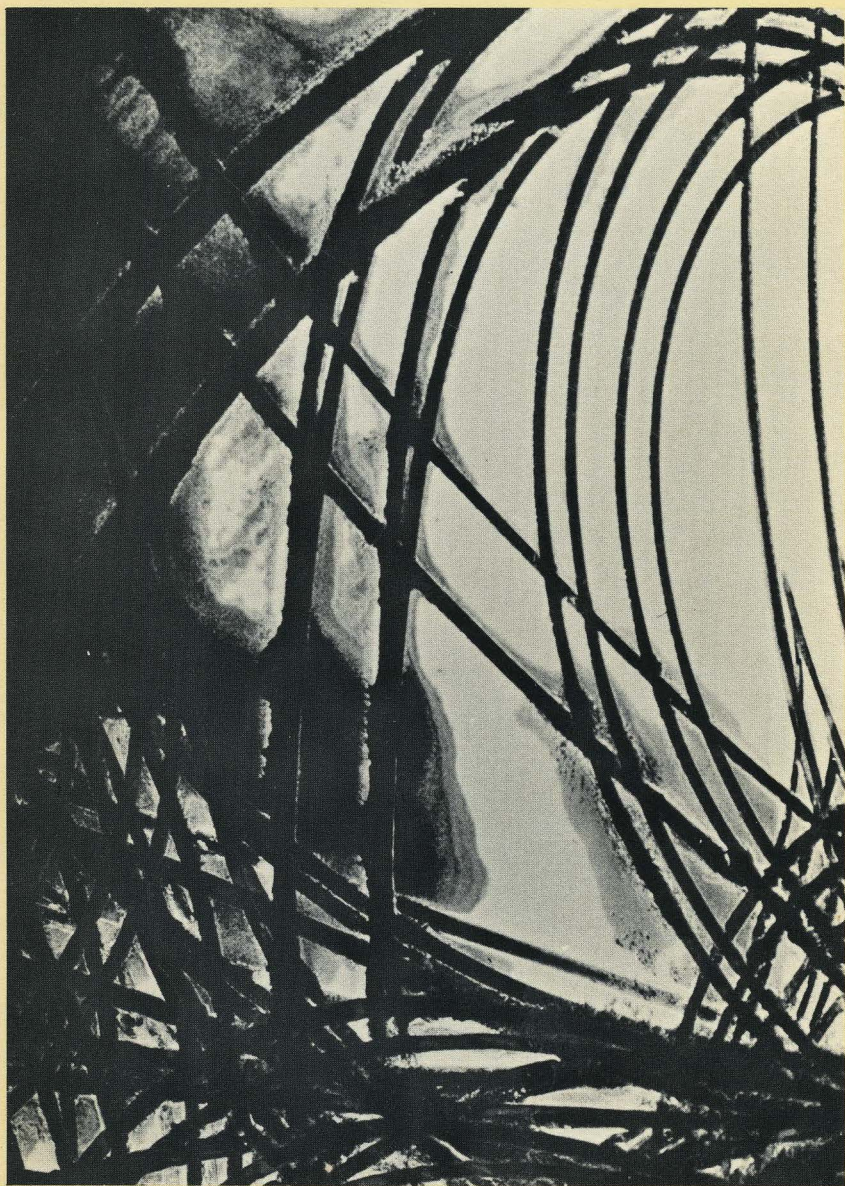


THE CAPILANO REVIEW



I'm going in a circle, one leg longer than
the other. I'd like to find the centre and stop.

— JOHN HARRIS

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THE CAPIRANO REVIEW

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Monty Reid / THE DREAM OF
THE SNOWY OWLS

1

Slow wings. The arrival,
late in October, of snow.
It begins and you have
never learned to expect it
because nothing changes
fast enough. Love,
wisdom, weather.
Owl on a pole.

2

From the overpass north to the beaverdam is eight miles of meander, deadfall. They got up, spread a hard white wax on their skis and broke trail up the creek. Moonlight quilted to the snow, shadow stitched from bare willow branches. Once they heard an owl and stopped. Twice they found the end of tracks. Shit, green bark in the scrub, rosehips with a faint red still in them like wineglasses in the morning, gnawed. The rabbit flushed, then wings.

They remembered angels. How they fell into fresh snow backwards and tried to get up, to walk away in their own footprints; no unnecessary marks. But now in the creekbed sweat cools against their skin and they need motion to release them. Returning, snow filters through gaps in black poplar along the bank, the flakes weightless, as petals off the cherry tree in the garden in May, collapsing not in the late frost but in sunlight afterwards. Two miles out she broke a tip and had to walk the rest of the way.

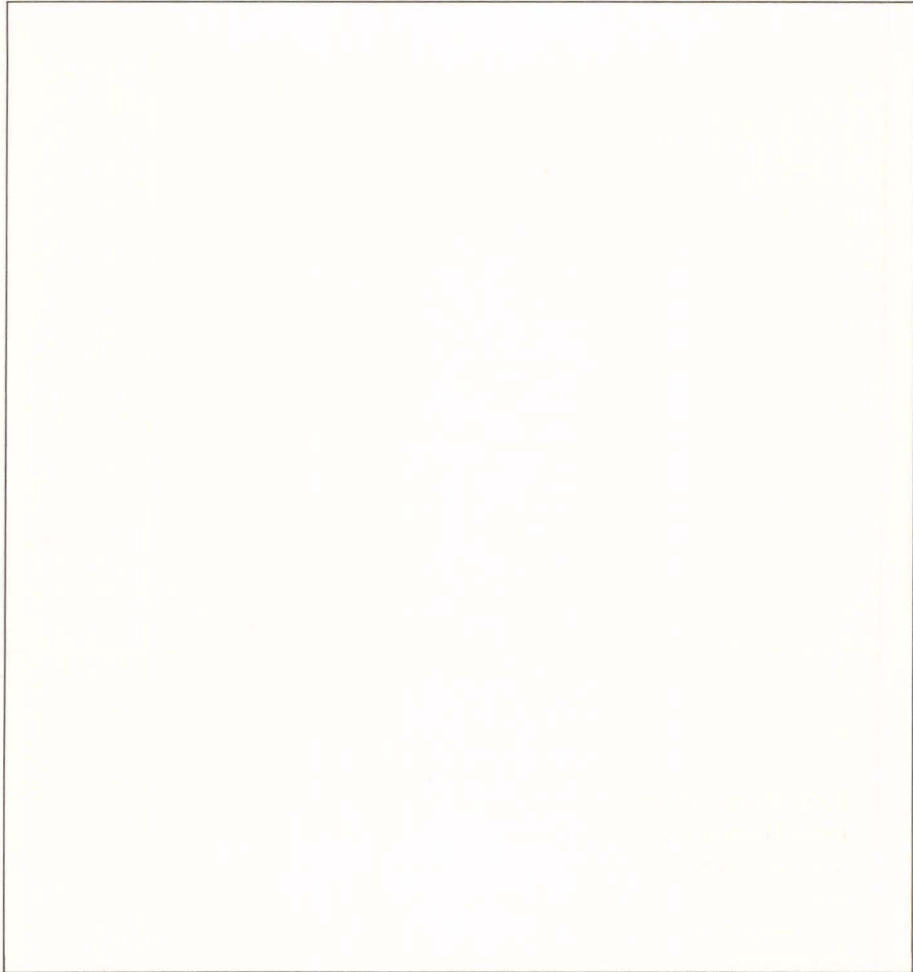
3

He rarely dreams but dreams owls. Fixed eyes.
Snow on the highway. They refuse to move, perched
on shattered roadkill with intestines in their beaks,
brown bands deep across breast and wing. Not the
immaculate birds of midwinter but spring, the hollow
bones brooding with instinct, ready to fly north.

Indifferent. The first one he hit barely moved.
Later, they walked towards the wheels, owl after
owl, exploding like pillows, tho in his hands there
is no feeling. The air is soft as feathers. In the
mirror he would discover them intact, unruffled, pivoting
absolutely, unable to turn only their heads, towards
his disappearance.

In the end it was deliberate. Steering at them, foot
rammed with belief against the floor.

He rarely dreams and when he does the dreams wake him.
Moonlight quivers on the glass.



4

In the summer they are gone.
He sleeps with the window
open and sweats into the pillow.
In the public library, an owl
mounted on a cut maple, a patch
of rabbit fur in its talons.
The librarian cannot remember
who donated it.

5

early March, driving
home from the city
in a wet snow, an
owl
 caught in solid
light, lifted
so slowly from the shoulder

no feather, wing, just
a thud on the glass, an
imagined flailing
out of the light
and behind him

tho he stopped, the
snow melting
audibly
on the pavement



6

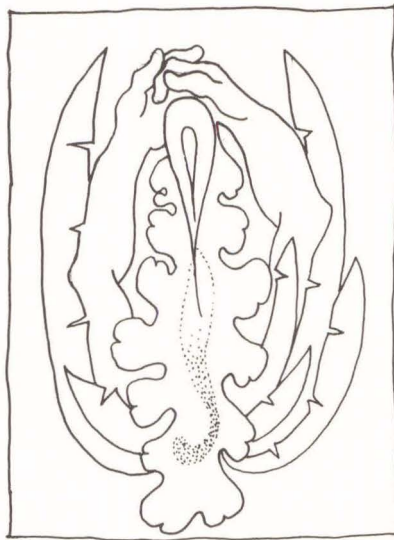
undreamt, the owl
flies from the pole
or does not fly

 that
there are wings, silent,
held, among curtains, glass,
a body of light persistent
in snow, a particular
symmetry

that the owl, at
least, assumes air
and the air
embraces it

Rainer Maria Rilke / THE LIFE OF
THE VIRGIN MARY

Σάλην ἐνγοῶεν ἔχων
Having a storm within



Dora FitzGerald / INTRODUCTION
& TRANSLATION

Russell R. FitzGerald / DRAWINGS

Dora FitzGerald / INTRODUCTION FOR *DAS MARIENLEBEN*

Here is a slender volume of poems of which Rilke writes, "It is a little book that was presented to me, quite above and beyond myself, by a peaceful generous spirit, and I shall always get on well with it, just as I did when I was writing it."¹ This harmonious event took place at Duino in January 1912, yet this was hardly a characteristic mood for Rilke at this time in his life. The preceding month he had written to the proprietress of the Duino Castle that he was creeping around in the thickets of his life, "shouting like mad and clapping my hands. . . . I howl at the moon with all my heart and put the blame on the dogs."²

Later that year, Rilke began work on the Duino Elegies as a voice in the wind carried these words to him: "Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?" (Who, if I cried out, would hear me then among the angelic orders?)³ Of course the angelic orders had already been engaged in dialogue with the cast of characters in *Das Marienleben*, at times in homely simplicity, at others, in dazzling magnificence. Rilke's very real angels interact with both the living and the dead, personifying, if you will, his profound belief in the affirmation of life *and* death.

But why poems about the Virgin Mary when Rilke maintained, as Denise Levertov states, a “lifelong . . . balance between his innate and intense religious emotion and his equally definite rejection of theological monopolies, especially of conventional Christianity”⁴? Actually the subject matter had been introduced to him some 12 years earlier when a friend, an artist named Heinrich Vogeler, presented him with a series of drawings and suggested that it would be nice to have some poems to go with them. Apparently, these drawings did not generate quick poetic response, nor is there any record of them.

Nevertheless, after prolonged exploration of solitude at Duino, Rilke found himself one day in receipt of this series of poems. His Mary is not the saint in crowns and gowns, or bleeding hearts and piercing swords; his Mary is an incredible and totally human woman! Rilke’s Mary in “The Presentation of Mary in the Temple,” in fact, experiences the temple in a manner quite reminiscent of the young Malte Laurids Brigge visting his grandfather’s old manor house known as Urnekloster.⁵

As a little kid, I was brought up speaking German. Since we happened to be at war with Germany at the time, speaking German could hardly be considered an asset. I hated German. And I continued to hate German until the day I started reading Rilke’s “Sonnets to Orpheus” and was dazzled. By the same token, having been raised Lutheran, my only contact with Mary had been when one of the older sweet-faced girls in the Sunday School would wear a blue shawl over her head and be Mary in the Christmas pageant. The BVM that the Catholic kids prayed to was a scary, foreboding icon. Again, Rilke came to the rescue, and thanks to *Das Marienleben*, I now have Mary as one of my all-time favorite heroines.

My pleasure in these poems was shared by Russell FitzGerald, although we had discovered them independently of each other. Russell, a religious painter in the largest sense of the word, had always had a deep affection for Our Lady. Over the years, we often celebrated our delight in these poems, especially by way of the song cycle in which Paul Hindemith set them.⁶ Russell had in mind to create splendid drawings that would capture both the essence of the poems and the line of the Hindemith song cycle, but this project kept getting delayed. Finally, when Russell was already deeply involved in his own dying, he translated each poem into images both powerful and utterly simple. He gave me these drawings as a Christmas present. It was his last work.

Not until almost four years later, through the prompting of a poet friend, did I notice that the existing English translations of the poems were not suitable for his drawings. The various English versions did not convey the excitement and passionate humanity found in the originals. You have here my attempt to convey to English speaking persons the wonder and joy I experience in reading these poems.

You will notice that the subtitle reads, "having a storm within"; it seems a German scholar, Ernst Zimm, did considerable research pertaining to this phrase, and in his book⁷ establishes the fact that the concept that Rilke had intended to convey in the Greek subtitle was "having space within." Feel free to read it as you wish, and may that "peaceful generous spirit" that Rilke perceived find you, too, in reading these poems.

NOTES:

- ¹ Rilke writing to Hugo Salus, June 28, 1913, after the publication of the poems.
- ² Rilke writing to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe, December 30, 1911.
- ³ Opening line of the first Duino Elegy: begun 1912; completed 1922.
- ⁴ From Denise Levertov's "Forward" to Rilke's *Where Silence Reigns* (New Directions, 1978).
- ⁵ See page 24, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* by Rilke (Hogarth Press, 1972).
- ⁶ Recording of *Das Marienleben* (new version 1946) by Paul Hindemith (Nonesuch HB-3007).
- ⁷ *Rainer Maria Rilke und die Antike: Antike und Abendland*, by Ernst Zimm, published in 1948, pages 215-217.

Rainer Maria Rilke / THE LIFE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Translation by Dora FitzGerald



GEBURT MARIÄ

O was muss es die Engel gekostet haben,
nicht aufzusingen plötzlich, wie man aufweint,
da sie doch wussten: in dieser Nacht wird dem Knaben
die Mutter geboren, dem Einen, der bald erscheint.

Schwingend verschwiegen sie sich und zeigten die Richtung,
wo, allein, das Gehöft lag des Joachim,
ach, sie fühlten in sich und im Raum die reine Verdichtung,
aber es durfte keiner nieder zu ihm.

Denn die beiden waren schon so ausser sich vor Getue.
Eine Nachbarin kam und klugte und wusste nicht wie,
und der Alte, vorsichtig, ging und verhielt das Gemuhe
einer dunklen Kuh. Denn so war es noch nie.

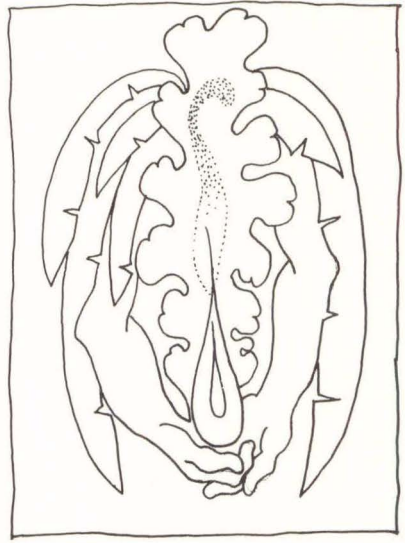


THE BIRTH OF MARY

Oh, what it must have cost the angels,
not to break into song, the way one bursts into tears,
as they well knew: this to be the night in which the boy's
mother would be born, the One, soon to appear.

Hovering, keeping silent, they pointed in the direction,
where, by itself, stood Joachim's farm.
Ah, they felt in themselves and in space the pure concentration,
but none was permitted to go down to them.

Because the two of them were already beside themselves with agitation.
A neighbour woman came and played wise and didn't know how,
and the old man, carefully, went and quieted the lowing
of a dark cow. Because nothing had ever been like this.



DIE DARSTELLUNG MARIÄ IM TEMPEL

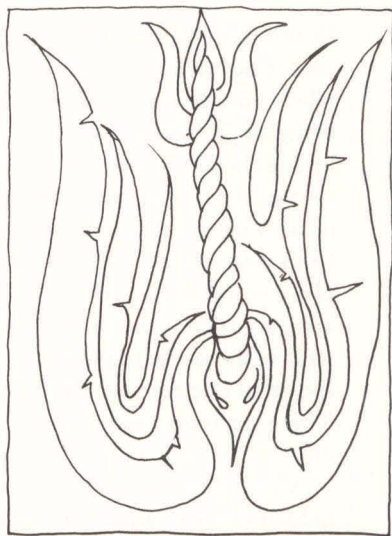
Um zu begreifen, wie sie damals war,
musst du dich erst an eine Stelle rufen,
wo Säulen in dir wirken; wo du Stufen
nachfühlen kannst; wo Bogen voll Gefahr
den Abgrund eines Raumes überbrücken,
der in dir blieb, weil er aus solchen Stücken
getürmt war, dass du sie nicht mehr aus dir
ausheben kannst: du rissest dich denn ein.
Bist du so weit, ist alles in dir Stein,
Wand, Aufgang, Durchblick, Wölbung — , so probier,
den grossen Vorhang, den du vor dir hast,
ein wenig wegzuzerrn mit beiden Händen:
Da glänzt es von ganz hohen Gegenständen
und übertrifft dir Atem und Getast.
Hinauf, hinab, Palast sieht auf Palast,
Geländer strömen breiter aus Geländern
und tauchen oben auf an solchen Rändern,
dass dich, wie du sie siehst, der Schwindel fasst.
Dabei macht ein Gewölk aus Räucherständern
die Nähe trüb; aber das Fernste zielt
in dich hinein mit seinen graden Strahlen — ,
und wenn jetzt Schein aus klaren Flammenschalen
auf langsam nahenden Gewändern spielt:
wie hältst du's aus?

THE PRESENTATION OF MARY IN THE TEMPLE

In order to fathom, what she was like at that time,
you must first call to mind a place,
where columns work in you, where you can empathize
being steps, where vaults full of danger
bridge the abyss of a space,
that stayed in you, because it was piled together
of such pieces, that you can no longer lift them out
from yourself . . . lest you tear yourself down.
Have you gone so far, is everything in you stone,
wall, stairway, vista, arch — then try,
with both hands, to pull back just a little,
the great curtain that you have in front of you . . .
There the most exalted substances glitter
and overwhelm your breath and touch.
Upward, downward, palace looks upon palace,
balustrades stream widening from balustrades
and surfacing at such precipices,
that you, in looking at them, are seized by vertigo.
Meanwhile the foreground is darkened by clouds
from incense burners, but the furthest one aims itself
into you with its piercing rays —
and now as the light from the clear flame basins
plays on the slowly approaching vestments . . .
how do you stand it?

Sie aber kam und hob
den Blick, um dieses alles anzuschauen.
(Ein Kind, ein kleines Mädchen zwischen Frauen.)
Dann stieg sie ruhig, voller Selbstvertrauen,
dem Aufwand zu, der sich verwöhnt verschob:
So sehr war alles, was die Menschen bauen,
schon überwogen von dem Lob

in ihrem Herzen. Von der Lust
sich hinzugeben an die innern Zeichen:
Die Eltern meinten, sie hinaufzureichen,
der Drohende mit der Juwelenbrust
empfang sie scheinbar: Doch sie ging durch alle,
klein wie sie war, aus jeder Hand hinaus
und in ihr Los, das, höher als die Halle,
schon fertig war, und schwerer als das Haus.



MARIÄ VERKÜNDIGUNG

Nicht dass ein Engel eintrat (das erkenn),
erschreckte sie. So wenig andre, wenn
ein Sonnenstrahl oder der Mond bei Nacht
in ihrem Zimmer sich zu schaffen macht,
auffahren — , pflegte sie an der Gestalt,
in der ein Engel ging, sich zu entrüsten;
sie ahnte kaum, dass dieser Aufenthalt

Yet she went and lifted
her gaze, so as to take it all in.
(A child, a little girl amongst women.)
Then she climbed calmly, full of self assurance,
into this extravagance, warped by its own indulgence . . .
so much was everything that men build,
already exceeded by the praise

in her heart. Of her desire
to surrender herself to the inner signs . . .
her parents had meant to present her,
the menacing figure with the jeweled breast
seemed to receive her . . . yet she went through all,
small as she was, beyond each hand
and into her fate, which, higher than this hall,
was already complete, and heavier than this house.

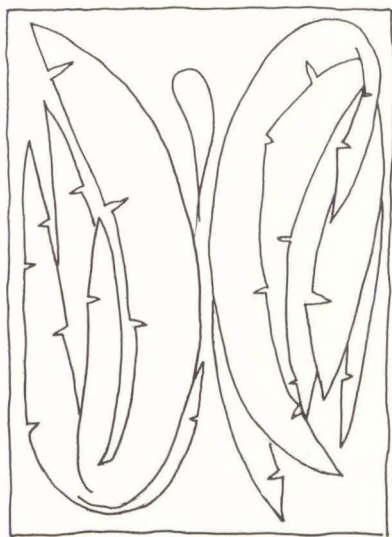


ANNUNCIATION TO MARY

Not that an angel entered (understand this),
was she afraid. As little as others, when
a sunbeam or the moon at night
makes its way around their room,
might startle — she nursed a sense of indignation
at the form in which the angel came,
hardly imagining that this habitation

mühsam für Engel ist. (O wenn wir wüssten,
wie rein sie war. Hat eine Hirschkuh nicht,
die, liegend, einmal sie im Wald eräugte,
sich so in sie versehn, dass sich in ihr,
ganz ohne Paarigen, das Einhorn zeugte,
das Tier aus Licht, das reine Tier — .)
Nicht, dass er eintrat, aber dass er dicht,
der Engel, eines Jünglings Angesicht
so zu ihr neigte, dass sein Blick und der,
mit dem sie auf sah, so zusammenschlugen,
als wäre draussen plötzlich alles leer
und, was Millionen schauten, trieben, trugen,
hineingedrängt in sie: nur sie und er;
Schaun und Geschautes, Aug und Augenweide
sonst nirgends als an dieser Stelle — : sieh,
dieses erschreckt. Und sie erschraken beide.

Dann sang der Engel seine Melodie.

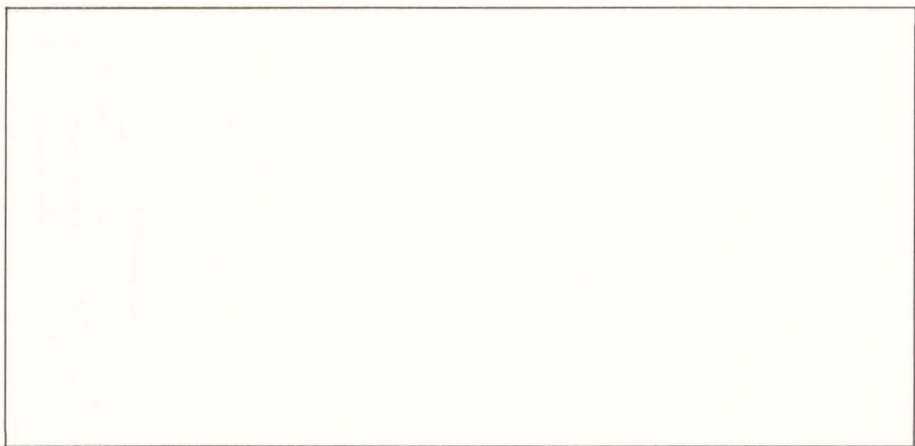


MARIÄ HEIMSUCHUNG

Noch erging sie's leicht im Anbeginne,
doch im Steigen manchmal ward sie schon
ihres wunderbaren Leibes inne, —
und dann stand sie, atmend, auf den hohn

is tiresome for angels. (Oh, if we only knew,
how pure she was. Did not a deer,
which, lying, once see her in the forest,
and so lost itself in her, that it,
entirely without mating, conceived the unicorn,
that animal of light, that pure beast —)
Not that he came in, but that he bowed down,
this angel, a young man's face
so close to her, that his gaze and the one
with which she looked up, struck together,
as if suddenly everything outside were empty
and, that which millions saw, struggled, and endured,
penetrated them . . . only her and him,
the seeing and seen, the eye and the eye's delight,
nowhere else but at this spot . . . see,
this was frightening. And they were both afraid.

Then the angel sang his song.



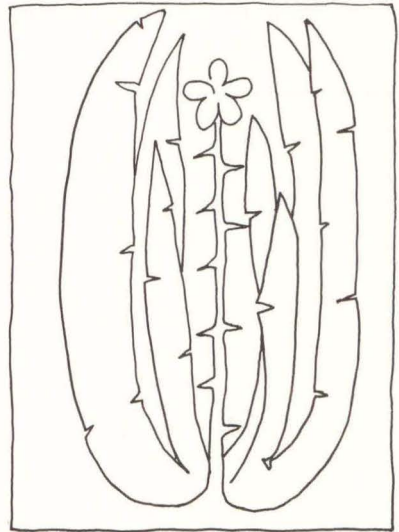
VISITATION OF THE VIRGIN

At the beginning she still moved easily,
though in climbing sometimes was already
aware of her body's wonderful possession —
and then she stood, breathing, on the high

Judenbergen. Aber nicht das Land,
ihre Fülle war um sie gebreitet;
gehend fühlte sie: man überschreitet
nie die Grösse, die sie jetzt empfand.

Und es drängte sie, die Hand zu legen
auf den andern Leib, der weiter war.
Und die Frauen schwankten sich entgegen
und berührten sich Gewand und Haar.

Jede, voll von ihrem Heiligtume,
schützte sich mit der Gevatterin.
Ach der Heiland in ihr war noch Blume,
doch den Täufer in dem Schoos der Muhme
riss die Freude schon zum Hüpfen hin.



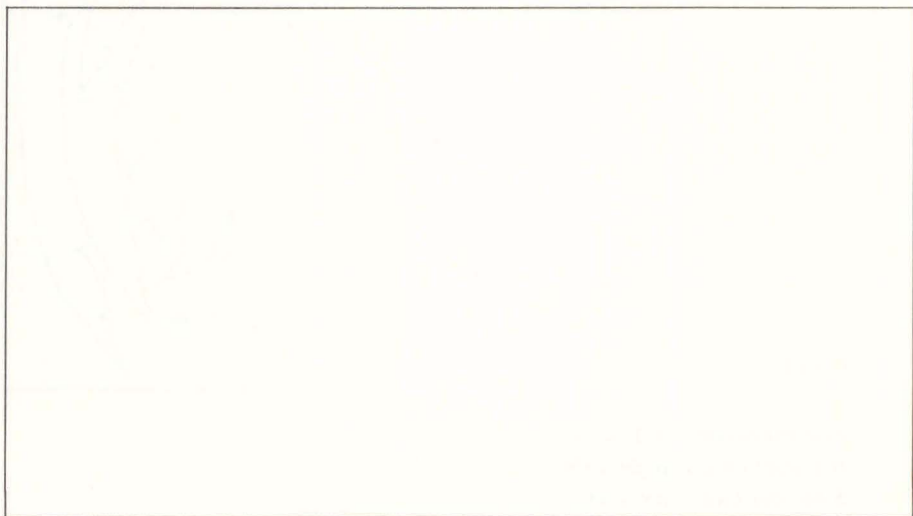
ARGWOHN JOSEPHS

Und der Engel sprach und gab sich Müh
an dem Mann, der seine Fäuste ballte:
Aber siehst du nicht an jeder Falte,
dass sie kühl ist wie die Gottesfrüh.

hills of Judea. But not the land,
it was her own fullness spread around her,
walking she felt it . . . one can never exceed
the immenseness, that she now experienced.

And it pressed her, to lay her hand
on the other body, that was further along.
And the women swayed toward each other
touching each other's clothes and hair.

Each, full of her holiness,
protected herself with her godmother.
Ah the Saviour in her was still a flower,
while the Baptist in the womb of her cousin
was already jumping for joy.



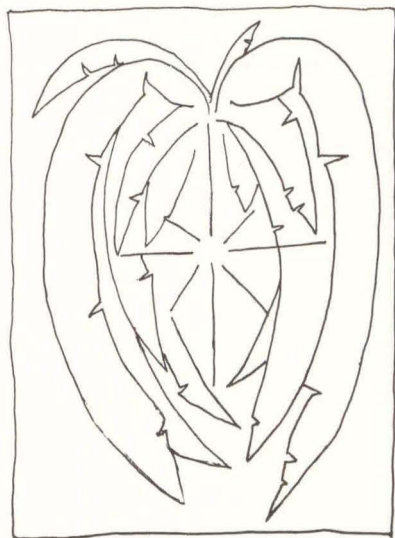
JOSEPH'S SUSPICION

And the angel spoke and extended himself
towards this man, who clenched his fists:
But don't you see in every fold
how cool she is with God's morning?

Doch der andre sah ihn finster an,
murmelnd nur: Was hat sie so verwandelt?
Doch da schrie der Engel: Zimmermann,
merkst du's noch nicht, dass der Herrgott handelt?

Weil du Bretter machst, in deinem Stolze,
willst du wirklich den zur Rede stelln,
der bescheiden aus dem gleichen Holze
Blätter treiben macht und Knospen schwelln?

Er begriff. Und wie er jetzt die Blicke,
recht erschrocken, zu dem Engel hob,
war der fort. Da schob er seine dicke
Mütze langsam ab. Dann sang er lob.



GEBURT CHRISTI

Hättest du der Einfalt nicht, wie sollte
dir geschehn, was jetzt die Nacht erhellt?
Sieh, der Gott, der über Völker grollte,
macht sich mild und kommt in dir zur Welt.

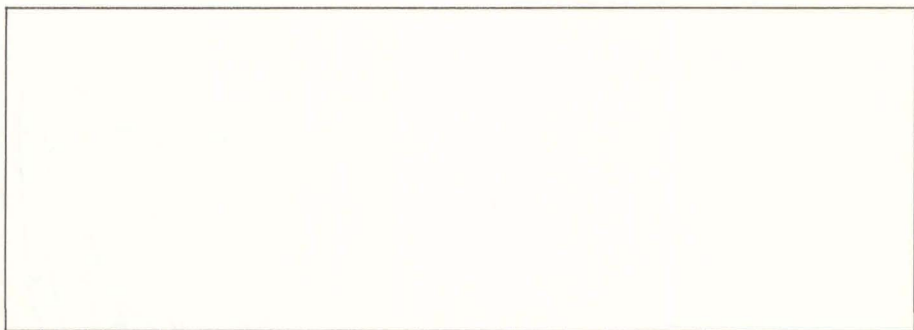
Hast du dir ihn grösser vorgestellt?

Was ist Grösse? Quer durch alle Masse,
die er durchstreicht, geht sein grades Los.
Selbst ein Stern hat keine solche Strasse,
siehst du, diese Könige sind gross,

Still the other gave him black looks,
muttering only: What has changed her so?
But then the angel shouted: Carpenter,
have you still not noticed that the Lord God is at work?

While you, in your pride, make boards,
are you really going to question
him who modestly out of the same wood
causes leaves to grow and buds to swell?

He understood. And as he now looked,
alarmed, up toward the angel,
he was gone. He slowly pulled off
his thick cap. Then he sang praise.



BIRTH OF CHRIST

Had you not the innocence, how could that
which now illuminates the night happen to you?
See, the god, who thundered over nations,
makes himself gentle and comes in you into the world.

Had you imagined him greater?

What is greatness? Right through all matter
which he overrides, moves his straightforward destiny.
Even a star hasn't such a course,
see, these kings are great,

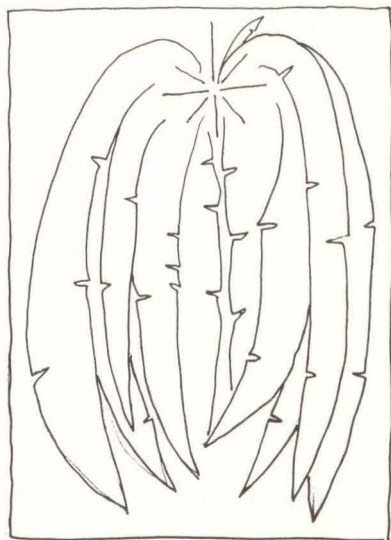
und sie schleppen dir vor deinen Schooss

Schätze, die sie für die grössten halten,
und du staunst vielleicht bei dieser Gift — :
aber schau in deines Tuches Falten,
wie er jetzt schon alles übertrifft.

Aller Amber, den man weit verschifft,

jeder Goldschmuck und das Luftgewürze,
das sich trübend in die Sinne streut:
alles dieses war von rascher Kürze,
und am Ende hat man es bereut.

Aber (du wirst sehen) : Er erfreut.



VERKÜNDIGUNG ÜBER DEN HIRTEN

Seht auf, ihr Männer. Männer dort am Feuer,
die ihr den grenzenlosen Himmel kennt,
Sterndeuter, hierher! Seht, ich bin ein neuer
steigender Stern. Mein ganzes Wesen brennt
und strahlt so stark und ist so ungeheuer
voll Licht, dass mir das tiefe Firmament
nicht mehr genügt. Lasst meinen Glanz hinein
in euer Dasein: o, die dunklen Blicke,
die dunklen Herzen, nächtliche Gesichte,
die euch erfüllen. Hirten, wie allein

and they drag before your lap

treasures, they take to be the greatest,
and you are astonished perhaps by this offering . . .
but look into the folds of your shawl,
how he already transcends everything.

All amber, shipped far and wide,

every gold ornament and the aromatics
that insinuate themselves upon the senses,
all this for the fast moment,
and in the end is regretted.

But (you will see) . . . he brings delight.

ANNUNCIATION ABOVE THE SHEPHERDS

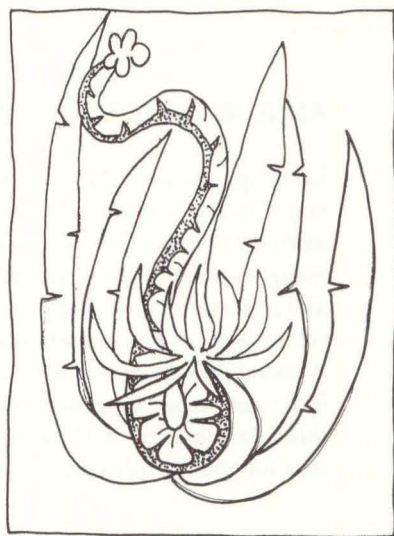
Look up, you men. Men there by the fire,
you who know the limitless heavens,
astrologers, this way! See, I am a new
rising star. My whole being burns
and radiates so powerfully and is so incredibly
full of light, that the deep firmament
is no longer enough for me. Let my radiance enter
into your being: Oh, the dark looks,
those dark hearts, black destinies
that fill you. Shepherds, how alone

bin ich in euch. Auf einmal wird mir Raum.
Staunet ihr nicht: der grosse Brotfruchtbaum
warf einen Schatten. Ja, das kam von mir.
Ihr Unerschrockenen, o wüsstet ihr,
wie jetzt auf eurem schauenden Gesichte
die Zukunft scheint. In diesem starken Lichte
wird viel geschehen. Euch vertrau ichs, denn
ihr seid verschwiegen; euch Gradgläubigen
redet hier alles. Glut und Regen spricht,
der Vögel Zug, der Wind und was ihr seid,
keins überwiegt und wächst zur Eitelkeit
sich mästend an. Ihr haltet nicht
die Dinge auf im Zwischenraum der Brust,
um sie zu quälen. So wie seine Lust
durch einen Engel strömt, so treibt durch euch
das Irdische. Und wenn ein Dorngesträuch
aufflammte plötzlich, dürfte noch aus ihm
der Ewige euch rufen, Cherubim,
wenn sie geruhten neben eurer Herde
einherzuschreiten, wunderten euch nicht:
ihr stürztet euch auf euer Angesicht,
betetet an und nenntet dies die Erde.

Doch dieses war. Nun soll ein neues sein,
von dem der Erdkreis ringender sich weitet.
Was ist ein Dörnicht uns:

Gott fühlt sich ein
in einer Jungfrau Schooss.

Ich bin der Schein
von ihrer Innigkeit,
der euch geleitet.



I am in you. Suddenly I have space.
Aren't you amazed: the great breadfruit tree
casts a shadow. Yes, it comes from me.
You unfrightened ones, if you only knew,
how the future now shines on your
gazing faces. In this powerful light
much will happen. To you I entrust it, because
you are silent, everything speaks
to you True Believers. Fire and rain speak,
the flight of bird, the wind and what you are,
none predominates and grows excessive
with vanity. You don't keep
things on your chest in order to
torment them. Just as his joy
streams through an angel, so rushes through you
your earthliness. And when a thornbush
suddenly bursts into flame, even through it
might the Eternal One call you, Cherubim,
when it pleased them to walk amongst
your flocks, didn't astonish you . . .
you threw yourselves on your faces
prayed and called on this the earth.

This is how it was. Now something new shall be,
that ripples out in widening circles around the earth.
What is a thornbush to us . . . God feels himself
in a virgin's womb. I am the light
of her piety, which leads you.

RAST AUF DER FLUCHT IN ÄGYPTEN

Diese, die noch eben atemlos
flohen mitten aus dem Kindermorden:
o, wie waren sie unmerklich gross
über ihrer Wanderschaft geworden.

Kaum noch dass im scheuen Rückwärtsschauen
ihres Schreckens Not zergangen war,
und schon brachten sie auf ihrem grauen
Maultier ganze Städte in Gefahr;

denn sowie sie, klein im grossen Land,
— fast ein Nichts — den starken Tempeln nahten,
platzten alle Götzen wie verraten
und verloren völlig den Verstand.

Ist es denkbar, dass von ihrem Gange
alles so verzweifelt sich erbost?
Und sie wurden vor sich selber bange,
nur das Kind war namenlos getrost.

Immerhin, sie mussten sich darüber
eine Weile setzen. Doch da ging —
sieh: der Baum, der still sie überhing,
wie ein Dienender zu ihnen über:

er verneigte sich. Derselbe Baum,
dessen Kränze toten Pharaonen
für das Ewige die Stirnen schonen,
neigte sich. Er fühlte neue Kronen
blühen. Und sie sassen wie im Traum.

REST ON THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

These, who still were breathlessly
fleeing from the midst of the slaughter of the innocents . . .
oh, how they had become imperceptibly great
over the course of their wanderings.

Barely in their timid backward glancing
had their fearful anxiety been allayed,
but that they on their grey mule
brought whole cities into danger,

for as soon as they, small in a great land,
almost a nothing, approached the strong temples,
all idols burst as if betrayed
and entirely lost their senses.

Is it imaginable, that everything in their path
was thrown into such despair?
And they even became frightened of themselves,
only the child was utterly consoled.

Nevertheless, they had to sit
and rest for a while. Yet there went —
look . . . the tree which quietly arched over them
like a servant to them . . .

it bowed. This same tree,
whose garlands protect the brows
of dead pharaohs for eternity,
bowing. It felt new crowns
blooming. And they sat as in a dream.



VON DER
HOCHZEIT ZU KANA

Konnte sie denn anders, als auf ihn
stolz sein, der ihr Schlichtestes verschönte?
War nicht selbst die hohe, grossgewöhnte
Nacht wie ausser sich, da er erschien?

Ging nicht auch, dass er sich einst verloren,
unerhört zu seiner Glorie aus?
Hatten nicht die Weisesten die Ohren
mit dem Mund vertauscht? Und war das Haus

nicht wie neu von seiner Stimme? Ach,
sicher hatte sie zu hundert Malen
ihre Freude an ihm auszustrahlen
sich verwehrt. Sie ging ihm staunend nach.

Aber da bei jenem Hochzeitsfeste,
als es unversehns an Wein gebracht, —
sah sie hin und bat um eine Geste
und begriff nicht, dass er widersprach.

Und dann tat ers. Sie verstand es später,
wie sie ihn in seinen Weg gedrängt:
denn jetzt war er wirklich Wundertäter,
und das ganze Opfer war verhängt,

OF THE MARRIAGE AT CANA

Could she really do other, than be
proud of him, who made the most ordinary beautiful to her?
Was it not that even the high, majestic night
seemed beside itself, when he appeared?

Did he not once, when he lost himself,
unimaginably pursue his glory?
Hadn't the wisest traded mouth
for ears? And was the house

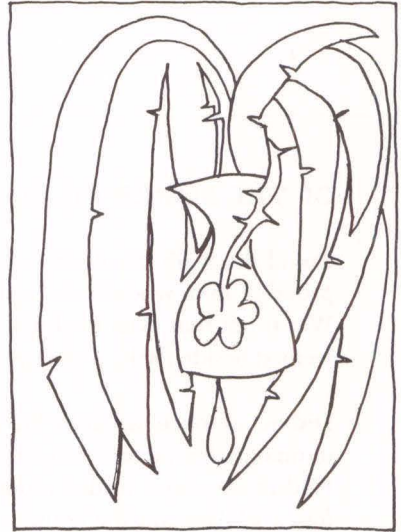
not like new at the sound of his voice? Ah,
surely a hundred times had she
held back from radiating
her joy in him. She followed him in amazement.

But here at this wedding feast,
there was an unexpected need for wine,
she looked at him and begged for a sign
and didn't understand, that he resisted.

And then he did it. She realized later,
how she had forced him onto his course . . .
because now he really was a miracle worker,
and the whole sacrifice was decreed,

unaufhaltsam. Ja, es stand geschrieben.
Aber war es damals schon bereit?
Sie: sie hatte es herbeigetrieben
in der Blindheit ihrer Eitelkeit.

An dem Tisch voll Früchten und Gemüsen
freute sie sich mit und sah nicht ein,
dass das Wasser ihrer Tränendrüsen
Blut geworden war mit diesem Wein.



VOR DER PASSION

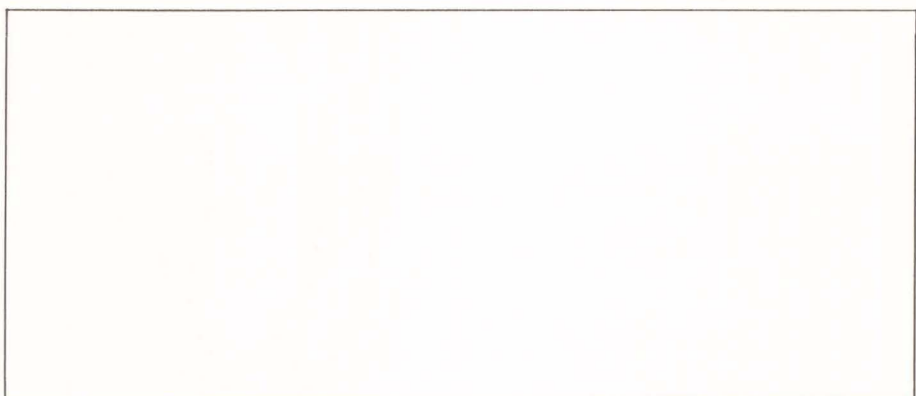
O hast du dies gewollt, du hättest nicht
dusch eines Weibes Leib entspringen dürfen:
Heilande muss man in den Bergen schürfen,
wo man das Harte aus dem Harten bricht.

Tut dirs nicht selber leid, dein liebes Tal
so zu verwüsten? Siehe meine Schwäche;
ich habe nichts als Milch- und Tränenbäche,
und du warst immer in der Überzahl.

Mit solchem Aufwand wardst du mir verheissen.
Was tratst du nicht gleich wild aus mir hinaus?
Wenn du nur Tiger brauchst, dich zu zerreißen,
warum erzog man mich im Frauenhaus,

irrevocably. Yes, it was written.
But was it time already?
Look . . . she precipitated it
in the blindness of her vanity.

At the table full of fruits and vegetables
she was pleased and didn't realize,
that the water in her tear ducts
had turned to blood with the wine.



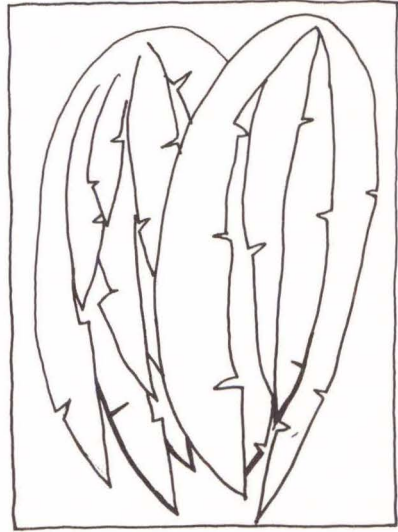
BEFORE THE PASSION

Oh had you wanted this, you should never
have been permitted to escape from a woman's womb . . .
saviours need to be carved out of mountains
where one breaks the hard from the hard.

Don't even you regret, so to lay waste
to your own lovely valley? See my weakness,
I have nothing but streams of milk and tears,
and you were always excessive.

With so much ceremony had you been promised me.
Why didn't you just step wild out of me?
If you need only tigers, to tear you apart,
why did they raise me in the women's house,

ein weiches reines Kleid für dich zu weben,
darin nicht einmal die geringste Spur
von Naht dich drückt — : so war mein ganzes Leben,
und jetzt verkehrst du plötzlich die Natur.



PIETA

Jetzt wird mein Elend voll, und namenlos
erfüllt es mich. Ich starre, wie des Steins
Inneres starrt.

Hart wie ich bin, weiss ich nur Eins:

Du wurdest gross —

. . . und wurdest gross,

um als zu grosser Schmerz

ganz über meines Herzens Fassung

hinauszustehn.

Jetzt liegst du quer durch meinen Schooss,

jetzt kann ich dich nicht mehr

gebären.

so I could weave a pure soft gown for you,
in which not the slightest trace
of a seam could touch you . . . this was my whole life,
and now you have perverted nature.



PIETA

Now my grief is complete, and utterly
fills me. I am numb, the way a stone
is numb inside.
Hard as I am, I know only one thing:
that you grew
. . . and you grew,
as though to span
a suffering so great
completely beyond my heart's comprehension.
Now you lie across my lap,
now I can no longer
bear you.



STILLUNG MARIÄ MIT DEM AUFERSTANDENEN

Was sie damals empfanden: ist es nicht
vor allen Geheimnissen süß
und immer noch irdisch:
da er, ein wenig blass noch vom Grab,
erleichtert zu ihr trat:
an allen Stellen erstanden.
O zu ihr zuerst. Wie waren sie da
unaussprechlich in Heilung.
Ja, sie heilten, das wars. Sie hatten nicht nötig,
sich stark zu berühren.
Er legte ihr eine Sekunde
kaum seine nächstens
ewige Hand an die frauliche Schulter.
Und sie begannen
still wie die Bäume im Frühling,
unendlich zugleich,
diese Jahreszeit
ihres äussersten Umgangs.

CONSOLATION OF MARY WITH THE
RESURRECTED CHRIST

What they then experienced . . . is it not
sweet beyond all secret
and yet still earthly . . .
that he, still a bit pale from the grave,
unburdened came to her . . .
resurrected in every way.
Oh first to her. How were they then
in unspeakable healing.
Yes, they were healing, that was it. They didn't need
the strong touch of each other.
He laid for hardly a second
his about-to-be
eternal hand on her womanly shoulder.
And they began
quietly as the trees in springtime,
simultaneously without end,
this season
of their ultimate communion.



VOM TODE MARIÄ

I

Derselbe grosse Engel, welcher einst
ihr der Gebärung Botschaft niederbrachte,
stand da, abwartend, dass sie ihn beachte,
und sprach: Jetzt wird es Zeit, dass du erscheinst.

Und sie erschrak wie damals und erwies
sich wieder als die Magd, ihn tief bejahend.
Er aber strahlte, und unendlich nahend,
schwand er wie in ihr Angesicht — und hiess
die weithin ausgegangenen Bekehrer
zusammenkommen in das Haus am Hang,
das Haus des Abendmahls. Sie kamen schwerer
und traten bange ein: Da lag, entlang
die schmale Bettstatt, die in Untergang
und Auserwählung rätselhaft Getauchte,
ganz unversehrt, wie eine Ungebrauchte,
und achtete auf englischen Gesang.
Nun da sie alle hinter ihren Kerzen
abwarten sah, riss sie vom Übermass
der Stimmen sich und schenckte noch von Herzen
die beiden Kleider fort, die sie besass,
und hob ihr Antlitz auf zu dem und dem . . .
(o Ursprung namenloser Tränen-Bäche).

OF THE DEATH OF MARY

I

The same great angel, which first
brought down to her the message of her bearing,
stood there, waiting, so that she noticed him,
and spoke: It is now time, that you appear.

And she was afraid as she had been and felt
herself again like the girl, adoring him deeply.
He however radiated, and endlessly approaching,
seemed to disappear into her face — and called
the widely scattered tenants
to come together in the house on the hill,
the house of the Last Supper. They came reluctantly
and entered with fear . . . There she lay, along
the narrow bed, in her dying
and in being chosen, enigmatically submerged,
entirely unchanged like a virgin,
listening to the song of the angels.
Now that she saw them all waiting
behind their candles, she tore herself from the ecstasy
of the voices and gave from her heart
the two garments, which she possessed,
and lifted her face from one to the other . . .
(oh source of untold streams of tears).

Sie aber legte sich in ihre Schwäche
und zog die Himmel an Jerusalem
so nah heran, dass ihre Seele nur,
austretend, sich ein wenig strecken musste:
schon hob er sie, der alles von ihr wusste,
hinein in ihre göttliche Natur.

II

Wer hat bedacht, dass bis zu ihrem Kommen
der viele Himmel unvollständig war?
Der Auferstandne hatte Platz genommen,
doch neben ihm, durch vierundzwanzig Jahr,
war leer der Sitz. Und sie begannen schon
sich an die reine Lücke zu gewöhnen,
die wie verheilt war, denn mit seinem schönen
Hinüberscheinen füllte sie der Sohn.

So ging auch sie, die in die Himmel trat,
nicht auf ihn zu, so sehr es sie verlängte;
dort war kein Platz, nur Er war dort und prangte
mit einer Strahlung, die ihr wehe tat.
Doch da sie jetzt, die rührende Gestalt,
sich zu den neuen Seligen gesellte
und unauffällig, licht zu licht, sich stellte,
da brach aus ihrem Sein ein Hinterhalt
von solchem Glanz, dass der von ihr erhellte
Engel geblendet aufschrie: Wer ist die?

Ein Staunen war. Dann sahn sie alle, wie
Gott-Vater oben unsern Herrn verhielt,
so dass, von milder Dämmerung umspielt,
die leere Stelle wie ein wenig Leid
sich zeigte, eine Spur von Einsamkeit,
wie etwas, was er noch ertrug, ein Rest
irdischer Zeit, ein trockenes Gebrest — .
Man sah nach ihr: sie schaute ängstlich hin,
weit vorgeneigt, als fühlte sie: i c h bin
sein längster Schmerz — : und stürzte plötzlich vor.

She lay back in her weakness
and drew the heavens of Jerusalem
so close to her, that her soul,
in stepping out, needed only to stretch itself a little . . .
till he lifted her, he who knew everything about her,
into her godly nature.

II

Who would have thought, that till her coming
the vast heavens were incomplete?
The resurrected Christ had taken his place,
yet next to him, for twenty-four years,
was an empty seat. And they had already begun
to accustom themselves to this pure space,
which was as if healed, because the son
filled it with his lovely radiance.

So even she, as she entered into heaven,
did not go toward him, much as she longed to,
there was no place, only he was there and shone
with a radiance, that hurt her.

Yet as she now, this moving figure,
placed herself, inconspicuously, light to light,
amongst her recently blessed companions,
there broke from her being a reservoir
of such brilliance, that the by-her-illuminated
angel was dazzled and cried out: Who is she?

There was astonishment. Then they all saw, how
the Father God above detained our Lord,
so that, a soft twilight encircled
the empty place, like a bit of suffering
showed itself, a trace of loneliness,
like something that he still endured, a remnant
of earthly time, a dry scab.
One looked to her . . . she peered anxiously ahead,
bent way forward, as if she felt: I am
his longest pain . . . and suddenly plunged forward.

Die Engel aber nahmen sie zu sich
und stützten sie und sangen seliglich
und trugen sie das letzte Stück empor.

III

Doch vor dem Apostel Thomas, der
kam, da es zu spät war, trat der schnelle
längst darauf gefasste Engel her
und befahl an der Begräbnisstelle:

Dräng den Stein beiseite. Willst du wissen,
wo die ist, die dir das Herz bewegt:
Sieh: sie ward wie ein Lavendelkissen
eine Weile da hineingelegt,

dass die Erde künftig nach ihr rieche
in den Falten wie ein feines Tuch.
Alles Tote (fühlst du), alles Sieche
ist betäubt von ihrem Wohlgeruch.

Schau den Leinwand: wo ist eine Bleiche,
wo er blendend wird und geht nicht ein?
Dieses Licht aus dieser reinen Leiche
war ihm klärender als Sonnenschein.

Staunst du nicht, wie sanft sie ihm entging?
Fast als wär sie's noch, nichts ist verschoben.
Doch die Himmel sind erschüttert oben:
Mann, knie hin und sieh mir nach und sing.

The angels however took her to themselves
and supported her and sang blissfully
and carried her upward the last bit.

III

Yet toward Thomas the Apostle, who
had come, even though it was too late, stepped
the swift long since rehearsed angel
who pronounced at the gravesite:

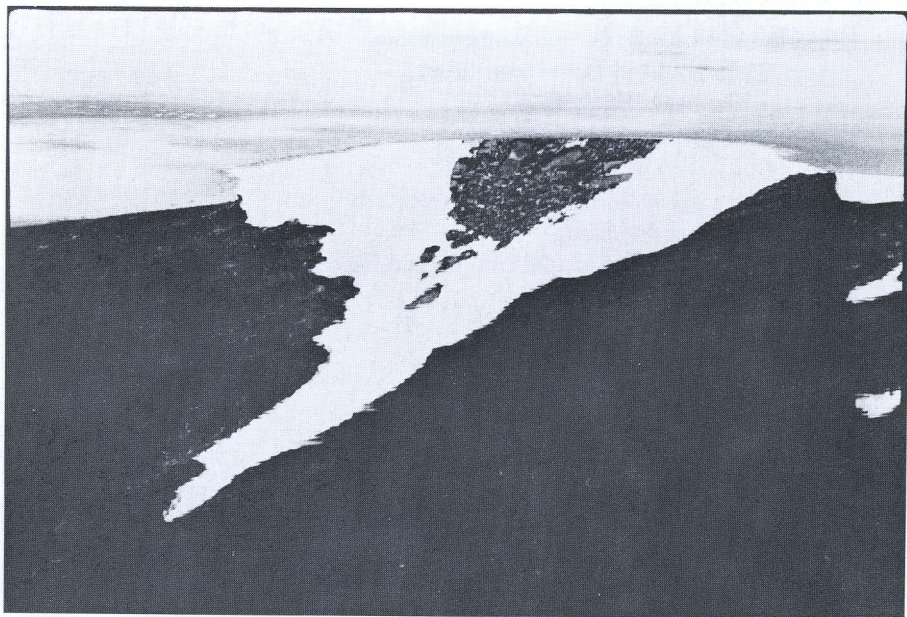
Push the stone aside. Do you want to know,
where she is, she who moves your heart:
See: she was like a lavender sachet
lain within here for a while,

so that the earth would henceforth smell of her
in its folds like a fine cloth.
Everything dead (can you feel it), everything foul
is stunned by her fragrance.

Look at this shroud: Where is a bleach,
that could make it shine without fading?
This light from this pure corpse
was more bright to them than sunshine.

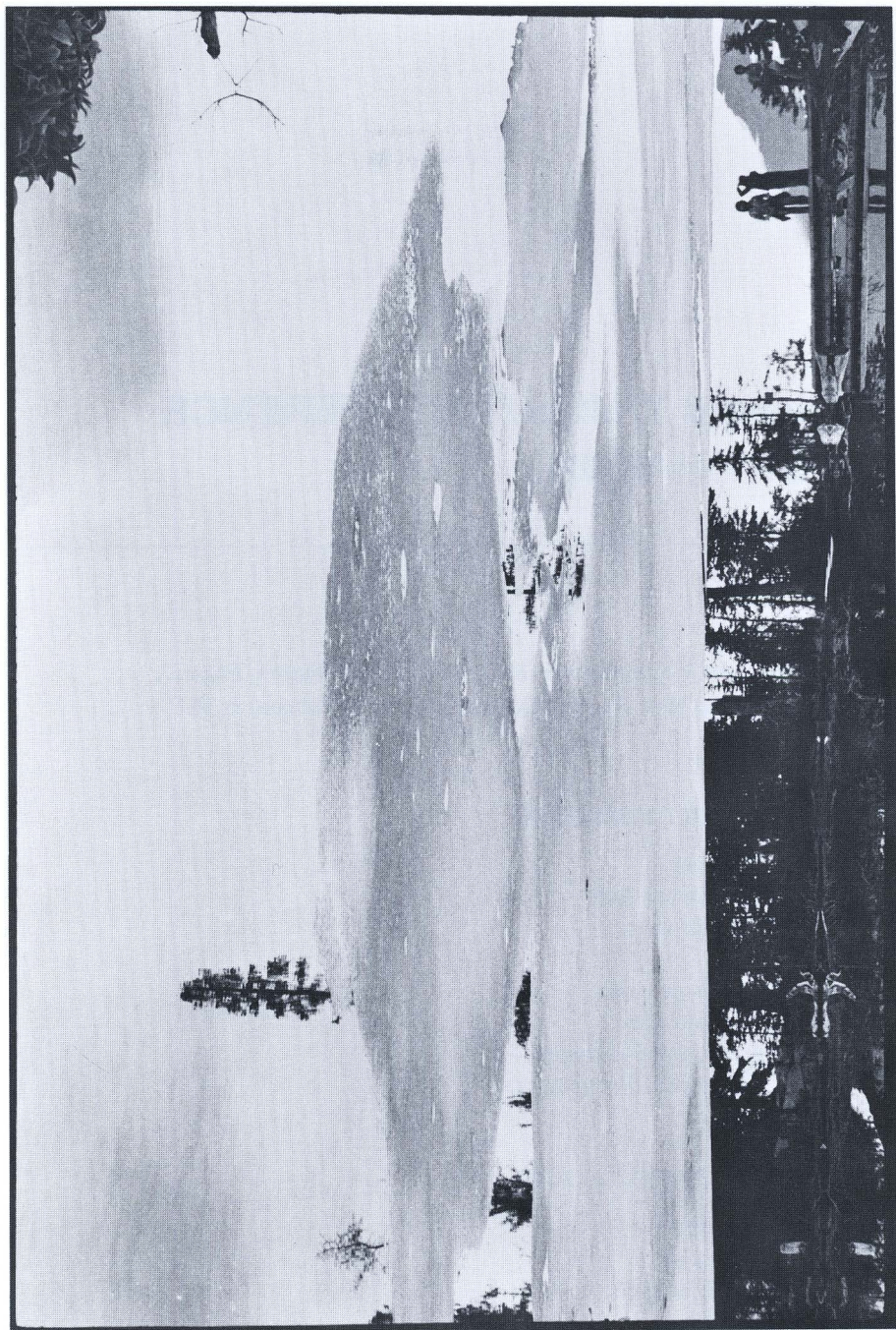
Aren't you amazed, how gently she left them?
Almost as though it were still she, nothing is out of order.
Yet the heavens above are convulsed:
Man kneel down and look to me and sing.

Donna Hagerman / IMAGES









Richard Truhlar / INTERFERENCE FOR SHARON

NOTE:

Interference is a homolinguistic translation of Sharon Thesen's poems Radio New France Radio (Slug Press, Vancouver, B.C., 1981).

TEMPORARY POSITIONS

from a distance
an unexpected window
is but a sum of lines

until much later when
pausing in your gaze
over a preoccupied stranger
the displacement of your hands
measures you

IN THE WAITING ROOM

at a vacant desk
the absent agent
seemed something like
an open door

OBSCURE DISASTER

each tree faces the frozen pathway

something sharper than a mask
is looming where
the fear of immobility
condescends to take a social form

TRAFFIC

in the silent slippage
of the mind's orchestra
the human radio
is an involuntary secretion

TEMPORARY POSITIONS II

cosmetic movements
settle themselves
into embarrassment

SNAPPING OPEN SUITCASES

in a midnight blue sequined gown
crossing silky knees
an object in disguise
could go up and down
up and down
this whole town

OBSCURE DISASTER II

broad hats, dark glasses
waver in shop-front windows

there is no sunset
behind this human scenery
only white skin
behind black sheets
imitating romance

THE WRITER ON HOLIDAY

carrying bits of old textbooks
from where all things
are formed and perfected
in the clearest light

it must've been the wind
scratching at the windows
with fingernails of dust

CHANTEUSE

in the coanaesthesia of use
voices by necessity
draped with things
will slay rouged lips
that daren't say
this place is snowy

TEMPORARY POSITIONS III

the eyes alone
gazing out the window
they disappear into
belong elsewhere

MIRAGE

things holding still
momentarily dislodged
in the bluish air
walk into you
before turning to scenery again

GHOSTING

situated
as a surgical operation
in the landscape
the city alone
is suspicious
of the end of things

Keath Fraser / ROGET'S THESAURUS

I had begun my lists. Mother was always saying, "Peter, why not play outside like other boys?" Her patience with collectors was not prodigal; she didn't understand my obsession. I wanted to polish words like shells, before I let them in. Sometimes I tied on bits of string to watch them sway, bump maybe, like chestnuts. They were treasures, these words. I could have eaten them had the idiom not existed, even then, to mean remorse. I loved the way they smelled, their inky scent of coal. Sniffing their penny notebook made me think of fire. (See FERVOUR.)

I fiddled with sounds and significations. No words could exist, even in their thousands, until I made them objects on paper: hairpins, lapis lazuli, teeth, fish hooks, dead bees. Later on my study became a museum for the old weapons poets had used. Mother would have died. By then, of course, she had, pleased I had grown up to become what she approved, a doctor.

My young wife died of tumours the size of apples. That I was a practitioner of healing seemed absurd. It smothered me like fog, her dying, her breath in the end so moist. When his wife died my uncle took a razor to his throat. (See DESPAIR. See INSANITY. See OMEGA.) He died disbelieving in the antidote of language. Oh, my wife, I have only words to play with.

When I retired, it was because of deafness. My passion for travel spent, my sense of duty to the poor used up, I remembered listening for words everywhere. At the Athenaeum, among the dying in Milbank Penitentiary, after concerts, at the Royal Society, during sermons in St. Pancras. I started to consolidate. At last I could describe — not prescribe. After fifty years I concluded synonyms were reductive, did not exist, were only analogous words. Unlike Dr. Johnson, I was no poet. My book would be a philosopher's tool, my sobriquet a thesaurus.

My contribution was to relationships. I created families out of ideas like Space and Matter and Affections. I grouped words in precisely a thousand ways: reacquainted siblings, introduced cousins, befriended black sheep, mediated between enemies. I printed place names and organized a banquet. London had never seen anything quite like it. Recalcitrant louts, my words, they scented taxonomy and grew inebrious. Mother was well out of it.

She knew me for my polite accomplishments, my papers on optics, comparative anatomy, the poor, zoology, human aging, mathematics, the deaf and dumb. I was a Renaissance man for I chewed what I bit off. Still, I was no more satisfied with my Bridgewater Treatise on the design of all natural history than with my report for the Water Commission on pollution in the Thames. Only less pessimistic. By the time Asiatic cholera broke out, and the people were vomiting and diarrhoetic, my work had been forgotten. Not until I fathered my *Thesaurus* did I dream of prinking. Who knew, perhaps crazy poets would become Roget's trollops, when they discovered his interest in truth, not eloquence.

My book appeared the same year as volumes by Dickens, Hawthorne, Melville — fabulators, all of us. (See FICTION.) I too dreamt of the unity of man's existence, and offered a tool for attacking false logic, truisms, jargon, sophism. Though any fretless voice can sing if words are as precise as notes, men in power often sound discordant. Music isn't accident, nor memory history. Language (like the violin) so long to learn.

There is no language, I used to say to Mother, like our own. Look how nations that we oppress trust it. It's the bridge we use to bring back silks and spices, tobacco leaves and cinnamon. Yet all one reviewer wrote of my work was it "made eloquence too easy for the lazy and ignorant." Eloquence I have always distrusted. Maybe this is why my *Thesaurus* has gone through twenty-eight editions.

Men are odd animals. I have never felt as at home around them as around their words; without these they're monkeys. (See TRUISM.) The other day I was going through my book and it struck me I have more words for Disapprobation than Approbation. Why is this?

So I spend my last days at West Malvern in my ninety-first year. I no longer walk in parks. I'm pleased I fear death; it makes me feel younger. Death is a poet's idiom to take the mind off complacency. (See SWAN SONG. See CROSSING THE BAR. See THE GREAT ADVENTURE.) I have never thought of death but that it has refurbished me.



John Harris / LOCAL INITIATIVES

Vicki is sleeping off a night shift. I am in the Sears Cafeteria drinking coffee and writing. I just did the grocery shopping. Cheryl is at the High School. Wesley is on a field trip to the skating rink. He is having a change.

I bought a book in the meat department. They have a sale bin there. It's a biography of Dorothy L. Sayers. I had a look at it while my coffee was cooling. Dorothy was an energetic lady all her life. A chainsmoker. She was quietly eccentric and religious and did church work. Never a dull moment. She got fatter and fatter and finally she had a heart attack. She was in the middle of her translation of the *Paradiso*. She was at the bottom of the stairs. Her body couldn't take the weight of her accomplishments.

My accomplishments evaporate like gasoline. For the tenth year in a row I scored "mildly interesting" in my teaching evaluations. Ten percent of my students thought I was "very good." Ten percent thought I was a jerk. This seems reasonable to me. However, compared to forty thousand instructors across the continent, I'm in

the bottom ten percentile. Maybe English is not a popular course. Maybe the Americans are better teachers. Maybe the computer fucked up. The Union is investigating.

Meanwhile, I teach for fifteen hours a week, sit in the office for five but nobody comes. I carry my writing and marking in a shoulder bag. I do five papers in the Chuckwagon at Pine World, five in the Simon Fraser Hotel coffee shop, a few more at home. When I run out of papers I work on a story. On Tuesday morning I do the shopping. On Wednesday I take the kids to piano practice. I buy a paper and sit in the car with the engine running. On Saturday morning I take the kids to the pool, sit in the bleachers and watch them do laps.

It's important to have things to do and places to go. Sears is good because it is big and varied. You can spend a couple of hours here, maybe three if you have lunch. Right now it is thirty below outside. Snow is blowing in from Dawson Creek, piling up. The city has run through its budget for clearing snow and trucking it out onto river ice. No one knows if the city will keep trucking or not. Meanwhile the garden tractors are lined up in the mall. The dummies are wearing bikinis.

There is a problem with heavy boots and coats. If I were a businessman, I would cater to this. You could make a fortune checking coats and galoshes. Better, you could rent conveyances so people could push their coats, boots, kids, and purchases around. People don't like things taken away from them. The heating system could break down. There could be a fire. The Russians could come thundering over the North Pole, spreading death and communism.

The bush is always there, around the edges of everyone's eyes, empty, a promise. Once it covered this town thick and silent. It was pushed back to make room, converted into heat, canoes, forts, buildings, roads. In Sears, there are pictures that document this procedure, scenes from the town's historical past. They are a testimony to progress. The fort is built, the Indians are offered better land somewhere, anywhere, the tents give way to wood frame buildings, the railway comes and takes the men to War, the old wooden buildings burn down and are replaced by brick. The eye seeks out the bush, fringing the cutbanks, in the sloughs along the river, carpeting the sleeping hills to the north.

The Russians plan everything first, in five-year increments, and then they do it. Winter and space congeal them. They believe in mind over materialism. This is what makes them so dangerous. They start with essentials — fur coats and vodka. The fur is genuine and the vodka is ninety-eight proof and they give them away for nothing. Everyone gets a couple pounds of meat every week and lots of cheap Black Sea oil. Their only danger is falling asleep outside and freezing to death. Russian streets are long and empty. Everything is locked up at five o'clock. Boredom is a significant factor. It is unlikely that any amount of planning will solve this problem.

We prefer to improve whatever happens to be around. There are obvious similarities between Simon Fraser's fort and the Sears "Spruce Centre Mall." You can see similarities between Simon Fraser, whose portrait hangs over the salad bar, and the latest manager who is close to the cash register. There are further pictures with captions like "Fraser Prepares to Explore the River that Bears His Name" and "Danger!" The first shows the Fort, a pallisade enclosing three log cabins. A field of stumps separates the Fort from the bush. In the foreground, men are knee-deep in the river loading two canoes. The second picture shows a man in buckskin holding onto an overturned canoe as it slips into the rapids. You assume that this is not Simon Fraser.

Nowadays, there isn't much danger in working for the Bay, except maybe unemployment. They have a store in the downtown area. It is as big as Sears and has a nice cafeteria in the basement but the suburbs are moving further and further out and the people with money don't come downtown to shop. City Council made a deal with the Bay for a big complex in the downtown area. They put up six square blocks of property that they agreed to buy from themselves. They circulated pictures of cities with rotten cores. They devised a plan for a development that would bring Eatons in and introduce over a million square feet of retail space into the downtown. There was a model in City Hall with free coffee.

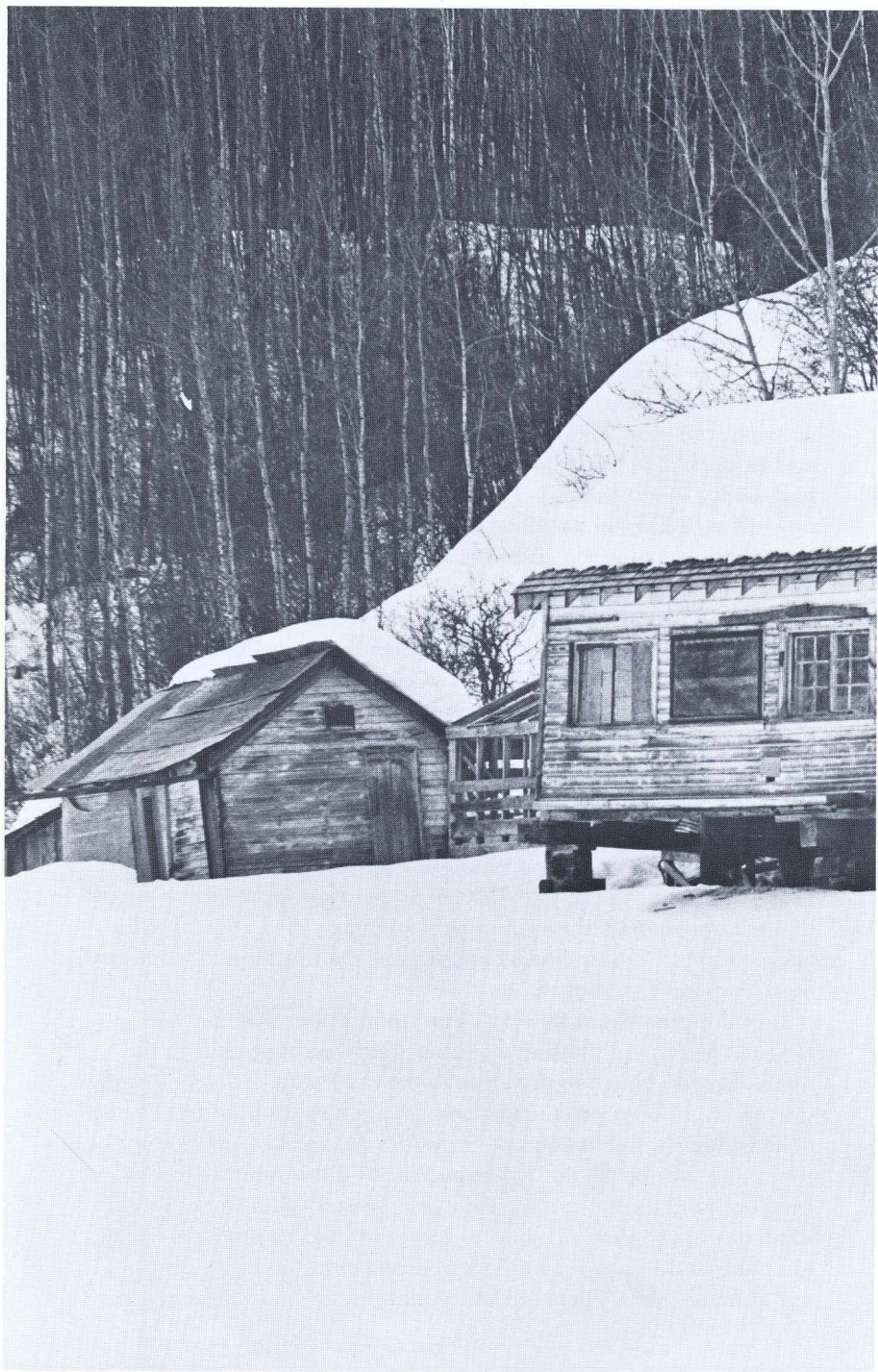
People weren't impressed. Sears and Woodward's fought back with their own expansion plans and free coffee. Free enterprise was at stake. Besides, the old town has a certain charm. It is not locked up at night. The wooden hotels have strippers and rock bands from Richmond, White Rock, and Seattle. The Chinese cafes stay open for as long as you can nurse a coffee. There are second-hand stores, basement karate dojos, billiard parlours, and local art shops. Of course there are a lot of drunks around, scavenging beer and pop

bottles, fighting, asking for handouts, and freezing to death in doorways on winter nights.

Most of city council went down on that one. Personally, I wasn't sympathetic to the idea myself. I miss the past. The bush has a tendency to seed itself in my head, take root and grow. In Sears I always sit under a picture of the town taken some time in the Thirties, halfway between "Danger" and a color photo of Spruce Centre. I feel more at home there. There are no highrises in the downtown, one for each bank. There are no pulp mills, with concrete silos and steel towers, along the river. There are only a couple of cars on the street, parked in front of the hardware store. You can still see the cutbanks along the river. There are empty lots between the buildings, growing wild roses, Indian paint brush, mint, camomile, buttercups and lupin. Where City Hall is now there is a small triangular-shaped park with a war memorial. The picture is bloated and grainy, but I can still see a lady by the Hotel on the wooden sidewalk. The sidewalk is elevated and runs in a circle for ten blocks through the downtown area.

She could go into the Bay, Ray's Ford, Manning's Men's Wear, Rosie's Ice Cream, the Dandy-Pole Barber Shop, the Ritz Cafe, Interior Hardware, Ming's Cafe, T. Cake and Son Bakery, the Windsor Hotel, and Smith Billiard. No doubt there are many more places around the north side of the boardwalk, away from the camera. Someday I should do some research on this in the new library, write a local history book. I've never been in the library, but it's an impressive building. It's got skylights, underground parking, and a wrap-around patio with planters. It was a victory for the forces of liberalism and professionalism. It's the second stage in the plans for a culture centre that will incorporate the swimming pool (stage one) and a theatre and new arena. Due to budget constraints, the theatre and arena have been temporarily scrapped.

I would rather work for Ray's Ford than Fraser. I'm not the adventurous type. I'd rather work for Sears than Ray, though the musak here is enough to drive you to the truck stop. If I ever lose my job teaching I'll go into nursing and get a job in the hospital. I've done Cardio-Resuscitation and St. John's Ambulance, all paid for by the school. Maybe I'll do Industrial First-Aid this summer just to keep my hand in. If I can't make it as a nurse I could work in a mill, sit all day in an office on a bale of band-aids and read novels. Vicki is a nurse and I go to the hospital to drop her off and pick her up. I feel at home there. There are lots of places to go and smoke, places



to rest and talk, chairs by the windows where the hallways end, roll-away room partitions parked in the halls, forgotten coffee urns, stacks of old *Time* magazines, underground tunnels where the change rooms, cafeteria, laundry and furnace rooms are.

The people look interesting. I'm past forty, wonder about getting old, am bored by the future. I like the kids at school but have trouble identifying. Patients are rich or poor, young or old, male or female, famous or infamous; it's all fiction. They are struggling with their bodies and improvements get less and less likely. The hospital keeps their valuables in a safe. Their names are written in chalk above their beds. Some are in their last room, going down their last hall, through their last door. The cemetery is out west, on the bank high over the winding river, facing south into the weather.

Vicki works in the "Sunset Lodge" addition. She says she likes it. Colorful surroundings. Flowers. The town is still growing so there's not much chance of layoff. We can walk from our place. The girls are a real team. They have lots of parties and don't mind tossing back the brew. They hit the bar regularly and we hear about all the acts working their way north to the Arctic Circle and jobs on the oil rigs.

Last year they entered the Mardi Gras sno-golf contest. They decorated a snowmobile like an ambulance and put on crash helmets with red crosses and smacked purple tennis balls around the golf course. They took first prize. They got their pictures in the paper and brought in lots of contributions for macrame on the ward. After that the snow started to melt. It was spring thaw. It was a miracle. The d.j.'s were phoning at 6 and 8 a.m. They got free tickets to Reno and judged a male stripper contest.

Never say die. Some of them have been working for fifteen years. I'm cracking after ten. Actually in the past two years I've done sweet fuck all. Nobody seems to notice but I'm losing my nerve. The lesson plans I give to the Dean are a mess. My outcomes don't match up with my objectives. Nothing is typed. Last year I didn't even do the three novels on the curriculum — *Johnny Get Your Gun*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and some other piece of Fenimore Cooper bullshit about Louis Riel. I hate it when white people write about Indians. I gave them Conrad instead. Mostly, I talked about myself.

Last week I started shouting at the Principal. He says that the bottom ten percentile is no good. He has to account to the public. He wants me to write a report. I told him that was his job. Do your fucking job I told him. That was a mistake. If I get fired funds would be low. There would be no music lessons and no orthodontic work. No talent and no beauty. There would be no university education. No class and no money. Of course I could get three months' severance pay, do some real writing. Three months to get famous, finish up my novel and the articles I'm supposed to be working on. We could stretch it, sell the house, move to the country, eat the bark off trees.

When I finish my coffee I have to go home and then go teach a class and then I get Cheryl and take her to the dentist. She has braces and an appliance over her head that looks like a horse's harness. She hates it. We tell her if she wears it for a couple years she'll be beautiful. She wants to be beautiful now. The only time she takes it off is when she eats or plays the flute. She plays flute tonight in the school concert band. We're all going. Vicki will be awake and Steve my youngest brother will come over and maybe my other brother and his wife and Peter who is her oldest kid by a previous marriage and one of my best friends. He is in town for a few days, buying supplies. Maybe we'll have coffee after and Cheryl will go to bed with her head full of praise and in harness again.

Both the kids play instruments. This makes me proud and I try to follow along in Book One Toronto Conservatory with Mozart and Shostakovich. Sometimes I fantasize that I'm playing piano in the bar at the Vacation Inn. The Inn has only been around for a few years but is already on the skids. It's a good place to go if you want it quiet. It was going to be hooked up to the Bay development and provide convention facilities, shops, three movies, two cafes, and a lounge. Somebody jumped the economic gun. One cafe is shut down and the other is a pancake franchise. The movies are doing ok but the shops are all empty, brown paper over the windows. They keep the building open because of new coal development in the north. Someday the place will be full of bureaucrats and Japanese businessmen.

In my fantasy I have a Tequila sitting on a napkin at the end of the keyboard and I have a little box with slips of paper for requests. A big party comes in and the hostess tells me that some guy named Don has just been promoted to Assistant Manager at Saveco. He likes Tony Bennett. I make a speech telling about Don and his promotion and I give a toast that gets rid of the third Tequila for the night. I do "I

Left My Heart in San Francisco.” I wonder what it would be like to work for Don.

Peter plays piano and sometimes he works the bars when the bush closes for the summer. Seven years ago he was my student. I don't know what happened to him in high school but his writing was awful. His essays were pieces of scrap paper that he pulled out of his pocket in crumpled balls and flattened out on my desk. I knew he was smart but I couldn't prove it. I couldn't read his work. One day I made him sit in my office and print his essay out on clean paper, double-spaced. This is part of my job and I wish I could get famous and quit. The school is considering diagnostic testing and remedial courses with self-instructional modules on grammar, spelling, and logic. This would certainly take care of Peter and his problems. I went over his essay. There were brilliant flashes of insight but it still didn't make sense. He admitted it was crap. He admitted he didn't know a complete sentence from Adam. I said nobody does but you learn to pretend. He said he couldn't pretend. He said he wanted to write poetry. I gave him a “B” and told him not to take any more English courses.

He quit college and moved to McBride, out in the country with all the middle-aged hippies who sold soybean cafes in Berkeley and bought Canadian land. His closest neighbour repairs pianos, organs, nickelodeons, and pinball machines, eats a pound of granola in the morning and goes like a camel all day. I admire this. I love the country. In the country you can really feel at home, but it takes a long time. If you know what color of dirt you need for a garden, if you can read the battles of trees in their green circles of light, if you can think like an animal, then you have finally found yourself. You can go out gradually to where the dirt roads end and the trails start and the abandoned trapper's cabins sit in their closing circles of trees. In the city humility gets you nowhere. You have to invent your own work, turn the sun on and off, love like a sniper, work like a machine.

I've got literary projects coming out of my ass. A journal back east wants an issue on northern prose and a chapter for their literary history of Canada. Another wants reviews. I want stories. Maybe I'll get famous but it isn't easy. I've got problems. The Principal wants me to work on my lessons. I can't sit at a desk anymore. I write at the kitchen table while the kids are eating. I write in laundromats. Long ago I loved libraries but I gave that up. Mainly, I work in cafes. I'm drinking too much coffee. I'm wired all the time. How can I write an



article if I can't stay in the library? How can I write a novel when I'm always on the move?

On weekends when I get time I drive out of town, park the car and hike into the bush as far as I can go in the time I have. I carry boots, snowshoes, and granola bars in the trunk of the car. There are logging roads everywhere. Years ago I never went out there unless I was hunting. I didn't feel at home without a rifle. But you never see any animals. You can walk in safety, day and night. They know where you are. They have their own trails, beaten paths in snow or worn in clay, marked on the exposed roots of trees. Hollows in the snow under pine, burrows, landmarks, tools of our trade. They cross our trails only occasionally and with great care. I can tell tracks of coyote, moose, rabbit, raccoon, bear. If you walk far enough on any road you come to a millsite. First there's cellar holes, bleached planks, car bodies in the willows. Then there's the sawdust heap, turned into black humus, the foundations of a mill and planer, cedar piles driven into the gravel down below the frost line, sometimes a black burner, rusted out and shot full of holes. The whole country around here was cleared but you'd hardly know it now, twenty years later. The pine and spruce are thick and pungent. In another twenty years, maybe, the loggers will be back, mills and towns going up.

Sometimes you meet people out there. Last autumn I met the president of the snowmobile club, out on his Honda XL 125 checking the trails, a Swede saw tied onto the back fender. He told me that his club leases two hundred square miles of land off the government for a dollar a year. Wilderness is cheap. I wondered if I was supposed to be there. He gave me a shot of rye. "You come a long way, walking," he said.

Somehow, I cleared the time for myself, pushed the people out. Can't seem to focus on anything much except a few stories and poems that soak up all ambition except to leave things the way they are. Vickie and the kids and I face our separate lives, duties to one another sliding away. The kids go to school and learn how to go up and down hallways, responding to buzzers and bells. Vicki takes her vaseline from room to room, rolling the patients over and soothing bedsores, massaging muscles, checking charts, talking. I push carts up and down the shopping centre aisles, fill the fridge, walk to work and back, mark papers, drive the kids to lessons. I walk Vicki to work in the

early morning along the silent streets, snow-swept in winter, fragrant in summer. I walk her back at night. We hit the bars and lounges downtown, have a cafe lunch on her days off. I take my shoulder bag of papers and books off to the cafes.

This is my third refill. The lady who clears tables is starting to wonder. If I leave I'm ok; the day is sorted out. I wish the story was sorted out. Dorothy Sayers always had a project. Her list of works is impressive. She knew how things went. She ignored her fat. She puffed her cigarette. These are minor concerns. Of course they can kill you but that is always in the future. Meanwhile, you can work. I can't do that. I don't smoke or gain weight. If I did, I'd have something to write about. If I get another coffee I'll be happy for another hour. I'll think of something. Somebody will come in, say something.

I'm going in a circle, one leg longer than the other. I'd like to find the centre and stop. I like to watch the trees grow back.



James Dunn / S/HE

I

After working for a short time at a real estate office, Conrad started a fox ranch in Summerside and in 1948 married Lois Gallant. The couple raised two children, Herbert and Elizabeth.

During the war, he fought at Dunkirk and Verdun, and on August 8, 1943, he was wounded while fighting in France. She was a nurse in a nearby army hospital and she endeavoured to help him recover his strength and dignity. She felt sorry for the man whose right testicle had been blown off.

The son of an undertaker, he was born in Toronto and attended Guelph Agricultural College in 1941. He left college, joined the army, and was sent overseas. The daughter of a doctor, she was raised to be a nurse and quickly volunteered to go overseas.

The funeral was held yesterday, with hundreds of mourners in attendance. Conrad and Lois were buried side by side.

* * *

While Lois gave birth to her son, Conrad carefully calculated the monthly financial statement in the unpleasant confines of the hospital waiting room. He didn't believe in wasting any time. It was the same when Elizabeth was born.

* * *

Herbert wanted to be an accountant right from the start. He liked the way numbers always yielded satisfactory solutions to difficult problems. Elizabeth liked to play golf. Unfortunately, her scores were much too high.

* * *

Conrad would have stayed in real estate except for a bitter disagreement with his partner. He felt that his partner was becoming much too familiar with Lois. Lois didn't even bother to disagree. She was already beginning to feel that all men were loathsome and dishonest.

Later, Conrad was furious when she refused to wear the fur coat he had secured for her. He threatened to sell her imitation Cezanne if she did not advertise his product. Lois eventually succumbed to his fervent demands.

* * *

While Conrad busied himself with the mating of rare foxes, Lois quietly became interested in art. She was moved by the dark, smouldering broodiness of Rembrandt's subjects. And she enjoyed the bright colours of Van Gogh.

In her dreams, Lois tearfully refused ardent young artists who threatened to cut off an ear if she did not elope with them. When questioned, she told Conrad that she did not have dreams anymore.

It was the same for Conrad. He could not tell Lois about his journeys inside women whose only source of happiness was his violent penetration.

* * *

Words were seldom spoken. When Conrad required something, he would use one of his many gestures in order to articulate that need to Lois. For her part, Lois did not see any further use in attempting to talk to him. She was tired of discussing the futility of language.

* * *

Elizabeth could not understand her mother. She could not see what was so interesting about a giant picture of a bowl of fruit. Herbert rather liked the painting. He liked the way it captured the essence of the apples and oranges without making them indistinct or indistinguishable.

* * *

Conrad had purchased the painting on the occasion of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. He had often seen her casting coveting glances at it in an art gallery owned by friends of theirs. Besides, he had been told it was a solid investment.

Elizabeth thought she would vomit when he made her take part in the unveiling. She was afraid to do anything that might incur his anger. She had been touched in a place where she knew fathers shouldn't touch their daughters.

The party was an enormous success. Everyone was so impressed by the grandeur of the work. While Lois was overjoyed to receive the painting, she also felt bitterness towards the man who offered it. Frankly, she mistrusted the spirit in which it was given.

* * *

Soon afterwards, Lois became disenchanted with art. She no longer loved her Cezanne. She no longer appreciated Rembrandt. She didn't even care for Van Gogh anymore.

Somehow, she felt helpless in the face of the masters. She felt like an empty glass waiting to be filled. She wanted so badly to give something of herself. But it was not required.

* * *

When he graduated from college, Herbert opened his own practice in Charlottetown. Still, he dreamed of Hitler's Messerschmidts each night. In her little bed, Elizabeth dreamed of social discomfort and loneliness. By day, she worked as a dental hygienist.

Lois spent her days at the library, searching madly for a painting that would please her. She found nothing. Conrad spent more time than usual daydreaming. He often thought of escaping to Mexico and becoming a shepherd.

One day, while looking through a book on revolutionary art, Lois discovered what she was looking for. She felt compelled to account for herself.

* * *

III

She had purchased the framed print for a mere thirty dollars and had thought he would be pleased with her frugality. She did not realize the extent of her error until he smashed the glass with his bare fist, causing it to bleed. It was probably just such a reaction that Kazimir Malevich had intended when he painted the work in 1918. For her part, she was unable to explain or justify why anyone would paint a "White Square on a White Background." Conrad was consumed with rage.

* * *

Starting his engine, he asked himself why women were so stupid. He asked himself why he even bothered with them. He silently cursed their need to manipulate. He silently cursed his need for sexual amelioration. He backed his car out of the driveway and turned left at the traffic circle.

Starting her engine, she asked herself why men resented women. She asked herself how they maintained so much hatred and anger. She loudly cursed their need to dominate. She loudly cursed her need for security. She backed her car out of the driveway and turned right at the traffic circle.

* * *

At the far side of the traffic circle, a cat prepared to cross the road. He could see a mouse on the other side and he was very hungry.

* * *

Gunning his engine, Conrad swore that she would kill him someday with one of her unbridled impulses. Slamming on her brakes, Lois swerved to avoid the cat who was crossing the road.

* * *

There was no problem with "the big white thing," as Herbert liked to call it. The garbage collectors were called to take it away and they did so for a relatively small fee.

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