



# **Wisconsin Academy review: Letters in Wisconsin. Volume 33, Number 4 September 1987**

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# WISCONSIN ACADEMY REVIEW

Published Quarterly by the Wisconsin  
Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters

**September 1987**  
**Volume 33, Number 4**



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## Letters in WISCONSIN

Cover photograph by John Chosy

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THE WISCONSIN ACADEMY  
OF SCIENCES, ARTS, AND LETTERS  
The Wisconsin Academy was chartered by  
the state legislature on March 16, 1870 as  
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of the state of Wisconsin by encouraging  
investigation and dissemination of  
knowledge in the sciences, arts, and  
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## Editorial

**A**t the same time as this annual literary issue is published the Academy is supporting Wisconsin authors and publishers with a new publication, the *Wisconsin Academy Review of Books* available from the Academy and from some bookstores across the state for \$6.00 per copy. The first volume reviews more than twenty-five recent books by Wisconsin authors. It also features articles on writer's organizations, conferences, and festivals around the state. We plan to continue this roundup of Wisconsin authors in an annual volume and are actively seeking books and reviewers for the 1988 issue. If you would like more information on this publication, please write to the Wisconsin Academy, 1922 University Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin 53705.

Well-known state poet Bink Noll died last November of a heart attack at age 59. Professor of English at Beloit College, Noll had published poems in numerous anthologies and journals and three books of poetry, the last *The House* in 1984.

**Future issues.** The December *Review* will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of conservation leader Aldo Leopold with articles updating his ideas and by his students who have carried on his work. The March 1988 *Review* will feature state wildlife artists who were selected by a panel of curators, artists, and collectors earlier this year.

Jane Brite will be leaving the *Review* editorial board now that she has accepted a new position as administrator/curator at Maryland Art Place in Baltimore. Jane wrote about state artists for the March 1985 and March 1986 art issues of the *Review*, and she served on the committee to select exhibitors for the Academy Gallery. However, the state art scene will not be losing her entirely since she will act as curator for the new nonprofit Walker's Point Art Gallery by returning to Milwaukee at least once a month.

We hope you enjoy the fiction and poetry presented here. Our editorial board members Ronald Ellis of Ft. Atkinson, Angela Peckenpaugh of Milwaukee, John Rosenwald of Beloit, and Ronald Wallace of Madison and I have read through hundreds of submissions in the past year and selected these. The experience and diversity of our editorial board members broaden our publication. We're grateful for their dedication to the literary arts and for the time they spend reading all these anonymous manuscripts.

Patricia Powell

# Authors

**Mary Ellis** was born and raised in northern Wisconsin and educated at the University of Minnesota. She currently lives in Minneapolis.

**Elizabeth Balestrieri** received her B.S. in education from the University of Michigan, her M.A. and Ph.D. in English from UW-Milwaukee. She is foreign lecturer in American literature at Toyama University, Toyama, Japan. Recently her poetry has been published in the *William and Mary Review* (25th Anniversary Issue) and her fiction in the *Colorado Review* (1986).

**Claire Bateman** has a B.A. in literature from Kenyon College. She has taught high school English and done proofreading and editing. She has poetry and fiction published or forthcoming in several publications: *Cimarron Review*, *Plains Poetry Journal*, *Voices International*, *Studia Mystica*, and others.

**John Bennett** is Pennings Distinguished Professor of English and poet-in-residence at St. Norbert College, DePere. His most recent book of poetry is *The Holy Unicorn: A Book of Meditations*. He has just completed a narrative poem cycle of ghost stories, *The Lambert Poems*, from which his poem in this issue is taken.

**Robin S. Chapman** is professor of communicative disorders at UW-Madison and editor of the 1988 *Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*. Her poetry has appeared recently in *Yankee*, *New Letters*, and *Madison Review*.

**Daniel F. Cooper** has a B.A. from UW-Eau Claire. He worked for the *Fon du Lac Reporter* before moving to Minneapolis. He published a short story in the June 1985 *Wisconsin Academy Review*.

**Credo James Enriquez** currently works as a public health educator (epidemiologist) with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services. Previously, he worked for an American company in Tokyo. His new collection of poetry *White Cosmos* will be out next year. He handles a poetry workshop with the UW-Madison Union Mini-Courses Program.

**Victoria Ford** received her B.A. from Ohio Wesleyan University and her M.A. in English and creative writing from Indiana University. Her work has appeared in *Abraxas*, *The Feminist Connection*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, and *The Wisconsin Poets' Calendar*, 1987. She has been a guest on local radio stations and was a cowinner in the First Dane County Poetry Competition.

**Marc Hudson** is a Northwest poet slowly grafting his imagination onto the Wisconsin landscape. His poems have recently appeared in *The Sewanee Review* and *The Kenyon Review*; his most recent book is *Journal for an Injured Son* published in 1985 by the Lockhart Press of Port Townsend, Washington.

**William T. Lawlor** is associate professor of English at UW-Stevens Point. Recently he has published short stories in *New Mexico Humanities Review* and *Ball State University Forum*. Lawler received a 1987 literary arts fellowship from the Wisconsin Arts Board.

**Arthur Madson** grew up in the Great Depression on an Iowa farm and is lately recovering from a clinical depression in a Wisconsin university town.

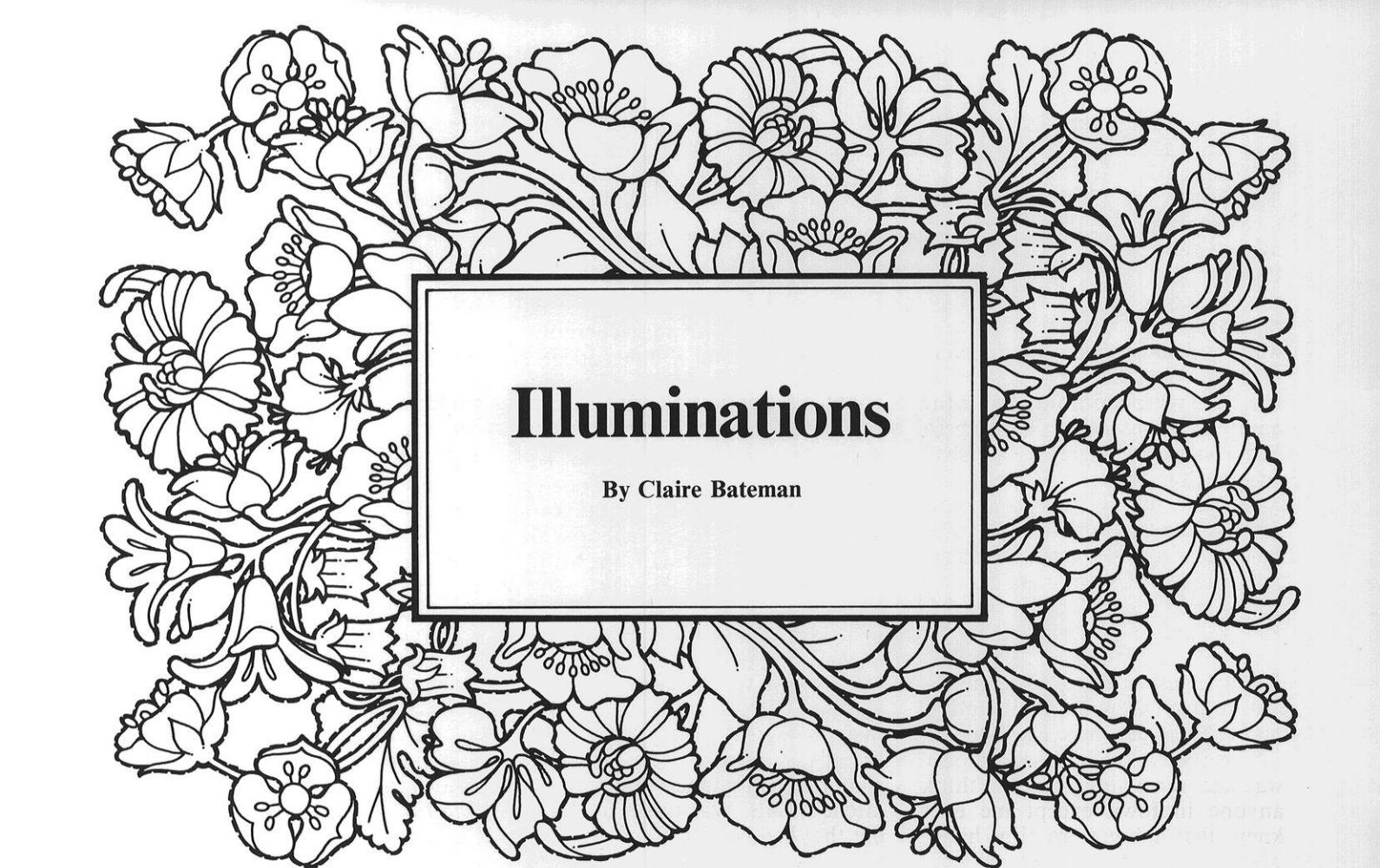
**Jayne Marek** is a Ph.D. candidate in English in twentieth-century literature at UW-Madison. Publications include poems in *The Windless Orchard*, *Spire*, and *Isthmus*. For one year she was poetry editor of *The Madison Review* and has won prizes in poetry contests in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio.

**David Martin** teaches writing and literature at UW-Milwaukee, where he also serves as fiction editor for *Cream City Review*. His writing has appeared in a number of literary magazines, including *The Northern Review*, *Midland Review*, *South Coast Poetry Review*, and *Amelia*. He is currently working on poetry and a novel, tentatively titled *Asleep at the Wheel*.

Wisconsin native **Jeff Schultz** writes poetry and fiction and now resides in Milwaukee. He is a graduate of the English department of the UW-Green Bay. At present he is completing a book-length cycle of short stories examining life in a trailer court.

**Doyle Wesly Walls** is writing a dissertation at UW-Madison on contemporary American poetry. His poetry as appeared in *Poet and Critic*, *Bits*, *Sou'wester*, *Negative Capability*, *The Madison Review*, *Wisconsin Academy Review* among others. He has poetry forthcoming in several other journals.

**Tim Zeglin** worked as an auto mechanic, truck tire repairman, and social worker at the Cook County House of Correction before moving to Wisconsin's Coulee country in 1973. Since then he and his wife have struggled to build a semi-confined sheep operation in Trempealeau County, while he worked on dairy farms, large and small. He has published numerous freelance articles and photos in farm publications, including *Wisconsin State Farmer* and *Farm Journal*.



# Illuminations

By Claire Bateman

I had known the Meracles—Bob, Ava, and their son Joey, who was ten years older than I was—since before I could read their name on the mailbox, when I heard it as “Miracle.” Later, it was impossible for me not to think of them as the people who missed out on some inexplicable marvel by just one haphazard “e.” And indeed, they could have used a miracle. Joey, the last Meracle, had the Simmings-Traxler Syndrome, which meant that he could never have children and would not live past thirty or thirty-five. Bob and Ava were older than most of Joey’s friends’ parents by a good ten years. Everybody, of course, knew all this, and spoke of the Meracles as if they were already more than half vanished. Sometimes I would walk by their house and be surprised that it was still there.

And a good thing for me that it was. Because of a falling-out with my own parents I found myself in need of lodgings and ended up boarding with the Meracles through

the summer months before my junior year at college. I lived in the guest room and fended for myself in the kitchen. Since I worked the night shift at the foundry, I rarely saw them. We remained mutual satellites, moving in each other’s peripheral vision, making infrequent, almost accidental contacts along the fringes of some days. It was as if the house were haunted by conversations we didn’t have, meals we didn’t share.

That was the last summer of Joey’s life. At first he seemed no different than he’d always been, so I didn’t know. He was, as ever, mysteriously brown, as if he snuck off every night to Bermuda and tanned in secret, returning just in time to rumple his sheets and tousle his sparse hair. Whether the darkness of his skin was due to some mischievous Indian chromosome swimming through his history, or whether it was a pigmentation due to his disease, I did not know. It gave him an ironic aura of well being. He could have passed for a lifeguard if our town had had a pool. He was almost always silent. When

I was a child, I had assumed that he was unable to talk, but when I was eleven I heard him talking to the paper boy about too many late papers.

His parents, too, seemed the same. They were gray haired and blue eyed and about twenty pounds overweight. They could have been twin brother and sister. (Maybe they were; maybe that explains their son’s illness. At least, that’s the kind of thing you dream up when you lie alone in your bed at noon, listening to the muted sounds of a family at whose center early death sits like an oversize bird’s egg waiting to hatch.) They were only a little less taciturn than Joey. It was as if they were lying low to escape any more notice from fate, but realized that too much silence could draw its attention as readily as too much noise.

From the outside, it was a normal house. It was yellow, with a few competently but not necessarily lovingly tended flowers out front. It was the inside that was the wonder. For one thing, the male Meracles seemed to be constantly taking showers. If it wasn’t Joey, it was

his father. The upstairs was perpetually steamy. I kept expecting to meet some gaudy bird or be ambushed by a pygmy with a blow gun. It wasn't as if they were particularly smelly people that they needed to be doing this. The flesh-colored walls were always barely damp, and there was a feeling of fecundity in the air, which perhaps was the point. Ava just took her bubble bath every Saturday night. She did buy an awful lot of towels, though—there were two whole closets full, and she got them in all different colors. It was a pleasure just to open the closet doors. The best way was to keep your memory purposefully blank as you walked down the hall, so that when you threw those doors open it looked just as wonderful as it had the first time when you hadn't known what you were going to see.

The other thing about that house was the scribbling. I don't think anyone in town except me ever knew that there were tiny handwritten notes covering large portions of every wall. At first I mistook them for wallpaper. It took me a while to distinguish between the notes. After about a week I began to recognize Bob's loopy letters, Ava's compact ones, Joey's slant. These notes were the work of years. I could tell by the change in Joey's writing and the different subjects. For instance, there was a note on the bathroom wall about the absurdity of a blizzard in late April that had occurred when I was about thirteen. They wrote notes about everything. There were pens and pencils all over the house. The Meracles quoted to each other on the walls from the humor sections of *Reader's Digest*. They complimented each other on tasks well done—a neatly mowed lawn, a light muffin. They reminded each other about bills due, dry cleaning languishing in plastic bags downtown, the birthdays of relatives in faraway states. They complained about boots left inconsiderately in each other's paths, neglected anniversaries, hours of aloofness. (How could they chide each other for aloofness when they apparently rarely spoke?)

They hashed over TV docudramas and late night movies. The younger Joey was reminded often to throw his dirty socks in the hamper, for goodness' sake, instead of leaving them in the middle of the floor to rot. The older Joey was admonished many times not to "overdo it." (Overdo what? Did they know about his clandestine trips to Bermuda?) I read that house from top to bottom, feeling like a voyeur the whole time, yet curiously unable to stop. I don't know if they knew I did it. Maybe they wanted me to, so that they could live on in someone's mind in all their daily detail, the way they would have lived in the mind of a child or grandchild.

In the middle of the summer there was a change in the writing; it was as if each of the three became instantaneously obsessive in a different way. Joey began to draw elaborate Christmas trees on the kitchen walls. Was this a freak talent that had suddenly swum to the surface of Joey's consciousness? Those mystic elves, gleaming fruits, enchanted stars—in what part of Joey's brain had they lain in wait during those long years of *Reader's Digest* discourses? And why the kitchen? There were colors in those trees that I had never even imagined. Soon packages began piling up under them. Like a child, I began to guess their contents. The bicycle was easy; it was merely shrouded with the same tarp that would keep it safe from weather once it resided outdoors. The puppy was obvious because of the air holes in the box (and was there a faint doggy odor?). Other things were more difficult. But since none was for me, it didn't, in the long run, matter.

Bob began drawing maps on the walls of Joey's room. First Wisconsin appeared. It was quite good, actually, and more detailed than one would have anticipated. Then the surrounding states. After that he began to move westward. It wasn't long before he reached the ocean, at which point he sketched in the east coast, the north, and the south. He did an especially beautiful job

with New York. I don't think he missed a city or a town. The mountains were all there, and the rivers, major and minor. After about a week, Joey began filling them in with colors. Some were standard—the rivers, for instance, were blue. But the deserts were mauve and the mountains were red. Though I couldn't deduce any pattern to his choices, he made the nation glow. I wouldn't mind having a smaller version of it on my study wall.

Ava simply wrote recipes all over the inside of Joey's closets. I say "simply" but I really shouldn't; I wanted to loosen my belt after I read them. She always went heavy on the creams and sauces. She especially favored baked goods, I remember, though there were two or three days when she experimented solely with Oriental dishes whose names made you feel that you needed to clear your palate. She put *The Joy of Cooking* to shame; Julia Child could have learned a thing or two from Ava. She spared no expense, and when appropriate, never failed to recommend a suitable accompanying wine.

Bob and Ava's room was filled with lists of words that seemed to have no connection with one another. Ram, am, glass, sale, clear, ream piled on top of each other across the walls. It took me a while to figure out that each was rearranging the letters of the other's name to form as many words as possible. It was amazing how many words you can get out of Ava Glas-  
ser Meracle and Robert Walter Meracle. In the loneliness of my room I worked with a little note pad, trying to come up with ones they hadn't thought of. I never did. When they started cheating and combined all the letters of both their names, I gave up.

Meanwhile, Joey's tan darkened, and his skin began to dry out. At first I thought it was all those showers, but after a while he stopped taking them. It wasn't long before he began to peel. Each layer of newly exposed skin was slightly browner than the last. Was he tanning from the inside out? Did his heart protest

its premature deadline by exuding an acute summer heat? It was then that I realized that Joey was actually dying, and that the two-dimensional United States and the alarmingly exquisite meals were his parents' last gifts. His legacy to them consisted of color and light, a concrete evocation of omitted celebrations and cancelled travels. And the older Meracles consoled each other with the formal but limited possibilities of their mutual aloneness.

By the first of August my spying was curtailed by the fact that they were now home almost all of the time. As far as I could tell, the wall decorating ceased. When a "For Sale" sign was purchased and propped in a corner in the hallway, I was seized with an irrational panic. They would paint the walls and move out. A priceless work of art would be destroyed. I bought a cheap camera and began to sneak into rooms, furtively snapping pictures as if I were an undercover man microfilming forbidden documents.

One Saturday morning a note addressed to me appeared in the mailbox. It was from my mother, who informed me succinctly that although I didn't have to come home if I didn't want to, my presence in the Meracle household at such a time was inappropriate. If rent for the rest of the month was a problem, she would be willing to offer me a small loan. Gus and Jeanne Kinnell were looking for a boarder to help offset their daughter's orthodontic expenses. It seemed to me that if the Meracles wanted me to leave, they would say so, but the fact was that I had never before shared such close quarters with death, and I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. I had the photos, after all. Maybe it was best that I leave. There were only three more weeks until school began again, and since I had already paid the August rent, I would not be short-shrifting the Meracles. Oddly, I do not remember whether I moved home or went to the Kinnells' for the rest of the summer. All I remember is the blankness, the barrenness of three weeks of clean white walls.

Somehow, my relationship with my parents resolved itself without noticeable effort on anyone's part—so much so that I found myself at home and rancorless at Thanksgiving of that year. Joey had, of course, died. My treasure trove of film resided, still undeveloped, in my camera, some kind of insurance—against what, I did not know. The Meracles, my father had informed me casually, had spent October and November readying themselves for a move to Florida. The house was sold, and the new owners would be moving in soon.

The day after Thanksgiving I walked over to Meracles's and cautiously approached the back door, casing the joint, so to speak. It was locked. The windows were also locked, but Ava had taken her drapes with her, so I was able to see in. I had, I now realize, been preparing myself for this moment for quite some time.

What I saw was wallpaper. Bob and Ava had covered over their wondrous walls with a simple floral print that was, if anything, understated. I stood on a large rock and peered in the kitchen window, too. There the wallpaper was a serene yellow with vertical rows of tiny baskets of fruits and vegetables suggesting a sufficient, if modest, harvest, nothing like the pagan luxuriance of the Christmas trees that were—where? Gone, covered over with paint? Or glowing secretly less than a hundredth of an inch beneath the new paper? I would, of course, never know. There was nothing to do now but walk away, which I did, satisfied by my own suspicions that Bob and Ava had not betrayed their era of the house's history with a bucket of Springer's paint. Their loyalty remained, I believed, for anyone who might chance to find it, undefiled upon the walls like the Paleolithic cave murals of Niaux, a testimony to the imagination where love is lavish with color, contour, and nourishment, even in the face of the inevitable silences.○

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## Even in Dreams

Flower in a garden world  
and I, a gust-borne bee  
blown in, a refugee  
from clover fields contested for  
where swashbucklers are preferred  
and "peace" is a newspeak word

and falling in love  
with the freshest nectar  
in the bluest bloom  
falling in love  
with a garden world  
with adventure undone.

Wedding in haste without a priest  
nor chapel in the garden  
and she loved me  
whoever I was  
and I loved her  
who never was

but her ear was caught  
by the whistling thrush  
my eye by the stooping hawk—  
in turn we bit  
the fatal fruit—  
she sang, I wrote.

Even in dreams of she-and-I  
of pastoral love  
and Paradise garden  
the plot ripens, autumn happens  
and squirrels the ending  
awry.

Arthur Madson

## Heron seen in the limited light

One morning in Japan

    spring rains loose-stitch  
    rice stems and sky together  
    a scrim of Noh mist and ink  
the mud, a weighted hem  
    anchoring the screen.

Farther are the bamboos

    that circumvent vision  
    a brushstroke of the visible  
    beyond which is passion  
or to others, corruption  
    of thought.

The horizon, for all its misty promise

    is only a dim elaboration  
of the central issue  
    the great blue  
question mark appended  
    to no thought but its own  
search in the mud  
    in this limited light  
for sustenance.

O, hybrid of gravity and grace

    in your dance of hunger  
your arched serrated wings  
    lend you false enormity  
it is your shadow, the rumor of power  
    that stuns the unseen prey.

But even you, local icon

    of pure intentions  
even you feign death  
    the stillness of no desire  
to lure the invisible  
    to flash in an angle  
perfect for seizure . . .

A stab, a quiver: a muddy finger

    wriggling in its bill—  
a meal perhaps for its mate.  
    A thrust, it's gone.  
In its wake, rings of weak light  
    loop farther out  
beyond sight.

*Credo James Enriquez*

## Braiding

When I try to collar the cat  
she raises a paw as if to protest  
it pinches. She's not fooled by a caress.  
I know. When I had hair all down my back

mother, you would braid it, first  
scraping a ponytail to brush  
the snarls out, and it always hurt. "But  
I'm holding it" you'd say. The inside part

stung, just the same. We often fought.  
Now the cat stalks away and stares  
at the door. I can read her back.  
She wants me to think about my sins

won't let me touch her, insolent.  
Of course, she wins. The single word  
of the door, as it opens, loosens her;  
in our old kitchen, the wooden spoon

marked me your child, held with one hand  
stroking and stroking, the hair all tangled  
around my neck, the edge of the spoon  
biting my back, down and up

I know how the hand drops  
when it ends, when the door finally opens  
the glass pane flashing back  
my old familiar face

reaching to touch empty air  
my arm moving in the cold  
like an offense.

*Jayne Marek*

## On The Death Of Peace Pilgrim

*This woman, known simply as Peace Pilgrim, crossed the nation on foot seven times, walking for peace for over twenty-eight years. She died in a car accident in Indiana in 1982.*

Where corn and soybean flower  
and hills bloom with the sky  
she planted her last word:  
a dirt and gravel road  
drove her into her elements  
buried the seeds of an old woman  
who walked from her own name  
into the blue of an idea

and in the blue of why  
she died as she walked  
nameless; thus, in New York  
the papers skyscraped nothing  
no dust, no leaf of her  
pressed among their pages  
no image of her taken  
into their concrete surmise

but in the grass-held hills  
the voices of their living  
take the word of Peace Pilgrim  
to heart, plant it again  
pledge it to their soil and stone  
and murmuring her unfinished  
cry, they leave her then  
to the wind's abstraction.

*Victoria Ford*

## River Evening Twilight

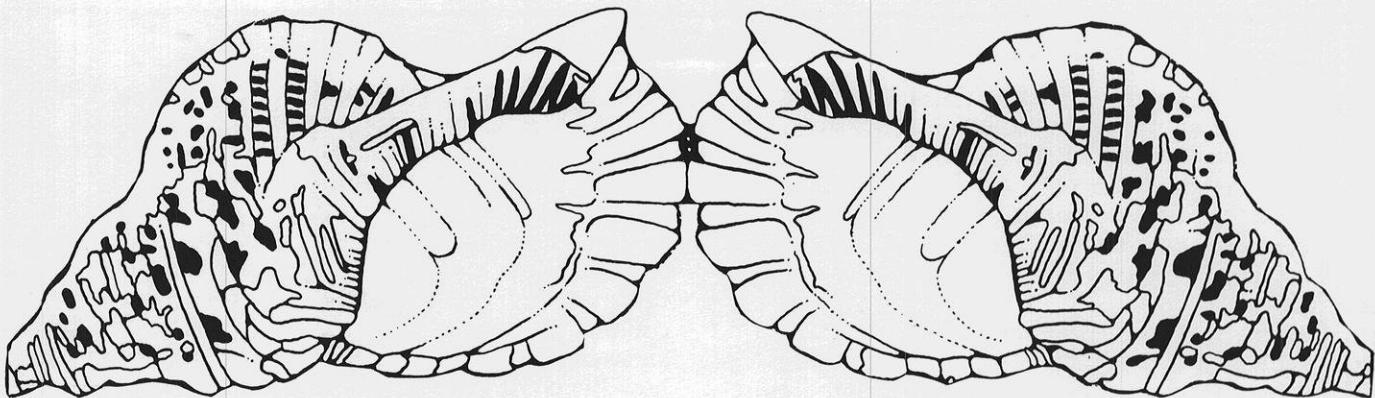
Down here sirens  
fall from the city  
caught by trees  
soughing in rising wind.

The brassy green  
surface rattles  
against current's  
constant Om.

A lost picnic table  
and a battered painter  
float past willows  
snarled with lures  
bobbers and monofilament  
line.

Red-winged sergeants  
span the valley like  
sentries and chill  
their cries. Shadowed  
coons climb overhead.  
Your thighs sweat  
the excitable enzyme.

*David Martin*



## At South Haven

By David Martin

**I** stand here, hands on the railing, knowing I'm not ready to go in.

Lisel, behind me, her hand pressed cheek-high against the arched hall, watches.

Heat rises from the sand below and dries the sweat on my temples.

From the apartment next door I can hear their baby crying.

I grip the railing tighter and lean over the concrete embankment until I hear Lisel behind me and I know she'll ask me to come in now.

So: time hasn't passed as I thought. Each day becomes interminably long with the heat: the sun glares indiscriminately over sand and rooftops and skin. At night the lake fills the air with such sound that I almost think I'll fall too deeply inside the rhythm of wind and waves—I won't be able to surface, I'll waken mute and senseless.

*This isn't safe. I know it isn't safe.*

Lisel's on the couch napping, her legs crossed just below the ankle. How she can sleep in this heat I'll never know. I lean my hand on the stucco wall and wonder if she ever feels the way I do—even though I know I should be the one who feels like her. We've talked lately, she as soon as she returns from the bank and me when I get into these moods, but we repeat the same words and I know what we intend to say. We walk along the shore, me with my hands in my pockets and my pants rolled just below the knees and Lisel with her little hands inside the folds of her muslin dress. We talk as openly as most people when they stroll the water's edge. There's an intimacy revealed here in the way people walk—even from here I can see them wrestling with their souls, all the time they're thinking they're the only ones with such thoughts,

they're the only ones who see the world as it really is, who think they reacquaint themselves with who they really are out there. All the time they think they're unwatched I see them breathing and observe the slight expansion within their ribs and I also see how their eyes dart away from one another when the wind shifts.

*Don't try too hard* I want to shout after them, for I tried all that out there. You're a fool if you let it bother you.

But it does.

Sometimes, when I feel Lisel's hand, I think they too must watch. That makes it hard.

**H**er head moves on the pillow. She opens an eye, smiles, and then returns to sleep. Now her forehead's smooth and the smile remains. She knows I'm here and this eases her. I imagine the warmth in her cheeks and I know without brushing them with my hand that it's the same as when her father stood over her years ago. I try to become her for a moment and see the world from her eyes: through the orange on my eyelids a dark shape watching from above. She uncrosses her legs, curls her toes and points them before she falls back into her limp sleep.

Suddenly I'm taken with an urge to wake her just so she'll look at me again. I want to carry her to the water, wade in, and swim with her holding on to my neck. That's all I really want: to swim and feel Lisel's hands clench my neck, tugging my face into the water, her hair bobbing over and around our shoulders, and feel the night coming from the cold tightness in my legs.

She shifts her arm to block the afternoon sun from her eyes. I can see her barely squinting at me from the oddest angle beneath that thin arm.

"What are you looking at?" she finally asks.

"Nothing" I say, feeling suddenly restless. I let my hand slide down the arch and feel the cool stucco on my palm. I walk down the hall and look out the sliding screen door.

"It's hot" I say, loud enough for her to hear.

Lisel doesn't respond.

It's hot. Let's go for a swim. Or a walk. Or a drink. Something."

"But I'm just lying here, hon" she says. "Let me rest. We'll go in a while."

This just tears me. It's as if I can feel the pulse running through my arms. My chest is empty. God-damnit, I say, to myself, goddamnit all to hell. I turn and look for something to grab on to and swing from. I consider putting my hand through the screen. Instead I slide the door back and walk into the sudden heat of the courtyard.

And again that feeling that I'm thrust into another country, a Mediterranean land, and I almost expect to hear a guitar in the distance. The sun's brilliance seems garish. For an instant all towels and swimsuits and sails and deck chairs bleed into a dull silver flat against the water. I squeeze my eyes and the salty sweat mingles into tears. There's the hollow sound of the lake's steady breathing and the neighbor boy is crying again.

I grab the railing and consider whether I ought to throw myself over onto the sand. If I do, I know I'll walk for hours and I'll only frighten Lisel, although sometimes that's exactly what I want to do. I begin to hoist myself over the railing, but I feel the weakness in my chest. Goddamnit I say, and I pound the railing with my fist and I see something cool and distant within me. I can see a place: an empty corner, a long room, and I think if I can just find that corner, that room, and if I just stand there for only a moment, I'll be all right.

Inside I hear her push off from the bed. She comes out through the sliding screen, and I can tell she's putting her hand to her forehead so she can look out over the water too. She's standing with her legs apart, balancing on the outside edges of each foot.

"I'm ready to go" she says.

She puts her hands on my shoulders and holds them there and I feel the coolness of her palms. She holds on like she does when we're swimming and I tow her behind me.

I take a last look at the water spread below.

"Okay." I turn around.

Lisel holds out her hand so I can take it if I want. I do take it and I nudge her with my elbow to begin. We start with slow, methodical steps along the railing, really waiting for the other to lead the way. As we walk down the steps, we lose the sound of the lake, the steady breathing, so that now the air is more dark and calm. Already the sand is cool.

"The lake's pretty calm" Lisel says.

I have to laugh at that, but I don't let her see. I look out to where the sun is setting and how it appears to swell and squat as it nears the horizon. The contrast of color there twists my stomach.

"It's been still all day" I say, and I think of this morning's swim and how barren and heavy the water was. I feel the quiver in my stomach as I did earlier this morning. The water was so calm and deep that I couldn't keep myself from falling to the bottom. The air seemed thin and useless to my lungs. I think of how I can tell Lisel this, but I know it's too hard.

"I love the lake like this" she says.

I look at her and see her smile twisted beneath her hair, and I can see she's not just saying this.

Her hand tugs me and I know she wants me to stop now and admire this scene. We both turn and I put my arm around her shoulders, hoping she'll cradle the small of my back with her hand and nuzzle her nose into my side.

It's moments like these that I want to take my head off my neck and dropkick it as far down the beach as it will bounce and roll. I want my ankle to grow numb from swiping at it.

*What a fool you are. Why don't you just shake this off?*

But I can't. I know I can't.

Along this line of cliffs I can see a row of houses sitting on the sand. Two've collapsed from erosion and the rest are condemned. Lisel and I've been inside most. We pass over little sand humps and through the valley of dead birch where like crooked fingers only the top branches stick above the sand. Runners of ivy lead off in every direction. Yellow razor grass cuts at the tops of our feet no matter how carefully we walk. Lisel stops to scratch her legs and readjust her sandal straps.

Once Lisel and I took a picnic basket and a couple bottles of wine to that house. We ate cold barbecued chicken and blueberry muffins. Later I remember I woke to the sun beating down full bore on my head through the screen and all around dust motes floated off the yellow plywood floor. I looked for Lisel but couldn't find her in the sudden brightness. Her clothes were still piled in the corner. I stood and looked out on the lake below. I remember holding my head because I was almost senseless from the thick air and the heat. In the distance, up the beach, the foghorn was going.

I heard Lisel call. Her voice seemed to float in through the screen as though it was coming in off the lake.

I think I feel something, she said.

I remember I was even more stupid from the heat. I looked around, rubbed my thighs, and sensed the awful flatness of the room. I must have run straight through the door and up the stairs without stopping. I poked my head in each of the empty rooms, sensing

the hollow rectangularity of each, until I saw Lisel sitting in an open and weathered window.

Look at you, she said, laughing.

She pointed at me and covered her mouth at the same time.

I looked at her and saw her smiling. She had pulled her hair off her shoulders and held it suspended with her fingers in order to let the wet breeze at her neck. She looked long and thin and naked there, flattened, and for a moment I thought how her breasts and legs looked absolutely silly and absurd. There was something in her arms and legs all bent and folded within the window that made her look . . . what? Embodied. Complete.

What are you looking at? she wanted to know.

I ran down to the porch and brought up the wine.

We finished the second bottle and Lisel said she wanted us to move here.

We fell asleep and this time when I woke I could feel Lisel beside me. It'd grown cool and dark and a swirling wind was blowing mist in off the beach and into the room. I could smell it was going to rain.

I pushed off the floor and almost fell. I remember somehow in the darkness I sent a bottle clattering and I said *Shhhh* hoping it wouldn't wake her. I had to walk with my arms outstretched before me, groping for the walls and the stair rail. Once I was on the ground floor I walked to the screen and leaned my head against its black mesh so I could see the night. I breathed the thick wind coming off the water and felt my legs grow strong. My neck and arms ached where I had supported the dead weight of Lisel's head. I brushed dead flies with my feet. I remember thinking of how much my life was going to change and wondering if I'd be happy and I remember I must have stayed there watching the shapes of gray mist roll in for a long time before I finally dozed off.

The entire house shook: the explosion clapped so loud it seemed as if the very sky was cracking overhead. My legs snapped into my chest and I remember I thought the house was falling down the cliff. A pain ripped through my stomach and a horrible smelling sweat broke across my skin. Lightning flashed across the wooden walls. Then I heard Lisel cry out above.

“When do you want to talk about it?” Lisel asks. I knew she was going to ask this. Even so I wish she would've said something about how pretty the sailboats are as they push down to the pier. I want to release her hand and walk by myself now. I'm not comfortable with this.

I stop to face the lake. The horizon line is now only a thin red line. Soon the sky'll grow gray and then blue-black.

“Maybe we'd better go back.”

She lets that sit.

I turn and look at her. She's strange tonight, not trying to force an answer. She looks at the water, her eyes blank and flat. She folds her arms across her chest and leans on one leg.

“No, I don't think so” she says. “I think we'd better stay here and work this out.”

The breeze raises my skin. A couple of sandpipers have run up the shore behind Lisel and now they scurry at her feet before running away pecking at the sand. I want to point out how comical they look, how sad their skittery lives must be, how stupid they are to chase the water and then run away all their lives, but she's heard this before and I can see she won't be amused.

I look up and see the dark flecks of gulls wheeling out over the pier.

“Catch is in” I say.

No response.

She bends to pick up a stone, holds it between her thumb and index finger as if to gauge it, and then she rears back to skip it over the water. I can see now how she won't budge. She won't look at me but at the water and the stones she throws and the skips they make even as the water turns black. She'll wait, I know, until I begin. And for a moment I think: *fat chance, rot in hell, goddamnit* precisely because I know that strategy won't work with me.

But she must know I can't stand it when she refuses to look at me.

“This isn't the time” I say. “This just isn't the right time.” It's not very convincing, even now as I say it to myself, but it's true.

Lisel stands straight, as if to watch the last stone slip into the water.

“Why not?”

She throws another stone, this with greater force than the others, enough so that her follow-through looks awkward.

“Shit Lisel. I just know these things” I say. I begin to feel flushed. My stomach tightens and I think about shaking my fist at her, although I know that won't work. Similar gestures flash through me and fly across my muscles, but I restrain myself from playing the complete fool.

I'm trying, goddamnit.

“Let's go.”

I turn to take her hand but she raises her arm and knocks me away. She doesn't want any part of this, and I guess I understand. She folds her arms tightly across her chest so that she hides her breasts, turns, her heel in the wet sand, and hikes off.

“Jerk” she says hotly.

I can see the tightness in her face when she says this. I'm happy that I don't have to look on it again.

I want to laugh, too, the way she spits when mad.

Take it, I say, you deserve it. I am a jerk. And worse. Still, when she spits, even with such conviction, it makes me laugh.

**T**his just won't work I say, out loud, and then Jesus why not just let everyone in earshot know you're a fool?

She just doesn't understand how difficult it is. I bite my lip, for now I can see the shadow of an old fisherman walking down the pier. I stop and turn sideways so he can pass, and when he does I watch the orange glow inside the bowl of his pipe. *Fool* I say, for this is exactly what I want to avoid now, any public scene, any neighbor or stranger picking up on what I say.

The man's head shifts slightly to look me in the eye. "Good evening" I say, automatic, even though I want him to hurry off.

"Ev'nin'" he says.

In the pipe glow against his cheek I think I detected him winking, as if he could see right through me as he passed. I smell the fish flopping in his pail. I turn and walk away, hands buried in my pockets, secure in the fact that I'm alone and in the dark, and I count the steps it takes to reach the end of the pier.

I wonder what makes him so goddamned cheerful.

**T**his just isn't safe.

I hear Lisel's voice somewhere saying you do all you can, that you just let yourself feel, and if you fall apart, well then, that's not the end of the world: you try again.

*But what if you fall apart, Lisel, what happens then?*

I sit here with my legs dangling over the cold concrete, the black water lapping over my ankles. The water and wind seem good after such a long day under the sun. My eyes almost feel as if a salve has been smeared across them. The air's so clean and good that I smile at the thought of never wanting to go back. It'd be wonderful to sit here till dawn and walk along the shadowed shore and swim in the still water before anyone wakes. Lisel, too, if she was here, would want to sit and watch the stars glitter in the breeze. If I'd been thinking I'd've brought some whiskey or some wine, and I could hear her silly laugh and watch her when she gets loud and talks to the lake. If a dog howls she bays at it like a wolf and then even the dog seems embarrassed. And we could watch the stupid water flap at our feet.

I wish I could see her laughing now. I wish we were back in that house and she was in the window telling me I look silly. "And what about you?" I'd ask, and I'd graze her cheek with my knuckle. I'd grab at her belly with one hand, set the bottle down, tug her hair and say: "And don't you think you'll look silly yourself?" Lisel, I love you so much it hurts. And she'd take my arm and pull it around my waist and pull me close so I looked out on the night lake sky over her shoulder, her hair against my face.

**Y**ou've got to let it out, I hear Lisel saying and of course I know she's right. But there is, I know, a

timing for everything, a sense of propriety, and although I haven't begun what I know I must, I know I feel it and I feel it right now.

This isn't safe: if I was to let her hear what this is like, I know she couldn't stand it.

I couldn't stand it.

*Goddamn this lake.*

*Goddamn this lake and goddamn this life.*

**T**he Black River flaps between the two piers, the oil-thickened surface reflects star specks and the moon out over the west. Most of the lights along the shore are out now. Only the shadows of the rooftops and the cliffs show in shadow. Across the water a single sailboat's light bobs in the distance. You can hear music wafting in with the slow waves.

Lisel's waiting now and I know I'm a jerk for having stayed out so late. If I pretend not to know what this is doing to her, then I really am in trouble.

I can't get over how difficult it can be to say something. I shake my head until my hair snaps and my ears ache. Christ. Am I just an idiot?

I open my mouth. Nothing but my breath comes and even that seems like the day's hot air that the night sweeps away so easily. I stretch my arms as if to hold something and I know how far apart they seem from each other. They don't even seem connected. The world must laugh at every move I make since only the world knows when it will fly apart. It has its own sense of timing.

Lisel turns out the light. Even from here I can hear the neighbor boy over the sand. He's wakened from some dream, some nightmare, and he wants comforting.

I look out on the lake.

Out there, up the beach, I can see myself in one of those summer houses: Lisel's singing in the kitchen and I'm standing at the screen looking out on the twilight with *our* boy in my arms. He's been crying for some time although we can't find a reason. Lisel has asked me to see if I can do anything for him. Through the screen I can see the clouds moving in and I smile because the boy is crying less now. He burrows the side of his face into my collarbone. I cup his head and his legs kick my stomach. He may be afraid or he may still be teething or he may just feel like letting loose.

"Shhhhh" I say, letting him feel the air pushed through my lips against his ear.

He quiets even more and breathes in less shallow gasps.

Lisel stands behind us now. She puts her hands on my shoulders. I can see she's smiling at the boy.

It's going to rain, I can see, and the wet wind pushes our hair back against our scalps.

Lisel says something.

*Me too*, I say, although I can't hear exactly what she says.

*Me too*, I say, and I kiss the boy's closed eyes.○

*I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray;  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.*

William Butler Yeats

## The Swamp

By Mary Ellis

Bill Lucas briefly glimpsed the beaten-up Volvo and its attractive owner when she drove into the station and saw her more fully when she walked through the open door, toting a canvas bag with some foreign word scrawled across it in white letters. The men all looked up and nervously shifted their eyes away as she approached the counter to buy a pack of cigarettes. It became silent in the station for a moment, and then the sounds of low talking and of cars being repaired started up again. Bill had rolled himself closer to one of the front wheels of the car he was working on for a better view. Her dark hair fell waist-length, and she flipped it away from her face with annoyance as she dug into the bag for some change. She was a city woman—he knew from her car covered by political stickers. He became so intent on watching her that he stopped working on the car above him. She turned to the soda machine, facing him almost directly, but took no apparent notice of the mechanic staring at her through the doorway of the garage. Bill felt the warmth creep up his neck and flush his face as he gazed at the nipples outlined in the thin fabric of her halter top. He wanted to reach out and gently squeeze those breasts and rub his fingers over the tips. He wanted to push his nose into the skin of her belly and draw in that female smell. Bill almost felt as though he were breathing in her scent instead of the gaseous odor around him when the loud bang of a dropped hammer startled him. It startled her too, and the woman looked up and stared at the mechanic as though he had produced the sound.

In a panic, Bill fumbled for something to say. "Hey sweet baby" he said with a false cockiness, imitating a successful line of streetwise lovers on TV. He stared at her, expecting her to turn away nervously like most women he knew would, but she only stared condescendingly back at him. Bill quickly looked away, then was pissed to be intimidated. He turned to watch her again as she finished buying her soda. Packing the can in her bag, she started toward the door. Before stepping out, she turned to give Bill a look of defiance and city superiority. And her I-don't-need-you-redneck-glance told him he was not in her class. Then she was gone, and the rest of the men jabbed each other, snorting with laughter. Bill felt the immediate rush of humiliation and anger come over him, and he rolled to the other side of the car and slid out from beneath it. He slammed his tools down onto the work bench and grunting his goodbye to the station owner, left his job an hour early.

Bill gunned his Chevy out of the parking lot onto the main highway which ran through the small town of Clifford and raced it down the smooth black-top to the Pike Creek turnoff. There on the gravel back road to his home, Bill's anger and humiliation subsided and he slowed the car down to a reasonable speed. He felt stupid, ashamed of his absurd remark because it made him seem like the man she expected in that place. In the instant after she left, Bill had wanted to run after her and apologize; make her know that he was a good man, that he was just as capable of loving her as any man from the city. Yet that begging feeling had angered Bill, and he knew the men would have thought him weak. He had wanted to prove himself her equal in the fleeting moment their eyes met. Now all he wanted was to get the hell home. His throbbing head was made worse by the July heat, and the late afternoon sun poured on the car like a thick batter. Bill rubbed his arm across his face, but the dirt on his arm left streaks that felt gritty on the oily surface of his skin. He gave up and let the sweat drip down his cheeks, slumping in the car seat with exhaustion and with the sudden realization that it was Friday. A small hope glimmered briefly for a weekend without the smell of gas and oil in his hair and nostrils. But the glimmer died when Bill considered his empty evening ahead on the most social night of the week in town. Just that morning his friend Ray razzed him about not having a woman to spend the evening with. "What's the matter Lucas, can't ya get anybody?" "Fuck off!" Bill had yelled, and the rest of the morning everybody avoided him. Then the city woman had shown up. The truth was he had planned to ask someone out, but had lost his courage when opportunities presented themselves. All he could do was watch them. And I get fuckin' laughed at when I do that, he thought angrily, the city woman fresh in his mind.

He picked up the rag he had used to wax the car and blew his nose into it. Bill wiped his nose with one hand and noticed the mucus was a black and tarry mixture like the oil he cleaned out of car engines. What the rag had missed, Bill pried out with a finger, and randomly wiped onto his dirty jeans. He slowed for the upcoming curve, and his knee bumped the dashboard. Even with the seat pushed back as far as it would go, Bill could barely fit his long legs into the car. He sometimes felt permanently bent to his vehicle, slouching his narrow shoulders so that his head would not hit the car ceiling. He was 6'6" but thin, missing the fat and muscle that would have distributed his proportions more equally. Fat or muscle didn't really matter; he still felt as he came out of the curve, like a bear stuck into a chicken coop.

The thought about his size diminished as Bill came into full view of his farmhouse, and he turned into the driveway, easing the car into its parking space by the clothesline. He disappeared into the house, returning with a beer to sit on the cement steps outside the back

door. Tilting his head back to stretch his sore muscles, Bill gazed at the sweep of land behind the house.

This is *my* home, he thought with a mixture of raw pride and bitterness. The old faded red of the barn and the quivering tips of timothy weeds and thistles that grew in the acre behind it were as familiar to him as the mottled white scars on his body. There was the long, thin picketed snow fence like rows of large teeth that marked the boundary of the yard from the oat fields. In the middle of the yard was the light pole, flooding the night's darkness with a brilliance that kept the coyotes and deer from venturing in too close, but was ignored by the very hungry fox and occasional garbage-raiding black bear. Far beneath its penetrating bulb was the nailed tail of a snapping turtle he had recently killed; its dying nerves waving the drying flesh in the warm breeze. He loved the openness of the yard and the way the cultivated land flowed, despite the fences, into the swamp and woods. He especially loved the edge of the swamp that met the tamed land and he turned to look at its beckoning greenery. Bill knew when the time came to walk down to its border that the swamp would open up and take him in—it always had since he was a boy playing in the swamp's shaded interior. He smiled, remembering how his mother came down to the swamp's edge in her apron with barn boots pulled over her slippers and swinging a kerosene lamp called him in for bedtime.

But the farmhouse he leaned against was what other people loved; the house he had been stuck with, topped with a black peaked roof and sides of peeling white paint. He used it for a place to eat, sleep, and cover his head in bad weather. Not Dad, Bill silently mused, he's all over this place. The past generations and their history in the house had been talked about constantly when he was a boy by his father. But the generations were *alive*—he felt them and their unresolved emotions which filled the house and shook the beams, squeezing out through the cracks in the eaves, long-held screams mistaken for the wind.

Bill tilted his head to take the last swig of beer and heard the wind as it cut around the corner of the house. As the wind picked up again and separated itself to move around the building, Bill remembered how the wind's sound had disturbed his mother as she planted and cultivated the flowers around the house's foundation. "God in Heaven! That wind cries, doesn't it?" she would say. He crushed the empty beer can with one hand and tossed it into the garbage can. The flowers near the door reminded him of his obligation to visit her this weekend. She had lived in a small house in town since his father's heart attack when Bill was sixteen. The will decreed that the farm be left to the remaining male, and his mother felt Bill was old enough to care for what was going to be legally his anyway. She moved to town to make a living as the bookkeeper for the church. His brother James had been killed in Vietnam, so the farm became Bill's when he turned

eighteen. I'll call her, Bill decided, not wanting to go into town over the weekend. He turned to check the sun's position in the sky and, satisfied that it had not touched the land's edge, entered the house to eat and shower.

Sitting on the fence post behind the barn, Bill felt it was his time to rise just as the burning eye of the sun was setting. The shower had rid him of the loathsome smell of oil and gas mixed with dirt, and his skin felt dry and clean, almost crackly when the breeze moved across it. He wrapped his arms around himself and arched his back, stretching his cramped muscles. His headache was gone. Bill felt almost good again as he watched the sun gradually lose its brightness. Yes, he felt almost good, but not quite. Too bad water can't reach inside, he thought wryly, and at that movement, Bill had a mental picture of himself: a green garden hose shoved down his throat while his pants were dropped around his ankles, drinking and peeing himself clean. Even after he scrubbed himself physically clean he never felt spiritually clean; and through the years he tried to rid himself of the accumulated soulful dirt that made him feel old and ugly. Bill knew it was a deeper impurity than the church could eliminate, although he continued to spend Monday nights sitting silently in the confessional booth while old Father McKenzie quietly snoozed.

Bill breathed deeply, taking in the comforting smell of fertile soil. Looking at the field, he stretched out his long arms carefully so as to maintain his balance on the post and reached upwards as if to embrace the approaching twilight. The heat was slowly retreating into a coolness that kept the mosquitoes and black flies from preying on his exposed arms and face, and steam rose from the plowed field as the overturned earth responded to the breeze. A thin layer of white mist rolled and swirled with the moving air above the ground. He shivered as it reminded him of one February night when the moon was luminescent enough to change the sky from black to light gray. His older brother James had pulled him out of bed and taken him outside in the middle of the night, saying only that it was a "night for foxes." On the field behind the barn, lay a hard crust of snow that glittered under a full moon. Bill could hear several short, high-pitched barks coming from the field, and James had lifted him onto his shoulders so he could see better. At first he saw nothing and then James had pointed and said, "See'em . . . see'em dancing over there." Sure enough, a vixen and dog fox were chasing each other on top of the hard crust, running in playful circles and lifting themselves up on two legs as though to dance with one another. Then abruptly, as the two boys watched, the vixen stopped running and crouched low as the dog fox maneuvered his body behind hers, roughly nipping the back of her neck. He then mounted the vixen, thrusting hard, and remained locked into his mate for what seemed like hours instead of minutes

to Bill. He had tugged at his brother's hood and asked, "What's wrong . . . why are they fighting?" "They aren't fighting stupid! It's their mating time . . . you know . . . to make little foxes" James had tried to explain. Still confused and uneasy, Bill had watched as the dog fox suddenly released himself from the vixen, and moved forward to nip the ruff of fur behind his mate's neck. "I heard them barking, that's how I knew" James had whispered to Bill, letting him slide off his shoulders.

Bill had lingered for a moment by the fence post as James went ahead, plowing through the thick snow toward the house. Outside of the foxes, it had been an almost magical night with the wind blowing softly like a flute through the pines clustered on the field's edge and the moon shining down on the fox pair to illuminate their instinct-inspired performance. The strange feeling had held him until there came a painful numbing from his toes. James returned to hoist him up onto his shoulders to walk back to the house. Bill had suddenly become very tired and relaxed into the rhythm of his brother's gait, watching the sky as James trudged through the snow. God lived up there with the Virgin Mary and their son Jesus. Bill had wondered if the Virgin could see him, and then if she could come to him if he called to her. Sister Agnes had told him that the Virgin was kind and gentle and loved little children. James had told him it was all a pile of crap, the stuff they tried to make you believe in Catholic school, but Bill thought the statue of the Virgin in church was beautiful. She smiled down at him the way his mother did sometimes when she was fleetingly happy. Looking up, Bill had taken off his mitten and waved, just in case she was watching him.

Biting his nails, Bill wondered how he had kept his innocent belief in the Virgin Mary after watching a pair of foxes screw their brains out. Mating is the part of a wider scope of natural stimulus that affected even humans, he recalled his high school biology teacher saying. That's how they got you, you dumb shit, he thought disgustedly, leaping free of the post and its barb wire. Bill walked instinctively across the field and down the bank that led to the swamp. Here the ground became a spongy peat moss in between the dried humps of yellow-green marsh grass which prevented anything heavy from sinking down into the marl-like mud underneath it. A rush of stink rose from the disturbed swamp bedding, and he stopped after he had trekked halfway in, to lean against a tall cedar to catch his breath. Bill groped around for a handkerchief to wipe the sweat running down his forehead and found it wrapped around a pack of cigarettes. He felt annoyed as he shoved the pack into another pocket. He had forgotten to leave them in the woodpecker hole inside the fence post; he never brought them into the swamp. He didn't want to leave cigarette butts in the moss nor did he want to chance accidentally setting the dry humps of grass on fire. He shut his gray eyes for a moment, the lids heavy with resignation, and rested

his head against the rough bark of the tree. But he couldn't rest for long, feeling the urge to keep moving into the cover of the trees.

There was now only a thin line of orange on the horizon, and Bill could see the massive outline of the ridge that rose out of the middle of the swamp like a dinosaur which had petrified there and been covered with a blanket of trees. He moved catlike between the tamaracks and cedars, marveling at the sparseness of their undergrowth beneath the canopy of branches from above. The needled limbs made a speckled pattern on the spongy moss below as the light played on their surfaces and escaped through the uncovered layers to make sweeping shadows among the splashes of fading orange-yellow rays. The shsh shsh sound of the twilight breeze moving through them reminded Bill of the voices he thought talked to him when he was a small boy tucked into bed. The Norway pines next to his second floor bedroom made the same sounds, and often, after his mother slipped silently from the room, he would crawl out of bed and stand by the window, whispering back what he thought he heard them say. Now he couldn't remember what they spoke or what he said back, but the sound still seemed to contain a language for those who lived within it. He climbed the ridge's east side, wishing he could understand the message breathed through the pine boughs. Grabbing a low spruce branch to pull himself up, he stopped for a moment and looked up at the boughs. "Hey! Talk to me" Bill said out loud and getting no answer, continued to climb up the slope. Perhaps, he pondered sadly, it was only something a kid could understand.

Bill found his spot on the ridge with the dwindling light. It was a stand of four exceptionally tall cedars whose roots had implanted themselves in perfect geometric harmony, forming a natural square "room" without walls. Here in this imaginary room, the urge stopped, and Bill settled himself on the ground with crossed legs, leaning against one of the cedar's trunks. From this focal point, Bill could see the deep kettle lake that lay below on the north side of the ridge. Its water looked very black except for the small inner circle of light cast down by the moon. Bill felt it watched him like a large, watery eye with blinking ripples on its surface. Every night he had spent sitting on the ridge was partially consumed in wonder, looking at the lake and her moonlit eye. It stirred him into the familiar, and yet he had not been able to pinpoint just what place in his head the lake continually touched. Bill knew every contour of the shoreline surrounding the lake. He had canoed and fished around the floating bog edges; had learned to swim when his father threw him out of the boat, naked at the age of five into the intense cold of her spring-fed waters; and had lain in a puke-covered stupor one night on the swaying dock after throwing beer cans farther and farther into her center. Still it watched him, sometimes calmly but during a thunderstorm with a churning fury not expected

of such a small body of water.

He averted his eyes to avoid the sensation of being so intensely looked at, and then turned his head sharply around to stare back at the water. "Ma" he blurted out loud, suddenly realizing that the lake reminded him of his mother's eyes whose darkness were prone to tears and ripples of fear. Awareness crept over him, and he breathed in the swamp air. It contained a musky sweetness and odor . . . like Ma, Bill remembered and he remembered also, how it had disturbed him when he was young. He would smell it after she had awakened him from a bad dream and rocked him to sleep again before returning to the bed she slept in with his dad. Oftentimes he could not fall asleep when she rocked him, and he clung to her, hoping she would never leave. But despite his crying, she tucked him firmly into bed before hurrying out of the room and closing the door.

He ground the heel of his boot into the dirt and wrapped his jacket tighter around his middle. He gazed at the lake again until the sparkles of light on its surface blurred in his eyes and flashed like previews on a movie screen. Bill saw the station; he saw the city woman, her eyes and long hair; he heard Ray's jeering voice and saw his mother's face. His fingers folded into his palms and dug their bitten-off tips into the calloused flesh of his hands while his arms wrapped around drawn-up knees. His shoulders and head bent over and down until his forehead rested on top of his knees, and Bill shut his eyes tightly to stop the pain that was pulling him down. That proved useless, and down he went into his six-year-old body by the staircase, watching his mother struggle to release herself from his father's drunken grip. He saw her pinned to the kitchen floor, her arms and hands held down above her head by his father's blue-veined and muscled left hand, while his right waved the blunt tip of a screwdriver above her face. Her yellow housedress was bunched up around her waist, and Bill could see the deep purple grooves of garter marks in the white skin of her thighs. Her face was red and swollen, and tears poured from the corners of her eyes into her dark brown hair. He could hear beneath the scuffling noise an odd rasping sound coming from his mother's open mouth as though she were silently screaming. He could smell the tractor gas and oil that saturated his father's clothes and seemed to cloud the atmosphere around him. His father's pants were down around his calves, and one booted foot pressed upon his mother's bare ankle; the black dirt from the sole was peppered over her toes. Bill's adult body shook as the small boy's had, standing there wetting his pajamas, and pulling hard at the railing while one foot braced itself as if to go forward. Bill remembered his own sobbing, so loud that it momentarily caused his father to loosen his hold and turn around, giving his mother the opportunity to throw the big man off balance and struggle to her feet. She ran wildly toward the staircase, and grabbed Bill, almost dragging

his body up the steps until she reached the top. His brother James, awakened by the commotion, came running out of his bedroom just in time to see their mother carry Bill with her into the bathroom and lock the door. "Dad, stop it! Stop it, goddamnit!" James yelled as his father began to lumber up the stairs. "Jimmie! He's gonna kill me!" Claire Lucas had screamed through the bathroom door while Bill stayed hunched in his wet pajama bottoms in the corner by the toilet.

The figure of his big, fifteen-year-old son loomed before him at the top of the stairs, and Jon Lucas stopped in confusion, looking through a blur of red at his son's fierce black eyes and threatening fists. He weaved on the steps undecided which direction his feet would take and felt a spreading warmth down his legs, not realizing it was his own piss. James stepped down onto the first step, and kicked the metal edge of it with his bare foot. "Go ahead you bastard" he hissed at his father, "go ahead and blow your brains out. We won't miss you." Jon Lucas stared in drunken disbelief at his oldest son towering above him and stumbled back down the steps, yanking his pants up to his waist. He groped through the darkness for the back porch door, opening and slamming it with such a force that the tremors shook the beams up in the bathroom.

Bill's mother pulled him out of the corner, picking him up by the waist like a sack of feed, and carried him into her bedroom. She stood with her clenched, shaking hand wound in the fabric of Bill's pajama top, causing his small chest to be pulled out unnaturally from his body while watching her husband stumble across the backyard into the barn. His mother bent until her forehead touched the window and rested there for a few moments, weeping and mumbling, "your poor father, your poor father." She then turned, and in a burst of sudden anger, viciously shook her son, yelling, "What were you doing out of bed! Huh, huh?!" Bill could only sob and hiccup when he tried to answer her. She grabbed his hair in her fist, pulling his head back so that his trembling face was exposed. "I wanted a glass of water-r-r" he stuttered, his chest heaving in between each hiccup as he desperately tried to breathe. She slapped his face, and shoved him toward the door. "Go to bed now. And quit crying or I'll give you something to cry about!" she shouted and then dropped onto the bed and cried into the quilt. Bill managed to get out of the room and into the hallway where his brother lifted and cradled his sob-racked body.

Bill pulled himself up and wiped the tears and mucus covering his face onto the sleeve of his jacket. Outside of his own sounds, there was a silence, encompassing and peaceful. He felt the breeze move across his wet face and breathing heavily, peered up at the sky above him. Another deep sob erupted from his lungs and broke the quiet. He turned over and stretched his length belly-down onto the ground. His arms fell straight out from his sides, and one wet cheek

rubbed into the sand while each puff of air from his nostrils blew the minuscule particles away from his face. The muscles in his back twitched then relaxed, and his shoulders flattened onto the ground as the flood of pain drained away in rhythmic waves. He consoled himself with the feel of dirt beneath his hands and spread out his fingers, rubbing their tips into the sandy soil. As his breathing became more controlled, Bill felt the complete limpness of exhaustion and sleep start to come over him. He turned on his side, rounding out his back, and pulled his soaked legs up close to his body, drawing the knees in toward his chest. Bill could hear the lake's water lapping up against the bog shore, and at the far end of the swamp, a mourning dove cooed. The cedar boughs above him spoke in their shsh shsh language, and Bill felt the sensation of being rocked. He moved into the feeling, unaware that he began to rock himself, and flipped the collar of his jacket up to cover his face. The night wind became heavier with its collection of moisture and coolness and caressed his body like a soft hand. Slowly and gently, Bill felt his brain shut down into blissful sleep until the last essence his nose picked up and recorded was the perfume of swamp and cedar.○

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### My Little Sister Has An Asp

tattooed on her  
anoretic arm, and drinks  
one glass of pink lemonade a day, savoring  
it like a cancer cure or  
Love Potion #9.  
Summers even she  
wears the black jacket like  
a promise of fidelity, sweating  
off another pound of ugly  
vital organs. I remember  
she softened  
the leather to a 3rd World Look one  
sick humid afternoon by  
scourging it again, then  
again, slapping the driveway's  
face. That's  
the way you  
do it.

Jeff Schultz

## The Sunken House

This morning, unannounced, I stopped to see how Lambert was: did he need anything I could perhaps provide, need certain books that I could bring him from the library or need some food supplies he did not want to bother with himself? A useless hope: "Need nothing" Lambert said. "Just found a theme in Melville's *Billy Budd* that needs to be investigated: none has broached it yet in any book or article I know. If it develops as I think it might the college library will have to send for books it does not have. But now, right now I have the Melville canon and much more to start me on my way if way there is. A little work will tell me whether work is worth its given time. Meanwhile, let us fall back from scholarship for a short stretch and find if my new claret soothes the throat as it should soothe!"

He tipped our glasses full leaned back into his chair, and then began while mullioned sunlight poured around his head:

"Now, you remember that the *Essex* was an actual whaling ship, Nantucket-warfed that set forth on a cruise to whaling grounds on August Twelfth, Eighteen Nineteen, the month of Melville's birth. It met sea-nemesis a year and three months later when it sank beneath two massive blows from a sperm whale: that sinking was the primal starting source of Melville's *Moby Dick*, its narrative.

Think of the *Essex* on the ocean floor after those smashing blows by angry flesh: the utter utter silence that surrounds; the broken hull that sits perhaps upright; the unstayed masts and spars which cumber/droop on murdered pride; the sails held rigid by the deadly pressure caused by tons and tons of ocean water; yes, and ship rats, too inside the hull—all locked in long decay upon the growing silt that will become a solid grave dirt rising over it and all forever lost to living light. Think of the *Essex* and all whaling ships upon the ocean floor as I tell you about another kind of wreck I found deep in New Hampshire when I visited my hometown for one last, one final time.

He reached into his pocket for a pipe I had not seen before, long-shanked and thin reached in another pocket for his pouch to fill the pipebowl, tamped it with his thumb struck one of his large matches for a light took several puffs to get it going well and said:

"Whether he admits to it or not a nurtured, sad nostalgia makes a man go back to see his sources once he comes into his fullest age. What he most wants to gain by going back is to escape the pressures of heaped time—and somehow find his young ghost waiting for him in the streets the fields, the woods, and—yes!—even inside the library or church where he began to think of other worlds.

So I went back and I was disappointed. Nothing less than that—or merely that. Plain honesty must use receptive eyes: I could not walk along a street or wander through a field or course a woodland path except I saw that all was different, profoundly so. I was a merest stranger who had come into a strangest land: there was no ghost of my lost self to greet me anywhere nor any other ghosts. Of my gone world only a sentimental dregs remained—and that I could not love.

On my last day before I left the town behind for good I set myself to walk a country road that I had never traveled on before never in all those years when I was young and any road was highway to my feet.

As I walked down the thin dirt road that stretched to farther towns, I learned exactly why the area was called 'The Misery.' No woods but brush; the ragged burdock fields; the granite outcrops rising stark and sere; no farmhouse mile on mile; but here and there a sideless barn, small, less than nondescript. The land was dreary sameness as it lay in silent loneliness through which there flew now/then an intermittent bird intent on finding elsewhere. Overhead, the sun gave off a distant, a peculiar light that gave no blessing as it fell upon the Otherness through which I went. There were no butterflies in flight, no animals to break across my eyes, no single sound

of anything at all. I seemed to be caught in a kind of death walk. Nothingness—but can one say it?—Nothingness took *form* took *body* there inside Extended Naught.

Come to the middle of a right hand curve I saw a rocky driveway at whose end a tangled mass of burdock and pigweed surrounded—no! they pressed around!—a house gray clapboarded with falling chimney top and glassless windows gaping in its walls. Thick gray vines covered it like cordage on a sunken sailing ship: the vines crawled up the outer walls and so across the roof to clasp around the chimney. Yes, I thought *a sunken ship. Much like it. And the doom that weighs upon the house is like sea doom the weeds and vines like growing silt, the air another sea that locks the house in death upon a parallel to ocean floor.*

I shoved the sagging door and entered on gray emptiness, gray as the clapboards were. Just past the door's arc on the warping floor lay two dead mice, shrunken to mummified. There was no furniture inside the room no smallest pieces out of empty time in scatters on the floor: a sterile place a deathstruck human place much less than cave or hole in leaning rocks. The makers made—and then abandoned it as seamen flee an ocean-foundering.

But there! But there!  
As inexplicable to my eyes then as to your ears that hear me tell of it a battered box of books sat on the floor almost at its dead center. God! My mind leapt crazily in search for a surmise. Mint books they were, unsullied, printer fresh each one a copy of the others there: an illustrated book on camouflage fine binding and the type set sharply clear good paper and coherent photographs that showed the process of becoming Not or else becoming variants of Not; the text itself clear but pedestrian sufficient for the thoughts with which it dealt. It had no copyright, it had no name of writer/printer on the title page. What was its genesis? A manual for Army use? A flare of vanity to offset long denials of its worth? Or something else my mind could not embrace?

Through empty window frames, I watched sunlight grow heavier in its odd clarity that was not really clarity at all. Miasmic. Undersea. The whelms of doom. I thought: *The author, he is camouflaged past recognition now as if he went into his photographs and merged and merged into the endless variants of Not.* I took one copy with me when I left: I have it here."

He rose and crossed the room drew a small book out of a middle shelf and then returned to seat himself and put the book into my hands. I rifled through: it was as he had said.

"A single book"

Lambert resumed, "out of a sunken house—out of a sunken life, perhaps. But think: out of the *Essex* came a single book the firsthand narrative by Owen Chase who gave account of horrors undergone . . . and then came Melville's *Moby Dick*, a book that in itself is apotheosis. Levels and levels, yes. Sometimes obscure and sometimes clarified past clarity. All dooms become one doom once they arrive as indivisible as death. This book denied the doom from which I rescued it—or thought I rescued it—by being made by being *written* from a human mind. Levels and levels, yes. You take the book: I make a present of it. Never had a need for what it said—and never will. I always thought that camouflage was best for butterflies!"

He grinned at that and drained his dwindled glass. "Now on to *Billy Budd* and to whatever gives my theme good sense good sense, coherent, logical and just as Melville's ghost would have me work it out!"

I emptied my own glass and stood to go: "Let that discovered theme in *Billy Budd* flutter some dove-cots when you work it out." I left on that: Lambert knew well and well how to raise bulwarks against wrecking time. "Need nothing" he had said and it was so. He needed neither hope nor praise from me: only my friendship. That he purely had.

John Bennett  
From The Lambert Poems

**D**uring 1986 I was the poetry editor for a publication that reached over 90,000 people weekly. I paid fifty-two different poets for their work. I made around \$500 profit. Unfortunately, few little magazines reach such a large audience and pay every poet \$20 per poem. My project was simple. It could easily be and should definitely be duplicated around the country and for reasons of riches beyond any money involved.

Here is the equation those of us who read and write poetry all understand: *Everybody writes poetry and wants to publish poetry, but nobody much ever sees any audience or any money because nobody pays for poetry because nobody reads poetry because nobody likes poetry.* In the June/July 1986 issue of *Coda: Poets and Writers Newsletter*, Erica Jong says that poetry is "not the language of the land." Jong couldn't be more right. Neither the poet nor the educator in me believes, however, that we have to or should accept this accurate appraisal of the current state of letters as an indication of what the future holds. We must change our way of thinking about poetry and the public.

I approached my project from my perspective as a poet. Those among you who write and send out your poems know the familiar story. You get rejected, you get rejected, you get rejected, you get accepted! You've beaten the odds that sometimes not only seem but actually are enormous. A year later your poem appears along with thirty other poems in that little magazine you've long read and admired. You want some of your friends, relatives, and colleagues to see the poem that has appeared in a quality little magazine, so you head straight for the nearest photocopy center. In the best of all possible worlds, you would buy several copies of the magazine and distribute them. Unfortunately, it becomes very expensive to purchase a copy of the little magazine for everyone, particularly when you were paid only a couple

## *Poetry to the People, Payment to the Poets*

# The Pillbox Series

By Doyle Wesley Walls

of complimentary copies in the first place. So if you don't include photocopies in your letters, then these people you know will never see your poem until the day that the poem is published in a collection of your work. One reason they wouldn't see the poem is because they wouldn't know where to order the magazine. But even if you sent them the address, they would probably balk at sending off for it. They would be much more likely to order a magazine from a foreign country in a language they couldn't read.

The little magazines I'm referring to (called "little" because of small circulation) are quarterly, biannual, or annual publications of high quality, usually with 500-1,000 circulation. These periodicals are seen in only a very, very few homes. They have been collected, catalogued, protected, and made available to scholars and poets alike by places like the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of Wisconsin's Memorial Library (the world's largest collection of 20th-century small circulation literary magazines, roughly

5,000 titles, of which nearly 1,200 are current). I want readers out there who don't know about these magazines to become comfortable with the idea of reading them. The many potential readers of poetry will have to do that before they can ever become subscribers. The little magazines that feature poetry have an untapped audience that the little magazines will never tap by themselves.

In addition, the "poetry publishing madness" helped lead me toward my project. We see annual "market" book after book and listing after listing in the magazines for writers concerning where to publish our poetry, with our local stationery shops and the United States Post Office coming out the big winners. How can it be that there are literally hundreds of little magazines in which to publish, and quality work goes unheard? If we hunger for a wide audience, one that comprises more than those who are already "converted" to poetry, if we desire to make connections with those among us who are intelligent and literate in genres other than po-

etry, then we must answer that far too few read contemporary poetry. Poems protesting nuclear proliferation, the military, and the activities of the CIA, poems hard-won and passionate, are published after much work by the poets and the editors in 500 copies and relegated to an audience who will probably be in agreement anyway, and a few dozen people who actually read those poems as poems should be read will nod their heads sadly and read on, thinking that the villanelle is making a comeback.

Too many poets have resigned themselves to this form of silence, let themselves be shoved off the page. We're speaking, but the microphone has been turned off. We're battling against each other for the tiny space we in the United States have allowed ourselves to be allotted while sports writers and gossip mongers and trivia experts place their meager wares before millions daily in the newspapers. Look through Judson Jerome's *Poet's Market '87*. Unless I'm looking at misprints (and I doubt it), *New Letters* receives "about 7,000 submissions per year" and they "use less than 1 percent." Odds of seeing your work in *Triquarterly* and *Hiram Poetry Review* are 1 out of 150; *Poetry Northwest* is 1 out of 250, and most of us, for all practical purposes, can forget the big slicks where the exception proves the rule.

I can't help but think that more than 1 out of the 250 submissions to *Poetry Northwest* deserves publication. The fault is not David Waggoner's. To the editors of the little magazines let me say a word of thanks. Many of you are poets, critics, and savvy business people all rolled into one. And because of your efforts, for which you receive far too little financial reward, if any, we have the magazines that are often beautiful and memorable. However, editors are limited by space and monetary considerations. And so, as far as reaching a larger audience is concerned, many of these publications are doomed from the start—because they are perceived by the public as the foreign language of "poetry."

I approached my project from my perspective as an educator. I wanted to see fewer people saying *I don't understand poetry* and *I don't like poetry*. I wanted to sneak poetry into homes where it had never crossed the front door. Perhaps my project came in through the back door; but it made it inside the house. "Poetry" that is, language raised to the highest power, is around and can be appreciated. I once heard Jackson Browne referred to be a radio announcer as "one of our best rock poets." The disk jockey then went on to play Browne's latest hit record, "Tender Is the Night." There was no mention of Fitzgerald or Keats! Browne, indeed is a rock lyricist who would print poetry by Pablo Neruda as translated by Kenneth Rexroth on the back cover of his 1976 album, *The Pretender*. That one poem printed in that particular place was an introduction to poetry for many.

The particular place. It was my desire to tap into something that already existed, a publication with a wide audience. I knew, unfortunately, that 90,000 readers wouldn't buy a "xerox" issue of a magazine or a "fine press" issue either. Nor would they each spend \$2.00 to purchase an issue I could have had printed. I dialed, after marshaling my notes, the editor of a Madison free weekly press, Vincent O'Hern at *Isthmus*. This respected weekly addresses national and local politics and, most importantly for my project, covers the local arts, film, and various entertainments with information and critical reviews. O'Hern had the audience and the space I needed.

The Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission had the money I needed. Having received O'Hern's permission to use his name in a proposal, I approached Lynne Eich at the commission and found her most enthusiastic about the proposal from the start. (I'm sure it didn't hurt that I could mention the names of poets Janet Shaw and Ronald Wallace who had provided me with suggestions when I was sounding out my project on them. Shaw and Wallace are respected for

their poetry and their previous contributions to community arts.) I proposed to publish fifty-two Dane County poets—twenty-six women and twenty-six men—each to appear once during the calendar year 1986 with a poem of the individual's own choosing in a weekly from their own community, to pay them for their work, and to receive payment myself. The county's money would be spread around to many artists and to the maximum benefit of exposure for the arts and for the commission, with the people themselves receiving this free reading, which would last the year round.

There were forms to fill out, an essay to write, and recommendations others would write for me. Later, after receiving the grant, I set up a checking account for the money, wrote the poets, received their poems, and then made decisions concerning when to run the each poem, in accordance with holidays, seasons, and, for example, special weeks where organizations like the Humane Society focused on kindness toward animals, etc. For the most part, the entire process, from conception to mailing out the checks for the published poetry, was easy to administrate, thanks to the people with whom I dealt.

Perhaps the most fun was contacting the poets. Imagine receiving a letter soliciting a poem of your own choice that would automatically be published in a paper with a wide local audience, a poem for which you would receive a \$20 payment. Imagine having the opportunity to advertise your book of poems in that biographical note. Imagine the fifty-two dedicated poets who received a little recognition from colleagues, relatives, and friends because their work was placed in the spotlight in a familiar publication that thousands read each week.

I sent each poet a letter of introduction and invitation and a sheet outlining specific information which I hoped would answer questions about the project, thus eliminating my time and money spent on further correspondence.

I informed them that they could choose a representative poem of no more than forty lines with no more than fifty characters per line. I requested previously unpublished poems but permitted previously published work if they secured reprint rights; I assured them that the copyright would appear with the poem in *Isthmus*. I cautioned them that the poems would be printed by a newspaper unaccustomed to typesetting poetry and about the all-too-common misprint problems, especially since they would receive no proofs. (I must add here that the staff at *Isthmus* went an extra mile to check on spelling errors and typos and were 99 percent flawless.) I explained the poets would receive a tear sheet along with a \$20 check upon publication.

I requested the poets to prepare a poem with name and phone number on the page and to send the original and a clean photocopy to me; the original I would give to the *Isthmus* office, the photocopy I would retain for my files to ensure that no problems would prevent running the poems at the scheduled times. I gave the poets a due date which allowed me a month to make scheduling decisions before sending the entire batch of originals to the *Isthmus* office. I also asked the poets if they would want me to give out their addresses or phone numbers to anyone interested in reprinting a poem.

One problem for such a scheme is choosing the poets to be included. From teaching creative writing at UW-Madison for a few years, I knew many university people who wrote poetry. But to make the project attractive to the community funding agent I knew I must include poets outside the university community. I turned to the current edition of *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers* for poets from Dane County and to *A Confluence of Colors: The First Anthology of Wisconsin Minority Poets* edited by Angela Lobo-Cobb. Thanks to lists given me, especially those by Eli Goldblatt, Tandy Stur-

geon, and John Wolff who are active in poetry circles on and off campus, I was able to construct a list that was balanced, diverse, eclectic: poets beginning and established, academic and nonacademic, mainstream and experimental. I did not include myself as one of the poets.

My one poetic contribution was to title the series. I didn't want "Poets' Showcase" or "Poetry Corner" but because the title would appear with the poems every week, I didn't want an oppressive image. Finally I settled on "The Pillbox." I was thinking of the healing power of reading and writing poetry and of the woman's pillbox hat which served no purpose other than beauty. I also was thinking of the roofed, concrete emplacement for a machine gun, since I was sure some of the poems would be aggressively political. Finally, I was thinking of "pillbox" as an enclosure of narrow dimensions, what little space we poets will have in our community, a position from which we can fire

volleys, or parade in our finery, or offer comfort. That is, we can do these things if there's anyone there to hear us. For one year I provided the microphone and stepped back to listen.

What pleasure I had listening to people discuss "The Pillbox" during 1986. At parties, in offices, on the bus, I often met people who had opinions on particular poems. Many of these people, I'm sure, were just beginning to enjoy the habit of poetry. Many people, apparently, could converse in such a strange and foreign language. I hope they've each ordered a book of poems by their favorite poet from the series, or checked a book of poems out of a library, or looked for a little magazine listed in a contributor's note. I hope a few of them tried to write poems as well. I also hope that similar projects will bloom across the country for the sake of the poets and those people who soon could be part of the audience for all poets. That would be the best payment of all. ○

ISTHMUS

**THE Isthmus GUIDE**

TO EVENTS, ENTERTAINMENT, TV AND RADIO  
EDITED BY BUCKAROO BONSAI

**THE PILLBOX**

**SARA RATH**  
**Horses**

Hammer's father had a pony ring at county fairs and carnivals so he knew about things like that. Big head too large for his body, like a sledge hammer the boys teased. He was shy, blushed and stammered but he knew about making babies and it gave stature.

"We make babies for you and what do we for us?" he baited me once, watch spin on the monkeybars. I baited him letting my skirt tent over my head, frightened and told on him, had to go to the principal's office. Hammer You'd think he would hate me after in my fourth grade Valentines I found a red satin heart from Hammer. His huge red face beamed his print

© 1986 Sara Rath THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED

Rath is a free-lance writer and poet. Among books of poetry. She teaches classes in

**THE PILLBOX**

**JAYNE MAREK**  
**Trapping Season**

In Grandpa's basement, the old man showed me one evening the mystery. I was just nine, the October fields breaking along the mud lane stippled with the paths of muskrats. That day was raw, fit for the dark fur of clouds with their eyes of rain. He had eight or a dozen of them, trapped by the crick, and although I feared his heavy hand, he let me watch how it was done. First, chop off the head, a problem if the neck is tough. Then the paws like needles bundled in black velvet; then sink the blade in to the secret, the smell, belly; a slit for the tail, then hang on it.

## True Love Five Miles Up

Turning the pages  
Of the airline magazine  
I discover, on every one  
The same round cursive hand  
"I Love Del" slanting up  
In blue ballpoint across

The ads for English suits  
Irish hats, French perfume  
Scrawled in the middle  
Of London's best restaurants  
The 1812 Overture, marching  
Through credit cards, rent-a-cars  
A Caribbean vacation  
Ending abruptly on page 40  
In a midtown bank  
Advertising rollover mortgages  
One final balloon payment  
Or renegotiate in five years  
Capitalized one last time  
On the rubber gasket  
Of the emergency exit.

*R. S. Chapman*

## A Silence, A Breath

To choose the good is easy enough.  
The good shines, a flame that never goes out.  
But the good slips away like a breeze  
it recedes and recedes and recedes  
into the string of stars above the apartments.  
I cannot hold it, you cannot hold it.  
This paper, these words  
cannot hold it, even the flickering  
moment. We walk around the corners  
of the city, through tunnels of trees  
past a sliver of river, past abandoned desires  
now naked mannequins in the shop windows  
and the good slips between us, silent  
like some other breath.

*Elizabeth Balestrieri*

Jeff Holland, junior member of the Charter Bank of Okabena full-service financial team, owned the only Japanese import car in Sterne County. In a place like Sterne County, where nearly everyone believes that organized labor has contributed mightily to the imminent destruction of American Values, nearly everyone nevertheless buys American union-made cars, trucks, and tractors. When he parked his car near the mailbox of what had until recently been the Lonnie Macklin farm, Jeff failed to realize that he was making a public statement—a statement not only of his presence, but of his attitudes.

He surveyed the scene which had become so familiar during the winter and early spring months, as he had striven to work out a debt-restructuring plan with Lonnie. Now, the grove of silver-maple trees

which enclosed the gray, asbestos-sided farmhouse was bursting into leaf. They were the only trees within the panorama; on the other side of the blacktop township road were the barn and outbuildings; beyond them, behind the house, in every direction, stretched the flat black land, steaming in the mid-May morning sunshine.

Jeff noticed immediately that every steel gate was missing. The rising wind had set all the loose sheets of roofing tin to flapping and banging—a reminder to every passerby of Lonnie's neglect of the property. Feeling grim and more than a little bitter, Jeff collected his clipboard and papers from the back seat and crossed the road to begin his appraisal.

As he neared the milkhouse, cats began to appear. From behind every loose board and through every broken window light they came,

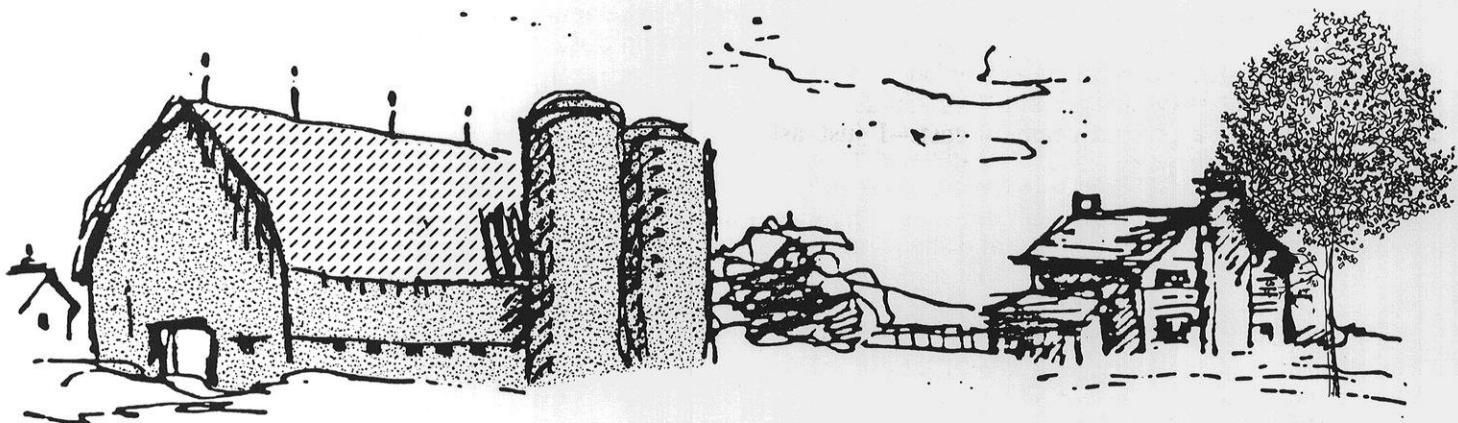
mewling, by twos and threes. A motley-colored troupe of them had assembled on the concrete steps by the time he neared the door, alternately eyeing him and the overturned hub caps scattered on the concrete apron.

Hungry, he thought. Out loud he said, "Don't expect me to feed you guys!" At the sound of his voice a kitten leapt from the top step and landed on the leg of Jeff's trousers, scratching him through the fabric as it clutched its claws. He winced, but resisted his first impulse to cuff it away. Instead he lifted it firmly by the nape until it released its hold, then lobbed it back into the center of the group. It alighted on its feet, arched its back, and hissed at him. The rest of the group broke into a cacophony of incensed-cat noises.

Two unpleasant experiences had been required, last summer and fall, to convince Jeff that all farm dogs

## *Mighty Sweet Piece of Land*

By Tim Zeglin



were not the dewy-eyed, waggy-tailed buddies that the Disney movies of his youth had led him to expect. Always ready to learn from experience and to extend those lessons to partially starved farm cats, he decided to begin his appraisal somewhere else. As he backed away from the cats, he heard the sound of tires behind him on the crushed-rock driveway.

The pickup's paint was sun-faded, but it had been recently washed and today's fresh dust looked conspicuous on its hood. Two tow-headed children peeped over the half-open passenger side window and a quietly authoritative male voice within said, "We're stopping here for a while. I've got to talk business with this man."

By now, Jeff knew all the farmers in his territory by their vehicles as well as by their faces. "Morning, Del" he said, before the man had even shut the truck's door. "How're things up the valley?"

Del walked around the front of the truck, a tentative smile spreading slowly across his already sunburned face. "Can't complain, I guess. Least not about the weather. Goin' right along, thanks to this dry spell."

"Got any corn in yet? The boys on the flats have started planting."

In Sterne County, a peeled, seasoned white oak fence post will last eight to ten years. Del was built along the lines of a fence post and he stood not much taller. But he most closely resembled a post that had been in the ground for six or so years, not long enough to rot off at the base, but long enough to weather, split, and be riddled by woodpeckers. He was wearing clean, faded dungarees, a pressed chambray work shirt rolled up above his elbows, and a cap that proclaimed "Ag is My Bag."

"Got any corn in yet?" he repeated, his voice sounding injured. "Why, Jeff, you bet we got some corn in. In fact, we'll be finished in a few days, if this weather holds. We should finish the last of the sidehill strips today and I'm goin' to try to get into the crick bottoms

today, too. Keith—my oldest boy?—he hasn't slept more'n three or four hours a night ever since we finished the oats last week." He announced it proudly. Jeff, reserving his opinion, nodded in appreciation. "We're runnin' low on 9-23-30, though, and I was just headed downtown when I saw your car. I was meanin' to stop in an' talk to you, anyway. Lookin' the place over, are you? I suppose the bank wants to know what it's got."

Jeff nodded and Del continued: "It's a shame—just a dirty shame—the way he left this place. Looks to me like he sold everything he could, then jumped in his car and took off during the night. Just like that—not sayin' a word to nobody. 'Course, we shoulda seen it comin', judgin' by the way he let this place go to ruin. Just made me sick, it did, watchin' this place fall apart."

Jeff wanted to avoid any discussion of Lonnie's recent hasty and unannounced departure. To change the subject he asked, "Used to belong to your dad at one time, didn't it?" although he already knew the answer was affirmative.

"You bet it did!" Del averred. "This is my old home place! I was born here, right in that house" he nodded toward it. "Granddad had it—he built the house. An' Dad 'n' me built the barn—all used lumber, did you know that? We tore down two ol' barns an' a machine shed to get the lumber 'n' tin to put this one together. Why, we even saved the old nails an' straightened 'em out—can you believe that? Who does things like that, nowadays? Certainly not your mister big-time farmer, like Lonnie here. You know what he told me once? He said, 'I never ask how much anything costs—I just ask, When can you deliver?'"

Del snorted and lifted the back of his cap with a forefinger to scratch his head. He looked upwards and sideways, from under the now down-turned brim, at Jeff. "Can you imagine that? He probably didn't talk to *you* that way. But that's the way he told it to me."

Jeff smiled ruefully but said nothing. No, that's not the way

Lonnie had talked to him. "That sounds like Lonnie, all right" he said at last, "he sure wasn't afraid to spend money." He paused again, his mind returning to the interrupted appraisal and to an eleven o'clock appointment. Del, however, like many men who spend their lives working in silence and in solitude, could become impossibly loquacious in company. He continued in the same vein: "My Dad got to be the same way towards the end. That was after the war, and everybody was spendin' money right an' left. It was those two silos that done it." He pointed an accusing finger at the twin sixty-footers, then clenched his fist at them. "Just got a bug up his rear end, Mom always said. Dad had to show he was real up-to-date, jus' like everybody else. Then all of a sudden prices went kerflooey. An' before we knew what was happenin', we was livin' in town, Dad was drivin' the fuel-oil truck—and damn thankful for the job—and you had the farm. The bank, I mean, you was just a tad at the time, I imagine. 1955. A Republican in the White House, jus' like now. You can always trust the Republicans to screw the little guy—right?"

Jeff forced a polite smile. After a moment's silence, Del abruptly changed the subject. "Goddamnit!" he said, with excessive vehemence, "Somebody ought to feed these cats! I'll send one of my girls down. What about the cattle? Did he leave anything for them to eat?"

"Looks like he took all the gates," Jeff replied. "I wouldn't be surprised to find 'em in the trench silo, eating themselves sick. I've already called Floyd at the PCA—they've got the lien on the cattle. He's supposed to have 'em loaded out of here today."

"And the machinery?"

"FHA's got the machinery. It's up to them to figure out what's left. There'll be a sale, I suppose, as soon as they can arrange it. Listen, Del" he said, raising his left arm to check his watch, "I know you've got to get into town, and I've got a lot lined up today myself. I guess I'll be movin' along. Say hello to Cora for

me, will you?"

"Just a minute." Del's right hand reached out and locked on to Jeff's forearm. It was a no-nonsense grip. Jeff turned to see Del's eyes focused on his own, Del's intent and imploring. "I didn't stop here to pass the time of day, either" he said. "I thought this could wait 'till we finished plantin', but looks like now's the time. You've got the farm—are you lookin' for a buyer?"

So that's what this is all about, Jeff thought. I should've guessed . . . these farmers—never enough land. Jeff knew enough about Del's financial circumstances to be sure that Del couldn't afford to buy this farm. One thing the bank didn't need right now was more bad paper, and for sure the last thing he needed, especially after this mess with Lonnie, was another delinquent account in his portfolio. Mentally, he searched for a kind way of putting Del off, but from the grip on his arm he knew Del wasn't going to be easily dissuaded.

"This whole business is going to be tied up in paperwork for a long time, Del" he contrived. "Months for sure; maybe even a year or more."

"So rent it to me!" Del said eagerly, relinquishing his grip. "That's even better—rent with an option to buy. By golly, I'll show you what a real farmer can do! Me an' my boys will have this place up to snuff in no time! Say the word and in another week, God and weather willing, we'll have all these flats worked up and planted. I already figured out how to take 'em. You don't got too much time, you know—another three weeks, even, would be cuttin' the growin' season pretty short."

The wrong tack, Jeff realized. Del was right about the time element, though, and it wouldn't look bad to have the place rented. "Listen, Del" he said quietly, dramatically, "Do you know how much we've got against this farm?" Del shook his head. "Close to half a million dollars. Four hundred eighty thousand, give or take a few. You keep that number under your hat—but that's gonna be our asking price."

Jeff could see that Del was shaken; he pressed the point. "And credit is a whole new ball game nowadays, Del. I know you're a good farmer, but your word and the mortgage signed over to us isn't enough anymore. You've got to think cash flow, Del. Cash flow is the name of the game now—the place has got to cash flow. Think of half a million dollars at twelve or thirteen percent, Del. What are those monthly payments going to look like?"

Quickly, while Del struggled to do the multiplication in his head, Jeff produced a calculator from the inside pocket of his blazer and deftly fingered the buttons. Del gave up and looked expectantly at him. Jeff shook his head in mock disbelief at the number that appeared. He knew it was correct, but he had learned a few tricks when it came to handling these farmers. A little suspense would make the figure hit all the harder.



"I'll work it through once more, just to be sure" he told Del. He raced through the numbers again, shook his head again, and looked Del straight in the eye as he held out the calculator for confirmation. "Four hundred eighty thousand a year at thirteen percent is sixty-two four a year—interest. Let's see . . . as far as the principal goes . . . at twenty years . . . that's an even twenty-four thousand a year for principal repayment. That's a total of eighty-six thousand a year, Del; about . . . oh . . . seventy-two hundred a month. Think about that

payment, Del. And you haven't even talked about taxes yet. How are you going to squeeze that kind of money out of your cows?"

I guess that finished him off, Jeff thought. I hate to be rough with him, but it's better to nip these ideas in the bud. Renting wouldn't be a bad idea, though, the board would like that. He shuffled the papers on his clipboard and eyed the milkhouse door again. The cats were still on the steps, grooming themselves, but watching the men. Out of the corner of his eye Jeff saw a car approaching, still distant, moving very slowly on the township road. Another minute to let those figures sink in and he would say his goodbye to Del.

Del cleared his throat. "Ah . . . well" he said. The voice was hesitant, but did not carry the sound of defeat that Jeff had expected. "Well . . . now, Jeff, those are some bi-i-g numbers. But they're not completely a surprise to me, either. I pushed a pencil on this, you know, two nights ago . . . soon as I heard that Lonnie had pulled out. I already knew just about what you had in the place. I know what the usual terms and interest come to—I already did my figurin'. I didn't expect to run into you, so I didn't bring the paperwork—but I jus' want to let you know I'm not blowin' a lot of hot air. You want to hear what I come up with?" Jeff frowned, then nodded assent.

Now Del's voice was confident. "Look, Jeff" he said, "Everything's here—it just needs somebody who knows what he's doin' to put it all to work. Land, barn, milking parlor, sheds, silos—it's all here already. This place will easy carry a hundred milkers; we both know that. I've got two big strapping boys—Keith is twenty already; Chad is goin' to graduate this year. The three of us can handle an extra hundred cows easy. Say eighty, even, to start with. At twelve hundred dollars per cow per year—that's eight thousand a month for debt repayment. We should be able to make seventy-two hundred a month without any problem."

"But that's all in the future, Del"

Jeff interrupted, trying to regain the offensive. "Cash flow is the problem—like I said before. Let's talk cash flow, Del—who's gonna carry you until you're all set up and milking an extra eighty? It'll take two years to raise 'em up from calves, even if you start today. And how could you buy 'em? Another loan? Out of the question, Del; not with us. I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut the boys at PCA will tell you the same thing; nobody wants to hold dairy cattle now. And you know the FHA's a waste of time." Jeff shook his head. "I really know how you feel, Del. It's like, I can understand how bad you want this place—but it just won't work. It's impossible." He looked at Del for signs of understanding, but Del was grinning wide, revealing his tobacco-flecked front teeth. Jeff had the uncomfortable feeling that he had been outmaneuvered.

"You got time to drive up the valley?" Del asked gleefully.

Jeff was irritated at the suggestion, but he replied, "Not exactly, Del. I'm really way behind schedule already. Why?" he asked, knowing that this was the quickest way to move the discussion along.

"Why? I'll tell you why, Jeff" Del chortled. He talked quickly, like a child telling a secret. "I thought maybe I could drive you over to that new pole building I put up two years ago. Remember? All the neighbors thought I was nuts? You too, maybe? Thought maybe you'd like to count springers with me, Jeff. Should be exactly ninety-four of 'em in there—that's right—ninety-four head of springing heifers, some of 'em real close, some of 'em bread a couple, three months." He slowed down after running short of breath. "I don't need no two years, Jeff—I'm ready to go now, practically. For sure by the time the corn off'n this farm is ready to chop. In the meantime, me 'n the boys c'n go to three times a day milking at home. That'll help make those payments, you bet. We already talked it over, the boys 'n' me."

Jeff had scuffed the ground clean of pebbles while Del talked. "So you've been waiting for this to hap-

pen? . . . For two years?" He glanced at Del.

"You bet" Del said, and lifted his eyebrows and wrinkled his nose in a way that suggested to Jeff that the idea had been conceived many years earlier. "So what do you think?" Del asked.

Jeff began pushing the ring of pebbles back into the cleared space with his now very dusty Frye boots. When he had almost finished the task he said quietly, "It might work." He paused, then began thinking aloud. "Rent—with an option to buy. Might work. At least you've got a plan." He paused again. "But wait a minute—you're not going to make an extra seventy-two hundred a month just by going to three times a day milking. How're you going to make your payments this summer?"

"Oh, I've got that all figured out, Jeff" Del hastened. "We got a little money saved, a little money to put up front. I know that's what the bank is gonna want—some cash money." He paused. Jeff noticed that the car on the road had moved closer. It was still moving at a snail's pace and was still indistinguishable. "Cora's got some money put away; she inherited a little from her folks. She's been holdin' on to it—she keeps talkin' about remodelin' the kitchen and addin' on a little greenhouse for her plants, you know. But we don't need no greenhouse and the kitchen's been good enough all these years—it can last a few more. She's agreeable to puttin' that money down; I won't have to give you nothin' but my name on a piece of paper. And there's another thing . . . Melissa is goin' to be sixteen this summer, old enough to get her driver's license. I know that Jerry down to the cafe would give her a job—he told me so. She's kind of cute, you know; the customers like that. She's goin' to help out too, you see. She probably won't make much, but every little bit helps. And of course we can always find chores for the little kids to do until they're old enough for real work."

Jeff could not conceal his surprise. "Do you understand what

you're doing, Del? Sounds to me like you're mortgaging your entire family to buy this farm."

"Sure I know what I'm doin'" Del asserted. Jeff regarded him steadily. Del looked away, fidgeted, and at last burst out: "Well, what else am I s'posed to do? Stand aside an' watch while somebody else gets it? How many more chances do you think I'm gonna get—at least while I'm still fit to work? And what're my boys gonna do, now that they're growin' up? Where are they gonna go to farm? Those hills that I own barely support one family—a chance at a farm like this comes along maybe once in a lifetime. Look at it, Jeff!" He waved his hand across the broad, newly greening vista. "Look at it! . . . A full quarter section of the flattest, deepest, blackest land in the county—and all in a piece! And another eighty with just a corner cut off by the crick, and a few hills at the upper end. There's 220 acres of work land out of the 240—where are you going to find farms like that around here? Why do you think Granddad stuck it out, and Dad too, f'r as long as he could last? This farm belongs in the family, Jeff; we earned it. If we have to pay for it all over again, then by God we will. They just aren't making farms like this anymore, Jeff. Wouldn't you try your damnedest to get it? Wouldn't you?"

Jeff found his resistance had almost disappeared. "All right, Del" he allowed. "We'll talk about it. Not here, though—down at the bank. You call the secretary and tell her to make an appointment. Better make it soon, too. Bring all your figures, and be sure Cora comes along too. I'll tell you, Del, it might work—your plan—but it's going to be a long, hard road. You better be sure the family's behind you one hundred percent."

"We're none of us afraid of a little hard work."

"I know that, Del, but this is going to take a lot more than a little." Jeff tried to make his face appear grave, but his look had no effect on Del. He was wearing an ear-splitting grin of elation. Jeff ventured, "I've really got to get on with

this appraisal . . .”

This time Del took the hint. He headed for the truck, but he continued talking about his plans for the farm. He promised Herculean effort from all the members of the family and reassured Jeff about the unprecedented profitability of the new operation. His jubilation was catching and Jeff found himself saying, “You know, Del, there’s nobody I’d like to see on this place better than you and your boys. If anybody should have it, you should. But it’s my responsibility to make sure that you don’t go in over your head. It would be on my conscience. Do you understand?” Del smiled and silently held out his hand; Jeff shook it firmly. “I’ll see you at the bank. . . .”

As their hands unclasped, the long-approaching car turned off the blacktop, crunched across the gravel and lurched abruptly to a stop, despite its slow speed. It had once been a luxury automobile, but it looked as if it had not been washed since it left the showroom. Ribbons of rust hung from its chrome strips and the vinyl top had peeled away in scabby patches. One end of the crumpled front bumper scratched the gravel and the car listed heavily to the left side. The driver, the sole occupant, shut the car off and began to untwist the length of wire that held the front door shut.

Jeff knew the man; he was certain that Del knew him too. They watched in silence as he slowly pivoted his bulk around on the seat and then, with a heave, tipped himself out and on his feet. The car sighed and rocked back to a more even keel.

Breathing heavily, the man shuffled to join Del and Jeff. His shirt was blackened with sweat stains below the armpits and around the collar. His ripped, dirty overalls were open on both sides, revealing a wide expanse of polka-dotted undershorts. His boots were held together with hog nose-rings and caked with dried and fresh manure; he brought with him the strong odor of unchanged clothing, confined cattle, and corn silage. He stopped in front of them, puffing, to remove his cap

and to wipe the top of his head with a grease-stained handkerchief, all the way from front to back in one motion.

Jeff reached out to shake the newcomer’s hand, then hurriedly replaced his own in his pocket as the man made no move toward him. “Certainly a beautiful morning, eh, Norm?” he asked anxiously. Without waiting for an answer he continued, “Really a nice spell of weather we’re having—just what we needed after that wet spring. I’ll bet you fellas are really getting a lot of work done. Out for a drive, are you?”

Norm grunted, “Huh. Looks like I got here just in time.” The effort of exiting the car and walking a few steps seemed to have cost him too much breath to waste any on conversation. He gave the briefest of nods to Del, who nodded in return and stepped back, unconsciously, at the same time. Turning his whole body toward Jeff, he demanded, “What happened to your big-time cattle-feeding friend Lonnie Macklin? I hear he took off a couple nights ago—after selling off everything that was worth anything. That so?” Jeff nodded assent. “Come out here to count up what’s left?”

“Well . . . he wasn’t exactly my friend” Jeff said.

“No? He must’ve been yer friend, the way you’ve been throwin’ good money after bad in his direction. Some of my money, too, I bet. Serves me right for trustin’ it to the bank, huh? Any fool could see he wasn’t goin’ to make it.”

Jeff’s face reddened. “I just do as I’m told, Norm” he said in a tense voice. “I’m just a loan officer. I’ll admit—we went that extra mile with Lonnie, but the whole board voted on it. If you’ve got a complaint, maybe you should bring it up before them.”

“Too late now—ain’t it?” Norm retorted. Having ended the conversation, he stopped talking to mop the sweat from the rolls of flesh which protruded above his shirt collar. “Mighty sweet piece of land, ain’t it?” he said, aiming his comment at no one in particular. Neither Jeff nor Del answered him.

Norm looked carefully at Del, but spoke out of the corner of his mouth to Jeff, "Got any serious buyers yet?"

The granary door slammed closed. The same gust of wind sent an empty feed sack skittering across the driveway and plastered it against a corncrib. Jeff glanced at Del, who was looking at his toes.

"We . . . we've been hashing things over—a little" Jeff stammered. "Things are pretty much still up in the air. After all, I just heard about this yesterday afternoon."

"That's time enough" Norm said. "There's some people who been waiting for a chance at this place for a long time. Bunch o' buzzards, is what some people is like nowadays. It's a good thing I happened by an' saw yer car. How much've you got against this place, anyway."

"Four hundred eighty thousand."

"Whew!" Norm let out a gasp. He swung his head back and forth slowly and deliberately, like a cow trying to rid herself of a swarm of face flies. "You bankers! That's a hell of a lot of money—even nowadays." He paused and looked around carefully. "Mighty sweet piece of land, though, this one" he said. "Joins up real nice with my middle farm."

Perhaps taking new hope at the sound of another human voice, the cats on the milkhouse steps had started to mew again. Norm turned deliberately to look at them. "Somebody ought to shoot 'em" he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "The dog came 'round for a handout this mornin'—I told one of the men to shoot 'im. Nothin' worse than havin' stray dogs aroun'". He looked hard at the cats; they grew quiet.

"So that's your price, then?" Norm asked suddenly.

"What?" Jeff said. "You mean . . ."

"I mean four hundred eighty thousand" Norm said impatiently. "What've we been talkin' about? Is that how much you've got to get for this farm? Is that the price you gave him?" He tipped his head sideways at Del.

"Yes . . . well, I mean . . . that's

the amount of unpaid debt; but like I said, this is all up in the air. I mean, I'm a loan officer—I don't have the authority to make a decision about the price. The whole board would have to hash this out . . . there'd be a meeting . . . and so forth."

Norm took his right hand from his overall pocket and poked his stubby forefinger into Jeff's breastbone. "Well, you tell them that's my offer. I'll take this place off'n yer hands fer what the bank's got in it—even if they did sink too much money out here."

Del cleared his throat, loudly. He stepped forward and lifted his chin. "Listen, Norm" he announced, "I was here afore you. I've already got a claim to this place—right, Jeff? It's as good as settled—we already shook on it."

"Wait a minute, Del!" Jeff exclaimed. "I didn't settle anything! I can't! I'm just . . . I didn't shake on anything, except . . ."

"Except what?" Del's voice turned angry and hurt, now his jaw jutted upward toward Jeff. "You tryin' to tell me that Norm's offer's better'n mine? After I talked to you first? When we shook on it? I don't know about things where you come from, but around here, a man's handshake's good as a deal. If that's the way you do business . . ."

"Banker!" Norm barked. Jeff turned . . . "You tell yer board of directors that my offer is four hundred eighty thousand . . ." he paused to glare at Del, ". . . cash. On the barrel head. You ask 'em whose offer's worth more."

Jeff blinked. He saw Del stagger ahead slightly and catch himself, legs extended, like a butcher calf that had just been shot through the head.

"Four hundred eighty thousand—cash—that's my offer. Take it or leave it. You can get out from under this one scot-free, thanks to ol' Norm." Slightly dazed, Jeff mumbled some confused words about intending to talk to the board members anyway. "Don't take too long about it, young fella" Norm commanded. "I don't got more'n a couple weeks to put in a crop. I gotta

make some money off'n this place this year. You better give me an answer right quick, 'r I'll go talk to 'em myself an' cut you out of this entirely. I could do it now, but I'm givin' you a chance to make good. Don't ferget I'm doin' you a good turn, neither. That's my trouble, al-right' I'm jus' too easy-goin'." Norm pushed his hands deeper into his overall pockets, gazed at the horizon, and rocked back on his heels. "Mighty sweet piece of land" he murmured to himself.

Del said nothing, but shot Jeff a look which mingled accusation, despair, and sorrow. He turned on his heel and plodded toward his truck. Jeff felt an impulse to run after Del and console him. At the same time, he felt anger at Del's misunderstanding of the handshake and at finding himself accused of betrayal. The impulse, born of contradictory emotions, died immediately and he stood still, confounded.

Norm turned away and ambled in the direction of his car. Del hushed the children; doors slammed shut; Del pulled away quietly as Norm retwisted his door wire. The front tires of Norm's car cut two furrows in the gravel as he swung the big car around in a circle and eased on to the blacktop.

Jeff's gaze followed the car's slow progress down the road as it gradually, almost imperceptibly, diminished in size.

A drop of sweat tickling his nose made Jeff aware that he had been standing still, in the hot sun, for some minutes. He looked around and saw the cats, grooming one another once again. He checked his watch; 10:50; no time to make his eleven o'clock appointment. There was a phone in the milkhouse; he would have to call the bank to explain his absence.

Jeff Holland, junior member of the Charter Bank of Okabena full-service financial team, had gained new insights. Striding forward, he kicked the first cat that got in his way. He caught it squarely below the belly and it bounced off the milkhouse wall. The other cats scrambled away in terror as he reached for the door.○

# The Pilgrimage

By William Lawlor

**V**ito could eat a loin of pork, inhale a whipped-cream cake, and down three quarts of beer. When I think of Vito now, I think of Chaucer's Miller, who if he could not force a door with his shoulder would ram it with his head.

My mother sends me letters. They have always arrived in the same small business envelopes, ones with windows cut out to show addresses from inserted correspondence, especially a bill.

My mother never uses the window to show an address. Years ago she somehow got thousands of these envelopes and they have constituted a constant supply for her writing ever since. In the corner for her return address, she scratches out the return address of a New York insurance company and puts one of her own stickers over it. Then, in pencil, to the right of the window, she writes in my address, always in the same hurried hand.

In 1970, the Selective Service drafted Vito. He trained energetically for the infantry and served a year in Vietnam.

He made war effectively, and according to an army citation, he "dynamically processed ninety-four percent more enemy soldiers" and suffered "seventy-six percent less impairment of performance" than the average infantryman during his period of service.

Though not as noble as Chaucer's Knight, Vito was no less a soldier.

The letters, when I was twenty, arrived at my apartment about once a week. She wrote on paper from the same insurance company and told me news of my father and brother and minor events in the neighborhood.

She wrote, "I went out to the stores and brought home big bags of fruit, vegetables, and meat. Someone who said he was a friend

of yours, someone I've never met before, helped me with the bags when he saw me on Jamaica Avenue. He said his name was Vito."

After Vietnam, Vito got an "early out" which permitted him to leave the army before his full service time was up.

He returned to Jamaica Avenue.

With the setting of every sun, he and two or three other t-shirted, muscular men each bought a fifty-two cent pint of Gypsy Rose wine, taking it from the Norge refrigerator at Buy-More Liquors. They sat on the fender of a conveniently parked car on 192nd Street and slugged down the juice. Then they took downs, smoked reefer, or dropped acid. Some nights they became rowdy and howled, laughed, and shouted as darkness set; other nights they passed out; some nights they walked on the avenue, stumbling, talking incoherently, dropping their keys, their change, their pills.

In my life, my struggle is to steer my way through opposing forces.

On one hand, I love my mother and want dearly to please her and give her happiness, for she cares for me in a selfless and unconditional way that shows her ecstatic purity.

On the other hand, I am a hopeless rebel, thriving on the national celebration of individuality. I read Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* once a year, I study Creeley, Corso, and Ginsberg. I keep a notebook as I read, recording lines that impress me, writing out my responses briefly.

I want to be a writer.

You might think of me as Harry Bailey, Chaucer's Host, who supervised and judged the storytelling of the pilgrims on their way to Canterbury.

Or you might think of me as Chaucer's Plowman, who carted dung through the morning dew, working to grow a crop.

Vito was attracted to women but made only crude, unsuccessful overtures. He saw women on the avenue and admired how faded yet meticulously laundered jeans clung to thighs and hips. He liked women who wore thin sweaters over bras that left their nipples semi-visible and upturned, like the hull of a ship.

But Vito's head appeared to be cut with a blunt chisel. His nose was broad, flat, and angular, and apparently he did not breathe through it well, for his mouth usually hung open, revealing gapped teeth, like those of Chaucer's Wife of Bath. And Vito's left front tooth was badly chipped. His cheeks were craggy from acne scars. He was not attractive to females, whose rejection frustrated him, making him take more drugs, especially pills.

Desire and restraint are forces to be kept in balance.

It is all right to want something, be it sex, or drink, or wealth, so long as moderation keeps practices within limits.

But restraint's control of desire is hard to judge for every individual.

For example, Chaucer's Prioress liked jewelry and paraded herself in a royal (some say sensuous) way.

Who would come forward to tell this nun to show restraint?

During Vito's time of desire and rejection, he was spoiling for fights. In his first fight since the war, he pushed a friend over the hood of a car and pounded him for seven minutes. About a week later he slammed a drunk against a school-yard handball court and whipped him with a snapped-off auto antenna.

Between fights, when he had the attention of others, Vito liked to recall his infantry training. He liked to show how to jam the heel of a hand under the cartilage of someone's nose, thereby driving the cartilage fatally into the cranium. Vito demonstrated the manipulation of

a broom handle as a bayonet to incapacitate an opponent with a deep thrust up and into the solar plexus.

Now I must admit that during these days I did not want to be around Vito, mostly for fear that he might start a fight and I might be the one he picked. I tried to behave like Chaucer's Clerk; that is to say, I tried not to speak about Vito unless comment was strictly necessary, and even then I kept things short.

My best security was absence, so when an offer came from a mid-western university, I moved out of state to study and teach. Nevertheless, I always returned to New York to see my mother, and Vito always seemed to be on the corner or coming up the block.

My mother started having seizures and was not well for a long time. At first, a doctor said it was her "change of life." Then some other doctors located a massive brain tumor. They cut off the top of her skull, scraped tissue from her brain, put the top of her head back on, and left her paralyzed on her left side.

Letters from my mother stopped. Then amazingly, the tumor was shown to be benign. She responded to physical therapy and could walk again. After three months in the hospital, she came home.

The letters began again, but now they were written on half sheets of paper, in a fine, closely set hand. It was as if she were trying to get the most out of every page she had.

Although the reader may doubt my word, Vito did feel, in addition to rage, a fierce sense of love. He fell in love in 1972. He had never been in love before, and his woman of the streets was the woman of his heart. Vito and his woman lived on Jamaica Avenue, in an apartment upstairs from Perlman's Television Center. Vito still drank and took pills, and he was both jealous and proud of his girlfriend. People, he thought, ought not say wrong things about her.

Over the years, strong medication to prevent seizures has sometimes made my mother somewhat confused. She might not be sure about the season or the date. In one letter, which I got in late October, she referred to the arrival of spring and her expectations for beautiful flowers.

"Hell" I said to myself, "Shelley wrote that once and he became an immortal genius."

How does one steer between death and life?

If one is the victim of murder, no steering is involved. The moment comes and passes. But if one is the victim of disease, then all kinds of preparations must begin for the transition.

Finding direction in the hour of death is the goal of all souls—but where are the signs? who is the guide?

Police could not identify who committed the homicide. I spoke to Perlman, the owner of the television shop, and he said a gray car, maybe a Dodge Polara, pulled up in front. A white man with dark hair rolled down the window, craned his head out, and shouted, "Vito's woman sucks camel cocks and blows the boys in the bar." Perlman can quote these words because, he says, the phrase was repeated, and according to him, the alliteration made it catchy.

Vito came pounding down the stairs and roaring out the door, ready to drag that scum from the car and beat him to a bloody pulp. But when Vito, with anger widening his nostrils and curling his lip, leaned over the car window, a gun blast from a very large caliber gun met him in the face. He stumbled back, his hands clumsily clutching at his maimed face, and he died on the sidewalk.

My mother needed further surgery. Neurosurgeons reopened her head and peeled off the tumor that had grown back. She started a new recovery but suffered a fall, cracking her hip. The fall may have been part of a stroke.

Now I want to write my mother a magical letter to make her young and healthy again. I want to send it to her in one of her envelopes with windows. From inside the envelope, I want my soul to look out and tell her, "Take it easy, Mom. I'm coming home. I'm bringing the fruit and vegetables and meat you want, and I got a great buy on all of it."

No one, not even Perlman, who said he told the police that the murderer must have been someone Vito fought with, could positively identify the car, the driver, or the murderer. The car hotly spun its wheels and whipped away, making a fast and mean exit.

Vito's woman, whom I met one cold afternoon on Jamaica Avenue, could not explain anything to me either.

"Shit" she said, "he was shot."

Now where can I go, and how can I be sure that the going will be good?

To forget my sorrow, I could set to sea, and like the Shipman, learn all the channels and be satisfied to see my enemies sink. Instead of brooding on death and disintegration, I could, like the Merchant, preoccupy myself with commerce, capital, and taxes. Or should I be like the Physician? Had I been a doctor, a neurosurgeon, I would have saved my mother, and maybe, with a prayer and God's help, even Vito.

I know I will not be deceived by the ploys of the Friar, Summoner, or Pardoner. I would prefer to be a pastor myself, a pastor like the Parson, who tended with love to his fold—but I fear I might behave more like the Monk, who kept fine horses and dogs and hunted in the forest, clothed in elegant robes.

Do I dare to think I might be the pilgrim Chaucer? Shall I tell immortal tales and thereby steer past death? If I could meet Chaucer at the Tabard, I would walk with him to Canterbury, in spite of the Black Plague, to see Becket, the kind, unswerving martyr, to learn of death, and to learn of living life.

## The Houses of Oconto

are like Bryan's dream of America—  
they have never crossed to this century.  
The spirits that perambulate the infinite verandas  
and crowd the railings of the belvederes  
the governor who waltzes—he has just won the election—  
the sisters who write to Mrs. Eddy  
“How ravished we are by your words, O Teacher”  
even Abel Tourtillote, rowdy millwright and owner  
of a great, brass, engraved spittoon—  
could we call them to the long table  
where the medium has filled the snifter with brandy  
and glaucous eyes float in the gloom—  
could we summon those spectral guests  
their innocence would bewilder us.  
And the mill hands go on dancing and whoring  
and the children wander under the spruces  
dreaming of Spain.

These December evenings  
the houses of Oconto are like travelers in the dusk  
or tall ships ghosting in the wind  
that blows away from us, hauling a preposterous cargo  
of tile fireplaces, claw-footed sofas, and velvet hangings  
their mansard roofs glinting like well-sheathed galleons  
bound to the same country where the copper people  
clasp in silence their crescent knives.

*Marc Hudson*

## Small Bird in an Old House

A small bird, a redpoll  
hops from stone to stone  
in the opened house below.  
My chattering guide  
a farm wife from the neighbor  
croft, points out  
its neolithic comforts—  
stone bed, stone cupboard  
oven and mortar.  
There a woman crouched  
and pounded seeds  
with a beach cobble.  
There a couple slept  
on bracken and moss  
campion. Under that  
door curb, among kitchen  
refuse, fish scales  
and limpet shells  
a navel cord was buried.  
Twenty centuries before Christ  
they lived quite well.  
A domestic cheeriness  
still hangs about Skara Brae  
which the redpoll  
glad for the warmth  
of the sunlit stones  
does nothing to dispel.

*Marc Hudson*

# Chance

By Daniel F. Cooper

Through the swirling snowflakes there seemed to be a part of the night darker than the rest. Elliot didn't think that was possible. When the blackness congealed into a horse and buggy, there was no time for thought, only the instinctive reaction of hands and feet. He caught a glimpse of the horse rearing and then the headlights swept across the blurring trees. Confused by the speed with which things were happening, Elliot could only think how odd it was that he could watch his car progress down the highway by looking out the side window.

The car came to a stop in a snowdrift on the left side of the highway. The lights were on and the engine was still running.

Elliot opened the door. Lulled by the car's heater, he was not prepared for the cold and gasped as though he had been dropped sleeping into a pool of water. Forcing himself up and out, he surveyed the scene. In the reflected glare of the headlights, the flakes danced wildly. The rear of the car disappeared into the drift.

The creaking of the approaching buggy snapped him to attention. The horse was not visible, but Elliot could hear its throaty breaths. He crouched and removed a flashlight from underneath the car seat. The beam silhouetted a tall figure wearing a wide-brimmed hat and high-collared coat that melted into the dark interior of the buggy. Elliot could barely discern the thick lines that seemed to emerge from the horse's wide flank like umbilical cords. For a moment, he half-expected the faceless man to conjure a flaming jack-o-lantern in his hand. The man rose and stood upright, towering over Elliot and the car.

"Hold it!" Elliot said.

"Get that light out of my face. I'm not going to hurt you." The voice was earthy, friendly.

"Then step over here by the headlights where we can see each other."

Elliot lowered the flashlight and the man came near the illuminated drift. He had tired eyes and his face was masked by a thick beard encrusted with ice. As Elliot looked again at the long black overcoat and wide-brimmed, high-crowned hat, a childhood image flashed in his mind. Just like the pilgrims, he thought.

"Ambrose Miller" the man said, offering a hand shedding its tattered glove. Elliot didn't shake it. "I saw you go off the road. Are you all right?"

"I went off the road because of your goddamned buggy! You're lucky I didn't hit you. What the hell are you doing driving a buggy in a storm like this?"

"I don't have a car."

With embarrassing swiftness, Elliot realized the man was Amish. He had heard there were a few of them left in this corner of the state.

"I'm sorry" he said. "I'm tired and I've got a long

way to go."

"That's all right," said the older man. "Came to see if I could help you get her back on the road. I feel responsible."

Elliot felt his fear and anger leave him.

"Fine" he said, "But let me see if I can get it loose first. Might get lucky."

He got in the car, put it in first gear and gingerly pressed the accelerator. The rear wheels lurched forward and spun in the snow.

Ambrose rapped on the window. "You'll only dig her in deeper!"

Elliot got out and closed the door. "I guess you're right. We'll have to try something else."

"I've got some rope in my buggy. We can try tying your car to the harness rig and pulling it out. I'll get the horse."

Elliot's fingers and toes were numbing. He stamped his boots while he waited and shoved his bare hands into his trouser pockets. He was almost surprised when the fingers of his right hand closed about the small velvet box containing the engagement ring. Again he began to worry and was glad when he heard the hooves on the icy road and saw the horse approach, jets of steam rising from its nostrils.

"I untethered her from the buggy" Ambrose said. "Let's see if we can tie these ropes around this metal thing."

The two men each took one of the ropes and crouched in front of the car, between the translucent columns of the headlights. As Elliot worked the stiff, coarse rope behind the bumper, his fingers throbbed with pain.

"Jesus, it's cold."

"It sure is. What's your name, son?"

"Elliot. Elliot Meyer. You never did tell me why you're out in a storm like this."

"It's my daughter, Meg. She's run away from home and I want to find her before she freezes to death."

"She picked a hell of a night to run away" Elliot said, his teeth chattering. "How old is she?"

"Sixteen."

Elliot winced as the rope bit into his palm. He sat back on his haunches. "There. How's yours?"

"Best I can do. Hand me the other end of your rope."

Elliot watched as Ambrose tied the free ends of the ropes to the harness rigging and cinched them tight.

"Okay, let's give it a try" he said.

Inside the car, the heat rushed over Elliot. He ignored the pain in his fingers, but as he tried to clutch in, he realized he could not feel his feet. He was forced to turn on the interior light so he could see where to place them. He watched Ambrose guiding the horse by its bridle and saw the lines draw taut and gave the

car some gas. Nothing. He tried again and this time the car strained forward. Ahead, the mare was tossing her head in protest, then she bent forward and pulled again, and this time the car skidded loose. Elliot pumped the brake and turned the wheel so that he wouldn't strike the horse, and the car came to rest in the middle of the road. He guided it to the right lane, switched on the hazard lights and got out.

The tension on the ropes had drawn the knots into hard, seamless balls. Elliot began to kneel.

"Don't bother" said Ambrose. From inside his coat he drew a long hunting knife. Elliot felt a moment of panic as the double-edged blade flashed before the headlight and tossed stilettos of white light into the darkness. Ambrose bent over and sawed through the first rope. It gave stubbornly, its fibers frozen into a hard mass. The second was even more difficult, and he was breathing heavily as he sheathed the knife, the brittle, frayed rope lying at his boots like a piece of dead timber.

Ambrose turned and began hitching the horse back to the buggy. Elliot watched as he whispered to the mare and fumbled with the rigging, his fingers hampered by the cold.

"Thanks, Ambrose."

"No thanks necessary. Sorry I caused you the trouble."

"Listen, why don't you ride with me? At least up to Phillips. If we don't see her along the way I can drop you at the police station and you can report her missing."

Ambrose stopped working the straps and looked up. He studied Elliot's face for a moment and then turned his eyes back on the harness.

"I'd be obliged to you, Elliot, if you didn't say anything about Meg to the police. I'd rather not have them involved in this."

"All right. But I would like to help. Why don't you come with me? We'll make better time."

"I appreciate that, but I think I'd better stay with my horse" he said, patting the mare's flank.

"Okay."

Elliot turned to go.

"If you would come across Meg and if it's not far out of your way, could you drive back this way? I'll be following along behind you."

"Of course. Good luck. I hope you find her and that she's all right."

They shook hands. Elliot got in the car and drove off, glancing in the rear view mirror for a final look at the mysterious man, but he and his horse had already blended into the night.

**I**t took ten minutes for the tension to drain out of Elliot's muscles. His body was soaked in sweat and a great weariness settled on him. He had been driving for six hours and Phillips was still fifty miles away. This trip was quickly becoming a disaster.

He tried to picture the scene upon his arrival: "Hello,

Lori. Sorry to wake you, but I was wondering if you'd marry me."

He felt ridiculous. They had not been together for two years. Why did he want to do something calculated to make her reject him? He didn't know and he checked his thoughts, afraid that they would answer him if he let them continue. He had to go through with this. He had to drive on.

Fifteen minutes later, his headlights caught the Amish girl in their beam. There could be no mistaking the long coat and bonnet, cantilevered to shield her face from the wind. The car came to a stop beside her. She got in and Elliot started driving slowly, still toward Phillips.

"It's a bad night to be out" he said. "Where are you headed?"

A scarf covered the girl's nose and mouth, and the moisture from her breath had frozen into crystals that made the cloth sparkle. A worn canvas bag was cradled in her lap. Her eyes were dark and conveyed suspicion, fear, and, above all, exhaustion. She seemed totally overwhelmed by the warmth of the car.

"North" she said at last.

Elliot was silent for a few minutes. He wanted the girl to rest before he told her about her father. She leaned her head back, and he noticed that her eyes were fixed with wonder on the sweeping windshield wipers.

"Meg, I know you're running away from home."

Her body stiffened. "I don't know what you're talking about" she said.

"You don't have to lie. I just met your father a few miles back."

"All right, so I'm leaving home. So what?"

"So, I'm taking you to Phillips to buy you some food and coffee and then I'm taking you back to your father like I promised him."

"No. You can't."

"I promised him I would."

"I'll just run away again if you do."

"Why? What are you running from?"

"You wouldn't understand. You're an outsider."

"Try me."

"No."

Elliot was silent and watched the snow fall. In front of him, the night spit granules of snow at the windshield. They all seemed to emerge from the same invisible point in the black maw and shot outward in trajectories of almost geometric perfection.

"Are you going to take me back?"

"Listen, Meg, you're running into a whole world of outsiders. If you're really serious about this, you're going to have to change completely."

"No, I don't. People can accept me for who I am."

"You look like you stepped out of the last century. You're going to be stared at everywhere you go."

Then let them stare."

"And how are you going to live? How will you support yourself?"

"I'm going to get a job as a cook. People always need a good cook."

"Sure, and it might even pay your bus fare to and from work everyday. You have no idea of the expenses you'll be faced with. I can tell by your face you've never ridden in a car before. You've probably never been ten miles from home before."

Suddenly she was crying. "I'm not afraid" she mumbled between sobs.

"Please, Meg, tell me why you're running away."

"This is why! This is why! Are you satisfied now? Now will you leave me alone?"

"Jesus."

**S**he had pulled the scarf down and was looking at him, tears of rage in her eyes. The left side of her face was a disgusting patchwork of shriveled skin and burn tissue. It was formless, as though made of putty. She turned back and looked out the windshield, not bothering to recover her face. Elliot focused his attention back on the road. The lights of an oncoming car changed the droplets on the windshield into tiny constellations. Without noticing, he grabbed the handle of the window and rocked it slightly, moving it back and forth in the small play of its rotation, feeling it catch—the moment when more pressure would move the window down, break the seal—then back along its minute arc until it could go no further. Back and forth it went, faster and faster.

"You know why you're running away from home? It's not to get away. It's not to see the world."

"Oh, no? What is it then?"

"It's to punish yourself."

"You're crazy."

"You think life's been unfair to you and you feel sorry for yourself."

"Shut up! You don't know what you're talking about."

The handle continued to shuttle rapidly between its boundaries, unnoticed.

"You don't want to admit that life goes on with bad things. That there is happiness beyond misfortune. Admitting that would show all of your unhappiness to be what it really is: self-pity. That's it, isn't it?"

"Stop it! Leave me alone!"

They both stiffened as the subzero wind roared in, laced with gritty snow, masking Elliot's voice, vaporizing his words. The flakes swirled about like a swarm of angry bees. Elliot cranked the window shut and the trapped storm subsided; silence flooded the compartment. Meg stared at him, but he made no move, no reaction. He felt spent, exhausted, stunned by wind and words. His own had come out without thought or effort, as if they had been there all along, but it had taken the cold to reveal them to him. Elliot seemed to come back from a long way away, and he noticed the glow above the trees in the distance. They were approaching Phillips.

"You're going to take me back, aren't you?"

He glanced to his right. She was again looking away from him, out the window.

"No. Sometimes the only way to learn is the hard way. I'll drop you off at a truck stop in Phillips. You can catch another ride from there."

The rest of the way was painfully silent. They stopped at an all-night truck stop. She walked across the room wrapped in her scarf and bonnet and sat in a booth. Elliot walked over and sat down.

"Go away" she said.

"I'd like to buy you something to eat. You can't go far on an empty stomach."

"I don't want anything from you except to be left alone."

"Suit yourself."

Elliot walked to the counter and ordered a burger, fries, and coffee. He ordered the same for Meg and instructed the waitress to take it over. Meg scowled once, but the aroma overpowered her and she began eating the hot food. She had set her scarf on the seat next to her, but ate with her bonnet carefully shielding her face from the rest of the diner. Elliot finished eating and walked over. He sat down and watched her eat.

"Don't look at me."

"I won't."

"I thought about what you said. Maybe there's some truth there."

Elliot said nothing until the silence became uncomfortable. "Storm's letting up" he commented.

"Thanks for the food—and the ride."

"My pleasure. I was glad to have some company."

"You live around here?"

"No, an old . . . friend, lives just north of here."

"What's your name?"

"Elliot."

"Thanks for not taking me back, Elliot."

"I wish you'd reconsider, Meg."

"No. I can't go back. Sometimes something happens and you can never go back."

"But, there are doctors who can really help you. Plastic surgery, you know?"

"Of course, I know. And it costs money—lots of it."

"Yeah, it does, doesn't it?" Elliot mumbled. He looked out the window to the north and Lori.

Meg was carefully wrapping the scarf around her face. "And I can't even pay you for the food."

"You've already paid me."

Above the damp scarf her black eyes looked at him strangely.

"I have to go to the bathroom" she said. "Is there one around?"

"Back there, I think" he said pointing.

After she was gone, he noticed she had left her bag on the seat. He looked outside again. Snowflakes were landing gently on a street lamp and melting from the light's warmth. Elliot stood up and dug the velvet box out of his pocket and slid it into the bag. Then he went outside, quickly, and started the car. He drove south, looking for a bar or a motel; he didn't care which. ◉

# The State of the Arts

## New Study Profiles Wisconsin Arts Industry

By Carol Toussaint and Jennifer Hirsch

### *Arts study background*

The 1986-87 study, "The Wisconsin Arts Industry: An Economic Perspective" is the direct result of an intensive strategic planning exercise which took place throughout 1984 and 1985 at the request of then-Governor Anthony Earl. The Wisconsin Strategic Development Commission included the current governor, Tommy Thompson, among its twenty-three members. In its thorough analysis of the economic climate of Wisconsin, the commission repeatedly identified quality of life as one of the state's strengths. The Wisconsin Arts Board encouraged research on the economic impact of the arts, and some members of the legislature shared the Arts Board's interest in developing a strategic agenda for the arts. However, while more than fifty economic issues were researched and analyzed by the commission, quality-of-life issues were set aside as time consuming to research and difficult to quantify.

Because it did not include the state's arts industry in its research, in its final report to the governor in August of 1985 the Strategic Development Commission acknowledged the importance of the arts and recommended that the governor follow up the commission's work with a similar examination of the arts.

The governor acted on this recommendation in late 1985 when he requested the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters to conduct "a comprehensive study of the arts in Wisconsin, focusing on their contribution to the economy." Such a study, Governor Earl suggested, "would give us a thorough assessment of our current position and suggest new directions for both private and public development efforts." As evidence that this approach was approved of by the Wisconsin Arts Board and the legislature, the chair of the Arts Board and two members of the legislature accepted appointment to the Commission on the Study of the Arts established by the Wisconsin Academy. Carol Toussaint, who had served as assistant director of the Strategic Development Commission, managed the study for the Wisconsin Academy.

The study of the arts, underwritten by contributions from Wisconsin foundations and corporations, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School, and the Wisconsin Academy, represents a major addition to the scholarship of the Wisconsin Academy. The Wisconsin Academy Research Council, a distinguished group of Wisconsin citizens selected for their outstanding contributions in the sciences, arts, and letters, accepted responsibility for the study and its presentation to the governor, and appointed a sixteen-member Commission on the Study of the Arts to direct the study and oversee the research.

The research itself was contracted out to Professor E. Arthur Prieve, director of the Center for Arts Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School of Business. Prieve had headed the research team for Wisconsin's 1976 arts study, giving him not only background and experience for the task at hand but the ability to draw some comparisons with the 1976 data.

A popular view of arts organizations is that they operate in a state of chronic deficit, managed by "artistic types" who lack the business sense and fiscal responsibility essential to running a labor-intensive business. Indeed, because an orchestra going bankrupt is more newsworthy than one operating quietly, if just barely, in the black, the financial woes of arts groups tend to be widely reported and appear to confirm the popular image of the arts as poorly managed. Some view the arts as a net drain on tax and charitable dollars not justified for an industry which serves only a limited population.

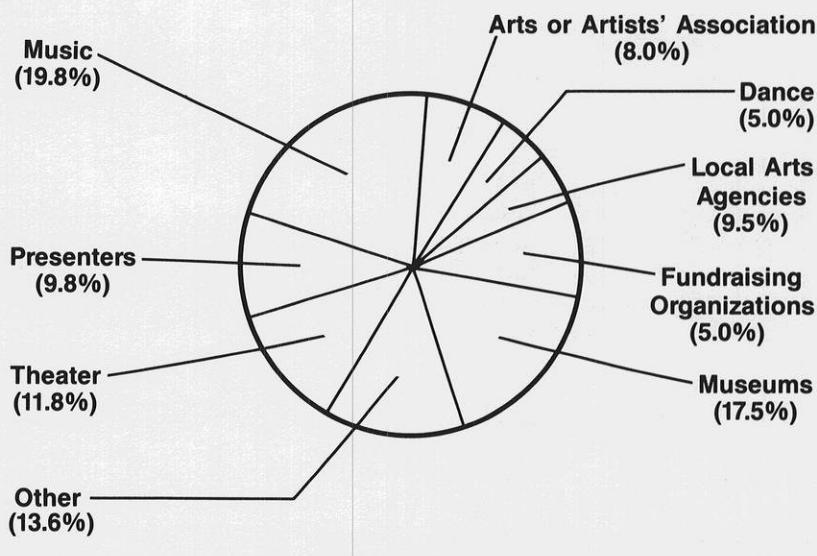
"The Wisconsin Arts Industry: An Economic Perspective," a profile and economic impact study of the nonprofit arts industry in Wisconsin, belies some of these views. Looking objectively at the state's nonprofit arts organizations as an economic entity which purchases goods and services, pays employees, and attracts money-spending audiences, the study yields some perhaps unexpected findings. Of the 338 organizations surveyed, 77.4 percent reported operating without a deficit, though for over two thirds of those in the black, the operating margin was slim—under \$1,000. Operating budgets are sustained with the help of large numbers of volunteers, who donated approximately 1.5 million hours in 1986. While the arts do attract substantial government support—over \$13.4 million from federal, state, county, and municipal sources in 1986—income taxes were paid on wages and salaries of \$30 million and sales taxes on \$13 million of admissions and sales of goods in 1986; and indirect spending of these receipts also generates additional tax payments to the state.

While the charge that the audience served by the arts is limited is supported by the study with respect to audience demographics—largely white, well-educated, with average income over \$25,000—most arts organizations are trying to broaden their audiences by offering free or reduced admission to minorities, students, senior citizens, and other special constituencies. In terms of sheer numbers, however, the charge that arts events attract limited attendance is soundly debunked by the research data. Arts activities in Wisconsin drew audiences of 6.2 million in 1986, which surpasses the combined in-state attendance figures for the Milwaukee Brewers, Milwaukee Bucks, and Green Bay Packers plus the Milwaukee Zoo and entertainment attractions in Door County and Wisconsin Dells—by a margin of 1.7 million people.

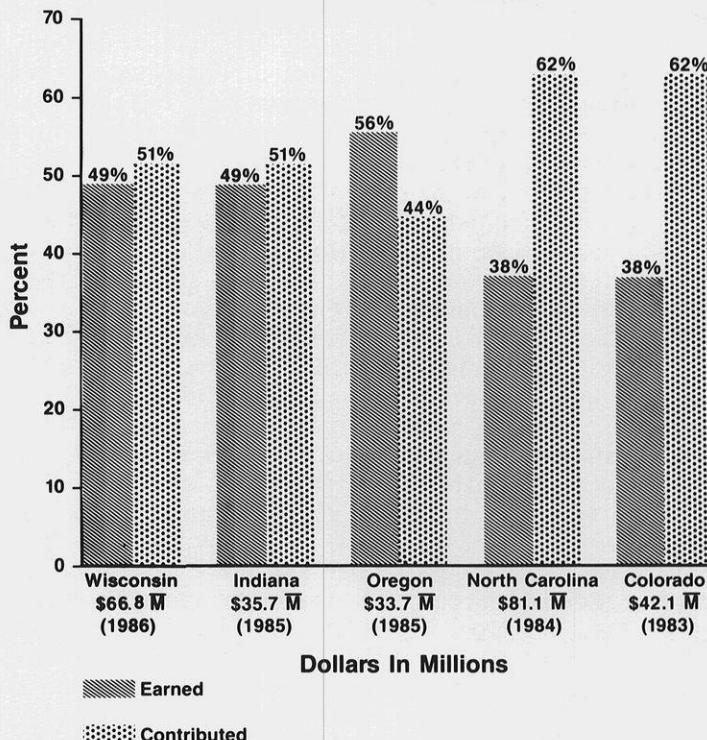
The study, undertaken by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters in 1986 at the request of then-Governor Anthony Earl, accomplishes several coordinated research goals: identifying the scope of the arts in Wisconsin, characterizing its audiences, and determining the overall economic impact of arts activities in this state. (Throughout the study and this article the term "art" refers only to nonprofit arts organizations; owing to limited time and resources, individual artists and commercial arts enterprises were not covered.)

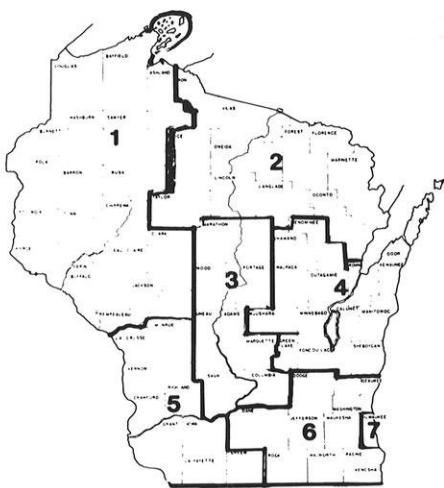
The study data were gathered primarily through two research instruments. The first was a questionnaire sent out to the 482 nonprofit arts organizations in the state which the research team was able to identify by October 1986. The questionnaire requested detailed information about revenue and expenditures, staffing (paid and volunteer), and audience attendance, and achieved an unusually high response rate of over 70 percent. The second instrument was an audience survey which the researchers conducted at twenty-eight arts events located throughout the state and representing a wide variety of arts disciplines. Designed to elicit data not on audience demo-

## RESPONDENT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS BY ART FORM (N=338)

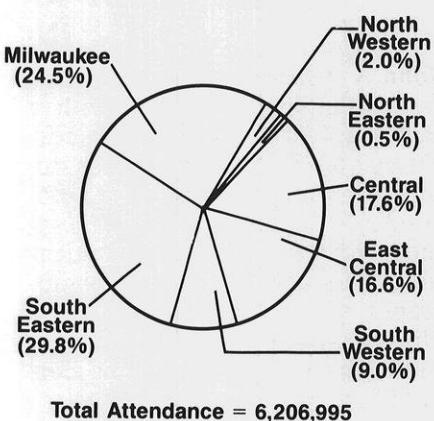


## EARNED AND CONTRIBUTED INCOME BY STATES CONDUCTING ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDIES





### PERCENT OF ATTENDANCE BY REGION (N=282)



#### Arts facts and figures

- Total direct in-state expenditures by the 338 respondents—including salaries, payments to suppliers of goods and services, and arts-related spending by audiences—amounted to \$81.2 million in 1986. Using a conservative 2.24 multiplier to assess the ripple effect of secondary, or indirect, spending as the dollars are recycled through the economy brings the total economic impact of the arts industry on the state to \$181.9 million.

- In the aggregate, arts organizations earned 49 percent of their total income and raised 51 percent from contributions, including gifts from private individuals (10.7 percent), corporate support (7.4 percent), foundations (6.6 percent), United Arts Fund (4.2 percent), benefit productions (2.4 percent), and government support (20 percent). Government support includes budget allocations and grants and is composed of \$1.2 million in federal funds, \$5.6 million in state support, \$4.9 million in county and municipal support, and \$1.7 million from undifferentiated sources.

- Arts organizations generated 4,390 part-time and full-time paid jobs in 1986. In addition, more than 37,000 volunteers provided 1.5 million hours of contributed time. Labor-intensive music and performing arts groups spent a high percentage of their budgets, 60 and 57 percent respectively, on personnel while museums, with high facilities and equipment expenses, allocated 39 percent of their budgets to employee costs.

- Arts audiences in Wisconsin are similar to arts audiences nationally. Key determinants of attendance at arts events include level of education (college), sex (female), and income (above \$25,000). While Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians attend at levels slightly higher than their population percentages, attendance by blacks is below their percentage of population.

- The art industry in Wisconsin appears to be growing: in 1986, the 338 respondent organizations reported a total income of \$66.8 million and total expenditures of \$66 million; in 1976, 222 organizations surveyed had an income of \$22.8 million and expenditures of \$23.4 million (adjusted using Consumer Price Index 1986 dollars).

- In addition to admission costs, each member of an arts audience spent an average of \$14 on transportation, food, and other items associated with attending an event.

- Arts organizations are distributed geographically throughout the state in close proportion to the distribution of the population, giving Wisconsin citizens access to arts events throughout the state.

The map on the left shows percentage of state population by region: (1) Northwestern 12%, (2) Northeastern 4.7%, (3) Central 8.1%, (4) East Central 19.2%, (5) Southwestern 6.5%, (6) Southeastern 30%, (7) Milwaukee County 19.5%. The pie chart illustrates the attendance reported by 282 organizations included in the arts survey.

graphics and on audience spending, the audience survey is a valuable component of this statewide study of the arts. The Wisconsin study provides a more thorough perspective on the significance of audience spending than many such studies done in other states.

Analysis of the data provides an economic profile of the nonprofit arts industry in Wisconsin in 1986 which should serve as a reference point for future studies and a benchmark against which to measure development in the arts. One caveat, however, must accompany this (or any) economic examination of the arts: documenting the economic impact of the arts industry is not an attempt to restrict the public's view of the contribution of the arts to jobs and revenue generated. As research director E. Arthur Prieve cautions in the research report, "to substitute the economic value of the arts for their human, spiritual, and aesthetic value could be dangerous. The economic value of the arts should be viewed as a by-product and not the primary reason for their existence."

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*Carol Toussaint was retained by the Wisconsin Academy to manage the study of the arts. A consultant on public policy issues, she served as secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Local Affairs and Development, 1977-78, and has held leadership positions with many volunteer organizations including president of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin and vice president of the national League organization.*

*Jennifer Hirsch served as project assistant on the study of the arts. A member of the Wisconsin Academy staff, she writes for the Review and other Academy publications.○*

# Wisconsin Photographers' Showcase

**John A. Chosy** graduated in June from Stanford University with a B.A. in international relations. Winner of the Moshe award for studio art, he exhibited his photographs in the Stanford Art Department and published them in student magazines. He took these photographs while studying at Oxford University and while at home in Madison. He is now attending Harvard Law School.





# Photographer

John Chosy



Wisconsin Photographers' Showcase: John Chosy





## BOOK MARKS/WISCONSIN

**NELL** by Nancy Thayer. New York: Morrow, 1985. 380 pp. \$17.95.

By Jennifer Hirsch

It is frustrating that a novel as nicely written as *Nell* should be undermined by a conceptual flaw. The novel is about modern women facing modern situations: divorce, raising children alone, dealing with stepdaughters and exhusbands and career questions. We expect these women to be as modern as the situations they face. But Nancy Thayer's women turn out to be unexpectedly old-fashioned: all they really want in life is to marry their man, and they're willing to make themselves abject and miserable in the effort. Still, a story about a woman's singleminded quest for her chosen man, if not ideologically satisfying, could nevertheless have made compelling reading; today the 1950s best-seller *Marjorie Morningstar* remains gripping and moving. But even as a love story *Nell*, buoyed along for a time by likeable characters, engaging scenes, and an intimate, fast-paced narrative style, falls flat.

The first third of the novel introduces Nell's world. Thayer fleshes out characters and relationships in deft, often humorous vignettes. Introducing Hannah, Nell's eight-year-old daughter, Thayer writes,

But then Hannah had always been critical of her mother. Nell knew in her heart that if Hannah had been able to speak at birth, her first words would have been, the instant she was pulled from her mother's legs: "Oh gross, Mom, *look* at you. Your hair's all wet and tangled, your stomach's all blubbery, and that hospital gown is really the pits. Couldn't you at least put some lipstick on?"

Though no plot is developed and little action occurs except in flashbacks, the people and scenes are inter-

esting, funny, moving, and always convincing.

The plot unfolds over the second two thirds of the novel, when Nell goes to spend the summer working on Nantucket Island. Thayer paints the Nantucket setting with a vivid immediacy, pulling us in—only to be disappointed by a story much less interesting than the characters and setting promised. The plot—will Nell or won't Nell get her man—and the subplot—will or won't Clary, Nell's stepdaughter, get *her* man—evolves from vaguely tedious to downright annoying.

The novel's entire conflict revolves around the relationship between Nell and Andy, a man she meets on Nantucket, and whether it will lead to marriage. Yet the basis for Nell's abiding love for Andy remains obscure. The narrator tells us over and over how greatly Nell loves Andy—"She knew that she would never love another man as she loved Andy. She never had before, she never would again"—as if insistent repetition might substitute for a compelling, realistic portrayal of love between two people. But Andy is just not someone we can care for, and, given the intimacy that Thayer has established between the reader and Nell, not someone whom Nell can plausibly care for, either.

Nell's two previous lovers, both manual laborers, are appealing men, but the class differences between them and Nell pose a barrier to a lasting relationship. Thayer brings home the magnitude of this socioeconomic barrier in a wonderful flashback scene in which Nell accompanies her boyfriend to a picnic with his crowd where the main activity consists of the men jumping motorcycles over dirt mounds. Yet despite the irreconcilable differences between subcultures, the blue-collar boyfriends are kind, warm, giving men, and it seems reasonable that Nell would like them, if only for casual dating.

In comparison with the previous two boyfriends, Andy's prime virtue seems to be that he is as educated and cultured as Nell. Indeed, he is more so: Harvard

educated and a gourmet cook, Andy is a classical provincial New England snob; he can't bear to go off Nantucket even to visit Nell in Boston, and he detests the summer tourists on the island. No doubt it is a relief to Nell to be with a man who reads for entertainment and prefers scallops to sloppy Joes. But other than physical attraction, their class status is all they share. Andy is utterly bored by Nell's interests—children, friends, the clothing boutique she manages—and she by his: computers and high technology, the environment. Andy is unable to give except in the most superficial material way. Most seriously, and in striking contrast to Nell, Andy is worse than asocial: he lacks the ability to understand, let alone empathize with, other people's feelings.

Because we know Nell and her previous boyfriends to be generous, congenial people—and we know Nell to value deeply these traits in others—Thayer strains our credibility when the narrative tells us that Nell “needed and wanted [Andy] more than she had ever needed and wanted anything in her life,” and that “only with him had she known real joy.” Thayer’s mistake here is not so much in telling us instead of showing us what she wants us to see (though that problem also weakens the portrayal of the relationship) as in telling us something which runs contrary to all we have been shown. We can accept that Nell may have the misjudgment to *want* this man, but in what sense can she possibly *need* him? And are we really to believe that she has never known “real joy” with her own children, whose dearness to her has been unequivocally shown in many tender scenes?

With such implausible narrative—yet narrative on which all conflict and tension in the plot depends—the story sinks from an engaging and realistic portrayal of someone we’d like to know to the maudlin hyperbole of a dime-store romance. Nell’s behavior—and the narrative describing it—cannot be excused as being a portrait of an older woman from a less “liberated” generation, and who, being older, is more desperate to marry. Clary, Nell’s twenty-seven-year-old stepdaughter, is quite as old-fashioned and extreme in facing her romantic problems. When her boyfriend moves to another state to begin his postdoctoral research, he asks Clary to move with him and live with him. He doesn’t want to get married first because, as Clary tearfully explains,

“He says he’s not ready for a commitment like that yet. He says he just got through with the pressure of getting his Ph.D. and he’s going to be under a lot of stress trying to get situated in a new job. He doesn’t think he could take the additional stress of being married yet.”

This explanation seems perfectly reasonable, in fact sensible, to me; but Clary will hold out for marriage or end the relationship. Both generations see marriage as the end, the reward, toward which women unques-

tioningly strive. Clary says to Nell, “You’re so fucking pretty and so fucking smart and so fucking nice: why aren’t you married?”

It’s not that modern novels must promote feminist ideals. Indeed, some recent novels err too far in that direction; Jean Auel’s protagonist in *The Clan of the Cave Bear* is supposed to represent a paragon of feminist behavior in the midst of a totally male-dominated Neanderthal society. But to satisfy the demands of realism and hold the reader’s interest, a novel should manage to strike a happy medium, and I think Nancy Thayer does strive for realism and contemporaneity. She is aware of her women’s weakness, though she apparently believes it is a weakness all women share: thinks Nell, “Oh God, don’t we women ever give up? Don’t we ever stop trying to manipulate men with our foolish games?” Thayer even seems somewhat aware of the irony of her characters’ old-fashioned attitudes. When Clary says, “‘Can you imagine how humiliating it is to be the person to suggest marriage—and get refused?’” Nell thinks, “I thought it had changed for your generation.” On the other hand, Nell clearly thinks nothing has changed for her own generation: “I don’t want to demean myself,” she thinks without batting an eye, “I want him to initiate the discussion [of our future]; I don’t want to have to drag it out of him.”

Perhaps Thayer is consciously flouting the respectable feminist line and presenting a novel which tries to show how ordinary women (as opposed to heroines of feminist novels) act: namely, the same old way they have always acted, with the same motivations, the achievements of the women’s movement notwithstanding. If so, Thayer presents a dismal commentary on modern women. As a modern female reader—and the book is unlikely to appeal to men—one wonders, why care about these women? Why read (or write) about them?

If Thayer is trying to assert that, despite certain social changes, women themselves haven’t changed and aren’t likely to either, then the novel’s style is at odds with its purpose. This book is not fraught with dark undercurrents and heavy social philosophy. Despite some tense scenes and contemplative moments, *Nell* remains a light, humorous, upbeat novel—an inappropriate and ineffective vehicle by which to present such a somber view of womankind.

If, on the other hand, Thayer is not presenting a sobering, provocative social theory but simply trying—as the novel’s style indicates—to entertain, then she ought to have written a better love story.

Before moving to Nantucket, Nancy Thayer lived in Racine and taught at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Her previous novels include *Stepping*, *Three Women at the Water’s Edge*, and *Bodies and Souls*.

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**BETWEEN YOUR HOUSE AND MINE: THE LETTERS OF LORINE NIEDECKER TO SID CORMAN, 1960 to 1970** edited by Lisa Pater Faranda. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986. 262 pp. \$26.95.

By Arthur Hove

"Al, burn these."

Although he was too grief-stricken to attend her funeral, the husband dutifully complied with his wife's instructions, thereby destroying an important part of the poet's archive. These were the journals she kept to record her thoughts and impressions, to try various drafts of the poems she continually worked over.

Lorine Niedecker died at age 67 on New Year's Eve day in 1970 following a stroke. She had lived most of her life on a promontory called Blackhawk Island where the Rock River flows into Lake Koshkonong just outside of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin. She left behind a small but intensely compact and eloquent collection of poetry that grows in stature as her work reaches a wider public. Two recent collections of her work give testament to her achievement—*The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker* edited by Cid Corman (North Point Press, 1985) and *From This Condensery: The Complete Writing of Lorine Niedecker* edited by Robert J. Bertholf (The Jargon Society, 1985). Karl Gartung's article, "One By Herself: The Achievement of Lorine Niedecker" which appeared in the June 1986 number of the *Wisconsin Academy Review* is, along with Gail Roub's accompanying article "Getting to Know Lorine Niedecker" a helpful introduction for the general reader.

This volume is a collection of letters to one person—Cid Corman—who was responsible for publishing many of Niedecker's poems in his literary magazine *Origin*. Unfortunately, the correspondence is one-sided (only Niedecker's letters are available) so we have to read between the lines and guess about Corman's initiatives and responses. That is not difficult since Niedecker's letters are constructed to give a clear understanding of the nature of the ongoing exchange—the passing of poems and small volumes of poetry back and forth, the periodic "grants" of modest sums from Niedecker to support Corman's publishing ventures, general comments about Niedecker's personal life and her observations about poets and poems, and comments about Corman's choosing to live most of the time in Japan with his diminutive and fragile Japanese wife. It is a chronicle, a testament to their mutual dedication to giving poets a forum, for giving poems a chance to live.

Although Corman appears to be Niedecker's soul mate in these letters, her abiding inspiration is the objectivist poet Louis Zukofsky. She first contacted him in 1931, writing to him after having read the objectivist issue of *Poetry* magazine. Their friendship,

which included periodic visits to see Louis, his wife Celia, and son Paul in New York City, would ripen and last for nearly forty years. Zukofsky was both critic and exponent of her work. His son served as the inspiration for one of Niedecker's most important series, "For Paul and Other Poems."

Objectivist poetry, like many other labels, was an arbitrary categorization. William Carlos Williams caught the spirit in his dictum, "No ideas but in things." Niedecker described it as "thinking of things as they exist." There is also an objectivist idea that the poem becomes a thing and exists by itself ("... does one need a poet's life to get at his poetry? Perhaps so, never struck me so, really."). She underscored this feeling elsewhere: "the work says all there needs to be said of one's life . . ."

While she was creating "things" by composing poems, she felt that life should not be compounded by "the desire of possessing things." Part of her attitude in this area, no doubt, was fostered by the rental property of two cabins left to her when her father died. Taking care of them became a drain on her energy and concentration: "If only I could be free of the dirty business of property."

The scholarship that appears in the annotations to the letters in this volume is an important contribution to our understanding of Niedecker and the work of the objectivist poets. Editor Lisa Pater Faranda has been meticulous and expansive in supplying both biographical and literary information on the text. She is a sensitive and reassuring guide.

Niedecker was fiercely dedicated to her privacy. As Faranda points out, "No one in her hometown had any notion that she was a poet . . ." Niedecker herself echoes that reality in often-quoted verses she wrote as a result of her experiences as a proofreader at *Hoard's Dairyman*:

I worked the printshop  
right down among 'em  
the folk from whom all poetry flows  
and dreadfully much else . . .  
What would they say if they knew  
I sit for two months on six lines  
of poetry?

She was a very private person, one who gained the most sustenance from the life she experienced on Blackhawk Island and along the Rock River. The result was: "I have more trees for friends than people."

The letters themselves are witness to the otherness of Lorine Niedecker's life. They are a chronicle of her private working out of the realities of her life and the "condensery" of her poetry, that squeezing down of the language to its most basic essence. There was the drinking problem of her husband to deal with. She married Albert Millen, a Milwaukee laborer and handyman, in 1963. An earlier, brief marriage in the 1920s had failed, and she waited more than thirty years be-

fore trying again. Much of the time in between was devoted to taking care of her aging parents as she worked at such jobs as proofreader, scriptwriter, and, finally, hospital attendant scrubbing floors. Her husband's drinking was a manifestation of escapism she described in these lines: "Some float off on chocolate bars/ and some on drink . . ."

In another poem she explains, "I married/ in the world's black night/ for warmth/ if not repose . . ."

Although she refrained from any kind of regular social involvement, much less activism, Niedecker was sensitive to the Vietnam War and its intrusions on American lives. One of her early champions in the Wisconsin academic community was Morgan Gibson, a member of the English faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and editor of *Arts in Society* which published some of Niedecker's poems. Gibson was an antiwar activist who along with his wife, as Niedecker reported to Corman, "went into classrooms breaking in on teachers lecturing, telling the students it would be within their rights if they joined the strikers outside." Niedecker had earlier confided her own displeasure with the war: "I hope as much as they do that the damn Vietnam War soon ends."

It is unfortunate that the papers of Lorine Niedecker not in private hands are somewhere other than in Wisconsin. The two major collections are the Henry W. and Albert W. Berg Collection of the New York Public Library and the Lorine Niedecker Papers in the Mugar Memorial Library of Boston University. We owe it to ourselves and to our state to be more aggressive about identifying, claiming, and sustaining the cultural treasures we have among us. This collection gives further testament to the fact that it is time to accord Lorine Niedecker the recognition she deserves as one of Wisconsin's distinctive poetic voices.

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Arthur Hove is director of public information at UW-Madison.



**TO TELL A FREE STORY: THE FIRST CENTURY OF AFRO-AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1760-1865** by William L. Andrews. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. 353 pp. \$25.95.

By Michael Edmonds

Readers who enjoy the engaging, familiar literary essays of Edmund Wilson or Virginia Woolf will find this a distant and alien book. It is not simply a history of black autobiography or a conventional attempt to resurrect neglected works and place them securely in some "great tradition."

Instead, Professor Andrews (who teaches English at UW-Madison) conducts a technical analysis of the rhetorical devices used by black authors to get their stories across to a predominantly white audience; from this analysis he then draws conclusions about the political and personal significance of their texts. He has identified more than 100 spiritual autobiographies, criminal confessions, captivity narratives, travel accounts, interviews, and memoirs published by black authors between 1760 and 1865 and examined their methods in great detail. This permits him to show how the personal empowerment required to write the autobiographies paralleled the growth of political empowerment for blacks in the decades leading up to the Civil War. The result is criticism at its most challenging and exciting.

By assessing the fundamental assumptions on which the genre rests, Andrews demonstrates early in the book how the autobiographies of black preachers, convicts, or activists differed from traditional (white) autobiographies. For example, he analyzes Thoreau's statement at the start of *Walden* that he required "of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life." Andrews points out that Thoreau ignored the question of how a writer proves his or her sincerity because he could assume his readers would believe him. As an essayist, Thoreau addressed peers who were willing to suspend their disbelief and accept him on his own terms.

This was obviously not the case for an 18th century black preacher, or the leader of a slave revolt, or a 19th century abolitionist organizer. When they attempted to give a "simple and sincere account" of their lives, they addressed not their peers (who were for the most part uneducated and illiterate) but a white audience with values and experiences radically different from their own. And not simply different, but hostile: they addressed a culture which systematically and intentionally denied their choices and brutalized them physically and psychologically. In order to explain and justify their lives (the essence of the autobiographical act), black narrators had to encase their words and thoughts in a framework palatable to the dominant white culture or risk misunderstanding or outright silencing. Tension always existed between the author's need to speak truthfully of the self and the danger of alienating white sponsors and readers. This dialectic, between the compulsion to speak the truth honestly for the sake of one's conscience and the need to accommodate the values of the oppressive culture in order to be heard at all, is the central theme of Andrews's book. How well it was resolved by individual writers is his principal criterion of intellectual and creative importance.

The earliest rhetorical devices used by black authors were Biblical motifs. Some early narrators, echoing Bunyan, posed as latter-day Christians, and claimed a spiritual equality in the eyes of God as they made their way through a wicked world. Others adopted a savior

motif stating in effect that they were a chosen leader sent to set their people free. By adopting these familiar structures black autobiographers could remove the conceptual stumbling blocks between themselves and their white readers, and then discreetly slip into their texts the truths, passions, and experiences that had led them to pick up the pen in the first place.

By examining such rhetorical methods Professor Andrews discovered that over the course of a century the authorial voices of black autobiographers grew steadily more self-confident and powerful. In the first half of the period, the texts generally presented slavery as a proper, God-given, and on the whole comfortable situation for blacks; misery, despair, and sinfulness awaited those who tried to escape it and make their way in the hostile white world. These early works also usually portrayed blacks as passive objects acted upon by uncontrollable, universal forces such as the wickedness of the world (as in the criminal confessions) or an all-knowing Providence. The latter viewpoint was epitomized in the title of the 1785 *Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black*, where the deity's actions are placed well in front of the narrator's own name and race.

Only at the end of the 18th century did men begin to be portrayed as responsible for the acts recounted in the autobiographies, including slavery and liberation. This was a crucial turning point in the empowerment of black authors since if mortals (rather than impersonal forces) were responsible for society, individual people could change their destinies.

Following this shift in viewpoint, early in the 19th century a strong, self-affirming voice began to emerge in the autobiographies. This complemented the increasing visibility and vociferousness of the white abolitionist movement in Northern cities and the resulting creation of a receptive audience for black narratives. Andrews demonstrates how the classic slave narratives of the 1840s, with their moving accounts of suffering under tyranny and daring struggles for freedom, meshed perfectly with the contemporary romantic notion of the American war for independence from Great Britain. He shrewdly points out how Transcendentalist intellectuals such as Margaret Fuller and Theodore Parker turned slave narrators into "a kind of culture-hero who exemplified the American romance of the unconquerable 'individual mind' steadily advancing toward freedom and independence."

In this seemingly sympathetic environment black autobiographers nonetheless had to accommodate themselves to the propaganda needs of white abolitionists if they were to be heard. They were pressured by editors and publishers to appear morally upright and to delete inflammatory or discreditable anecdotes which might hurt the cause of emancipation.

Andrews is at his best when exploring the personal and political significance of autobiography for these oppressed black authors. Blacks were kept illiterate by slaveholders (and their descendants) precisely because

the oppressors understood well the power of words and ideas. Literacy was the first major step in psychological emancipation: "the power to read books and discover one's place in the scheme of things" Andrews writes, "is treated in many slave narratives as a matter equal in importance to the achievement of physical freedom." More powerful still was the ability to put into words the shaping experiences of one's own life, to explain and justify it to the world. Attempting to tell a free story was itself a liberating act of primary importance.

For Andrews, early black autobiography reached its peak in the mid-century narratives of Harriet Jacobs, J. D. Green, and Frederick Douglass. In the telling of these three lives the tension between reluctant accommodation to the dominant culture and confident declaration of the authors' own views is best resolved, and in them modern readers can see the clearest examples of self-liberation through self-expression.

Throughout *To Tell A Free Story* the constant interplay between the texts and their environments, between literature and society, is Andrews's main concern. He rejects the well-established tenet of new criticism that a text is autonomous, that poems and plays and novels somehow stand alone as if dropped complete and independent onto the printed page. In contrast, Andrews dwells on the interaction between his texts and their audience, making frequent use of speech-act and reader-response theory, philosophy of language, and historical and political analysis. His erudition is remarkable, extending not just over Afro-American history and literature but also encompassing the maze of contemporary critical theories. Combined with a generous dash of common sense and obvious enthusiasm for his subject, his perspicacity has produced a rich, challenging book that suffers from only one inevitable flaw—inaccessibility.

For if we apply some of Professor Andrews's own methods to his book (albeit crudely) and consider the "speech-act" that it constitutes, if we examine for a moment the relationship between his text and our world, we have to conclude that the book will affect many fewer readers than the autobiographies it discusses. Like the black narrators, Andrews has had to accommodate the assumptions of a powerful audience (academic critics) and has encased his ideas in technical terms that are complex and often difficult to grasp. This, of course, is not his fault. Modern critics, like modern poets, talk mostly to each other, and those unfamiliar with their jargon and lacking advanced training in literary criticism are simply left out of the conversation. Still, one cannot help but regret that this splendid and deeply thoughtful book will not be appreciated by a wider audience.

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Michael Edmonds is on the staff of the State Historical Society; his articles have appeared in the Wisconsin Magazine of History, The Milwaukee Journal, and the library press.

**THE COMPLETE POEMS OF RAYMOND KRESENSKY, Volume I** compiled, edited, and with an introduction by John Edward Westburg. Fennimore, WI: Westburg Associates Publishers, 1985. xxviii 185 pp. \$16.00 paper.

By Mary Dalles

Raymond Kresensky's poems are like a bouquet of wildflowers—some as stately as the tall meadowrue, some dainty and delicate as the bluet, others delightful as the adderstongue. Like nature, they are full of variety, full of beauty and value. Widely published in literary periodicals and anthologies, Kresensky (1897-1955) was also the well known and highly respected state director of the Federal Writers' Project in Iowa, part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), from 1936 almost until its termination.

He is finally being given more widespread attention, thanks to John Edward Westburg, editor of *The North American Mentor Magazine*, who has compiled and edited his complete poems in three volumes. Volume one, *Complete Poems: "A" Through "G"*, is an enticing taste of the range of Kresensky's poetry.

Many of the poems mirror the devastation of World War I, the suffering caused by the Great Depression, interracial strife, the ideological conflicts brought about by emerging Marxist elements in the United States, the new concern over nuclear warfare. In such pieces, Kresensky returns again and again to themes of death, conflicts brought about by lust for power and by class differences. But the voice in which he speaks of this turbulent world is always reflective rather than angry, resignedly accepting rather than rebellious, full more of quiet hope than of despair.

Other poems, mostly earlier works (and it is probably these which explain how in a harsh world he could retain so much of mildness and hope) are religious, for he was trained as a Presbyterian minister. The best of these superimpose Christ upon the present world, as in "At the Marne" where a "forgotten Christ walks on the battlefield." Others counterpoint the words of Christ or a prayer with the description of a troublesome present-day situation.

Kresensky takes refuge, too, in nature and the simple life, rejoicing in the commonness of ordinary people. In fact, his most memorable poems are delightful tiny celebrations of humanness and the richness of common life. He creates characters reminiscent of those of Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*: Aunt Sarah, who spends her life eliminating dirt, only to be surrounded by it after death; Big Madonna, a stringy workhorse of a woman recognized as beautiful only by a sparrow and her nursing babe; old lady Saunders, who takes it upon herself to see that everyone in town attends Sunday worship service and who resorts to appointing one recalcitrant sinner as her pallbearer to ensure he steps foot in church at least once; and, perhaps the most poignant of all, a hearty German mama

so transformed by work that her shoulders and arms are like iron yokes but who melts into softness as she kisses her child.

It is enough for Raymond Kresensky that, in the world he perceives to be often uncontrollable and harsh, people exist who speak of little things, live little lives, who are content to grow a hefty crop of corn or a lusty crop of children. It is as though, granting the essential inability of the individual to control the large affairs of living, he is satisfied to rest in a world over which he feels more control and to which he feels more connected, the world of relating to others and to God, the world of nature. Poems with this focus have a more restrained quality, a spontaneity and freshness not quite so evident in the works of grander theme.

Despite the tone of apparent mildness and acceptance, at the deepest point of Kresensky's poems is a somberness, almost a helplessness, a sense maybe that satisfaction in the ordinariness of life is not quite sufficient amelioration for life's cruder aspects. This hint of an undercurrent of darkness provides a delicate balance which graces these poems of beauty.

Two additional aspects of the book are most welcome: John Westburg's essay which provides biographical information and an analysis of the poet's work with the Federal Writers' Project in Iowa and the sensitive illustrations by Nancy Kirchstein of Mount Horeb, Wisconsin.

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*Mary Dalles teaches in the English Department of UW-Platteville and is a published poet.*

### New Books by Wisconsin Authors

Eugene Cameron. *At the Crossroads: The Mineral Problems of the United States*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986. 320 pp.

Margaret George. *The Autobiography of Henry VIII With Notes by His Fool, Will Somers*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. 932 pp. (fiction)

William Green, James B. Stoltman, and Alice B. Kehoe, editors. *Introduction to Wisconsin Archaeology: Background for Cultural Resource Planning*. Special Issue of *The Wisconsin Archaeologist* (volume 67, number 3-4). Milwaukee: The Wisconsin Archeological Society, 1986. 395 pp.

Aldo Leopold. *Game Management*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986. (Reprint of 1933 Charles Scribner's Sons edition) 481 pp.

David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, editors. *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. 516 pp.

Lorrie Moore. *Anagrams*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986. 225 pp. (fiction)

Janet Shaw. *Taking Leave*. New York: Viking, 1987. 294 pp. (fiction)

Ronald Wallace. *People and Dog in the Sun*. (Pitt Poetry Series) Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1987. 66 pp.

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