the sorcerer's secret . . . was in our perception, that leaping was simply an exercise in perception . . .
— Carlos Castaneda, from *Tales of Power*

The ancient Chinese mind contemplates the cosmos in a way comparable to that of the modern physicist, who cannot deny that his model of the world is a decidedly psychophysical structure. The microphysical event includes the observer . . . a point of view diametrically opposed to that of causality. This assumption . . . takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer.
— C. G. Jung, from his Foreword to the *I Ching*

Sorcerers say that we are inside a bubble. It is a bubble into which we are placed at the moment of our birth. At first the bubble is open, but then it begins to close until it has sealed us in. That bubble is our perception.
The bubble is opened in order to allow the luminous being a view of his totality.
The mystery, or the secret of the sorcerer's explanation is that it deals with unfolding the wings of perception.
— Don Juan, as quoted by Carlos Castaneda, from *Tales of Power*

FIVE DRAWINGS

Woods (on a snowy evening)

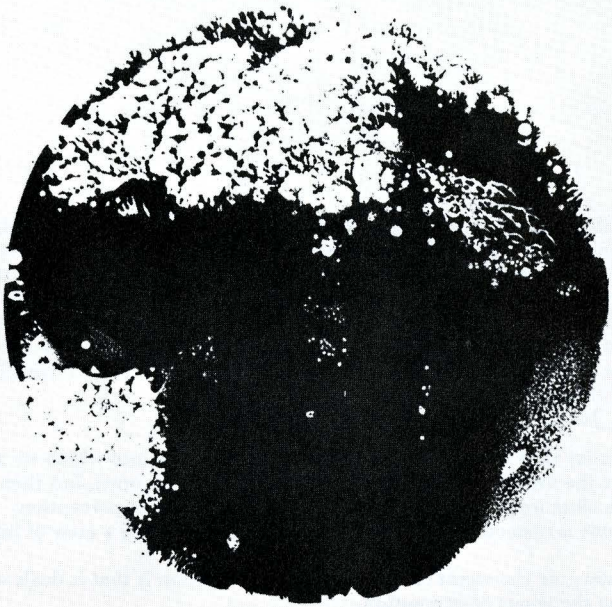
Kwakiutl

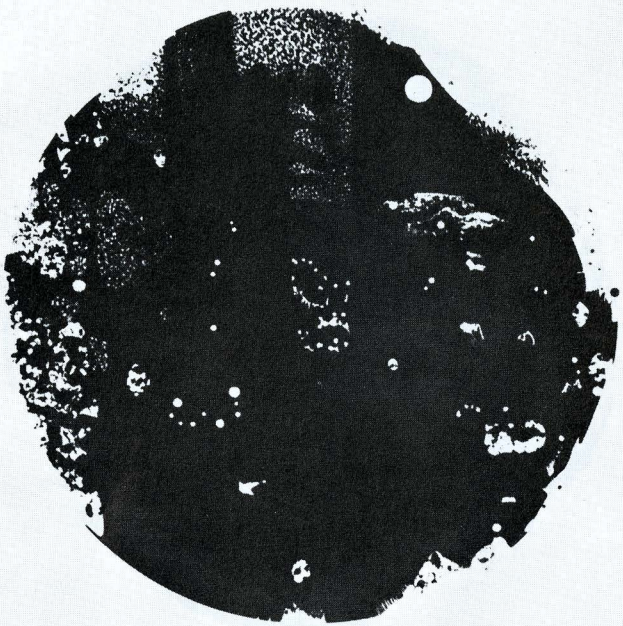
Eclipse

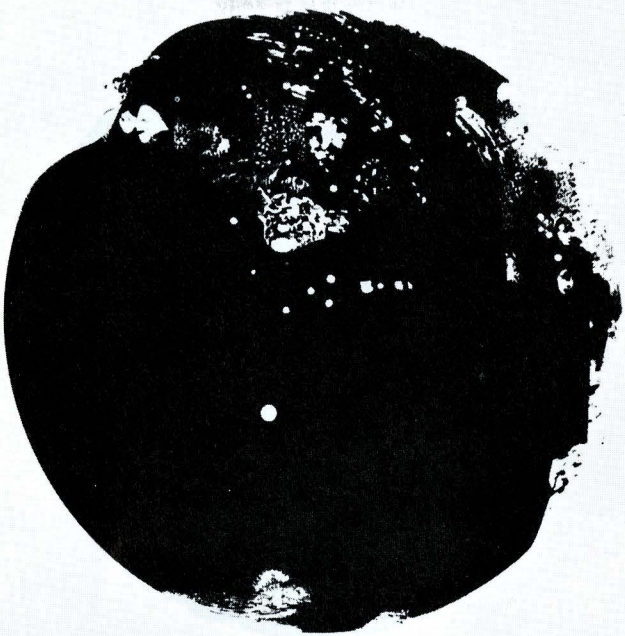
Conversation with an Old Elf

The Rock and the Ravine

Photography: Takis Bluesinger







Zonko / THREE POEMS

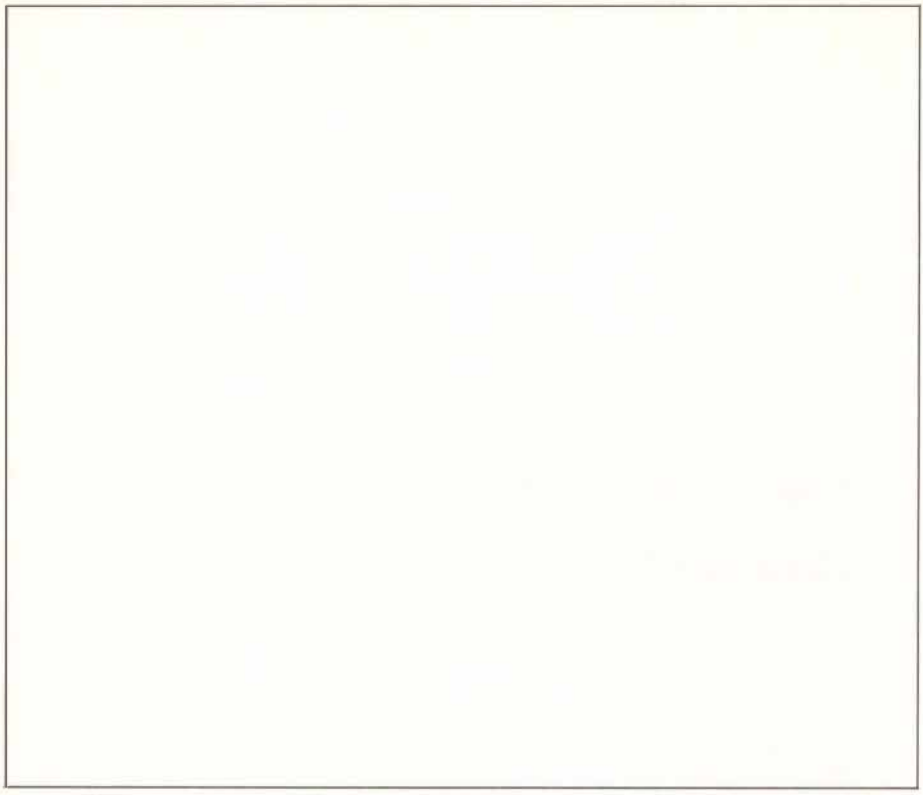
LOVE IS IN TROUBLE

Sharon says, 'Love is in trouble'
and I believe her.
The new mathematicks
hasn't prepared us
to work out this problem,
nor has insanity.

Infinitely organizing
search parties
Scout the badlands!
kindle small fires in the night
dance evocations.

We hunt the marquee that blazes
LOVE IS IN TROUBLE

whose face on the Wanted poster
who issues the summons
how is the capture effected
the rescue
who's got a clue



I'm the greenhorn
and nobody knows as much as me
how little I know

Hey you, Socrates,
put a toothpick in my mouth
my hat back,
'loving
makes me feel good
tenderness
affection
lively conversation
dancing
and not saying a word.'

December 14, 1974

LITTLE KISSING

So there was kissing
there was always kissing
in the beginning, Matthew
was kissing,
in the beginning of you
was kissing. Bill kissing
Holly. Holly kissing
Bill. Bill and Holly
were always kissing
in the beginning of you

ALWAYS LOVING FUCKING

After the kissing
Holly and Bill were
always loving touching and fucking
and coming
always loving feeling and rubbing
and hugging in the kitchen
fucking in front of the stove
or at the kitchen table
and there must have been a leather chair
somewhere loving fucking
in a leather chair
stoned fucking up the stairs
fucking up and fucking down
fucking sideways like a clown
fucking backwards and upside down
Holly and Bill were always loving fucking
and from our always loving touching and fucking
and coming, once
an ovum fertilized
began the coming of you
and all your loving

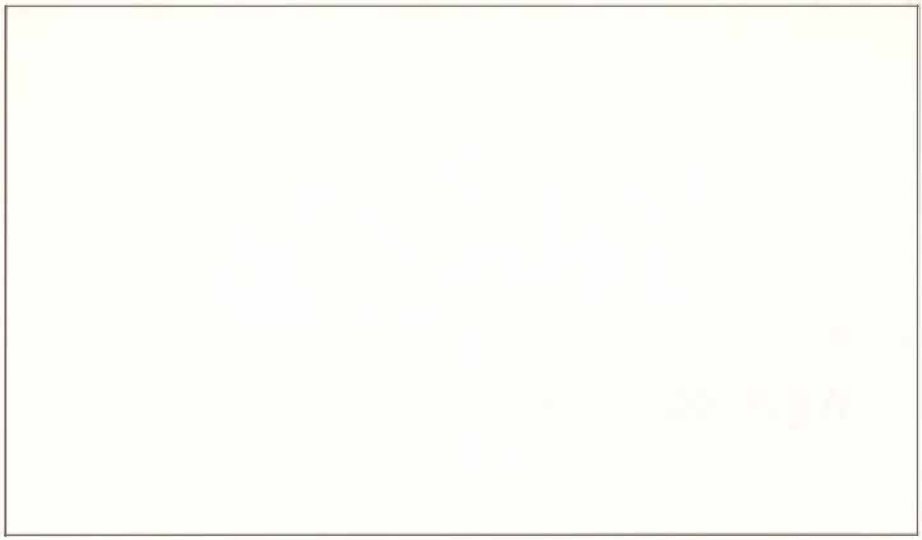
Michael Ondaatje /
WALKING TO BELLROCK

Two figures in deep water.

Their frames decapitated from the stomach up
glide along the surface. Depot Creek.
One hundred years ago lumber being driven down this river
tore and shovelled and widened the banks into Bellrock
down past bridges to the mill.

The two figures are walking
as if half sunk in a grey road
their feet tentative, stumbling on stone bottom.
Landscapes underwater. What do the feet miss?
Turtle, watersnake, clam. What do the feet ignore
and the brain not look at, as two figures slide
past George Grant's green immaculate fields
past the splashed blood of cardinel flower on the bank.

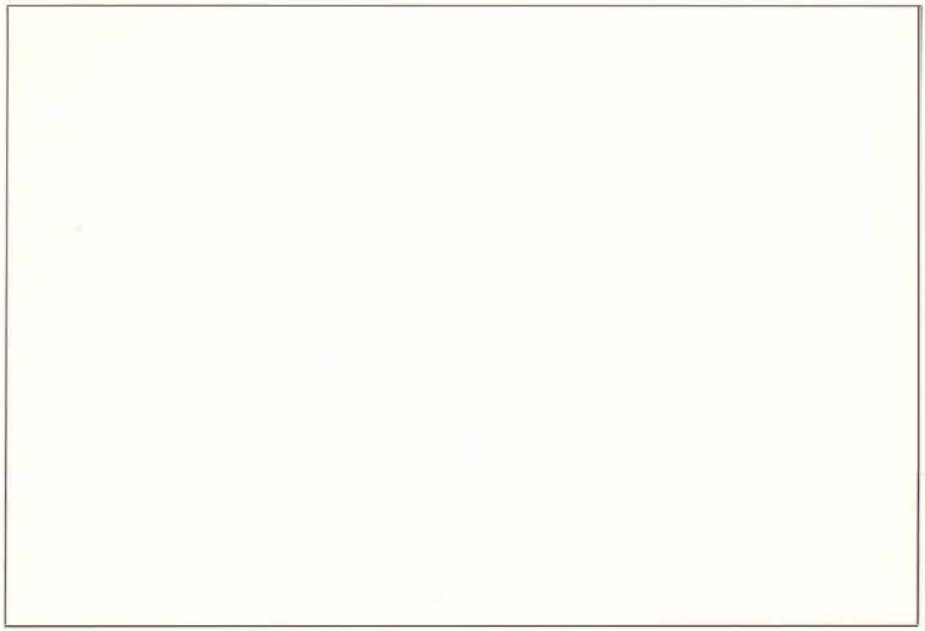
Rivers are a place for philosophy but all thought
is about the mechanics of this river is about
stones that twist your ankles
the hidden rocks you walk your knee into —
feet in slow motion and brain and balanced arms
imagining the blind path of foot, underwater sun
suddenly catching the almond coloured legs
the torn old Adidas tennis shoes we wear
to walk the river into Bellrock.



What is the conversation about for three hours
on this winding twisted evasive river to town?
What was the conversation about all summer.
Stan and I laughing joking summer crazy
as we lived against each other.
To keep warm we submerge. Sometimes
just our heads decapitated
glide on the dark glass.

There is no metaphor here.
We are aware of the heat of the water, coldness of the rain,
smell of mud in certain sections that farts
when you step on it, mud never walked on
so you can't breathe, my god you can't breathe this air
and you swim fast your feet off the silt of history
that was there when the logs went
leaping down for the Rathbone Timber Company 1840-1895
when those who stole logs had to leap
right out of the country if caught.

But there is no history or philosophy or metaphor with us.
The problem is the toughness of the Adidas shoe
its three stripes gleaming like fish decoration.
The story is Russell's arm waving out of the green of a field.



The plot of the afternoon is to get to Bellrock
through rapids, falls, stink water
and reach the island where beer and a towel wait for us.
That night there is not even pain in our newly used muscles
not even the puckering of flesh
and little to tell except you won't
believe how that river winds and when you
don't see the feet you concentrate on the feet.
And all the next day trying to think
what we didn't talk about.
Where was the criminal conversation
broken sentences lost in the splash in wind.

Stan, my crazy summer friend,
why are we both going crazy?
Going down to Bellrock
recognizing home by the colour of barns
which tell us north, south, west,
and otherwise lost in miles and miles of rain
in the middle of this century
following the easy fucking stupid plot to town.

D. J. Simpson / SPRING BREAKUP

What a curse,
this damned intellect.

Always the ceaseless stream questions
every thoughtful word.

A darker line drawn through once
or twice shows

crocuses, all purple and white
are not the poem.

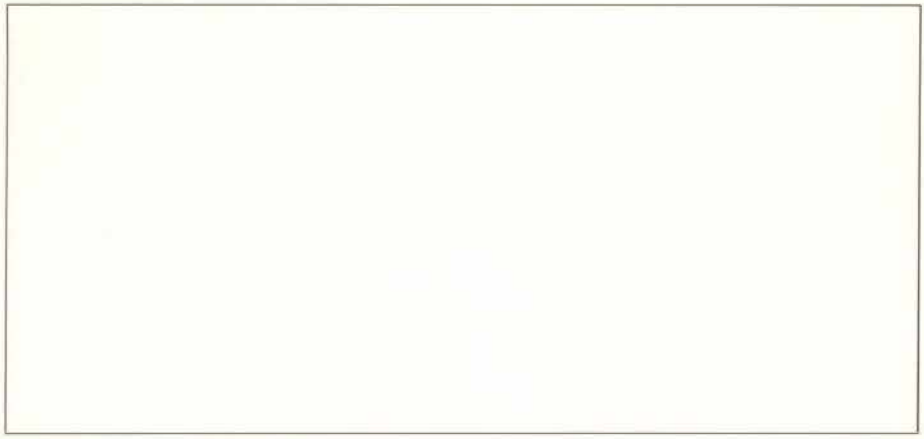
They're the omens of a darker season.
Like Newlove's bird —

not a robin, or any other bird of Spring —
A huge winged darkness,

shifts
heavily on a dead branch

in the rain
beyond my window

the lawn holds no robin's search
for worms beneath the wet holly.



What have starlings got to do with Spring?
Accept that.

They're the curse of every new lawn.
You can't believe the birds

so you draw a dark line through
to break the thought / that starling

over there on the fence, shits
on the grave where my cat lies

buried since last Spring.
Maybe the bird knows,

or maybe the robins know the starlings
are here already, and won't show.

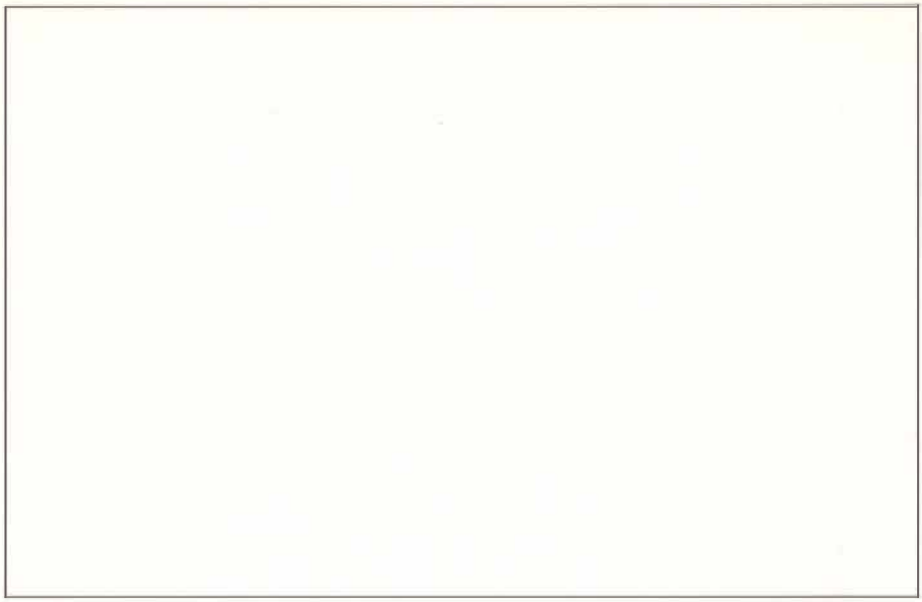
So much for this poem hasn't arrived.
Only your letter

hinting at Spring breakup.
But there are no icechoked rivers here,

up north the earthworms are still frozen.
Even the birds know that.

So what lies shall I use
to crack the ice-white shell

or coax the geese northward in
lined Vees?



The intellect is too powerful.
There's something ominous below the ice.

Isn't this the same water?
Those eight boys drowned last Spring.

Surely it's a crime
to conjure up the mind's grey ghosts.

And what damned poet called back the birds six years ago
to a landscape of snow and ice?

Twenty-seven below
the robin's orange breast froze.

Meadow larks, swamp robins, finches everywhere
there was death,

grouped around the cook-car, death
huddled in snowdrifts.

Spirited northward by some poet's lies,
they descended on Clinton

and died in feathered heaps
on the roadside.

Bob Rose / LIVING ON ISLANDS

(for Gordon Payne)

At 3 A.M. you know it too —

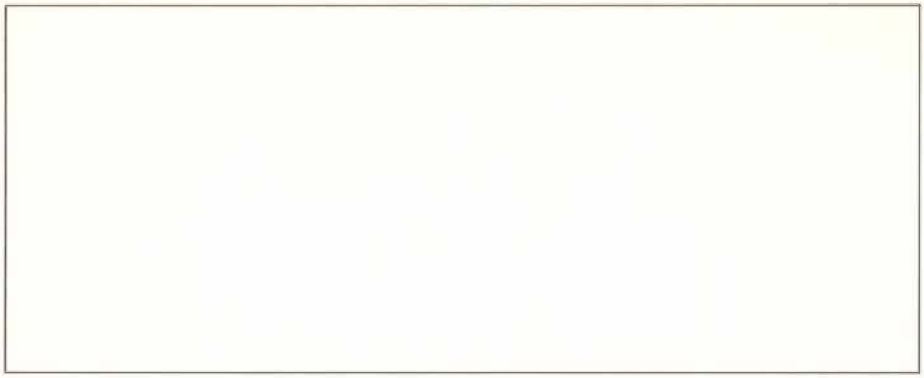
It all turns back on itself:
you turn
on yourself, your friends
wife, child, in mind
hate turns into —

How does it go? Boredom to frustration
to madness? Look, there's a gale blowing
the guts out of the gulf; every crow
from Downes Point wheels on its pivot in the wind.

The old people didn't live here, burning
the brush for deer, burying their dead under the cliffs

— Lift a bone, break a bone —
the locals say
and go periodically mad or drive their wives
to drink or themselves into a small
corner. And they love it and wouldn't live elsewhere.
After all these years could they
after the enchantment?

Islands off of islands off of islands.
et cetera



There's no end to the isolations
we live in, the armor of our love.

Who isn't wounded? Who isn't unto himself?
In spite of this we struggle, we shore up the breaches
of our pettiness against the mainland rush.

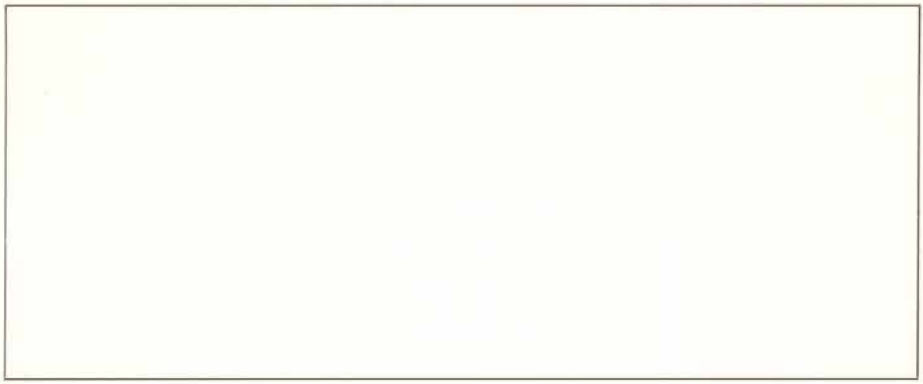
"Yeah, Rick hasn't changed over the years. Just grown more twisted,
gnarled, wind bent and shaped. Five more years and he'll be
a baptized local, fruit cup and all."

See those arbutus, there, on the point: aren't they our island
lives, isn't this another view, another landscape, another
escape? All interrogative
paths — thru the grove to the oyster rocks.
Ah! a small lusterless pearl.

> "If that a pearl may in a toad's head dwell,
> and may be found too in an oyster shell;
> If things that promise nothing do contain
> what better is than gold . . . "

Without work we wither and die:
without work the mind turns into a bog:
a miasma.

Those arbutus will never sprout oak leaves, we are all
Calibans and Prosperos, threatened and threatening. No
choice. A device for centering. A relief.



There aren't any ferries tonight, the weather's
fury won't abate. Even the crows have found a hollow tree or
a sandstone cave.

Face it. We won't be rescued from this island.
We must save ourselves. Translate Goethe's
'Be the hammer, be the anvil' to
'Be the island, be the mainland.'

Hate is no answer and
love, with what difficulty we come to it and how much
in spite of ourselves.

Such a polite world this
island, these closed
circles, the social equilibrium
curdles the milk, coddles
the false affections.

I don't want anyone to come home.
The fire's burning.

The door opens to those others who live here.
It's inevitable.
Let them in, let
them in.
They are yours and mine.

1/3/75

David Dawson / TWO POEMS

TWO SPRING SONGS

i

each spring
I live out my habit of anticipation.

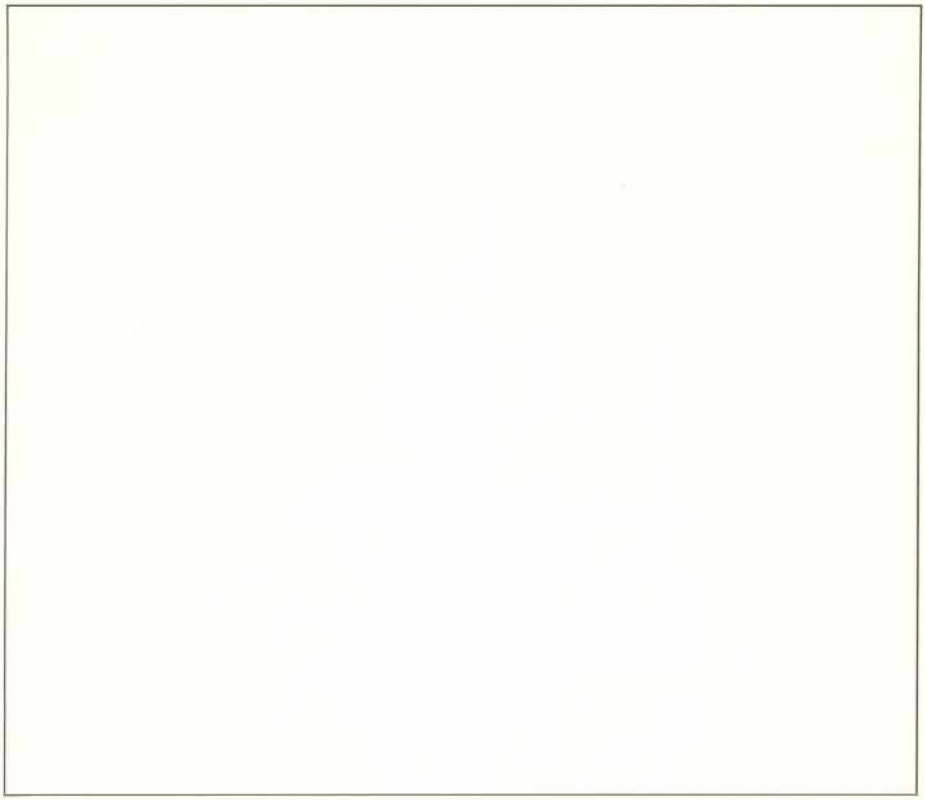
lentils
sprouting in green plastic eggcartons
near the window;
a warm sun
yellow on the kitchen floor —

I feel moss on the damp north sides of
slippery rocks;
bamboo
rustles in my garden, stalks
knotted in loamy clumps —

this new light, fern-green sun light

plays

on earth gods rousing.



ii

shudders at the end of gestation,
an almost
involuntary release

-the small, sheathed
inner leaves are pale-

eased (so pale, they are
the white of decay)
out of husks, dried
& dying winter skins.

this spring
is a snake-figure sloughing.

IN A NEW YEAR

I begin again

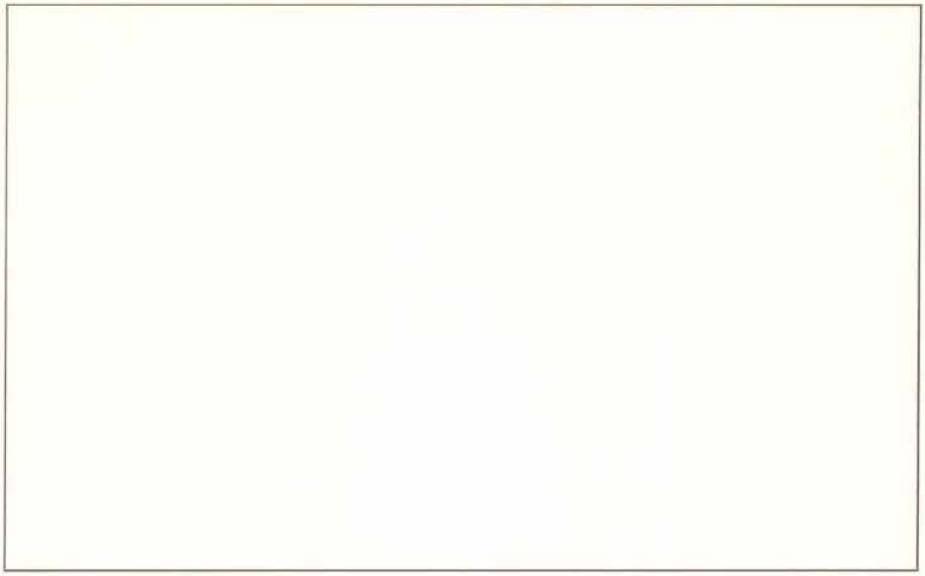
easing arms & legs to feel
all of my geography,

melody
of musculature & tendon playing out
into the spaces I inhabit.

song
of my body's
integrity moves forth
into summer air ringing
of sunlight
& a breeze off the Pacific.

I sense below

the steady
north-northwestern surge
of this continent / drift
against the sea's action, where,
rock by sand by cliff-face,
the shoreline falls off, submerges



as earth's moon
by barely perceptible degrees
retreats from us

in which retreat,
one by each, these moon forms, calculated quarters

move in terrestrial celebrations
as the cold stone
mad & love-charged images
coincide

chart
an unknown geography within my body.

surges
(with my fingers in my ears I hear them pound)
& touch.

this
is a song of renewal,
Yom Kippur
nineteen seventy-four.

Larry Eigner / SEVEN POEMS

July 24 72 # 7 0 7

brilliant

in the night

storm

coming and going

blot star

up close pass

ahead

the wind rain drop

smell and texture

September 2 74 # 8 6 5

(*for George Bowering*

T o b e

take and fill
your place

spread in
light through

what

it is

ever

or has

to be

November 29-30 74 # 901

up to
the minute
there was
will be

snow
in the earth

the air
melts
birds

April 19 69 # 308a

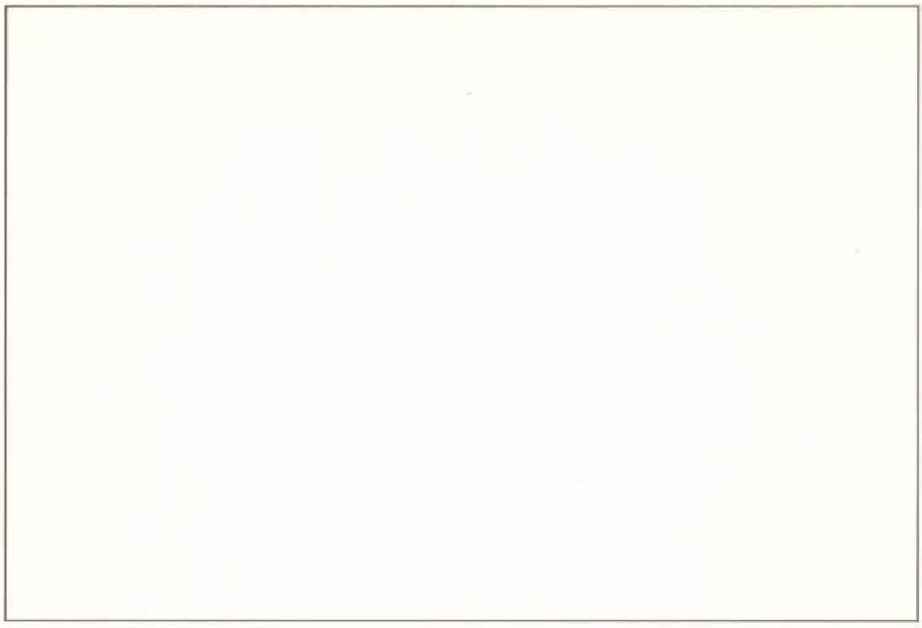
Sagittarius Orion
something that looks like water
far-fetched
study

hail on the patio
and down the steps

roads

alleys

What is a dead end



April 20 69 **# 3 0 8 b**

my nose too

window

abrupt wall

moon's face

August 1-2 69 **# 3 4 0**

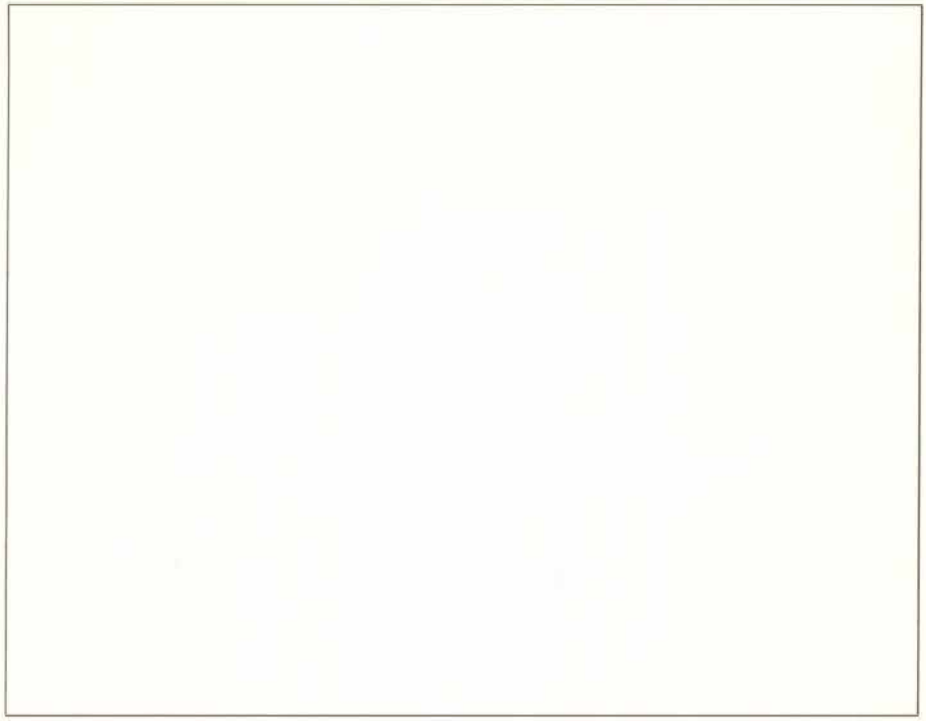
Mosquito? Powerful
fly

this area

let it go
on

oceans die in the ears

the moon walks around



May 11 68 **# 196**

What do we leave behind

what's crumbled

earth a bird gathering to

nest

flight levels of

the neighborhood

all made points erasure

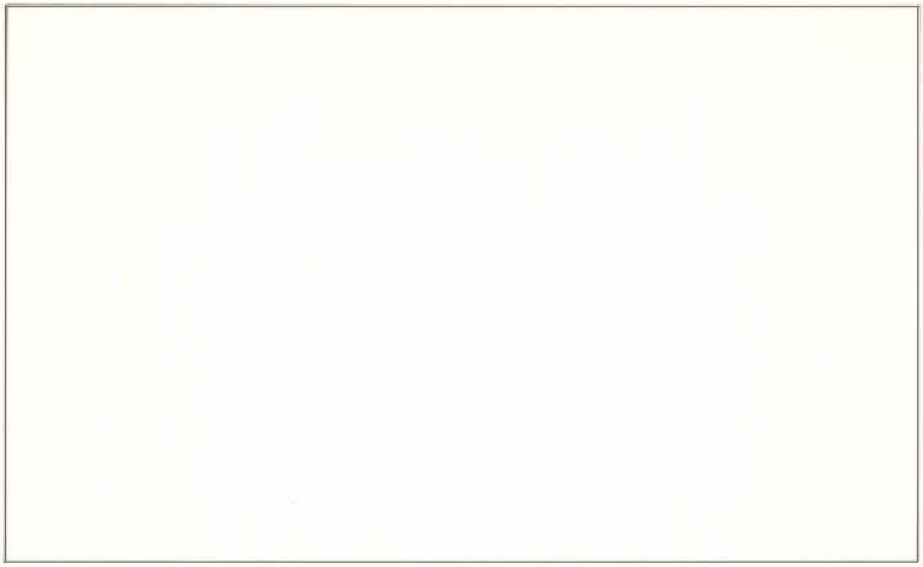
crossed

a pear wildly bent

whenever

some one

back yard



you can't see moves

in this distance are

bikes boarded

or riding

quiet

through

charm on

handles

grips out
side

the various

open

maple leaves

chirp

a long way

Susan Musgrave / THE IMPSTONE

(for Roy & Daphne)

i

The day the man
stumbled and
cursed the stone's
existence

the stone created
woman
out of another stone.

Darkness fell
like a thick velvet
curtain over the
land. The stone saw
that it was good.

And on the seventh day
he rested.

ii

This stone
was put here
for you to
trip over.

It has more value
than money
it has more power
than God.

Its first language is
dying,
its second,
survival.

This stone is neither
a man nor a
woman.

It was put here
for you to
trip over.

iii

This stone has been
rained on
this stone has been
left out in the
dark.
This stone has been
stepped on
though it never hurt
anyone.

Pick up the stone —
you will notice these
scars.
Drop it again
it won't blame you.

iv

This stone
is the guilt
each person takes
upon him

this stone
is a
mass-murderer,
a poet,
a god.

This stone is a
growth, a
failure, a
government.

This stone
stands for
nothing —
it has
no country.

v

This stone
was an island
once —
tourists would take
picnics to its
beaches,
fishermen would take
shelter in its
coves.

The stone knew
what it felt like
to be sinking.
Some people
changed the
island's name
in memory of a
dead politician.

vi

In your house
nobody mentions
this stone.
It is asleep
beside the fireplace
it is dreaming
of warmth.

Nobody mentions it
because they are
frightened.
Nobody feels it
because they are
cold.

One night
it changes
into an apparition.

Nobody knows why.

Your house trembles
like an animal dying.
It sees its reflection
for the first time.

vii

This stone
knows what it's like
to be chipped away
into nothing

to be blown up
into pieces
to make roads for people
to walk down
complaining all the
way.

This stone should have been
a writer
knowing the truth's disguised
as a bulldozer or a
typewriter

knowing the devil is
always present
wearing a
white carnation

being sucked like a
cigar

until he succeeds.

viii

This stone is
everybody's
culture hero.
He has been made to
explain his dream
once too often.

His dream
is the same scene
over and over.
He is standing with a
loaded gun in his
mouth
trying to explain
his feelings.

October 1974

Port Clements

Brett Enemark /

TWO DANCES FOR REVA

ONE

Thinking Love died, twas his death
Love required
his vision to fly, to swarm
among the hollow lights of pulp-mills
& ditches of construction. Yes
this was me, this is he, seeing the shrinking
of the Nechako River from an empty black bed
hidden in banks heaped with garbage where he squatted
picking among the rocks the shattered
pieces of the awful light
spite clouds & darkness don't move
spurning the land the goddess
streamed by him, for a time
out speaking
this river is another voice
singing
lilies fall, so awkward they are, in the air
& behind them are dogwoods
a sudden moon lights the river-moth
the mother-child changed androgyne
making room in the kitchen for a burning tree.

TWO

A poet is not a jukebox
but the nickel.
Or two songs for a quarter
(court her, fool) the song played
& the song heard (dancing)
differ
        my message is scrawled on water
between two dancers
writ by the moon

there's no swimming away from
that light
dividing the river, the lake as it
unmoves us

the fire
rages

Boreas bends
the bullrushes
but a sign says no swimming
the moon is on ice
but the scrawl stays til spring

Shelley fell on thorns
not on the ground
but round his head — a rose
sticking from floating hair, the trestle cut
by swords, the lumber falls
on Prince George

macheted skin & devils club cut to
the north wind & headless bodies
two giant logging-horses
at Lord Lake

a new channel under the snow.

Stan Persky / WRITINGS

TOPIC SENTENCE

We were forced to make 'outlines' in school. When? Grammar school? As early as that? I can't remember any specific teacher at the moment from either elementary or high school who required the outlines. But I feel the importance. I've hit something. The subject here is the painful emergence of an organization of sentences — they wanted to teach us — as they the teachers had been taught, in places as lousy as the Education Faculty, no doubt — my aunt Paddy? — to teach us the students (I wish I had a more definite age for us, between 8 and 14? No, later than 8. After the time when we could understand an idea like 'science'. That would be after 6th grade.

I'm preparing an essay for Mrs. Barry, the 6th or 7th grade science teacher at Sumner school. It's on nuclear something or other. Atomic energy. Lester. There's someone named Lester. No, can't get it. Lester has the same or a similar relation to me then as George Stanley does now is why he's here.

It was 14 pages long, double-spaced, one side, in ink, large handwriting, maybe even devising a way of leaving the bottom *two* lines of the paper blank to intentionally increase its 'length' which is vaguely connected to showing that you 'really worked' on it. A drawing of an 'atom', intersecting distorted ovals, without understanding a thing about 'atomic energy' (nor presumably did Mrs. Barry), just that 10 years after dropping the atomic bomb it was

exactly what American 8th graders properly wrote about which was apparently the main thing I had figured out.

The 'topic'. Stuck. The idea of 'topic' strikes me. I had to learn that, too. Stick to the topic. I had to learn what a topic was in order to stick to it. Eureka! Someone in the world had invented the following item:

In each paragraph there is one topic sentence. Locate it and underline it. Underline the fucking topic sentence. I can't remember what I looked like. There's a hiatus between the utterly gorgeous 4-year old photo of myself in a sailor costume on the piano mantel (my mother wanted the damn spinet) and the later photo, also in a sailor suit, on top of the same piano — did I again dream of re-enlisting a couple nights ago — taken somewhere around my discharge from the navy or possibly 'graduation' from Boot Camp — if I'm continually experiencing 'falseness' on my part, such that I think there is a madness here, is it possible the madness is also false, merely an organization of thoughts and feelings called madness that protects me from a really terrifying chaos underneath. Somewhere in my childhood I must have been told, you're making a big fuss over nothing. I have to wildly exaggerate any feeling I have in order to get it up through me (layers of fatty tissue?) outside into the world so that contact will be established with another human being (Brian).

I'll have to get back to my mother and the piano sometime — I can almost hear my cousin Sherwin's strains of *Melaguena* (I hope I've spelled it right) rising in their living room, larger than ours, the importance of the size is simply that it is the actual display of the superiority of their social status over us as the poorer segment of the family — his back to us, my mother and his mother, my aunt Rose, sitting on the sofa, where was I enduring it — I'd like to drag by the scruff of the neck that woman who taught me composition and make her find the fucking topic sentence in this scrawl. Underline it! Find it and underline it, damn you.

Let me push aside this whole thing of the piano playing relatives, the room, the status — no, I can't — the life-giving details breathe it — the stiffness of his hands (Sherwin's — I won't go into the whole relationship with him) as he strikes large chords in certain impassioned moments of *Melaguena* — I'm trying to get a sense of my mother's emotions during these scenes — I mean, I'm imagining myself as her, feeling a great deal of pleasure listening to her nephew Sherwin

— largely I remember being socially required to visit him after he had contracted colitis — now the strapping father of four children and getting rich in the accounting, slum management and assorted real-estate holdings business — having to sit at a great distance — the size of the place — across the room from his agonized bowels to decrease the discomfort of the visitor forced to endure the enormous foul gaseous effusions of his intestines, monster farts, and didn't he get the hysterical stomach (Derek Sanderson, he-man and womanizer formerly of the Boston Bruins had it one season) — didn't he get it precisely from being trotted out x-million number of times to that Steinway Baby Grand (the magnitude of that phrase — Steinway Baby Grand — in terms of goals and striving of various upper middle class Chicago Jewish families of the 1950's — my aunt Lilly ten, twenty years later shrieking at me her defence of Spiro Agnew passing before the sleeping grey face of the tv — used as an altar on the occasion of my mother's death, 1965?

One clue when you were given an utterly innocuous paragraph and required to find the topic sentence was that it was likely to be the first one, or the second sentence after the initial sentence whose decorative function was to engage the imaginary reader's 'interest' and 'attention'. I say 'imaginary reader' because although these paragraphs were purportedly lifted from real essays the only probable readers of them, now thinking about this retrospectively — at the same time as this writing is falling to pieces, sentence by sentence — were those of us looking for the topic sentence and wishing that the fucking topic sentence (possibly buried in the middle of the paragraph) could somehow, despite all, as if it were a neon sign or a drowning swimmer, signal to us so that we could underline it.

So the theory was — I finally learn the lesson that no doubt the teacher, Mrs. Somebody or other, was trying to pump into my brain, a dozen years later, half-crazed by compositional delirium — that in each 'well-written' (read 'bourgeois') paragraph (meaning, of course, 'well-behaved' paragraph) there is one sentence that succinctly contains the 'main thought', or rather, the most important thought in that paragraph: 'What the writer is trying to get across'. In the history of contemporary alienation I have just staked a claim to a gold-mine. Therefore, all the surrounding sentences had only a decorative function, or from my point of view (and I haven't even gotten to 'reading comprehension' and 'outlines' yet) the function of camouflaging the topic sentence in a jungle foliage as thick as the scrub we went through the night I climbed Mt. Tamalpais because I wanted to be with Mike Dodd.

The paragraphs in themselves were meaningless to us, despite the professions (I'm sure professional educators at conferences still assure each other of the value of this kind of thing today) — in short, how can a story be interesting when you know it's been selected in the first place to increase your 'reading skills' — I mean, didn't they know that we knew that we were reading not because we would be interested but because we were required to become fluent readers, I mean, if there was something interesting to read — a John R. Tunis sports novel, say, that would generate my own invention of leagues of imaginary teams, or a Walter Farley Black Stallion book, I would get it from the fucking library with the four-fingered librarian Mrs. Spiegal.

'I'll give you five more minutes'. A sentence lifted out of school exams. The teacher announces there are 5 more minutes to write then papers have to be handed in, some students scrambling frantically to get answers down under the diversionary clatter of papers being passed forward, able at this moment to ask questions of the students around them, violating the rule of 'not talking to your neighbours' — the degrading use of that word, 'neighbour', to smother the actual competitiveness of the situation. I wasn't one of the students trying to get last minute answers. Either I had it — let's see, there was also some behavioral instruction for those who finished the test early — yes: 'If you're

finished then check over your answers' (thus inculcating the lesson of avoiding hubris) — or if I didn't have them, I was fatalistic. I knew that no amount of 'thinking' would produce it though once when I didn't have the answers I wrote across the test criticizing the inadequacy of the questions thus bringing, during the next period, Mr. Markowitz the medieval history teacher who was also writing historical novels which had some juicy parts inappropriate for us to even hear — thus bringing him, the one person who understood the concept of a 'story' and its relation to learning something right down into the gymnasium to actually talk it over with me, genuinely upset at the possibility that his questions were indeed, unfair.

Now, turn in your papers. No dawdling. Pass them forward, please. And *that's* — another seed of my revolutionary being?

I don't *know* if we knew that. If we knew *all* that. Probably we mainly knew we had to get it done, whatever it was at any given instant. But look, I learned composition somewhere. And I learned it *there*.

They are trying to teach us 'good organization'. As a cliche they admit that real writers don't do this. Or rather that they 'break the rules'. Perhaps the teacher is thinking of Faulkner. Their slogan was: You have to be able to follow the rules before you are allowed to break them. Somehow we were to imagine ourselves related to 'real writers' by the fact that they too had gone through this business of 'outlines' and all the other deadening devices of composition, and had even found it helpful? before becoming 'mature' enough to abandon all that. Ironically, the 'outlines' which we were to make up simply to 'help' ourselves eventually becomes a formal assignment in itself. The teacher, perhaps from reading the badly organized 'final product' (yes, an essay was called a 'final product') deductively concluded that we were failing to make an outline. Thus, we were required to 'turn in' our 'outlines' along with our essays. The final irony being that *after* I wrote an essay, I would then be faced with the further task of abstracting from it the 'outline' which had to be turned in. They thought we were mentally unable to carry in our heads an entire required essay we were going to write . . . .

ARE YOU WRITING NOW

I stopped writing. I stopped writing completely then. How did it feel. How did you like it. It wasn't so bad. It wasn't so bad at all. It was a relief. Where did you feel it. Where were you relieved. I was relieved in my mind. It was really great not to feel in my mind having to write. I felt easier. It was much easier going through a day not doing that. Not thinking about doing that. Thinking about having a rest from doing that.

Did you really stop writing completely then. Did you really stop. Did anyone ask, Are you doing any writing now. Did any writers ask, Are you writing. Did you tell yourself, You're not writing now.

Yes, I stopped writing. I stopped writing as much as I could. I stopped writing completely except for journalism. I stopped writing except for journalism and that isn't really writing. I only wrote journalism and I didn't count that as writing.

Well, then, what writing doesn't count as writing. Did you really stop writing. Did you really stop affirming writing. I really stopped writing. Journalism doesn't count as writing. Did you write any letters. Does letter-writing count. Does it count as writing. Did you write any.

I really stopped writing except journalism and I didn't write any letters. I wrote to my father before I stopped writing then and I didn't count it as writing. Did you write anything else. Did you count it as writing. How does it matter to count writing as writing.

Did you write any messages. When the telephone call was for someone else I wrote down the message. I wrote down the message on little green slips of paper. Yes I can take a message, I said. Or, no, he isn't here can I take a message, I said.

What did you write. Was it good. Was your writing any good then. Did you write any numbers down to figure out what you spent. Did it add up. Did you write any notes. Did you write any call-numbers on little white slips of paper in the library. Did you use your writing to find a book. Did you write down directions without writing words at all. Were you a writer then.

When I was 19 Ron Loewinsohn wrote me that even in writing a note to the milkman one could take care in writing. Can you compare stopping writing for a week and stopping writing for 5 years. Can you say about 5 years even though you were writing that you had stopped writing. Ron Loewinsohn and I stopped writing. We stopped writing to each other. Did you have any more to write. When you stopped writing did you stop thinking about each other. Did everything stop when you stopped writing.

Can you stop writing in its tracks. Can you stop writing if it is a train coming through a tunnel at you in a movie. Can you come in a movie. I'd really like to. When I was 20 I was in New York in Times Square and there were movies. I would really like to've come in a movie.

What was playing there. What was on then. Were you doing any writing. Did you think you'd ever write again. I was in Bickford's in Times Square. Had you read about it in a novel. Had you read about Bickford's in a poem, had you read about coming in a movie in a book. Can you remember the author.

Did you hope someone would pick you up. Did you hope to come. A black man picked me up in Bickford's. Would you like to come with me.

Did you know any writers then. Were you hanging around with writers. A black man took me on the subway to Rockaway. Was Roi Jones around then. Did you see him. Was he into politics then. Had Irving Rosenthal published *Sheeper* by then. Was John Weiners down from Massachusetts. Had you read about Times Square in John Rechy's writing. Was it anything like he had written.

Have another beer the black man said before he was ready to fuck me. Did you ever think you'd write about it. Had you written to Hubert Huncke in prison yet. Was *Palante* magazine out by then.

He was an ordinary black man. He could have been a shoe salesman. He greased his cock with k.y. and was ready to fuck me. Did you do it in order to get some experience for writing. Did you write about it.

How was New York for writing then. Was this before New York poetry. How were you then. A black man picked me up in Bickford's and took me home to fuck. What do you think about it now. It's pleasant to think of myself now as an object then.

I wouldn't let myself get fucked. I was scared shitless. I wanted out. I wanted to talk my way out of it. I had done it because I had read about it. How did it all come out.

Did anybody come. Did you write a note to the milkman before you left. Did it all come out like a novel. He was an ordinary black man. He let me go. I was glad to be out of it. Did you write it off to experience. Was it a good experience anyway.

When you came to Canada did you learn to write 'fucked in the bum'. Did you keep writing 'fucked in the ass'. Did you find a way to write about it. When you stopped writing did the world stop. No, it went on.

When you stopped writing did they stop publishing your writing. Later, I got fucked in the ass.

I was walking on Market St. at night. I was 20 and picked up a kid. He didn't fuck me in the ass til later. Is there a way of writing like a train on a track. Does the moon drop beneath the trees as the train rushes past. Have you ever written any pornography. Did it give you a rush. I was fucked in the ass and it gave me a hard on. I picked him up on Market St. I was fucked in the bum.

Did you look at each other like men passing each other look when they are under the moon. Did you read that in Dante.

When you stopped writing did you sign any autographs of what you had already written. Have you ever written your name in blood.

My father rode the rails. Jack London was writing then. When you stopped writing did the world stop. No.

Is writing out of this world. Is it okay to write a book of portraits about writers. Where do you put your father and the trains and the moon and communism.

Can I raise the level of struggle. Can writing help.

How did he look when he finished fucking you. Did he let you fuck him back. He was a writer. We didn't have much to say to each other. Did you feel alienated. Were you both strangers. What did you have in common.

Later, he's a Cockette. What are the Cockettes? Do they write their own material. They are boys dressed in gowns singing old songs and not covering their genitals. Were they written up in *Rolling Stone.* Were there any pictures. There are photographs of them like there are photographs of men drinking beer like there is a moon. Can a car get stuck on the rushing tracks in a silvery light.

Do you have any new writing. In writing is the activity of writing a metaphor for being. In writing is composition a mode of existence. Is there writing which is necessary at a particular moment in history. Is there writing which is necessary which strives to resolve the problems it engages. Is there writing which is necessary which carries its own oblivion with it. Is writing for eternity a romantic posture.

What is to be done. Is writing a part of it. Is writing a party to it. Is there a party I can be part of. There is the moon rising over the trees shining on the communist party whose heart I'm inventing in the hobo fire my father sat at the side of. I do not carry the moon into my writing lightly. It wears me down glowing on my back like a giant milky marble I collected as a kid as I stumble down the embankment of tracks into the communist party.

My father is at the fire. My actual father leaving his bloodied white apron I have tied the knot around his waist innumerable times aside to sit younger at the fire like we sat in the car to talk about where I had been and where I was going which is a way of talking about getting fucked in the ass.

Does this story have an ending that is uncomfortable like getting fucked in the ass is uncomfortable at the beginning. Is writing individual. Is reading writing to writers individual. Or do we let each other's light filter through us, moon-like. Is the moon red tonight. Is it a sailor's delight.

FATHERS & SONS

While DeBeck, who had lost his father (age 11 or so), partially, through our love, found him in me; what I didn't realize was that in my love of Brian, my father also moved. Brian as a projection of myself loving my father in me. But the issue is: now what? When my father dies I'm not responsible to anyone. There is no love outstanding. Me and Brian. But in him I see myself. In myself I see my father. He, as myself, is loving my father, played by me: equals my loving, relocating my father. Also, as my father, loving Brian, who I see as me. Apart from sons & fathers, simply Brian & me, pain, sheer fucking pain, loss. Blind drunk? No, not blind. Barely drunk, finally. The pain kills the alcohol. Russell's advice — insofar as rescuing the proverb — drink more. I can write with practically everything in me dead. Pushing a pencil. My father said that. Death? It's not very frightening when you really think about it. (This conclusion after 2 years in the morgue and a decade of everything else.) I mean it. Even tho I barely believe myself. It's true. Ok. Let those moonsheep rest their heads.

June, 1974

E.

1.

Is he still beautiful, I asked (don't know why I asked) when they brought me back. Didn't think about myself (didn't think to ask), maybe I caught myself looking in the rear-view mirror, no make-up, no mask, face still okay.

No, not as beautiful as before I was told (by the driver, who had loved him also), barely hearing, above the radio, the music. I was becoming re-accustomed to the maze of roads, traffic heavier than what I remembered. I hardly heard.

They say (after it didn't "work out") that I went back. I didn't. I simply went away from his "world", his music (can barely remember "you have entered the abyss", it's an echo now). Daughters of the moon, they said in public — that's terribly romantic, isn't it?

Hell like a big department store full of dazed consumers. I went from counter to counter. Cloth of Indian bedspreads fell against my fingers. I don't recall its famous terrors, wax museum, or the marvellous machines clanking in pits. I wasn't present in its council-chambers. Odysseus' mother at the fosse of blood. That was before my time. Perhaps after.

I didn't return. I went away. Among others. I got along.

I went with women, into the countryside. We didn't have political illusions about that. It was only for the summer. And occasionally, by a stream, listening, it seemed as though I heard a voice, moving away, singing, "Eurydice", "Eurydice". I was happy when it stopped.

2.

Even the fact of hell is his version. I saw it as a field of human action. His immortal songs outlive my front-line dispatches.

I'm simply someone in or out of hell. Object of emotion.

Of course he's the hero. He went through everything; fires, mirrors, the ends of the earth, just for me — maybe you think I got there in a taxi (this sounds like the rhythm of one of our domestic arguments; I feel embarrassed hearing my old voice break into the present). His inconsolable grief along the banks of the river that was not Lethe, etc.

I went with him only partly because others would think of me as the one brought back.

(I assure you, there were times when I felt like the cheapest groupie clinging to some star's sideman.)

Only partly because others would remember our ill-fated relationship. Mostly because *I* wanted to go there, into what is sometimes referred to as an inferno.

PHUOC BINH STATEMENT

What's relevant in poetry
is not simply a recitation of the facts, e.g.
the liberation of Phuoc Binh, January, 1975,
75 miles north of Saigon
by the Provisional Revolutionary Government
thus strengthening the hand
of the Catholic segments
in the "third force"
now arrayed in a series of
anti-corruption organizations
calling for the removal of Thieu,
as well as putting the squeeze on
the puppet regime's control
of neighbouring Tay Ninh province.
What's relevant there
is not simply that additional step taken
toward Vietnamese liberation, but
equally, the weakening of U.S. imperialism,
after all these years, that string of
American presidents I've known as intimately
as my own relatives, Kennedy,
Johnson, Nixon, and now Ford,
Rockefeller, Kissinger, the slogans
they raised — their history crosses
the awakening of my generation
who first raised the banners of
anti-imperialism *within* the belly
of Leviathan itself. Yet, even, as of
Jan., 1974, the report released

by the U.S. Senate admits that
"although American troops and military
advisers were withdrawn, *a vast army*
of civilian contractors and advisors
filled their slots; the U.S. did not
so much withdraw their troops
as it withdrew their uniforms".
What's relevant here is not simply the facts
but our relationship to them as
manifested in what we are doing
in our lives, at home, in factories,
in service sector jobs (what most of us
have in B.C.), receiving UIC checks,
as students, old people, women working
in the house, that the same U.S. imperialism
via Trading With The Enemy legislation
interrupts the sale of typewriters or office furniture
to Cuba, that is, anyone taken in by Trade
Minister Gillespie's wounded & threatening
cry that this is 'intolerable interference'
is not in a relevant relationship to
the going reality. Nor, as far as I can tell,
is current poetry in such a relevant relationship,
to put it simply
if the lovers are kissing before a window
we need to know what is seen through
that window, that there can be a dozen years
of kisses, arguments, separations, divorces,
even consciousness-raising groups in front of that window
while remaining unaware of the demonstrations, processions
of people going to work, lining up out of work,
the moon rising, that poetry must properly locate
the relationships between these things seems
imperative. (Not, repeat not, a call for topicality.)

But then, there is the special question
of duration within poetry, the real Nixon gradually dies
within the San Clemente Compound, even as Phuoc Binh
and Phnom Penh become as distant for us as Iwo Jima
and the beaches at Anzio for those that preceded us. Yet
in Dante, the poet's master, Brunetto Latini
among those other men cruising the gay ghetto
looking into each other's faces as men do
under the light of the full moon, endures
to the present, certainly we have forgotten,
even now I watch a distant teen-age boy
in orange & blue school jacket casually turn a corner
as the light drizzle dampens Larch St.,
cars crawl up the hill to 1st, the gulls wheel
almost no one passes
the test of poetry, a few old magicians
honour the art, but
my 'sour-stomached contemporaries' (as J.S. called 'em)
have not investigated the conditions sufficiently
to even be in a position to be in relevant
relationship, or so much as to attempt it,
even if only to be broken within the demands
of the creative, to at least retreat
to some clear-eyed moment
standing on the street, hands in pockets, the
awareness of, This is the world, here I am, we are,
irrespective of the more difficult act of
such location within the language as admittedly
this self-consciousness, versified, does not solve it, such that
the song is heard among our children. Amen.

January 16, 1975

George Bowering / DESERT ELM

I.

I woke, & woke again, to see her smiling
at me, & turned to find soft sleep in the
green pillow.

Later in the day she said what were you
dreaming, you were smiling in your sleep,
but again it was my sleep, though I have
never said that.

Later I felt the pain three times inside
my left arm, driving the red car, & I re-
membered, I had dreamt that I too had had
my heart attack.

Attack, I didnt mean that when I told her,
sitting now on my lap, it was simply all
I could remember of my dream & thinking,
of course, but I am nearly thirty years
younger than him.

He finally had his on the green grass of
the golf course, how mundane, how it
filled my mother's voice with unwonted
fear, to be telling this to *me*.

I thought of a rock, not quite round, to-
night, reading H.D. on the old age of the
professor, a rock, not quite round, be-
ginning to crack, it will crumble, will
I know this earth.

II.

The earth he made me on, we dug into
side by side, has not long been there,
has been carried there by the glacier,
all rocks & all round rocks, all stones
rolled together.

We toiled among the stones, that rattling
sound is my earth, where I grew up look-
ing like him. There was some light fal-
ling always into the valley, always blue,
the blue that hovers over heat, a blue
I saw cooling the Adriatic shore.

It is the blue fading in his eyes, they
are not startling blue, it is the family
color I never got, they are not bright
blue but fading to a transparency you
will notice only if you are watching
closely, I mean within a few feet.

They found a desert & made it bloom, made
it green, but even the fairways seen from
across the valley are under a blue haze,
the smoke of space it seemed on high sum-
mer days, not a cloud in the sky, no mote
in that eye.

The earth is not brown but gray, gray of
stones, the flat stones round to the eye
looking straight down.

III.

I never saw him attack anything but a
baseball, a golf ball, his own records,
to be beaten despite his getting older,
to compete satisfactorily with himself.
That is why he never rebuked her, he is
more pure than I.

He said hold the hammer at the handle's
end, for leverage, not because he was a
science teacher, because he knew how to
do it, full out, not thinking or rather
thinking wide open, down the lines of
energy.

He had those muscles you can see under
the skin, the large vein down the middle
of his bicep I never had, I didnt get
the blue eyes or that, & not the straight
nose, I would perhaps never have broken
it then.

He is associated with no color, no color
clothes or car or house, he would as soon
eat a peach as an apple. I think of the
apple splitting in half as some can make
it between their hands, & he could likely
do that, & it is white.

In the last two years his hair is thin
& one may see between them, & they are
white. His slacks were white below the
purple blazer, & worn twice a month.

IV.

Rounding the bases his neck became red as
a turkey's but it was a home run, every
one like me has to see his father do that
once, fearing his father is like him, not
as good.

Red as a turkey neck, his eyes bulging,
his heart already something to frighten
the young boy, was it something she said
as this other says now to me playing my
guerrilla ball, I dont want you collapsing
& dying on the field. It is a playing field,
I say, I can feel my blood running red
under the skin.

I tell him about it whenever I can, my
average, joking as if I am my team & he is
his, & sometime we must come together,
clasp & both of us, win. He was his mother's
first child, I was my mother's first child,
& after us came just all the rest, the
bases cleared already.

But he didnt get it done till a quarter
century later, he lay they say on the fresh
cut grass, all the red gone from under the
skin of his face, pale, these pale blue
eyes looking for her?

In my dream I thought of course, I too,
what will I take up when too old to round
the bases, what crimson driver.

V.

I thought of a rock, not quite round,
sticking half out of the earth where I
would put the ladder's foot. In a hurry,
without patience to place it safely, to
be up that tree & working.

& working. Never half as fast as he could
do it, but in some ways inheriting his
quiet efficiency & turning it to grace.
He said he could never play second base
& I found it the easiest position, bending
over occasionally to pick stones off the
ground.

Even this summer, a month before his fall,
he pickt twenty pounds while I pickt
eleven, just more than half & I am more
than half at last, thirty-seven, moving
around to the other-half of the tree,
but someone guesst, that is under the
ground, the root system.

A tree, growing downward as I dreamed I
would or desperately hoped I would, to
become this child again, never having the
nerve or wit, age four, to follow that to
its home, from one hundred back to the
seed, & then what. A new lease on life?
For him?

The earthly tree grows downward, we do it
after all, bypassing the womb, back where
we came from, down the rabbit hole on the
golf course, above the shade of the old
cherry tree.

VI.

General knowledges are those knowledges that idiots possess. What words would you use to characterize your relationship with your parents. Scratchy tweed pants they provided for sunday school. I remember because of my legs. They look now like his legs, shorts he wears at the golf course, no embarrassment, he has come this far, what are they to him?

Prophecy is finally simple & simply more interesting than characterization. We are not characters, we devise characters. I sat as still as possible, the backs of my knees held forward from the hard curved wood. Those pants were never worn out, though they belonged unused to some uncle first.

His white slacks hung for two weeks in the closet we'd built some years earlier, he took them out two Tuesdays each month. A lifetime uses few such garments. Who wears the pants in this family is no sociological question. Prophecy is no answer. If you need an answer go make up a question & leave me alone without it.

He has those muscles you can see under the skin, the calf muscle like mine tending toward the other, inside the line of shin bone. I see his lines every morning in the mirror.

VII.

I woke & again I woke, to find her smiling
at me, & turned to return to soft sleep
in the green pillow. A tree, growing down-
ward as I dreamed we all would or hoped
we would, against my god or what they
gave me as my god, their god, given them
against their will, we punish the gener-
ation that succeeds us.

Did I mean to say he did that. No, he
never tried to bend my life, never stood
between me & the sun, this tree grew where
the seed fell. A new lease on life? For
him? In the thick dark forest the trees
grow tall before they extend wings. Tall
green pillow.

They found a desert & made it bloom, made
it green, but even the trees feel blue
smoke curling among their branches, the
smoke that holds away the frost, the early
message that fills our hearts with ice,
lovely to taste fresh from the branch,
but it doesnt travel well. All stones
rolled together, long enough & they will
all be dust, hanging in the air over our
blue lakes.

Prophecy is finally simple, & simply a
pair of eyes thru which the blue of the
sky travels, an observation thru a lens.

VIII.

Staring straight into his eyes for the
first time, I see the blue, a sky with
some puffy white clouds many miles away.
Step into the nearby field, over the sill,
into footprints that disappear as I step
into them, into the blue sky that is not
above but straight in front of me. Straight
eyes, in all the photographs, & in one old
brown kodak print of the family assembled
I look into his oval eyes & see inside
them a man walking backward, out of his
footsteps.

My eyes are brown, walking inside them
would be moving over burned grass on low
hills. They found a desert & made it bloom.
I move closer, zooming into his eyes &
find the first aperture completely filled
with one petal of a blue flower, a close-
up of a star weeping in surrender to the
earth, a tear, Aurora weeping helplessly
on the edge of the Blue Nile.

He's no sun of mine, I never stood between
him & the brightness, the mistakes I make
will live as long as these ovals stay open.
I walkt into his open eye, over the sill
& saw two enormous black holes in the sky.
A voice came thru a nose & reduced them
to personality. I had never said the word
poetry without a funny accent.

IX.

"Men who love wisdom should acquaint themselves with a great many particulars."
Cutting the crisp apple with a French knife
I saw that the worm had lived in the core
& chewed his way out, something I've seen
a thousand times & never understood & while
I'm looking he's on the other side of the
green tree picking. One two one two, the
wisdom of the tree filling his picking bag,
its weight strapt over his shoulders. He
showed me, you cross the straps like this
& keep it high. Get above the apples & look
down at them.

& I still do it wrong, reaching up, picking with sore arms, strain rather than wisdom filling me not the bag. He said the
safest step on the ladder is the top, he
was trying to get me up, & always right,
this one I have learned & Saturday I was
on the top step picking apples, wanting
someone to advise. That is how one becomes
acquainted, working to gather.

It could be a woman but is it a woman. Is
it a woman you can work together with, is
it a woman you know doesnt feel the particulars as you do, they are apples, not the
picking of them, the filling. She has been
without a man for years, she offers ladders,
tools, bags for the apples. You want someone to advise to be him, but do it silently
knowing your expertise is somehow, known.

X.

I did not see him lying on the grass, I
may as well have been under the ground,
perhaps entangled in the tree growing down-
ward, an earth. His earth, our particular
earth, as it sifts back & forth, composing
like dust on a piano. The piano is black
but where it has been rubbed it is brown.
He never sat at a piano, only an old black
typewriter with round keys, making faint
words.

So faint they barely heard him. It was Aug-
ust & the grass dry, the thin words rose
like a tree into the air, lightly, as blue
as the thin smoke hanging over the green
fairway. It has nothing to do with justice.
He spent thousands of hours in those trees
picking pennies for me, this day he was
knocking them into a hole, I'm glad to hear
that.

In the ocean light of the ward window his
eyes are barely blue & deep in his head
like my daughter's. He woke again to see
me smiling at him, his head straight in
the pillow, a rock nearly round. In the
desert the rocks simply lie upon each other
on the ground, a tree is overturned out
of the ground, its shallow widespread roots
coiled around small rocks. By these fruits
we measure our weight & days.

Sept. 14 - Oct. 5, 1973

Liz Magor /
INTERVIEW & IMAGES

Liz Magor has developed a well integrated body of work that arises out of her profound respect for the structures of animals. In her first pieces she covered 'found' skulls with stitched leather masks, and set animal teeth multiples in styrofoam cushions. Recently she has created fictitious animals out of real and cast parts, sometimes presenting them as rugs.

In this interview and the two following, the interviewers, identified by initials, are Ann Rosenberg and Steve Harris.

AR How did you find the Vancouver School of Art as a place to work?

LM I didn't go to school very much, I just signed up and did my work at home. I didn't meet anyone there or make any friends until the graduating exhibition (1971). When I was there, the school was in a morbid state, the halls were empty, the rooms were empty.

AR Did any of the teachers suggest in what style you should work?

LM Nobody laid any trips on me about what I should do and how I should do it. I was registered in Design because I had that kind of background from New York, and, anyway, by the time you are in fourth year they figure you are already gone. I used the school for technical advice — resin, fibreglass — no one passed any kind of judgments, the training was all technical.

AR Why were you trained in design?

LM Don, my husband, was the one who talked me into art school in the first place. I thought artists had to draw. In fact I thought all artists did at school was drawing. I liked to make things, yet the sort of sculpture I knew about didn't fit with my sense of practicality. I have horrible doses of practicality that led me to believe, then, that anything that I would want to invent or do should have a reason, like a chair. So I was trained in Industrial Design in New York, but at school I made things that couldn't do anything.

But in New York, I began to see what was going on. I saw that Claes Oldenburg was making things that weren't marble, wood and bronze. There are so many galleries there, I learned so much. I overdosed myself, got myself into a guy's train of thought — there were great retrospectives of people like de Kooning and Barnett Newman.

AR Well, now that you feel free to do as you please, as an artist, you seem to have a great interest in animals, real and imaginary. Are you really fond of animals? Do you like animals more than people?

LM It is not because I like animals, it is not because I hate people, but a cross between those ideas. I think that man has come to think that he is God of the Earth, you know the old idea that man is made in the image of God. I am reacting to that, it is not that I think that we are better or that animals are better, but rather it is a reaction to the idea that no one blinks an eye when we make a rug out of a polar bear. I wonder why anyone should be uptight if we made a rug out of a movie star? Let's take the finest specimens of mankind and do the same thing with them that we do with the finest specimens of animals. There are plenty of us around, lots of us to spare.

I am also reacting to the idea that we take people like Beethoven (or any example of mankind at its greatest) and say this is what mankind is. But people like him are exceptions to the rule, just freaks. Most of us are just ordinary, base, animals — not that talented — hunters and farmers. And if we are animals, and we are so biologically, then we must be the worst animals. Our intellect has buggered everything up.

I think it is narrow-minded to say that animals have no intellect. I heard this great seagull story. The seagulls, whose population has increased so much over the last few years, are hungry, they fly around the black tower and around the Vancouver Block where the National Film Board Offices are, voracious. This friend of mine, who works at the Vancouver Block had a six inch ruler to prop up her window and, one day,

a seagull came and took it. She saw the seagull fly away with it so she propped up the window with a box. About a half an hour later she heard the ruler fall into the window. The bird had brought it back. Now that's not instinct, that's thinking.

AR So, when you figured out that art today was anything you wanted to make, you were happy?

LM Yes, and I realized that how long it takes to make it, or how long it lasts doesn't matter anymore.

AR But you do care about technique.

LM Yes, but I know the things I make will not last as long as marble or bronze, but I think of making them carefully enough that they will last a lifetime.

I don't worry about making my things to last forever, because it is another audacious thought that this earth, this planet will go on for ever. Sometimes I have this feeling that we only have twenty or thirty years left, in that case I would be wasting my time to make things super-permanent. I also think I may be wasting my time sitting in my studio making these things in the first place.

I would rather be out in nature looking at the birds, discovering things on this planet that are not going to be here much longer. When I think of that I think that maybe conceptual artists have the right idea, because they are not taking up all their time making objects . . .

AR What do you think you would like to do next?

LM I like the idea of natural multiples, like when you are looking at a flock of birds, they are all so like, all so perfect, it is as if they all popped out of the same mold. I would like to make things like that (Gathie Falk's apples are a similar idea). For example I would like to make some identical kits with the pieces set in a vacuumform mold; kits of bird bones, chickens. In fact I bought a dozen chickens and took the meat off, put them outside to let the bugs finish, but the rats got them and the idea fell through.

But I think that I will do the same thing with the nests I have collected. Every robin makes a nest with exactly the same dimensions, it is always 4 inches across the top and 4½ inches deep, the materials might vary a little bit according to where they build it, but the dimensions will be the same. All the birds behave this way, you can tell a thrush's nest from a hummingbird's, they are natural multiples. They must have some mold-making device in their head, I guess.

So I have taken a robin's nest apart and you get a pile of big twigs, a pile of small twigs, a pile of fine grass, a few hairs, and I would put these into a vacuumform package and suggest by this that people, if they think they are so fucking smart, should make their own bird's nests. I mean the birds just know how to do it, and they keep on doing it, nobody tells them how.

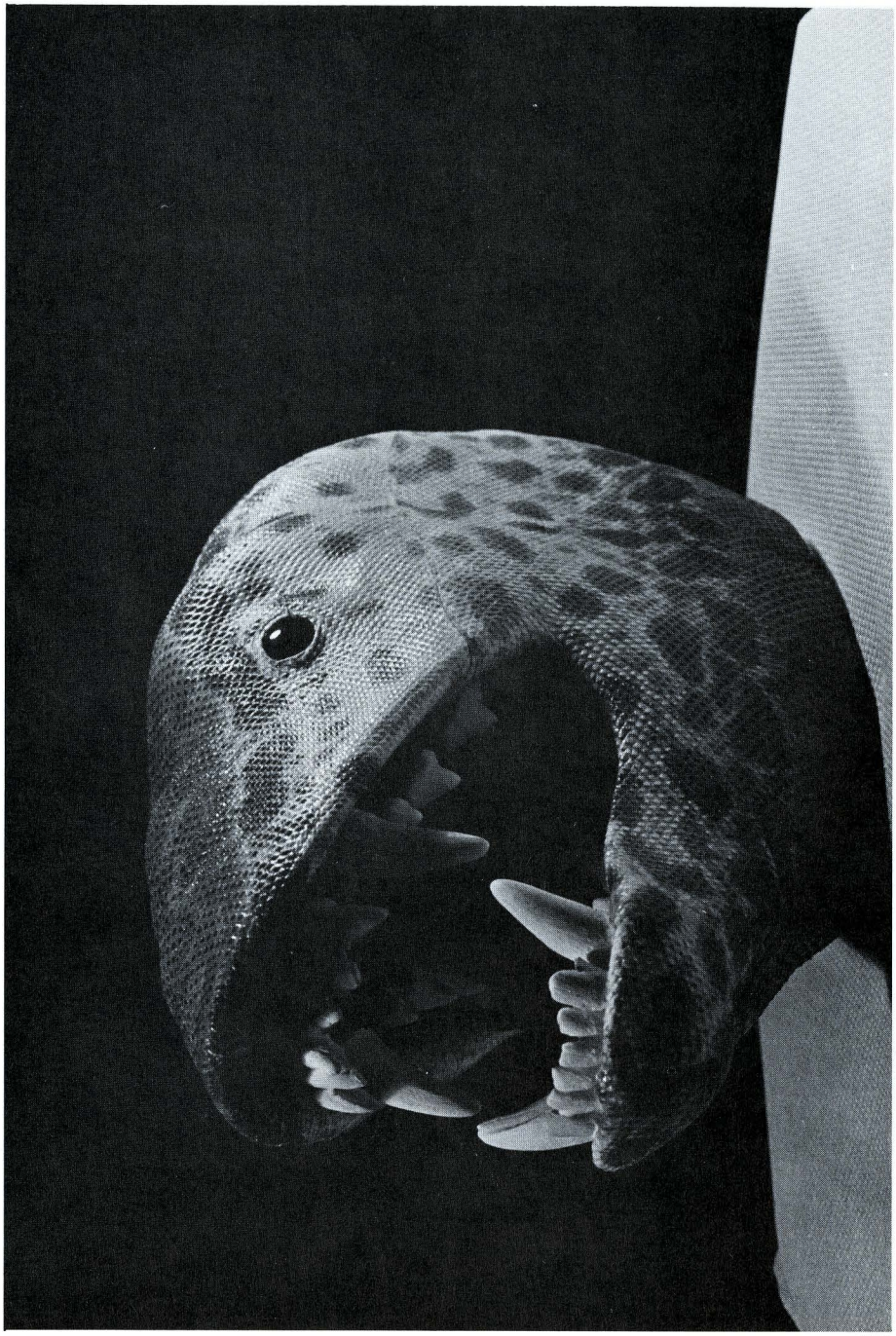
EXHIBITIONS

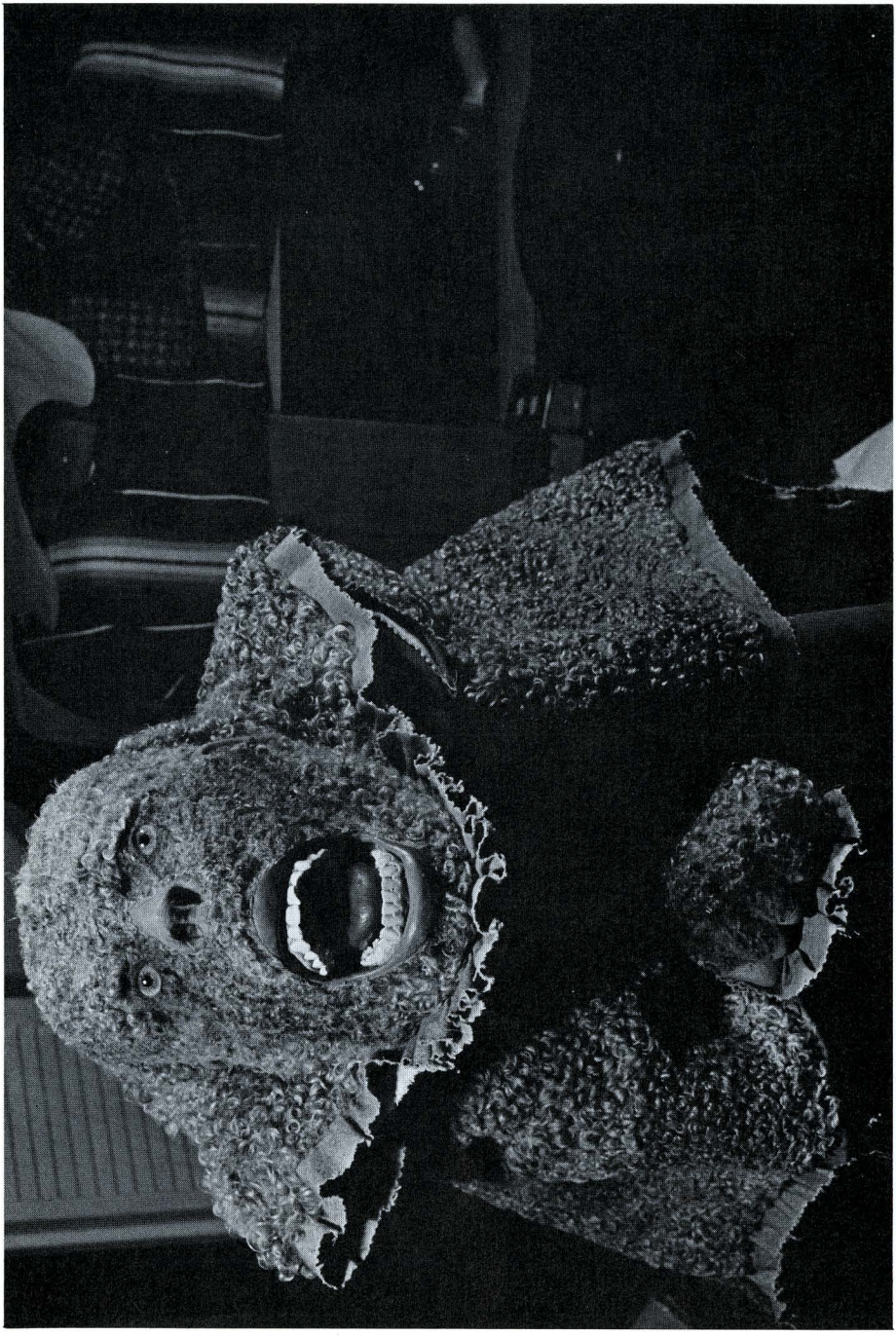
Stand Back You Fools. Burnaby Art Gallery, 1973.
Multiples. Burnaby Art Gallery, 1973.
Pacific Vibrations. Vancouver Art Gallery, 1973.
Librations. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1973.

IMAGES

Amputata Tyrannus (Male & Female), 1974, mixed media, lifesize.
Draco-ornata, 1974- , mixed media, lifesize.
Nonnus Atavus (detail), 1974, mixed media, lifesize.
Nonnus Atavus (front view).

Photography: Timmun Alariaq





Art Green /
INTERVIEW & IMAGES

Art Green, a recent immigrant to Canada, has just begun to exhibit in B.C. His paintings present a number of preferred motifs simultaneously and symmetrically within the borders of illusionistically painted rips. The colours are deep and resonant; the medium is oil on canvas.

AG After art school some friends and I formed a group called the *Hairy Who* which attained great notoriety in Chicago. We put out a comic book with each show and in the last show we did, we covered the walls with garish linoleum. One art critic, groping for a way of describing our work, said it reminded him of looking out of doors on a rainy day and seeing a wet hose pipe in the backyard. We became very famous in Chicago, and that can be detrimental to someone who is just out of art school. I did less and less work and the last year I was in Chicago, I hardly painted at all, because I was working at three teaching jobs in the school system.

AR Does Chicago contemporary art differ from the art of other American cities?

AG Chicago art is concerned with the primitive, with very personal experiences, with the art of insane people. It is less interested in formal concerns than is New York. There are lots of art museums where surrealist art is featured, Ivan Albright might be the best known Chicago American apart from Claes Oldenburg who lived in Chicago until he was twenty-three. His work is personal in the way much Chicago work is personal — he has always said that his art is original because he made it up as a kid. He didn't speak English, so he created his own private parallel world for which there were road maps and a daily newspaper. As in Claes Oldenburg, much Chicago art arises from personal circumstance. Jim Nutt, whose work is the best known of all *Hairy Who* artists does paintings that are strong and primitive. One would assume from his work that he is a complete acid freak, whereas in reality he is concerned with the classical and lives a traditional life.

AR How did you come to Canada?

AG I was offered a job at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, in 1969, the self-proclaimed conceptual art capital of the universe. It was a great shock to come from a place where I was overvalued to a place where I was undervalued.

The president of the school in Nova Scotia came up to see me one day, looked over my shoulder and said, "Well, I guess you can't call what you're doing art? Just what would you call what you're doing?" But he was really keen on conceptual art. When I first got there, there was a huge argument going on between the man who ran the art gallery and a conceptual artist who had been paid a thousand dollars for this idea for an exhibition, which was to spill five gallons of black paint on the gallery floor. The artist himself had refused to execute the idea, then was furious because the person who actually poured the paint on the gallery floor had moved the can a little, as he was pouring, screwing up the artist's concept.

Then Vito Acconci [a New York based conceptual artist] came up to make a lithograph at the school's print workshop that involved him putting lipstick on and smearing it on the stone — it was called *Kiss Off*, or something like that. Vito announced that he was going to do a print on the director's body, and so the director, thinking this was going to be a world-beater thing, something that would go down in the annals of art history, got video equipment to document the event. So what Vito did was to have the director roll up his pant leg, and bit him very hard in the leg, hard enough to draw blood and then rubbed printer's ink into it. This monoprint got infected, it was festering (allegedly) from Vito Acconci's teeth!

It's not that I hate conceptual art, it's that I hate fads in art where suddenly everyone is doing the same thing, and really it is that thirty-thousand people are doing one or two people's work. And when the fad is over, everyone can dump it, but the one or two people who started it have, in a sense, their work discredited. And there again, in the Nova Scotia environment, I did less and less work. But after two years were up, I got a Canada Council grant and began to paint again.

AR Has your work changed since you came to B.C. in 1972?

AG I think it has. I have just started to put mountains into my paintings and my colour sense is changing. I must point out, however, that the landscape I have been using is not the landscape around us. In one painting I have included a moon over water — this came from a postcard that I got when I married. It is such a horrible image that you only know that it *is* the moon over the water because you have seen the real moon over the water. I used it because it fitted in with the way I select images, though it is there in my work, possibly, because I now live in B.C. I am concerned with the tension that is set up between the real landscape we know and this type of commercial image.

Similarly, I used to use an ice cream cone a lot in my paintings, a perfect, idealized ice cream cone, like those pictures of Tastee Freeze cones with a nice rose-red outline around them — all airbrushed and perfect like the girls in *Playboy*. When you buy your ice cream and hold it up against the picture of it, there's no resemblance, but you accept it and eat it. That was what brought me to the tires I use in my work. In the thirties Firestone ran ads of huge tires with a racing driver beside them and these tires came down like a waterfall with colours, cascading, like a rainbow. *Fantastic*. If you saw a car with tires like that you would stop dead in your tracks.

Similarly with the wood-grain in my paintings, I don't really look at wood, but do a schematisization of woodgrain; my fire is not real fire, it's printed fire. I like to paint things that project a tension between the idea of them and the reality.

AR Was technique stressed in the art school you went to?

AG Well, my own technique is rather limited but it serves my purposes. I remember that the artist Magritte said that he only wished to paint well enough to become a hack painter, because he was more interested in representing ideas. But when I went to school it was in the dying days of abstract expressionism. The class stars were people who had beautiful signatures — Art Green is too flat for that. The guy who painted next to me, called Herbert Zeiden, drove an abstract expressionist teacher we had quite crazy because he would begin with pure painted abstraction then, half way through, out of the painting would loom a train with a very specific engine type (like Pacific 242), and soon tracks would be going in and out. The teacher would feel that the pure aesthetic moment had been destroyed.

So I had a hard time. I am not really interested in painting. At school I preferred drawing. My paintings are colourful, but I am totally uninterested in colour. I am taken aback when someone comes up to me and says, "Ah, that's amazing, that red is wanting to come out but you've held it back and that blue . . . " I am totally blind to any of that, I don't know what the hell he is talking about. Or someone else will say, "You've tied the canvas right in the middle, there. It shouldn't work, but it works . . . " And I just don't understand. I think colour and design concepts like that are aids to teaching that come after the fact, but you can't make a painting out of them, and if you did, it wouldn't be very interesting.

EXHIBITIONS

Hairy Who. Three exhibitions, Chicago, 1966-1968.

Three Man Show. Chicago: Allen Frumpkin Gallery, 1968.

Hairy Who. San Francisco Art Institute, 1968.
New York: School of Visual Art, 1968.
Washington: Museum of Modern Art, 1968.

Three Man Show. Paris: Dorothy Speyer Gallery, 1969.

One Man Show. Sackville, N.B.: Owens Art Gallery, 1973.

One Man Show. Burnaby Art Gallery, 1973.

Two Man Show. Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts, 1974.
1974.

One Man Show. Chicago: Phyllis Kind Gallery, 1974.

One Man Show. Vancouver: Bau-Xi Gallery, 1974.

Canadian Canvas. Cross Canada travelling group show, 1975.

IMAGES

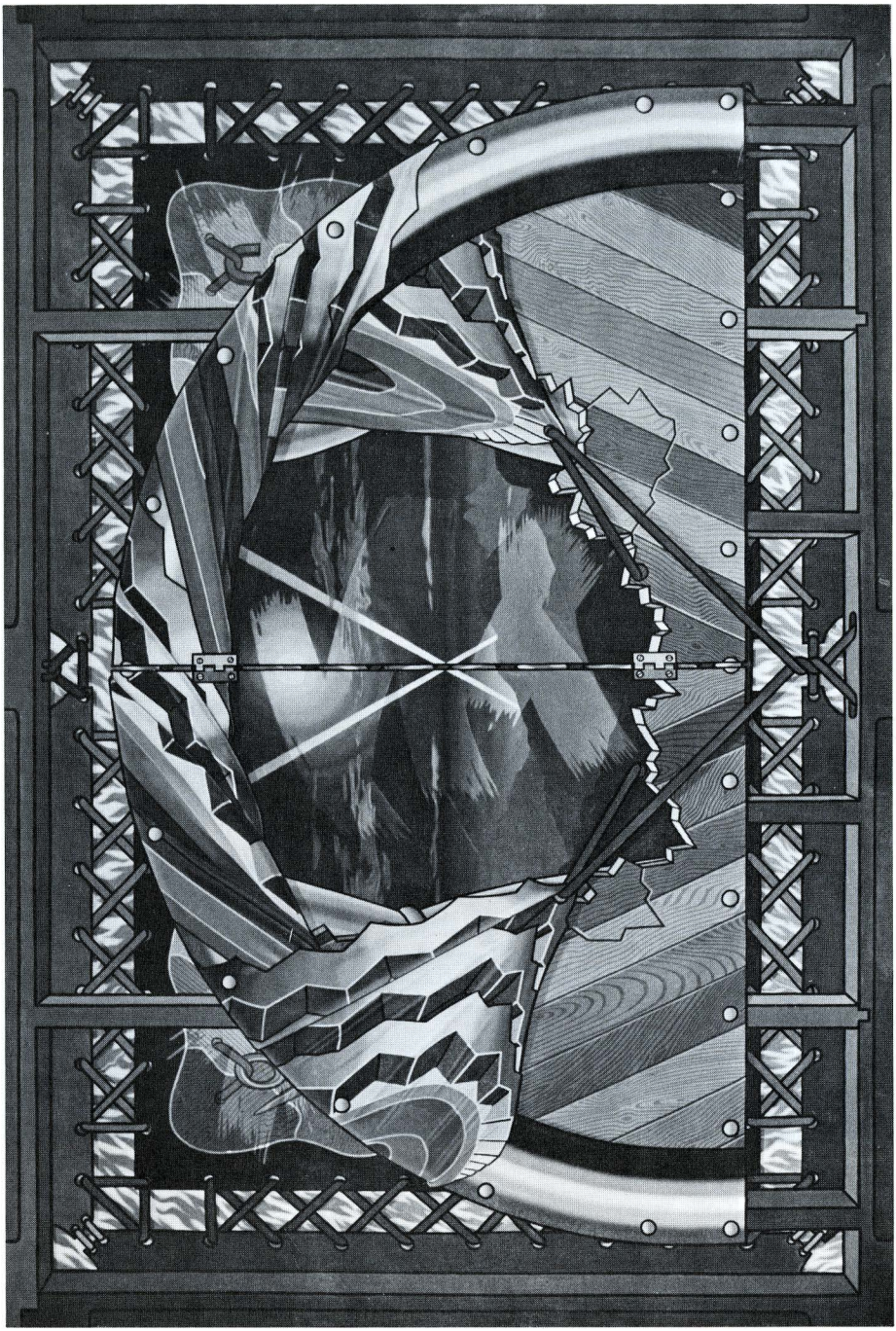
Undivided Attention, 1974, oil on canvas, 48″ x 72″.

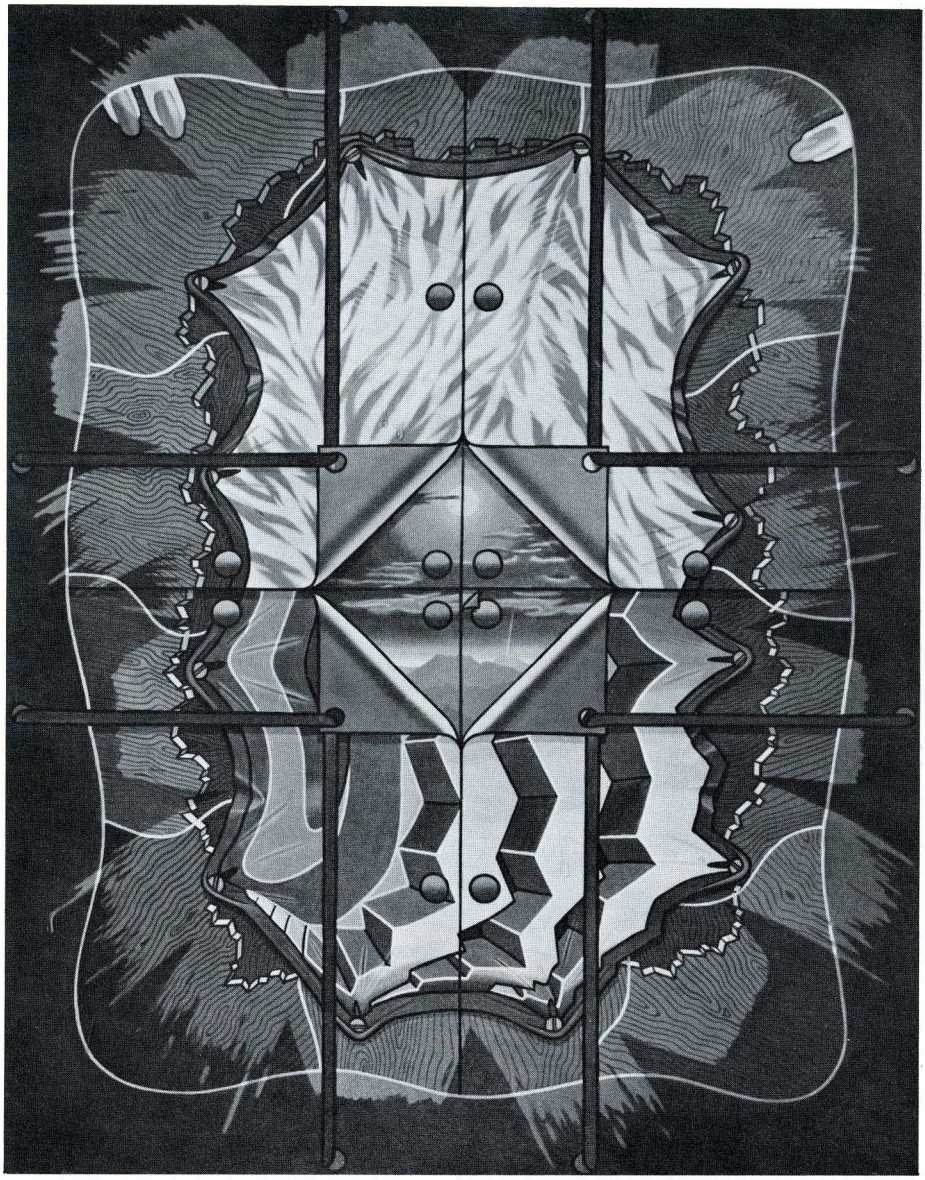
Deceptive Practices, 1974, oil on canvas, 48″ x 36″.

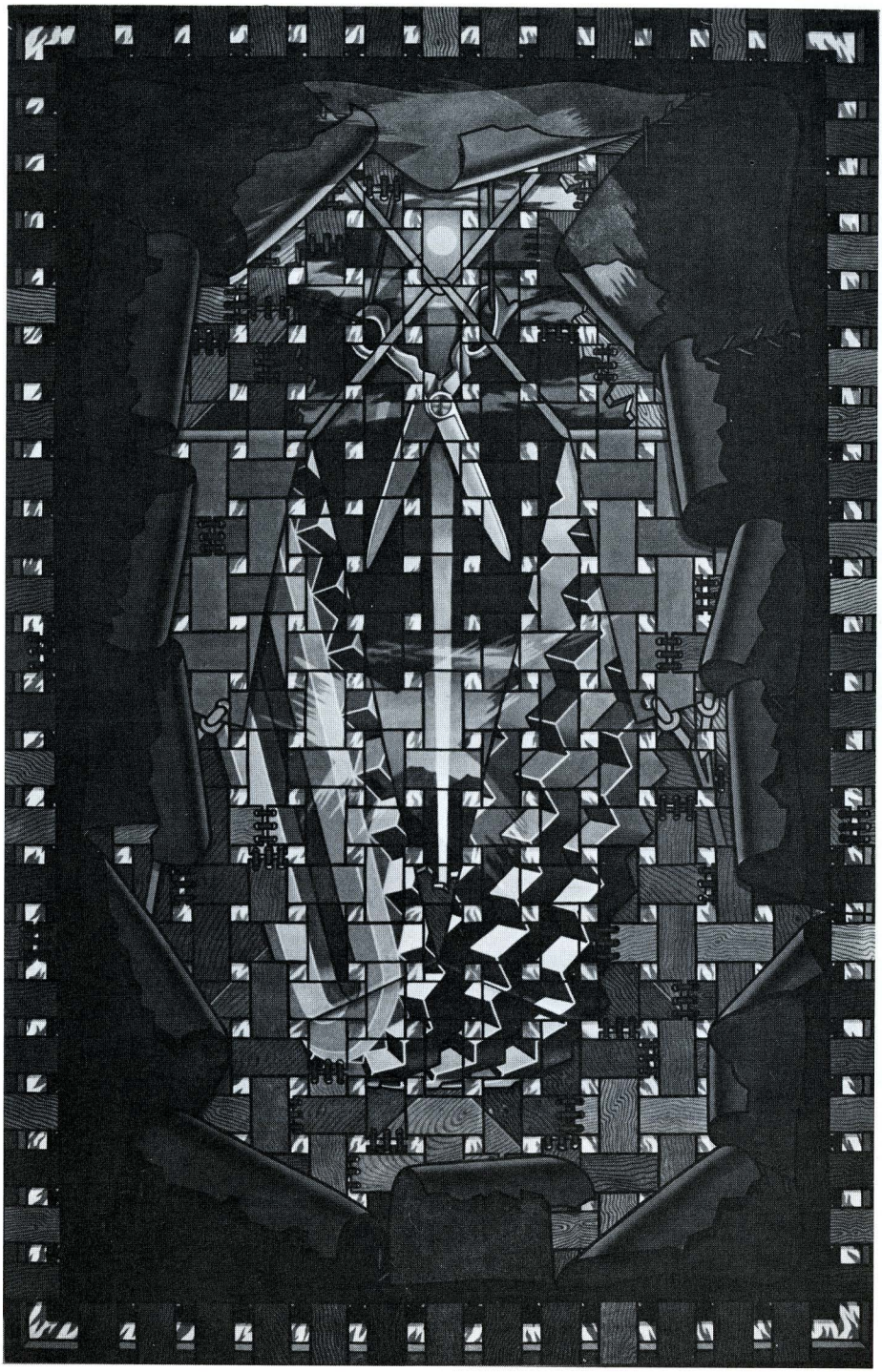
Irreversible Condition, 1974, oil on canvas, 72″ x 48″.

Troubled Sleep, 1974, oil on canvas, 72″ x 48″.

Photography: Mike Maxwell







Richard Prince /
INTERVIEW & IMAGES

Richard Prince is a prolific young sculptor whose works explore concepts related to local landscape, the action of the wind on land, literary and scientific ideas regarding nature. His pieces often include machines that can be activated by the spectator. The book illustrated here has the meticulous craftsmanship and economy of expression that distinguishes all his work.

RP I studied Fine Arts (History) at UBC from 1967-1971, before there was a studio program. Though I did take some studio courses, they were so informal that they could hardly count. Anyway, I think artists should have a strong academic background. It is rather odd that most of my training as an artist was obtained at the Vancouver School of Art on a casual basis. When I wanted to know something, like how to make plaster casts, I would just go down there and watch someone do it. It is a lot easier way to learn technique than spending years doing someone's exercises in art classes. But I mustn't underplay the importance of that incredible class I was in at UBC, taught by Toni Onley — fantastic group of people. It was one of those occasions when no one was really depending on the teacher, yet it was a curious moment in time when things just happened to work. All of us were over that hippie stuff, and we also thought that any kind of self-motivated work was valid, so we did a lot of it.

My parents were into crafts and I was encouraged to diddle and play but at the same time it was understood that I should not be so irresponsible as to become an artist. And whatever I made had to be well-done and finished. And that was a good thing, I think, it gets you away from self-indulgent work. Some of the things I am doing now go back to the time when I was 13 years old, and that worries me sometimes.

Claes Oldenburg maintains that he learned his style when he was a little boy, so some others do. I know that the possibilities (without radical change in content) are still expanding for me in those areas where I began.

I am doing things now where the object itself isn't the pure conveyor of the notion. For example in the wind machines, the concept is very important, and the vehicle of the concept is really electronic gear. I have a piece that I am considering now that will consist of a wind pressure recorder placed outside on the roof of a house, which will be coupled to a wind duplicator

inside the house that will reproduce qualitatively the actions of the real wind outside. It will probably look like a console record player, maybe it should even have some teakwood around it. It will duplicate the wind outside on a small scale in terms of direction and amount.

I haven't decided whether it will be always on or whether it will have a proximity switch that will sense the heat of a person beside it, or will respond to being spoken to, like to "Hello, how's the wind today?" I also think I might add on a memory, although that is going to be difficult because the information will have to be digitized, so that you could choose to dial yesterday's wind and then today's.

AR Your first works had no active parts and were pure landscape sculpture but this piece concerns landscape but is a machine. What is the first piece you made that relates to the wind-concept machine you are considering now?

RP *East Wind, West Wind* was the first. Attached to the ends of a plexiglass box are two fans powered by a battery that is suspended under the box by exposed wires. You can turn on one fan for the east wind and one for the west. They can't go on simultaneously.

SH Your landscape is very idealized, and this seems to relate to its meticulousness and a desire to get everything perfect.

RP Well, I think that once I achieved the effect you described I tended to perpetuate it. The surfaces are not unemotional, but at the same time they are analytical. They have a cool appearance when they are finished, but the ideas behind them are really quite romantic. No aspect of the cruel weird scientist is explored, I am never intellectually concerned with the cruel. My pieces always are based in ideas from the landscape or upon human experience in the landscape, I am definitely not a pessimist.

In my experience, things always seem the way they are supposed to be. My experiences at Tastee Freeze seem to demonstrate that the product always lives up to its image, as advertised. I used to marvel at the way the ice cream was always served up with three bulges and that marvellous little curl on the end. And how many times have you seen an imperfect car? When they come out of the factory, they always look just right. Have you ever seen one with the bumper on upside down? And there's so many of them too!

AR What are you thinking of doing now?

RP I am thinking of doing more books, like the one you have photographed. There is an aspect of concrete poetry about that one, but I really thought of it in terms of words I liked. I knew when I started that it was going to be a book, but I hadn't worked out the technical problems. So the first image I made was *trees* and about a year later I thought *sails* would be nice. And maybe a year later I chose *Airstream*. Then it was a surprise that the words went together even better than the images did. They are all aerial, all environmental.

I want to make a scene out of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, a sculpture of his very three-dimensional, very detailed description of the place where Cora is buried. I want also to illustrate the *Lady of Shalott* and the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

I also want to do a piece with rotating compasses on landscape fragments that will state with a progressive difficulty in comprehension and a progressive sense of disorientation through the four phases, the idea of finding your direction in space. Where do you go? How do you get there? And where are you when you do get there?

And of course I am still into my wind things.

EXHIBITIONS

Directions (with Dean Ellis). Vancouver Art Gallery, 1972.

Pacific Vibrations. Vancouver Art Gallery, 1973.

Librations. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1973.

Sights & Sounds of the Canadian North & West. Vancouver: Equinox Gallery, 1973.

Process Editions. Burnaby Art Gallery, 1973.

Summer Show. Vancouver: Equinox Gallery, 1974.

Woodlore & Other Romances. Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1974.

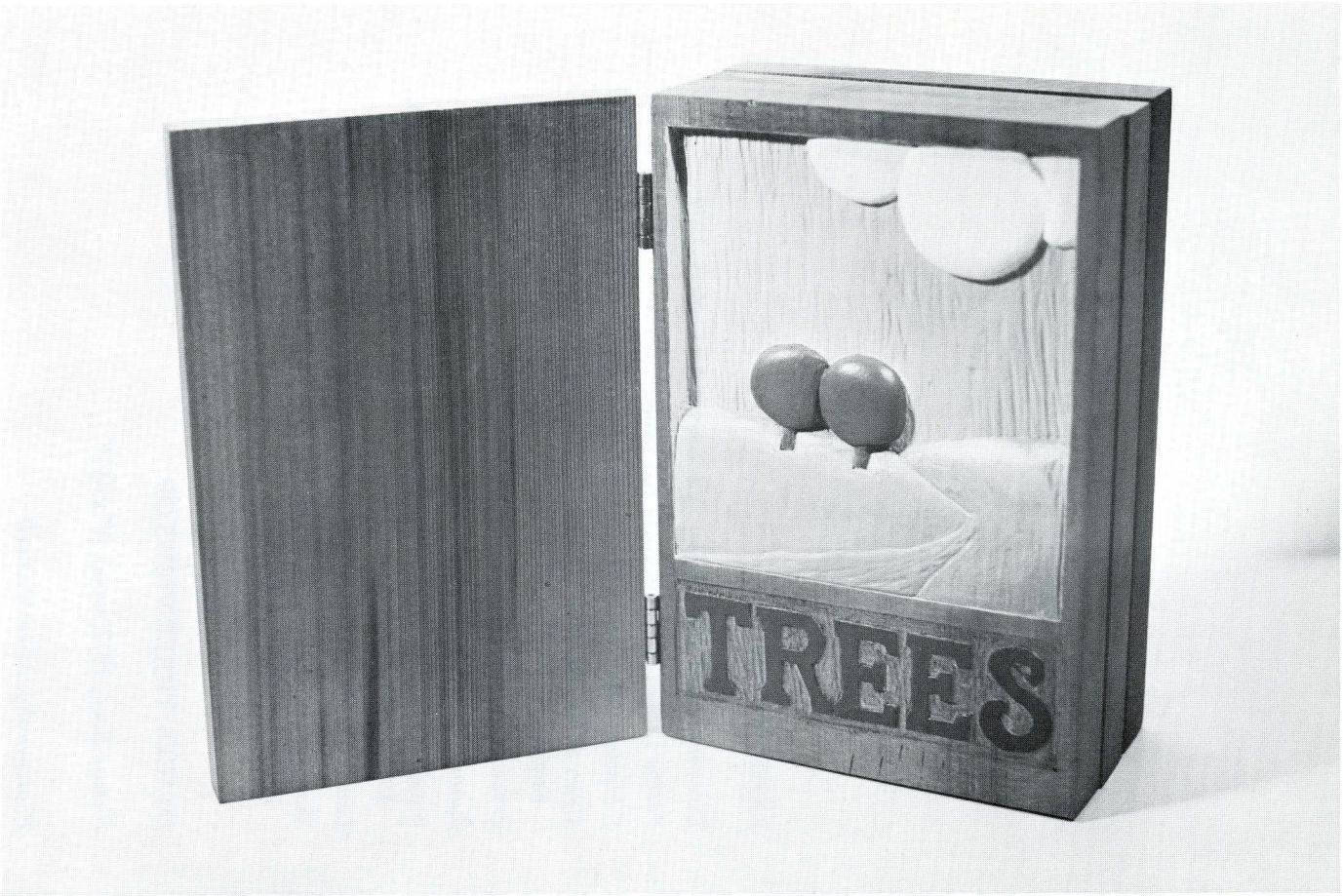
Landscape Abbreviations. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1975.

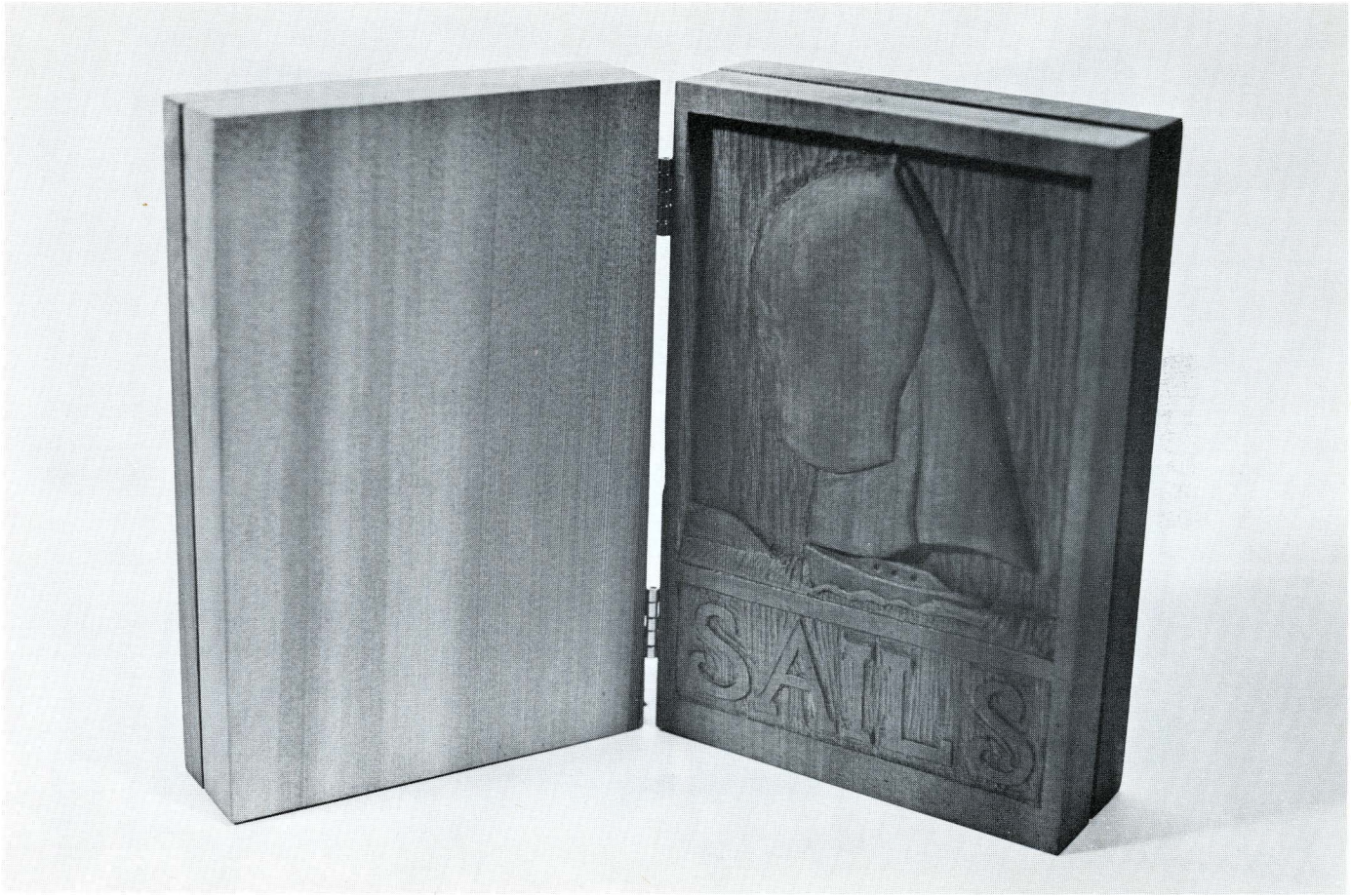
Nine out of Ten. Art Gallery of Hamilton, Art Gallery of Kitchener/Waterloo, 1975.

IMAGES: THREE VIEWS OF

Picture Book, 1972, wood, 6″ x 4½″.

Photography: Mike Maxwell


TREES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AIRSTREAM

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TITLE INDEX

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ZONKO's *Blue Book*, operating manual for the Model-A poem, is now available from Prose and Verses Press. Zonko recently read at the Western Front as part of their Monday Night Reading Series, and at Capilano College in its 1974-75 Poetry Reading Series.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE teaches at Glendon College of York University in Toronto. His published work includes *The Dainty Monsters*, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and *Rat Jelly*. He's also made two films, *Sons of Captain Poetry* and *The Clinton Special*. He recently read at Capilano College in its Poetry Reading Series.

JOHN BENTLEY MAYS is a Toronto writer, teacher, and critic. He has done work in ethno-poetics, particularly with the Kwakiutl tradition, and he has lately moved into fiction with two manuscripts — *Letters to Artaud* and *At Last* — both of which should appear some time next year. His most recent article in *Open Letter*, "Letter to bp Nichol, re: *America A Prophecy*," looks at the structure of Jerome Rothenberg's book and the condition of present day writing.

MARGARET ATWOOD's latest book of poetry, *You Are Happy*, recently appeared from Oxford University Press. In March she came to Capilano College as part of the 1974-1975 Poetry Reading series, and read, among other works, a chapter from her current novel in progress.

MIKE MAXWELL is a student enrolled in the Audio-Visual Program at Capilano College, whose extra photographic work for this issue of *The Capilano Review* is much appreciated. Rumour has it that he attended SFU and drove a cab in a previous life.

DALE DREWERY was formerly a student in the Audio-Visual Program at Capilano College. This is her first publication.

After ten years of steady publication, AUDREY THOMAS is now starting to receive the serious national and international recognition which her work merits. Her novels, stories and plays focus intently on the experience of being a woman. Audrey divides her time between writing and sharing her life with her three daughters, in Vancouver and on Galiano Island. She also has a perpetual itch to travel, of which the stories included here are products. (Photo credits: *John Bunch*, Kumasi: pp. 24, 55, 62. *David Robinson*: p. 110.)

BRIAN FISHER, who has lived and worked in Vancouver for the past fifteen years and now resides on the Sunshine Coast, has exhibited widely since 1965 (Canada, Scotland, France, U.S.A.). His works are included in numerous private and public collections in Canada.

D. J. SIMPSON is a night student in Creative Writing at Capilano College. This is his first publication.

BOB ROSE, who lives in Vancouver, is currently travelling through California and the Yucatan province of Mexico. His poem in this issue has also appeared as a broadside in the Prester John Series, illustrated with a drawing by Gordon Payne.

GEORGE BOWERING's new book of poems, *At War with the U.S.*, is available from Talonbooks. George is currently editing a series of interviews he has done with various writers, some of which will appear in *Open Letter*.

DAVID DAWSON continues living and writing in Seattle, where he also teaches. He recently gave his first reading in Vancouver in ten years. His Coach House Press book, *Ceremonial* (1972) poems 1961-1967, includes many poems which appeared originally in *Tish*.

LARRY EIGNER lives in Swampscott, Massachusetts. *Sparrow 13* was devoted to 13 poems of Larry Eigner's, and in 1974 Black Sparrow Press brought out his *THINGS STIRRING / TOGETHER / OR FAR AWAY*. Most recently, a fine collection from Elizabeth Press: *ANYTHING ON ITS SIDE*.

SUSAN MUSGRAVE's recent book *Gullband* was published by J. J. Douglas at the end of last year. McClelland & Stewart will be bringing out a new collection sometime this year.

BRETT ENEMARK recently read at The Western Front, and continues to work on a large series of poems dealing with Prince George.

STAN PERSKY works at the Mental Patients Association and writes for The Western Voice. He recently published an essay about Indian protest in *Canadian Dimension*, and McClelland & Stewart will be publishing Stan's three volume work: *Gay Males, Women's Oppression and the Dictatorship of the Bourgeoisie.*

LIZ MAGOR, after schooling in New York and Vancouver, has settled in North Vancouver and is now on a Canada Council grant. She was involved in the *Pacific Vibrations* and *Librations* shows, has exhibited several times at the Burnaby Art Gallery, and is presently exploring the possibility of "natural multiples."

ART GREEN arrived in Vancouver in 1972 via Nova Scotia and originally Chicago, where he graduated from that city's Art Institute. A recipient of two Canada Council awards, he now paints and exhibits full time. Last year he had exhibitions in Philadelphia, Chicago and Vancouver, and he now has two works included in the *Canadian Canvas* cross-country exhibition.

RICHARD PRINCE is a graduate of UBC and an ex-topographical map-maker, whose diverse interests are reflected in his fine wind machines and moveable sculptures. He has participated in many exhibitions, including recent shows in Vancouver and Halifax.

ANNE MORLEY is a mature-entry student enrolled in the Audio-Visual Program at Capilano College, and a West Vancouver resident. Her photograph, *Rocks*, which precedes this section, is her first publication.

Many thanks to PENNY CONNELL for preparing the indexes to Numbers 1-6 of *The Capilano Review*.

NEW PRICES FOR
THE CAPILANO REVIEW

The following are the revised back issue, retail, and subscription prices of *The Capilano Review*, until further notice:

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Numbers 1, 3, 4	$ 5.00
Numbers 5, 6	$ 2.00

(Issue No. 2 is sold out.)

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6 issues	$10.00
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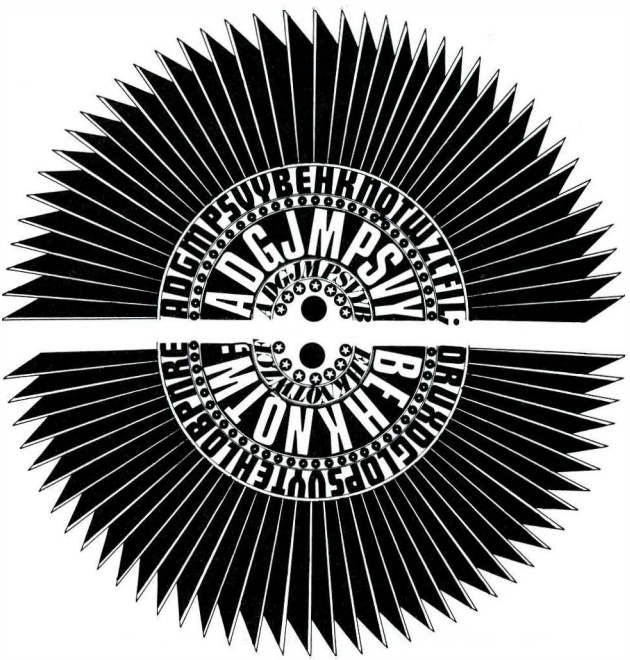

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