

Orpheus

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Orpheus

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Orpheus

A L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

v o l u m e • x v i

Dr. Solomon O. Iyasere, Advisor

William Adams, Editor

Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on 8½" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions on subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to understanding the work.

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P o e m s

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LEAR, V.iii. 311

"Pray you, undo this button.
Thank you sir."

I would press this child,
Withered here,
To one final warming
Draw her near.
This true, simple love
I trampled o'er
Lest I be unkinged,
In common stare,
I bid her make raiments
From her core.
Never's so honest a weaver
Been paid so poor.

"Pray you undo this button.
Thank you, sir."

I'll let depart this shell,
Not King severe,
But, reduced and renewed,
A greater Lear.
The naked babe who milked
His mother dear
For all mortal man
Need ever wear
To seal him from the
Torrent air.
All else is gilded
Shirt of hair.

"Pray you, undo this button.
Thank you, sir."

Obchair D'Arte

In Mistress Havelock's sitting room,
The sun makes appointments to illumine
The flitting motes, when no one sees,
As if such public chaos would displease
Some Divine inspiration vested there,
That placed each table, vase, and chair.
Supremely arrayed, and balanced elements,
Like staunch and barren continents.
A perfect order amid the scatter
Of tiny, secret, particulate matter.
A sofa system by God Himself.
Flawlessly placed stool, rack, and shelf,
Where not so much as migrant dust
Can rest before the frenzied lust
Of Mistress Havelock's wipe and flail
Of every slender spool and rail,
Of every finely lacquered face,
Each solid interlude in space.
Fans and screens, all deftly scrolled,
Each etch meticulously patrolled.
No fugitive jot shall harbor there,
And, thus, her universe impair;
Not by Havelock's furious flag-
Her ever watchful rocket rag-
Intent on that, one, holy purpose,
To protect each shining satin surface.
A dauntless sentry, bound to duty,
Forestalling all affronts to beauty.
Nay, not so much as lint, perverse,
Shall mar her immaculate universe.
Much less that someone's derriere
Should occupy a sacred, dustless, chair.

Dreams of Yesterday

An old man rocks and whittles
His way back to yesterday.
In the evening he sees dreams gone
by,
And, if you are there, you may just hear
why
He rocks and dreams 'til time is done.
Sleep well old one.

Come II

Sit beside me for a while.
Tell me stories,
For tomorrow's a long way off,
And the sunshine of today
Is filling the room, and holding
back the bold darkness.

The Passing of a Day

The Sea screams her rage as I leave
To dance in the golden light of Dawn,
Who is shy and fleeting, and is gone,
Leaving me Lady Day in her sky blue
Dress. The sunlight shimmers
As we whirl in a dance of Spring, Lady
Day and I, 'til Night steals me away
To love—In her indigo blue carress,
I Dream the night away.

The Polished Soul

Rough hewn
When first met,
Cold giver of light.
The sound of creation overwhelms,
Living's voice enfolds us
And offers a gift of tears,
Waiting, hoping to redeem
The slow erosion of innocence;
Unbidden answers to unasked questions.
Time conspires and tolls the loss
Of one more edge,
That smoothed itself against life's stone.
Those, the gods first loved,
Who, in, and through, us moved,
Are lost, like storm ravaged leaves,
Felled and scattered by that chill wind.
as visions through colored portals
We gaze upon past journeys
Of dulled magic and faded dreams.
A view as seen through a well polished soul.

Again

You Stand,
flaunting confrontation in stained white,
a brazen, self-Created god,
staring from shot out windows
boarded
against peering lights wielded by uniformed love.
spitting digestive slime, spotted brown
by masticated weeds and coke,
burning the gullet voice between us.
"Do you hate?"

yes, yes!
I hate peep holes
bored through sacred walls,
spawning genetic mutations in black and blue,
exhaling the smog of raped compassion
to collate acid drops of soul into stalactite points
"Nobody tells me."

No!
I choose...
to wield my machete against
your zombies guarding the chrysolite headwaters
of my exit
from the cramped caves of time.

I choose...
to uncover the parchment covenant
made before salvation's unborn altar,
to wipe my blood
off the clear plastic apron
I placed between us.
I choose...
choose to love,
Again.

Ghetto

Raped pillows, back-filled by brown asbestos.
mildewed padding huddling between skyscrapers,
filtering filth's neon eyes
masking the caves exit from the black beetles
fleeing the scorpion's nest

silky slut for sale.
soft,
coffee colored cream
curling
concupiscent into
cupped flesh.

river silt covers,
cascading
over mounded lace
open to the fourth button.

self separated
to order carmine from eyes bruised
by sitting in whiskey colored puddles.
oiled rainbows
floated on dreams
regurgitated by needle thin couriers
wearing constricted rubber cuffs.

hold your money
and
walk slowly.
Dirt adheres
to
ignorant hands.

Closet Child

when I was a child,
I crawled
to the house
with the dark closets.
closets where I sat,
tied in silence
on the little stool,
where doors closed
and never opened.
Shut
by the big lady
with a brown rose
ribboned hat
that hid
the fat face
with straight lines.

Dust fell out of the coats,
over and under,
covering twisted ties.
lengths of disobedience
plugged my nostrils.

I sat in the closet
pushing brittle breaths
with skinny muscles.
if I was very quiet
I would be dead
when she came back.

The skin peeled
off my wrists
in layers
that
mother did not see.

she was drinking
again.

she lie on the couch,
the man
came.

They laughed,
and
I grew
smaller.

I
tied
my soul,
over and under,
into the closet,

and I
closed
the door.

Four Haiku for You

When I think of you
I think of sunrises new
Warm and innocent

When I see your eyes
I see the end of our lives
And the start of our life

When I kiss your lips
And embrace your shapely hips
I'm in rainbow worlds

When you leave my side
I want to go, run and hide,
And dream your return

The Bio-Thing

Sitting in the college cafeteria
Looking at all the writers of life,
These minds individual.
One would mean nothing.
Together, parts of a thing,
A Bio-thing,
That calculates, cures, theorizes,
Laughs, loves, cries, wants, needs,
And has the power to assign a whole planet
To oblivion.
But, for now, they just eat...mostly

Translated by Jorge Yviricu and Carlos Lozano

Against the Poet

What's the use, I'd like to know, to change apartments,
leave behind a cellar darker
than my reputation — which means —
hang café curtains
and hire a maid,
renounce the Bohemian life,
if then, dullard, you come
an embarrassing guest, a simpleton dressed in my clothes,
A USELESS BEEHIVE DRONE,
hands washed,
to eat off my plate and mess up my house?
Accompanied by late night bars, panderers,
flower vendors, dead dawn streets,
and elevators with yellow lights,
you arrive, drunk,
stop to look at yourself in the mirror,
face distorted,
still violent eyes
that you don't want to close. And if I scold you,
you laugh, bring up the past
and say I'm growing old.
I could remind you that you are no longer funny,
that your casual style and carefree air
spell truculence
when one is over thirty,
and that your enchanting,
sleepy-child smile
— certain to please — is a painful remainder,
a pathetic try.

While you gaze at me with
an orphan's eyes, and cry
and promise not to do it again.

If you weren't such a whore!
and if I didn't know, for some time now,
that you are strong when I am weak,
and weak when I get furious ...
Of your returns, I keep a confused impression
of panic, of grief, and unhappiness,
and the hopelessness
and the impatience and resentment
of suffering again, once more,
the unpardonable humiliation
of excessive intimacy.

Hard put, I'll take you to bed
as one going to Hell,
to sleep with you.
Dying at each step from impotence,
running into furniture
in the dark. We'll cross the apartment
clumsily entwined, hesitant
from alcohol and suppressed sobs.
Oh, ignoble servitude of loving human beings
and the most ignoble of all
the loving of oneself.

Relationship

White-hot excitement
Races out to the razor's edge of my life,
Hurling me over the precipice,
Into the abyss.
Headlong toward
Pure, fine-tuned, fear.

Temporary peace.
I'm back in La La Land,
Floating and detached,
Happy for the rest.
What a love!
Tenderness surrounds me
Yet; need and desire.

The engines hum, now roar.
A ball of fire blasts up my spine.
Untold pleasure fills my head.
The peak of trajectory.
Then down, so far down ...
Plagued by burn-off...
Into the pit of my stomach.
I am paralyzed by fear.

Fawn Street

She lives on Fawn Street
That's appropriate; almost perfect.
It's in the color of her eyes.
Soft, dark brown, filled with...so many things.
Always slightly frightened,
Vulnerable, gentle, appealing.

But, sometimes a flame appears there.
Something no fawn's eye has ever shown.
A flash of fire betraying bitterness.
Perhaps, spontaneous combustion of hate.

I only know I didn't put it there.
Everything in her eyes comes to me unconnected,
Yet, begins to connect with me.

I like the fawn in her deep brown eyes, it draws me to her.
The fawn is loving and irresistible.
I fear the flame in her eyes, it makes me want to pull away.
The flame is intense and unbearable.
She lives on Fawn Street

Untitled

I leave.
It takes so long to fall,
Yet I fly so fast through the air,
Lilting, lingering flight.
My body shoots down at the speed of sound.
Slow-motion scenes slip through my consciousness.

Textiles, twilled patterns, wrap upraised arms.
Cruising, I seem to hover here.
Freeze-frame. They press for a better view.
Aimlessly floating, I challenge both time and space.
Faces aghast, twisted lips issuing shock.

Careening down through the violent vortex.
Astonished they swarm to witness the spectacle.
Gaining velocity, gravity grinds my last instinct for survival.
Squealing sirens soar through wailing wind.
Ground and gravel advance in a flash.
I cease!

Changes

(On being a student at Harvard and a mother in Houston)

There's a nip in the air which sparkles crisp and clear;
Idea upon idea bursts into the atmosphere
Which fairly crackles with excitement.
Lofty spirits share their thoughts with youth,
Adventurous and unafraid to dare
The Steep and rocky path that leads to wisdom and to truth.
The mind's unfettered, stretched, and free —
That's how it used to be
For me.

But now it's hot and humid.
There is no hill in sight, much less a rugged mountain trail.
The spirit struggles upward, but to no avail.
And yet a frail and tiny hand in mine
Can bring delight beyond compare;
And yet a kiss is warm and wet just like the air.
It's true that here the icy brilliance
Of the mind can have no part;
It must surrender, now, in favor of the heart.

The Good Life

In Intense Thought
Awaiting the sun to be seen
so its warmth could be felt
Shivering, drawing the blanket closer, tighter
Huddled, withdrawn into a fetal position
between sleeping brothers and sisters
hurled together, in the back seat of a faded grey
sixty-seven Belvedere station wagon
equipped with AM radio, heater, and seven sharpened hoes

driving through wheat-covered plains,
reaching distant fields of labor,
striving to end everyday's toil,
determined to relieve hunger,
aiming to defeat debt,
One truth revealed.

we worked in a state called "the good life" (Nebraska).
what mockery.
our country, nobly surnamed United,... Blessed,
I Dared not dispute, ... until,
until from the window projected, I saw
a sight depicting life.

the Wind commanded loudly, constantly
demanding tribute and praise.
the Wheat submitted humbly, instantly
bowing in waves of reverence and fear.
reaping profit from the fallen grain,
I understood, ... such was our life, then fell asleep

my sleep deepened to a dream, undisturbed
by the holes and bumps on the narrow country road.
I dream of my country, countless silos overflowing with grain,
schools filled with youth, the Land with opportunities.
But I was awakened by the sight of my empty bowl
and the sounds of my yearning stomach
crying silently. I held the question in. WHY?

somehow sleep prevailed over my anguish,
my tears dried, and stomach quieted.
perhaps the bumps on the road sounded a rhythm
that soothed my sorrow and cradled my pain, so as to leave it dormant.

at the screech of an opening door, I was, at last, awakened.
my father's voice urged,
"wake up, we're here. Let's move it.
we need to finish this field by tomorrow."

Song, Sang No Wrong

I once heard a song say,
"you can't run from thunder,
from thunder, you can never hide."
Mocking it with scornful unbelief,
I judged it, labeled it a lie.
anxious to disprove its simple, humble message,
I waited patiently, with cotton in my ears,
to confirm the truth of my judgement,
my prideful point of view.

Targeting my sight to that place —
you know, you've seen it —
that place where both Earth and Heaven agree to meet
Awaiting a storm. A storm of the type:
clamoring clouds, whining winds, raging rain,
and for the sake of my judgement, my pride,
an impulsive strike of lightning, rendering
resonating trumpetous thunder.

Though I waited long, I saw no crying clouds, no rampant rain,
no flash of light. I heard no booming sound,
but, suddenly, as if life fastened still,
with my hand to my chest, I waited.
Torturing anticipation battered my pride, and I feared,
until I heard It. By God, I felt It,
but I did not cause it, nor did I help it.
In awe, humbled to a tearful cry,
I knew, then, the Song Sang no Wrong.
Man can't run. He can never hide from the 98.6 degree,
God conducted, thunder.

Driven Thoughts

I touch roses

red turning blue—

many nations

implanted within my mind,

Like colors of the shredded flower
(breaking chains of tall green stalks) or
(thorns pricking skin)—

bleeding stalks swaying across the path like the drummer's
wooden sticks pounding narrow culverts.

Now

nature's gifts and disasters spread sunshine and rain

along mother earth's breast,

spreading thoughts—

smiles and dreams and hollow eyes and diseased minds

(how dreams roll

and laugh and become half-circle rainbows)

Thought's fine lips nibble on hearts until a shadow makes the
mistake of making a covering—

and these wrong thoughts

live with wildlife beneath the forest and are unknown creatures,
not knowing, never knowing, never will know, or keep their soul,

but they talk to the moon,

And they see the big bright yellow and orange sun,

and they conceive, and dream, and wonder, and plan, and do,

and they live, and are loved,

and they are never forgotten by nature,

or the infinite force,

until the great day when they become unknown and unknowing.

Intuition Takes Me There*

You better get back in the shade, babe.
Your skin is so dark
I can hardly find a smooth bow.
You tied a knot around your skin;
its choking effect kills me.
What made the string?
Men, women, and cotton, I guess.
The cotton is drenched with ocean water.
A few grains of sand trim your suit.
A few brains are in your head.
Much hair is on your head, too.
Shaved and slick body of a seal,
I find you too good.
What's the taste of your skin?
"Taste your skin?"
"Meet my kin, first," she replied.
Gold paint brush,
paint me a picture.
Gold paint brush,
dance in the sand.
Your feet
are fine hair,
painting pictures:
the toes and heel
inscribe your name.

*John Lennon

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The Poet

A cycle
begins and ends
with water.
I,
born of water,
live as water,
die in water (sucked down,
beautifully symbolized
and orchestrated
as the final end)
where breath ceases,
vision diminishes.
Where I
flow downward to depths,
fossilized and immortal,
not or not.

Yesterday I Failed the Firemen

Yesterday I saw
three or four firemen
dressed for war
helmet and suit
red engine and hose
passing through the neighborhood
attracting eyes of young
and some sort of envy
or subtle madness from the old
and how one fireman sat
facing toward the back
hemorrhaged into life
sitting complacent
with a tight
horizontal callow helmet
on his head
and after all had passed
he was the one
I truly noticed
as performing
his daily duty.

Translated by Carlos Lozano

Rebel

Charon, I'll be a scandal on your barge.
While other shadows pray, moan, or weep,
and 'neath your gaze of sinister patriarchy
the timid and sad ones pray.

I'll go along the river singing like a meadowlark
and bring aboard your barge my savage perfume,
and I will illuminate the waves of the somber brook
like a blue lantern that lit the way.

Regardless of your wishes,
Regardless of the sinister movements
of your two eyes, masters in terror,
Charon, I will be scandalous on your barge.

Bereft of shadow, valor, cold,
When you are ready to set me down on the river bank,
Your arms will lower me like a Vandal's prize.

Family Portrait

He sat there at Heavensgate, gazing
At the framed dark receding mirror
Of images of dark wounded faces, chained
To their Aprons and Will, matching
In frozen rhythm under the Whip, manacled
To time.

Grandpa willed it to his father,
His father willed to him as the covenant, framed
The mausoleum of all their family rights

Grandpa was right,
"We vanquished them All"
Stultorum numerus infinitus est

We Live as We Dream

Sunrise spreads its gold for me,
Like Lethe brings new thoughts to be,
From tangled webs that strive to bind
The troubled thoughts within my mind.

Anew I go each start of day
To walk the path along life's way.
But the unreal city awaits in lie,
So many undone by death pass by.

The brightness of the sunlight dims
As people strive to meet their whims.
A Cartesian Circle begins to form,
Then roses fade and render thorn.

Now vision's dream of happiness
Is turned into a game of chess.
So chaos mounts as light stays dim,
For everybody wants to win.

No person from Porlock will come to my aid,
The person from Porlock is also afraid
To think for himself or speak with lost souls,
No one has bothered "for whom the bell tolls."

A desperate society calls out its fears
But nobody listens, so nobody hears.
Where is the Beowulf or savior therein
Who hopes to put mankind together again?

Indifference exists and is voiced in a sigh
As Apollo sinks westward out of the sky.
The horror of mankind is all too real
People can think but don't want to feel.

The day is now gone and despair settles in,
The hour of lead is upon me again
As life confirms the revelation
That people, not hell, are true damnation.

Tormented by these thoughts of day,
My troubled mind begins to stray.
Diana cures my thoughts of yore,
Apollo's sun will shine once more.

But life reveals, the truth be known:
We live just as we dream — ALONE.

So Loftily

Like birds we drifted into the sky
Pulled by a yacht on a cable which rose
Above the ocean so loftily,
Awesomeness is seldom like this, one knows.

My mind felt peace which was light as air
As billowy clouds hugged hillsides around.
Wind stroked my face and tangled my hair;
A private fantasy dwells above ground.

The cobalt-blue ocean glistened like glass
As surf tumbled forth like pure fallen snow.
Bobbing black dolphins would surface, then pass;
A prideful spectacle they share below.

Spellbinding beauty and feelings thus bought
Diminished, descending, downward to yacht.

Hiding Place

I am hiding from the world;
I am hiding from its oppression.

From every direction I am pulled.
From every direction they come.

Family, friends, enemies want more than I can give.
Family, friends, enemies do not provide relief.

I can no longer participate in your melancholy ways.
I can no longer give you the comfort that I seek.

Leave me to my words that I can write in peace.
Leave me to this page that I can hide behind.

Metamorphosis

Oh how i wish i could
change You,
But i cannot,
For in doing so
You become
A different person.

And who You would become
i would not know,
and You would not like him—
and You
Would hate me.

For as You are now, You are happy
yet I am not!
To You
What I feel is irrelevant
to You
Am I nothing?

But you say I am something.
"your Companion,"
"your Friend," "your Confidante,"
(At Your Convenience)
I Must Be More.

Though I cannot change you,
My heart desires it,
along with you;
But you will never
change to
Love Me as I Am.

Love

I love you
my first born,
I love you
my son,
I love you
in spite of
what has been done.

I love you
my child,
as I love
your brother,
I love you
because
I am your mother!

Under the Toadstool

In the backs of caves
Under toadstools
Behind the shed
That's where we've been crouching

Out of the light
Under cobwebs
Behind broken glass
That's where we have stayed

Immersed in gloom
Surrounded by melancholy
Submerged in tears
That's how we have survived

What to do, now that the sun
Has broken through?

Untitled

i think about dying
and contemplate crying
and sometimes i do
and sometimes i don't

but mostly i doubt
and do well without
a belief in mortality
especially my own

Untitled

The song never ended
it has simply become
a gentle wind stirring
through my leaves alone.

The snow encompasses all.
The fires are out.

Interiors

The walls are glass-
I can see them-
I can see out,
can you see in?

The walls are mist-
I can feel them-
I can feel you,
do you feel me?

The walls are mine-
I'm locked within them-
I can't get out,
can you get in?

El Guardia

Majo, majísimo, de carretera
roble informador,
raíz, vid, tronco
ramas y flores
de la España de los ruiseñores.

Duro, macizo,
enamorado como Machado
de Soria.
A tu soriano rostro fino
tu casco en yelmo transformado
a serenos ojos
y viril sonrisa
da sombra y reciedumbre.

Rest in Peace

He is at peace now.
The clamor of anxiety and fear
silenced for all eternity.

Her questions are unanswered.
No final love note to console her;
Only anxiety and fear,
threatening to last for eternity.

Pain takes up residence
in a heart that once
harbored love.

From Earth to the Sea

Evermore, evermore
When I venture ashore
It's you I'll suddenly see.
But here, it's been here
I've always been near,
This desert abandoned by sea.

I held you to hold you
At times when I had to,
Each time that I found that I could.
And then I ask why
Those times should wash by
Like they hadn't ever been,

And soon you will ask, as I know you will ask,
If love is too distant and fluid a task
For someone as barren as me.
But I'll not be a fool,
Like children at school,
But instead you will see,
It's the earth that braces the sea.

Winter Understanding

It's fog, moist and cool, protecting
Semi-dormant buds now resting.
Forced by life, quickly they will burst
And show their color.

Will most come to green and feed
The life from which they spring?
Will others briefly flame
Or smoke or shimmer
With all the zeal of dance hall girls
Knowing their brief glories
Have few fruits?

A pretty interlude they are.

Life is not:
Relentlessly powerful,
Life is endlessly destructive certainly;
Eternally reblooming, perhaps.

So, after all, what is living
In the fog?

Translated by Carlos Lozano

To the Heights of Macchu Picchu

(Highest bastion of the Incas)

Sidereal eagle, vineyard of fog.
Lost bastion, blind scimitar.
Starry belt, solemn bread.
Torrential ladder, immense eyelid.
Triangular tunic, stone pollen.
Granite lamp, stone bread.
Mineral serpent, stone rose.
Buried vessel, stone spring.
Moon stallion, stone light.
Equinoctial squad, stone vapor.
Final geometry, stone book.
Drum fashioned among gusts.
Coral of submerged time.
Finger-smoothed wall.
Feather-embattled roof.
Clusters of mirror, storm bases.
Thrones overturned by vines.
Regime of the bloodied claw.
Sea wind supported on the slope.
Immobile turquoise cataract.
Patriarchal bell of those asleep.
Ring of subdued snows.
Iron abed on its statues.
Inaccessible closed gate.
Puma hands, sanguinary rock.

Headdress-like tower, snow discussion.
Night elevated on fingers and roots.
Window of the mists, hardened dove.
Nocturnal plant, thunder statue.
Essential cordillera, marine roof.
Architecture of lost eagles.
Heavenly cord, bee of the heights.
Bleeding level, constructed star.
Mineral bubble, quartz moon.
Andean serpent, amaranta brow.
Cupula of silence, pure fatherland.
Bride of the sea, tree of cathedrals.
Cluster of salt, black-winged cherry tree.
Snowy teeth, cold thunder.
Scratched moon, threatening rock.
Mane of the cold, action of the wind.
Volcano of hands, dark cataract.
Silver wave, direction of time.

Translated by Carlos Lozano

Ode to the Humming Bird

To the humming bird,
flitting,
spark of water,
incandescent drop
of American
fire,
ignited
resume
of forest,
rainbow
of celestial
precision:
to the humming bird,
an arc,
a thread
of gold,
a
green
blaze!

Oh,
minimal
living
lightning flash,
when
in mid-air
is poised
your
structure
of pollen,

feather,
or embers,
I ask you
what you are,
where
you originate?
Perhaps in the blind age
of the deluge
in the slime
of fertility,
when
the rose
froze into a handful of anthracite
and metals enrolled,
each one in
its secret
gallery,
perhaps then
from the wounded
reptile
rolled off a fragment,
an atom
of gold,
the last
cosmic scale, a
drop
of the terrestrial conflagration,
and it flew
suspending your beauty,
your iridescent
and rapid sapphire.

You slumber
in a walnut,
you are contained in a
minute corolla;
arrow,
design,
shield,
vibration
of the honey, the pollen's ray,
you are
so valorous
that the falcon
with his black plumage
does not intimidate you:
you gyrate
like light within light,
air within air,
and flying
you enter
the moist coffer
of a tremulous flower
without fear
that its nuptial nectar will decapitate you.

From scarlet to powdery gold,
to yellow that burns,
to rare
ashen emerald,
to the orange and black velvet
of your iridescent corselet,
to the tracery
which like
an amber thorn
is your beginning,

oh tiny being supreme,
you are a miracle
and blaze
from
hot California
to the whistle
of the bitter wind of Patagonia.
Sun seed,
you are
feathery
fire,
minute
winged
flag,
petal of peoples grown silent,
syllable
of hidden blood,
submerged
crest
of the ancient
heart.

In Honor Of

A dirty plaque
Made of metal.
Obscure letters that form a name,
Hazed by soil,
Forgotten by time.

No one has stopped.
No one has remembered
That beneath those trees,
Near the soil,
A minor honor
Has been bestowed

Madonna on a Page

"Lead Us Into Temptation,"
The ad says,
Loudly and boldly,
Fearing none.
I look, in pity,
At a girl's smiling face.
She dances and sings,
And is engulfed in flames.
I look in anger
At her confused soul.
She laughs,
And lives
In a pit of darkness.

Holly

To awake and look out forever
is to see the past in fierce winds
carrying by memory and memory
past my window as I watch with
fierce intensity to see what has been
lost, again, to see what merit there was.

To stand and look out forever
is to see and feel, again, the past
of dances I learned to step-side and
count in early years, reliving
the thrill of each one I held
and taught to waltz in fierce wind.

When the past fiercely awakens me
and I watch again the loss:
dancing becomes a way of standing.

To waltz is to look out forever
and to see again that life is worth
step-counting sideways, to escape
the world fiercely spinning its same step
of memory and memory and to prove myself
by dancing.

romeo and juliet

we are two nails
hammered into a board

there is a rubber band
stretched around us

it is trying
to pull us together

but we are nailed in

Pastoral Two 1971

While wading in the ocean,
my mother took a dip
and when she rose like Venus from the foam
her glasses took a flip
into the ocean deep, fifty yards from sandy shore.

As blind as grieving Oedipus,
she combed the briny bottom
of the sea with her feet,
but fell to salty tears, for fifty dollars for the pair
was a loss beyond compare.
She bade the Coast Guard, "Fetch them back for me!"

Off her face, into the sea,
first her glasses, now her tears -
Who had known such misery?
'Twas as Pan had lost his flute;
for three days no melody fell upon my mother's ears.
She was deaf as well as blind.
so full of sorrow, seaweed, salt and brine.

Then while walking half a mile away
from where she lost her sight,
a wave came crashing at her feet,
and much to her delight, her glasses
were returned to her;
the ocean had returned its prize,
had shown the kindness, to my mother,
of a salty beast of enormous size
to a woman feeling lonesome, sorrowful
and groping for her eyes.

Pastoral One: The Sofa in the Field

Decaying martyr, scattered on the field.
gutted, discarded sofa, unburied
though dead; skins of fabric, rippling
in the wind: unwanted, discarded, unburied.

Many invisible Antigones
had walked by to sprinkle, in ritual,
the dust that covered you: the traitor,
the sofa, despised and rejected.

In the morning, dew and mildew covered you,
Sparkling in sunlight, smelling of death.
I saw in the field an invisible family:
a mother, two daughters, no father,
relaxing on your soft, fragile skeleton.

I wanted to recline with them
on your open corpse,
but as the sun grew hot and hotter,
I left you to be conveyed by the gods,
like any ancient king, covered in magical patterns
of dead grass, to the quiet land
of my memory and your eternal rest.

Seduction of El Mar

She pushes on your chest,
gently, at first, deceptive.
Then crushing your ribs
with her great hard palm.
Then reaching to press
watered kissed all over your
seafoam lungs.
She longs for you, pulls you
ever further in.

You are flesh, composed of
so much water; you are like
the soft and quiet green
of her deepest parts -
you belong.
And still you resist.
Why?
Each wave wonders,
as her tide tugs you
down to find out.
Can you hear her whisper
As she toys with your hair,
and every pull says come in?
Just come in.

But you are air, you insist,
and earth. You reach for a semblance of ground
(an old lover of hers,
now shelled and discarded)
while she cries for your every part;

longs to hold you, still and sleeping
and place you, like a keepsake,
in some vast, green pocket.
And doesn't that call to you:
to be warm and endless,
covered gently
with the whispers of the sea?

And then, the last touch
of a red, red sun,
(Lingering many moments too long)
calls you to remember.

You cannot be her endless lover.
Challenge her discarded others
dash to conquer and
scramble always to survive.
Leave tiny fragments of yourself
in her midst,
but you'll no longer
listen to her cries.

To a Study Partner

Coiled seduction lays tense
on every white page;
a coil so tight that it
 makes the air shake,
 and bumps the pale evening angels.
 The book swims heat white
 and scalds my brain
until I blink.

When you close your straining
eyes, the logic flees, chased
 by the sting of your palms,
and the sudden, consuming, hard
presence of your skin.

Where did that skin come from,
I ask my books, and to what
does it lead? But I've studied
how it points in glowing lines
 to the soft of your
 electric lower lip.
(How the answer thins our angels).

Your tongue is moist, you stop to
notice, and you've seen how
 my own is so like
 the sensual stream from
 a summer hose. It washes
 my teeth while I read the air
above my book.

We cannot find our thoughts
We breathe in ether
packed with feel, and even
the angels are gone, pressed away.
My skin is awash with tiny
spills of your glare
that you must taste.

In memory of the storm

You could, I'm sure, turn water into stone.
The belief that pours out of
the top of your head wanders like
excess bodyheat,
circling the spines of
all those around you, and tightening them.
You've turned water into pebbles,
skipping them back over their
mothers' liquid breasts.

They are changed by your touch,
and different now.
These stony pearls know how to
sink and how to
cut the sweet flesh of
unsuspecting feet.
They are strong, and they are like
the thin-hard fingers of Jesus,
Who was once a rock himself,
and who waved his beacon
hands over water,
even on his off days.

When did you forget?
You crouched beneath a slab
of gracious and gray-angry rock.
Your mouth was chilled, your tongue
seeking sand crumbs from your teeth.
Focused only on the lightning
that stung the trees,
and stung again.
You let the skies cruel
liquid laughter taunt you.
Next time you'll turn it into stone.

Great-Grandma's Machine

The black iron pedal
moved back — then forth,
as her foot pushed heel — then toe,
and the needle went up — then down,
while the thread went in — then out.

That machine is older than I,
older than my dad,
older than his mom.

and yet, as I press the black iron pedal,
it moves back — then forth.
my foot pushed heel — then toe
and the needle goes up — then down
while the thread goes in — then out,

Almost as if she were still here.

New Glass — New Day

Each day is a newly washed glass,
clean, and sparkly, and clear,
and throughout each day
it may be...
filled and emptied,
dirtied and used,
dropped and broken,
but in the morning...
another clean, clear, new glass.

Book of Anna

I am a book
with an easily torn heart,
just sitting, waiting,
willing to share with all who'll open.

Anna of Tolstoy's mind,
and Vronsky's heart,
of Oblonsky's blood,
and Kerenin's soul.

I've only a crinkled, paper back
with turned down corners,
and a sad-woman cover
with its dark background.

Oh, to be that child's new book,
with a bright, hard cover
to protect the story of its heart,
and be read over, and over each day.

Yet, I have only to wait
'til the child is older,
and the new book is put aside
for me.

And once again,
my crinkled cover,
fragile heart,
and folded down pages,
will tell my tale.

Waiting for the Phone to Ring

My love left me.
I waited by the phone,
And waited,
But I can't call.
I was told not to use the phone.
Many months have passed, and I am still waiting
For the phone
To ring.
This does work for me.
The more I think:
The park.
The mountains.
The beach.
The movies.
The more I wait
For the phone
To ring.

Havoc Makers

Thunder kittens have been tearing up the sky
And have left soft, grey wads of cotton
Scattered everywhere.

Colleagues

From a tree, somewhere in the block next to me,
I hear the clear notes of a mocking bird
Trilling, chirping, calling,
Scolding too. I guess
He can't sleep
Either.

True Contentment

Giant rocks to lean on.
Sand to dig my toes into.
A restless, open sea
Wafting breezes to the land.

This is tranquility.

Curl and froth of breakers.
Thunder when they crash.
The swishing sound they utter
Racing up the yellow sand.

To feel this is excitement.

Basking in warm sunshine.
Watching seaweed rise and fall.
Knowing that the sea had breathed
The breezes ruffle-ing my hair

This is to be free.
Contentment is all three.

Convocation

Walking along the street tonight,
My attention caught, in fascination,
Flashing splinters of reflected light
Bouncing off full fronded palms.

Clustered loosely, as if in conference,
They leaned in simulation of intimate talk,
Clapping in approbation, swaying in laughter,
Then tossing, vigorously, in flat negation.

They shared with alien winds, it seemed,
The daily evening news they brought.

Black Bottom Clouds

Soot on the bottoms of the clouds.
It looks as if they have skidded across
An upturned camp kettle.

somewhere

Going somewhere, somehow, no use denying.
Tired of my brand of sleep,
I can't refuse it.
The mind constantly dying;
Trying to deal with this senseless crying.
I need to prove it, or move it to higher colors, varied, blue.
going somewhere, somehow.
This is what I'll do.

Can't Sleep

Who wants, who needs,
who the hell heeds
Anger at starvation,
Anger for deprivation,
Hunger in a world of plenty,
Hunger in a world of gone soft.
Am I my brothers keeper?

tabula rasa

How I loath it, that bastard clock,
The white socks,
And white, wrinkled, summer suits.
I can't stand it.
The same thing today, the same tomorrow.
Hamburgers, french fries, and cokes.
Hamburgers, french fries, and cokes.
Morning, noon, and night,
Twelve hours dark, twelve hours light.
Morning, noon, and night,
horror, disgust, ad nauseum.
Pearl beads and satin sheets.
White shirts, fingers snapping to a rock and roll beat.
It's all the same, the sweat and the heat.
Hamburgers, french fries, and cokes.
Hamburgers, french fries, and cokes.

Colorization

Black
streaking through my mind
wanting attention,
needing a place,
But all I see
are colors
in voices,
in people,
in things.
red, yellow, orange, blue,
and then, the black

comes
 in outlines,
and then,
seeps in
and the colors fade.

always

Prove
to me
the sun will rise.

Behind the door,
as if the room were her oxygen,
she sat with a smile.
Tears caught-

not a splash on the ground.

Laughs on cue-
no room for silence.

Shouts absorbed-
none in vain.

always.

And now...

Don't
open the door-
just...

prove
to me
the sun will rise.

Siempre, Our Culture

Siempre, a simple word shared
between my sister,
a Newyorquina,
born and bred
of a Latina woman,
our mother, a passionate Puerto Rican woman,
and an Anglo father.

Siempre, a word to bridge
two radically different cultures.
A word I heard my sister say
to our mother over the phone.
Now, my sister speaks Spanish
to our mother.
Spanish, the language we were taught
to hate, as mainland-born children.

We spent years as painful
as bullets tearing through flesh.
As damaging as child abuse,
as brutal as wife-battering,
and as inhuman as dead women
in New York back alleys
after suffering illegal abortions.

Siempre, yes siempre.
My sister will accept her Latina heritage
by speaking Spanish to our beautiful Latina mother:
Maria Esther, nuestra madre tropical.

Going Home

Today my sun is going out,
I feel the chill of night draw near,
And Darkness circle round about;
Today my sun is going out.

Today my love is going home,
His kiss still warm upon my cheek;
His caress, a dear love poem, but
Today my love is going home.

Today my life has gone from me;
Love's tether can no longer stay
The soul's sweet flight to destiny.
My Love, my heart, has gone from me.

Today my darling's called away;
Tho' joy abides in lone tribute,
The sweetness of his flame will stay.
Tho' my dearest one has gone away.

Comes Love

Joy is quiet now, as day
 In the wake of fertile morn.
It seems for always,
 But as spring, nourishing the meadow,
Returns in it's time,
 So joy, to the spirit.

Now, only love is.
 In the empty place where we walk, it comes,
Lone solace to the debris of violation;
 Reaching to the reluctant heart,
That fails at first to know it;
 Seeping in, filling the crack in the basement of the soul.

Not crack, but chasm; infinite abyss,
 Deep in loss and bitter hurt,
So huge, one can only play at its edge,
 Wonder at the rushing black,
Lone witness to eternity's march.

But, comes Love!
 A sweeping golden mist, heavy scented as jasmine,
Wafting tremulous on summer's nocturnal breath,
 A fragrance thick, cloying in sweet closeness,
Necessary balm, flowing, suffusing, permeating,
 Spending itself finally in healing warmth.

Comes Love! Reaching out with gentle tentacles,
To cling sweetly at the emptiness,
Seeking finding sorrow's core,
Creeping, quenching grief's utter turmoil,
As the cool of ocean fog caresses the dry shore,
Stretching its fingers in comforting embrace.

Comes Love: penetrating the void
That reels the soul's foundation;
Trespassing lightly, to loose the bindings of desolation,
And slather its healing salve,
As the breeding place, finally of acceptance,
When understanding fails.

Comes Love.

silhouette

bashful
are the shadows
of an awkward man

who quaintly stands,
bouquet in hand

w/ feelings mingled:
as a soaked dishtowel; worn-out,
waiting to be tossed.

thorn-pricked by rejection
apologizing, for some mundane question

not yet oblivious...

of an old indian ghost doll.

headline

channel five:
reports news at ten
first on the firing line

six, shot w/ .38
shockwaves of rampage
four, take a slay ride

as family survivors;
draw a blank

w/ a series of questions
left unuttered...

about,
the LONE
mad man.

Janitor

in the back of my mind,
 behind the stacks of notes
and bottles of life's colors, racked
 on shelves, dust covered;

i believe you'll find
 kind thoughts, once fresh
and white as new daisies, now
 preserved ... graffiti

each smudged note
 once graced the tongue tip.
soul quotes placed so carefully
 to feed love's early spark

each heartbeat
 (now dust-wrapped) awaits
a new lover's light and eager heart,
 or the janitor,
 cleaning.

Untitled

little words, in whispers
of massive thought
but tiny sound,
spill from my hand - my heart, abrupt, alone.

once out, they're on their own,
like you and me, as we
lay our hearts upon the ground
before each other

Haiku

Voyagers
 upon life's sea
 bail out loneliness
with laughing buckets

Betrayed

Catch me, if you can,
while I walk softly
through your mind.
Dancing waves of
whispered secrets
hang on bent ears,
sacred trusts are broken,
shattered fragments of
a life now lay beside you.

The Journey

The old Black man
walks silently through
time into another space.
His joy abounds
as beacon lights
sing songs of freedom,
and quiet times.
Now on hallowed ground.

Listen

Listen to the silence of passion,
two hearts pounding as one.
Listen to the silence of night
as it creeps, like a cat
stalking its prey.
Listen to the silence
of children playing
on a summers day.
Listen to the nuclear silence

LVII (Metamorfosis)

La distancia, a tu pesar, nos magnifica:
verte de la mano de vértigo
vaticinio de rubores perdidos
en el presente de silencio compartido.

Nada pretendo sino sobornar el vacío
manosear nostálgico el asedio
y la flor - precaria en su perennidad -
que el fruto contradic hasta borrarse.

Habr  justificaci n en el ensayo de un gesto?
Confianza en la repetici n del rechazo?
Cercan a en la intimidad de la sospecha?

Hoy comienza el ayer a desdoblarse
en pos de lo que pudo ser y ser :
ya no hay remedio.

LIV (Para una mascara)

Aires de gran senora
sitiada en su indignación,
desentonas, Adelita,
desde tu foso,
exageras la herida
con despecho otonal,
el alzar de las cejas
recalca el desdoro
del cabello sombrío,
y deslucen los ojos
la trágica mueca
del ceno glacial.
No te rajes querida!

Sigue oculta,
acumúla agravios, desdenes, rencor,
escudate tras el espejo cóncavo
-Micomicona charra-
de tu conciencia helada
por la ambición.
Pero no tiembles de envidia,
no embistas sin ton ni son,
y repara cuidadosa,
con laca y disciplina,
la perenne fachada de tu desilusión.

El Guardia

Majo, majísimo, de carretera
roble informador,
raíz, vid, tronco
ramas y flores
de la España de los ruiseñores.

Duro, macizo,
enamorado como Machado
de Soria.
A tu soriano rostro fino
tu casco en yelmo transformado
a serenos ojos
y viril sonrisa
da sombra y reciedumbre.

S t o r i e s

Orpheus •

Lunchtime

A man emerged from the skeletal shadows of steel beams and concrete columns. His shadow lurched along a foot or two in front of him, undulating across rutted ground toward a group of men settling themselves in the shade of a tool-shed roof. The man's left shoulder tilted sharply upward; his right shoulder sloped into the stretched sinews of a berry-brown arm. A five-gallon bucket hung from his calloused hand, scuffing along a path worn in the leg of his deteriorating, grey-white overalls. A scarred plastic lunchpail dangled from the three remaining fingers of his left hand.

The seated men studied his approach intermittently with surveys of their noon-day meals.

"Well, looky hyar," a pink faced man greeted. "There come a car-pen-ter with a five-gallon appetite."

Another man laughed. "Hey thar, nail-bender! Ya'll spouse ya'll can eat alla that in a half a hour?" The interrogator stuffed the corner of a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich past four opposing teeth.

A sandy-haired man nodded. "Man, you gotta be fresh married. Only one kinda wife's gonna fetch her ol' man that kinda lunch, 'n' that's a wife that's fresh offn'n the altar."

A balding man chimed in. "Yah, 'n' it's only one kinda feller that's gonna need that kinda lunch, 'n' that's her ol' man."

"Hot suey!" Particles of peanut butter and jelly escaped into the air. "Looky there, th' man's got two buckets. Hey now, why'n't ya'll set on down here aside o' me, hongry? I'll shore he'p ya'll eat some o' that."

The late arrival smiled and sat on the open five gallon bucket.

Another guest, propped against a roof support, scowled from under his hard hat. "Hey, pal you a Mormon?"

"What's bein' a Mormon got t' do with anythin'?" The bald man asked, scowling back at his neighbor.

"Well, reg'lar ol' wife gets up a reg'lar ol' lunch. A new wife, she gets up a five gallon lunch that aint fit t' eat, so a feller sits on it."

"Yeah," the owner of the peanut butter and jelly sandwich chimed. "And they's only two kindsa men tha's got more'n one wife, tha's Mormons and Ayrebs, and ya'll ain't no Ayrab."

The newcomer only smiled more broadly, placed his lunch pail between his used-to-be-brown boots, opened it, and removed a small harmonica. He tapped the instrument lightly on his leg, tucked it firmly into his hand, and raised it to his lips. They tuned-up as if two long acquainted creatures were preparing to make love, then they began to play echoes of rockingchairs and front porches. The tone and tempo changed from hymn to hoe-down, and the gathering ate and listened.

"Hey there, wood-butcher," a man in the open doorway of the shed called out. "Why don' ya take alla that across the lot somewheres? I'm gonna take me a little brain-break."

"Ifn you had a brain you'd break it aplayin' with it," the pink faced man countered.

"They's only one kinda playin' agoin' on and that's agonna hafta cease so's I can lose consciousness of Texas for a few minutes."

The eater of peanutbutter sandwiches sputtered. "Ifn ya'll lose alla ya'll's consciousness, ya'll ain't lost much."

The man leaning against the roof support rolled a radish between his oil stained fingers. "Son-in-law, you better curb your tongue or you're liable to find yourself conscious of lookin' for another construction job to hide-out on."

"Hell, he ain't agonna run me off. I'm feedin' his grandkids."

"Don't bet your truck on it," the voice echoed in the interior of the shed.

The troubador stood up and held out his hardhat in a mock appeal for donations, purposely missing the offering of a radish. He nodded at a man sitting slightly apart from the rest.

"Ahlh ketch ye on th' wall, Jess." He nodded to the rest of the group and moved away with the same starboard list that marked his arrival. Jess nodded back, and finished peeling an orange.

"You knowed him long?" The bald man pulled some strings from a stalk of celery.

"Uh huh. 'Bout five year." Jess contemplated the naked fruit, turned it around, sniffed it, and carefully separated it into halves.

"Boomers?" The man continued.

"Uh huh." Jess nodded at the ground between his feet, stretched his arms forward, and rested them on his elevated knees.

The bald man squinted at the retreating figure of the musician. "He jest set there an' played that mouth organ. Don' he eat no lunch?"

"Never knowd him to' eat no lunch. Allus eats a helluva breakfast 'though."

"He don't eat lunch?" A new inquisitor pressed the point, heavily accenting "lunch."

"I guess he's still aworkin' on alla that breakfast he ate," Jess chuckled.

The bald man snapped-off a mouthful of celery. "What's he got in that bucket?"

"Dirt." Jess popped an orange segment into his mouth.

"You said 'dirt'?" The sandy haired man put down a fried chicken leg and squinted at Jess.

Jess nodded. "Uh huh."

"Why?" The bald man's lips formed further, unvocalized, questions.

"Why in hell?" The sandy-haired man helped.

"Sits on it." Jess spit an orange pip into his hand and flipped it away with his thumb.

Son-in-law looked up from his third peanutbutter and jelly sandwich. "A bucket fulla dirt? I don' get it."

The pink-faced man gestured toward the departing figure as it disappeared into some shadows. "Take a look, dummy. Ifn' it warn't fulla dirt he'd fall in ass-first, no broader'n he is across th' beam."

"Dummy yer damn-self. Why don' he jest turn th'bucket over and set on th' bottom?"

The pink-faced man was ready. "Ifn he turned it over alla th' dirt'd fall out." The group chuckled. The pink-faced man threw a wadded sandwich wrapper at the butt of his humor. "It's no damned surprise that your a plumber."

Son-in-law slapped the missile aside. "I ain't no damn plumber. I am a damn pipe-fitter, an' I'll thank ya'll to remember that, Mr. thumb-nailer."

The scowling-faced man took aim and fired a radish at a sparrow a few feet away. "Carryin' around five gallons of dirt. Seems to me that your partner is a few bricks short of a full load."

"Naw, he's alright." Jess studied the ground between his feet.

"Man oughta eat lunch." It was the familiar accent on 'lunch.'

"Well, a man don' need to eat no lunch ifn he ain't of a mind to." The bald man picked a slice of tomato out of his bologna sandwich and sailed it into the sunlight.

The scowling-face man shook his head. "I knowd a time when I'da snatched up that slice o' tomatater, washed it, an' ate it."

"Hell!" The sandy-haired man slammed a crust of bread into his mouth. "I knowed a time when I woulda rassled a pit bull-dog for a slice of tomatater half that size, an' I wouldn't stop to wash it afore I ate it."

"I'd jist let th' dawg eat th' tomater, an' then I'd eat th' dawg." The interior of the shed echoed a lonely laugh.

"First liar aint gotta chance."

"No tellin' what he'd do ifn somebody throwed a bottle o' Jack Daniels out there."

"Hell, we'd all get trampled in th' rush."

"God give us time to eat lunch." There was the familiar emphasis again.

"Amen!" The sandy-haired man raised his Thermos-bottle cup/cap in a salute. "God and Peter Kiewitt 'n' Sons Construction Company Incorporated."

"You still harpin' on that harmonica player not eatin' lunch?" The bald man looked balefully at his neighbor.

"Well, hell, it's lunchtime ain't it?" The emphasis echoed.

The pink-faced man swallowed a spoonful of Jello. "Ifn he don't eat another bite of nothin' so long as he lives, you ain't agonna lose no weight."

"He had a damn lunch pail, he probly jest don't wanna eat with the crew." The scowling man glared in the direction of the departed figure.

"Ya'll run him off afore he could settle down. He prob'ly got lots to eat in there." Son-in-law cocked his arm and let fly an apple core, barely missing another sparrow. "I'll wager a six-pack that he's got somethin' to eat in that bucket."

"You lose." Jess closed the lid on his Styro-foam box. "I already tol' ya, he don't eat no lunch."

"It aint natural to not eat when your supposed to."

The pink-faced man slammed the lid on his lunch box. "Supposed to? Supposed to? I wish to hell that you'd get offn that note. He ain't no kid. If he don't wanna eat, let him go hungry." The man turned a slightly redder face to Jess. "Now. What about th' bucket of dirt?"

"What about it?" Jess gazed into the sky.

"I know," son-in-law nodded self-approvingly.

"You don't know a six inch tube-turn from a eight-penny nail. I was askin' his partner, here."

"It ain't nothin'." Jess scraped some dried mud off of his boot.

The pink-faced man leaned toward Jess. "You ain't agonna sell me that."

"Well, it really aint nothin'. We got partnered-up over in Newport News, close to where he's from. When th' job run-out we went over to Missouri and he brought that bucket along, full o'dirt." Jess smiled. "He warnt no carpenter when we first partnered, but he caught on fast."

"What'd he do afore?"

Jess sighed. "He was a sort of a farmer."

"Sort of?" Son-in-law wrinkled-up his nose.

"Yeah. Like a pipe-fitter is a sort of a plumber." The pink-faced man picked up a piece of orange peel from beside Jess and tossed it at Son-in-law. "What'd you mean, 'sort of a farmer'?"

"I already asked that." Son-in-law glared at the pink face and sailed the peel back at him.

"Well then, we both asked him."

Son-in-law snorted. "I'll bet he was one o' them organic farmers, and he got so good at it that he didn't have to grow nothin', he jest ate the dirt, an' he an' his family jest ate th' whole damn farm."

The scowling man shook his head. "I'd like to have a pound of what yore smokin'."

"Yeah?" Son-in-law continued. "Well not only that, but he was a fixin' to hep alla us to a seven course banquet that he had in that bucket, an' ya'll run him off."

"Will you shut-up an' let th' man answer a civilized question?"

Jess smiled. "He don't eat dirt."

"He don't eat th' dirt?" The bald man teased.

"Naw."

"Damn!" The scowling-faced man slapped his leg in mock disgust. "I was jest gettin' ready to go over there an' try some o' that gourmet soil."

"We are strayin' from th' point." The bald man leaned back and studied his gnarled fingers. "What's he got in the box ifn he ain't got no lunch in it?"

Jess shrugged. "Harmonica."

"I still say a man oughta eat when th' time fer eatin' comes."

The scowling-face glared back at the sky. "Now that I think on it, I don't remember if I ever knowed a man to not eat no lunch, 'cept if he's sick."

The sandy-haired man laughed. "It's prob'ly un-American."

"Laugh, if ya wanna, but ya know damn well, in them communist countries they gotta work twenny hours a day, seven days a damn week, fifty-two weeks ever year, alla their lives, an' they don't get no lunch neither. An' that's a fact."

"Your right," the bald man shook, and nodded, his head in ironic agreement. "Not eatin' lunch is probly unconstitutional."

The scowling-face stood up and brushed the dirt off of the seat of his overalls. "Ifn a feller don't wanna eat with the rest of the hands... well... I guess that's okay, but it don't seem right."

The pink-faced man stood and repeated the dusting ritual. "There sure as hell ain't no law 'at says a man's gotta eat ifn he don' wanna."

The lunch-fundamentalist stood and rubbed his back against the support post. "I thank ya for your opinion, there, Mr. Law-penter. Ifn there ain't no such a law, there better be one."

"Now that makes a whole lotta sense." The pink face shook sadly. "Ifn there ain't no such law, there better be one.' Now what in hell does that mean?"

"Why're you askin' me? Yore the high 'n' mighty lawyer. You figger it out."

Son-in-law crossed his legs and pressed to a standing position. "I got him figgered out. Ifn he ate, he'd blow that damn harmonica fulla food."

The pink-face nodded appreciatively at Son-in-law. "Your theory on the matter is duly noted."

"Yore talkin' more like a damn lawyer ever minute. 'Yore theory on the matter is duly noted! Now what does that mean?"

"Same as, 'Ifn there ain't no such a law, there better be one."

"I'll be damned."

"Well be damned then." The pink face turned back to Jess. "Like I was tryin' to say..."

The lunch advocate picked up his pail and started toward the structure. He stopped and turned. "It means that there is some things that's right, an' some that ain't right. That's what it means, Mr. Chief Justice of the Superior Court of the United States of America, E pluribus unum." He nodded, snorted an exclamation point to his comment, and continued toward the structure.

The pink face snorted back, picked up his bucket, and fell in beside Jess as they crossed the lot. "That bucket of dirt your partner carries around, that's strange."

"I don't see nothin' so terrible strange about it."

"Come on, now. He's got five gallons of Virginny dirt in a plastic bucket. He sits on it at lunch time an' plays a damn harmonica, an' he don't eat nothin. Now, yore gonna tell me that that ain't peculiar?

Jess shook his head. "I don't think I understand yore question."

"Well, hell. Th' first one is, he don't need no five gallons o' Virginny dirt to sit on."

"Seems like he does," Jess shrugged.

"Well... why?"

Jess thought for a moment, then confessed. "Dunno. Never asked him."

The scowling-face fell in beside them. "What if I was t' dump out alla his dirt, what then?"

Jess smiled and made a quick glance at the sky. "He'd jest fill it up agin, like he allus does."

The group paused at the base of the structure. Son-in-law peered at Jess with knitted eyebrows. "Ya'll mean ya'll would drag-up an' haul all th' way t' Virginia jest so's he can fill up that damn bucket?"

"Naw. He'd jest take a shovel an' fill it up." Jess put his lunch box in a corner of the gang-box and started up the ladder to the scaffolding. "Then we'd

drag-up an' head out lookin' fer another boom. Hell! As long as the sun shines, there'll allus be a boom ... somewheres."

The scowling-face dug his hand into a box of nails. "Boomers," he grunted.

A saw whined through wood in the false-work above them and a thin mist of sawdust filtered down.

"Hey!" The lunch advocate called to the two men on the scaffold. "What're ya tryin' t' do, kill th' job? What's yore damn hurry? That's boomers fer ya', they just can't wait t' get a job over with sos they can move on t' th' next one. Damn bunch o' gypsies, tha's all they are. Hell! Some of us gotta make a damn livin' aroun' here!"

The scowling-face looked up. "D'ya s'pose that ol' boy was serious about what they'd do ifn I dumped his dirt?" The men looked at one another, and moved away into the shadows.

Give or take a few minutes, it's always lunchtime somewhere in the world. For some, it is a ritual with prescribed duties to perform. For others, it is a brief celebration of freedom, a short respite from obligations, rules, forms, and policies. It is a time when, like a great dancer at the top of the arc of a grande jete, they can hover, momentarily free of pedestrianism.

The Perils of Goodwill Diplomacy

Sometimes it seems as if a day has humiliation written all over it. On those days, for some inexplicable reason, I suddenly forget how to read. I should see it coming: "WARNING—THIS DAY CAN BE EXTREMELY HUMILIATING (if you are not very careful)!!" Despite the warning, I remain naive. I am never quite sure if this phenomenon is simply a quirk of fate, or if the gods are amusing themselves at my expense.

On one such occasion, I was attending a seminar. The topic has long since escaped me, but it was significant in that several local administrators of major international corporations were in attendance. I may have known two of them, at the most, but only by name. Needless to say, I was slightly ill at ease in the company of so exalted a group.

We had been in session for about ten minutes when a latecomer entered. He was a tall, fashionably dressed, Black man. He had a self assurance about him that said, "I may not know all of you, but I know who I am, and I am very comfortable with that." The gentleman sitting next to me whispered, "He's an Ethiopian." The "warning sign" flashed, but it was too late. Three words, and I was off on a mental excursion to Africa. I could see the newcomer in tribal robes, seated in front of his tribal council, by the tribal fire, on a dusty plain somewhere in Ethiopia. I don't really know if Ethiopian corporate executives sit around tribal fires on dusty plains, but at that moment cultural accuracy didn't seem terribly important.

The director of the seminar introduced the man to the assembly. He didn't mention that the Ethiopian was of royal blood. He didn't even mention that the man was Ethiopian. I dismissed the fact, attributing it to simple oversight. Then I thought, "What if no one has remembered to extend an appropriate welcome to this foreign dignitary? What must he think of America?" My brain was

completely on its own, and I gave up any effort to concentrate on the seminar. I filled the time formulating plans to correct the director's faux pas. The "warning sign" flashed repeatedly, but I forged on. I was fully engaged in a drive to extend a goodwill welcome to this ambassador from Ethiopia. The director had done a very bad job of pronouncing the man's name, and that presented the first major obstacle in my plan to make the Ethiopian welcome in America. The man who had informed me of our honored guest's nationality could not remember his name, so I was in a real quandary. How could I be gracious to the man when I couldn't remember his name?

I sat for some time, pondering my dilemma. The man was seated only a few feet from me, but I heard no one call him by name. Suddenly, I had an inspiration — his binder. His name would be on his binder. I was relieved until I thought, "What if it's written in Ethiopian." I was desperate for a solution, so I decided to take a chance that the name would be in English. I left my seat and started toward the refreshments table. As I passed behind the man, I glanced quickly over his shoulder at the binder on the table in front of him. English! At least the letters were recognizable. I proceeded on my journey to the coffee urn, elated that I had his name firmly in hand. I casually replayed my perception of the binder as I returned to my seat. The name was not quite as clear as I had first thought. "No matter," I said to myself. "I'll just look again." When I arrived behind the man, on the way to my seat, his arms were covering the binder and I could not see the name. I hesitated for a moment that seemed like an hour, hoping that he would remove his arms from the binder. He didn't, and I returned to my seat fumbling with the fragments of what I had seen.

I sat staring, in my mind, at the indistinct picture of the binder. "Le ... O", it seemed to say. "Le ... On". It was becoming more clear. "Le ... Onius". "Le Onius". I had it. Mr. Le Onius.

I congratulated myself on my success. Of course, there was still the problem of how I, a person totally inexperienced in diplomacy, was supposed to address a foreign dignitary. I tried to visualize my options. I could approach him after the meeting closed, extend my hand, and say, "Mr Le Onius, I would like to welcome you to America." Or, I could say, "Mr. Le Onius, as a citizen of the United States of America, and a resident of the fair city of Bakersfield, California, please accept my warmest welcome to our great country. I hope that you are enjoying your stay with us." I decided to be spontaneous.

The meeting continued for an hour or more, and fantasy followed fantasy as I pictured the Ethiopian's eyes become misty in gratitude that someone had remembered to tender him a welcome. Decades later he would relate the story of the selfless American who took the time to befriend him when he was far from home. I saw letters of appreciation, sent to our State Department, praising my kindness. Trade between our two countries would flourish. There would be a

commendation from the White House. In a final flight of egomania, I saw my good deed splashed on the front pages of major newspapers extolling my act as an example that all Americans should emulate. I would be interviewed by "Time," "Newsweek," and "People" magazines!

In the midst of my caprice I was jerked back to reality by the scuffing of chairs as the group stood to leave. The seminar was over. The fatal moment had arrived. I stood, took a deep breath, squared my shoulders, and turned in the direction of the Ethiopian. He, likewise, was just standing. I approached the source of my future glory as he turned toward me, holding his binder against his chest. As I closed the few feet between us I glanced at the letters on the folder. "MISCELLANEOUS." I didn't raise my eyes, I fastened them firmly on the exit sign over the door and hurried into relative oblivion.

The Witch and the Toad

Once upon a time, there was a Witch who was married to the King of the land called Eternal Gardens. Eternal Gardens was bordered by Arcadia and Pescadero, and, because there were no wars, the people of Eternal Gardens were happy. Their one fear was that Prince John, would never marry because no princess had received Witch's approval.

One day, when Prince John was riding in the hills, he met Toad. They became friends at once. Every day, the Prince rode into the high hills to meet Toad, and, after a time, they fell in love. The Prince knew that his mother would never approve, but he brought Toad home and proclaimed his intention to marry her, with, or without, his mother's approval. Witch was furious and her tantrums went on for years. Toad was frightened of Witch, so she became equally as nasty to Witch as Witch was to her. The mutual nastiness guaranteed infrequent meetings, and that suited Toad very well.

Throughout the early part of the marriage, Princess Becky, tried to be friends to her mother and Toad. The King and the Royal Advisor, Duke Richard, ruled the kingdom and stayed out of the silly fight. Prince John, however, always found himself in the middle.

Then, one day, Witch said, "That thing is a toad!"

Prince John was furious and left the castle screaming, "She is my wife, and you can't talk about her that way."

Witch tried many spells to make Toad disappear, but the love between the Prince John and Toad was so strong that Toad could not be gotten rid of.

When Prince John proclaimed the birth of his second child the kingdom celebrated for a week. When Prince Timmy joined his sister, Princess Cathy, in the castle nursery, almost everyone was happy. Witch was not, but she had begun to realize that, like her or not, Toad was there to stay.

For many years, Princess Cathy and Prince Timmy joined in sprinkling happy dust in the faces of Witch and Toad. Each year toad became less toady, and witch became less witchy until, one day, they realized that they had always been a princess and a queen. They discovered that they only looked like a toad and a witch to one another. On that day, Toad and Witch became friends and all of the people of Eternal Gardens lived happily ever after.

The Fable of the Jeweled Fish

There once was an old man and an old woman who lived in a wretched shack by the sea. Their meager existence was made bearable only by the hope that, someday, their fortunes would change.

One morning, after a particularly violent storm, they found a large, beautiful fish stranded in a tide pool. His sides sparkled like jewels. "At least," said the old man, "we know what our next meal will be."

As they stooped to pick up the fish, it spoke to them. "I am a prince of the sea," it said. "If you will return me to the ocean, beyond the surf, I will grant you each a wish."

The old couple looked at one another in amazement. They could not believe their ears. At last, the old woman answered. "Yes, let us have our wish and we will return you to your ocean." The old man nodded his agreement, and the old couple's eyes glistened with anticipation. The fish, however, was aware of human greed. He also knew how deceptive humans can be and insisted that he be released first. But the old woman did not trust the fish and she refused to release him. The old man finally proposed a solution. He would put the fish in a net, take it out beyond the surf, and, after the couple were granted their wishes, the old man would release the fish. They all agreed and it was settled.

As the old man left the shore with the fish, he looked back at his wife and said, "Please make your wish, and say it loudly so that we can hear it over the roar of the surf." The old woman nodded, and the old man rowed toward the open sea, towing the fish.

The old woman was so excited that her heart raced as fast as her mind. "What shall I wish for? There is only one wish. What do I want most in the whole world? Riches? Youth? Beauty?" The old woman paused for a moment. "Or ... power?" The old woman's eyes grew wide with excitement. "Power," she

repeated. "Power, power, power," she repeated over and over, and louder and louder, her heart pounding like the surf. Suddenly, she clutched her chest and collapsed, dead, on the sand.

The old man and the fish could not help overhearing the frenzied chant, and were looking in the direction of the shore when the old woman collapsed. "It appears," said the fish, "that your wife has had a heart attack. I am very sorry. Do you still desire to make a wish?"

The old man paled, and looked confused. "I want...," his voice cracked, "I want... I want us to be together."

"So be it," said the fish. The old man held out his hands toward the shore, then clutched his chest and fell into the sea.

October 29, 1987

The third grave was the hardest to dig. Katherine McKensie was exhausted. Her strength had drained until she feared that she might collapse into the grey dust before the work was finished. She raised the shovel, drove it into the brittle soil, and her arms shook, became numb, and felt as if they were floating away from her shoulders. This grave was the hardest. When she completed the small rectangular hole, her baby would rest forever in its dark depths. Never again would she hear his little boy voice calling, "Mommie." Never again would he wrap his chubby arms around her neck, or grab her with muddy hands, leaving tiny Joshua prints on her skirt.

Katherine remembered Joshua's birth as if it was yesterday. He let out one lusty bellow, and then cooed softly as Katherine took him from the mid-wife's arms. Katherine's husband, James, had remained in the fields, working, during the birth. Four-year-old Jeremiah had danced around her bed, laughing at his new brother. Together, they named him Joshua. Two months later, the baby was baptised, Joshua Taylor McKensie, wearing the same gown that Jeremiah had worn.

It seemed like an incredibly short time ago that Joshua was a baby, and Jeremiah was still too young to work in the fields. Those were happy times. Katherine sat every afternoon in front of the east window and rocked Joshua to sleep. Through the lace curtains, she could see the neatly planted fields, and, in the distance, just the tip of the church steeple pointing the way to God. She blinked away her reverie as a silent hawk skimmed the nearby prairie grass like a sailboat gliding across water. It startled her. She braced herself against the shovel handle to catch her breath. She eyed the prairie coldly. Katherine had hated it from the beginning. It was too vast, and too empty. She ached for the geometric symmetry of the plowed fields butted up to ranks of fruit trees that

sheltered her home. She longed to look down the narrow, fence lined lane leading to town. The enormity of the prairie frightened her. It made her feel isolated and insignificant. Now, Katherine was utterly alone.

Within a week of leaving Ohio she was sick, physically and emotionally, of the bouncing wagon, the sound of whips over the horses, and the dust. The dust that filtered into everything — her clothes, the food; even the water tasted of dust.

Just as he did at home, James eschewed socializing with the others. Katherine sorely missed conversations with the other women, but she respected her husband's wishes. When she cooked their meals, she could hear the other women calling to each other, and to their children.

"Maybelle, after supper could you show me that rose stitch?" A woman called.

"Sure, Leddy," the answer came.

Katherine longed to call back, "I can show you right now, if you'd like." But she didn't. She heard the gossip from her boys. At night, when they were curled up in the wagon, and James was snoring in his bedroll outside, the three of them would whisper and giggle about the days events.

They were almost two months into the journey when James fell ill. She had been afraid when James first got the fever. She was afraid that he would give it to the boys. She was further terrified that James would die and she would be left with the responsibility for getting herself, and her sons, to Texas. The worst of Katherine's fears was realized when Jeremiah awoke, two mornings later, feverish and crying.

She sent Joshua to another wagon, away from the contagion. She divided her time between James and Jeremiah, bathing them, trying to ease their fevers. "Dear God," she prayed, "Not my first born. Please don't take my son."

They brought Joshua to her late that same night. She held his tiny, burning body to her breast and crooned softly, tears coursing down her cheeks. At that moment she could have killed James, but the men had already wrapped his body in canvas and laid it beside the wagon. Never in her life had she felt so totally helpless and alone. The other women knew no more than she did about how to treat the fever that raged in her children. She could only use what little water there was to cool their bodies and pray that merciful God would spare their lives.

Somehow the few elapsed hours seemed to make up a whole lifetime. She poised the shovel above the ground. In a combination of anger, disgust, frustration, and fear, she plunged the spade into the soil. The steel bit skidded across a rock and she stumbled to her knees. For a few moments all she could see was the hostile earth and the indifferent grasses. She raised herself slowly looking around her for the trails left by the other wagons as they continued

their search for Texas. There was no evidence that anything had passed, ever. As far as she could see, the golden grasses undulated over the land like ocean swells before the wind. In the distance, a lone tree reached bare, scrawny branches toward Heaven as if to implore God to rescue it from its lonely existence. They had much in common. Katherine's eyes traveled along the branches, into the cobalt sky where wispy, grey clouds galloped like a flock of panicked sheep. Behind them, edged on the horizon, followed massive, black, rolling clouds moving with dirgelike solemnity, escorted by flashing lightning and drumming thunder.

She heard the voices before Tully Moore opened the flap on the back of her wagon.

"Miz McKensie," he called peering into the dim interior. "Miz McKensie, we gotta move on, ma'am. Jack Waters cut signs of injuns this mornin,' an' folks is gettin' mighty jumpy, us sittin' out here in the open like this. Ma'am, we been here three days already."

"My boys cannot travel yet, Mr. Moore. They will die if I try to move them now." Katherine pressed Joshua tightly against her and rocked.

"Miz McKensie, we got to head on. Most everybody is runnin' low on supplies, and the stock is needin' water."

Katherine hated his whiny voice. "I can't go, Mr. Moore. You do what you must, but I will not leave until my boys are better." Her voice floated out to the crowd around her wagon. There was a murmuring that soon became shouting.

"Well I ain't gonna get kilt by no injuns 'cuz she ain't ready ta move."

"We got to think about everybody, not jus' one family."

"Her husband's dead, who's gonna drive her wagon?"

"I hate like hell to say it, but those younguns ain't gonna make it anyhow."

The group debated far into the night. Finally, they drew lots. Jack Waters pulled the short straw and cursed loudly.

In the first light of dawn, Katherine watched as Jack Waters angrily kicked the ground and cursed as the wagons slowly pulled away. Jack Waters was not strong. A few minutes before Jeremiah died, Katherine heard him leaving, taking her horses with him.

As she emptied the shovel beside the hole, the dust billowed around the tattered hem of her calico dress. With each stab into the ground, she cursed the demon in James McKensie that made him sell the farm in Ohio. Each stroke of the shovel increased her rage, and her rage drove her on. Again, and again, the shovel tore at the ever widening hole.

At first she sensed, rather than heard, them. There were three next to the wagon, and she saw others in the distance holding a brace of nervous horses. They sat astride their ponies like copper, pagan gods, totally motionless, their flat, black eyes never blinking. They sat and stared. Thick, long braids framed

their expressionless faces, and trailed down to rest on their shoulders. Each one had an assortment of feathers attached to a leather band around his head. The feathers danced and dove in the stiffening breeze. Paint streaked their faces and bare chests, and the wind carried the pungent odor of grease and sweat to Katherine's nostrils. They looked like Death's attendants come to ensure that he was not cheated out of his prizes.

"I suppose you'll kill me," Katherine called over her shoulder. "It doesn't matter. The water is gone and I'll die soon anyway."

An indian looked past her to the completed graves. For an instant she thought she saw compassion cross his otherwise placid countenance.

"I am Katherine McKensie." She said it politely, as if she was addressing some new neighbors back in Ohio. "Those are the graves of my husband James, and my son Jeremiah. This one is for my son, Joshua." Katherine's chin quivered as she looked skyward. "I did not want to come here, you know." Her voice trembled. "I loved my house in Ohio. It sat on a hill, and I could look down and see the fields and orchards that my father had planted. It was a fine farm, but James ..." Her lips twisted bitterly. "James wasn't content to stay there. He wanted to come west ... to Texas. He sold the farm ... my farm ... my father's farm. He sold it without telling me. I had no choice but to come with him." Katherine stabbed the shovel into the earth. "Do you see what you've done, James? Look what's become of us. You, and Jeremiah, and Joshua, all dead, and I soon will be. Wild beasts will scatter our bones all over this hellish prairie because you had to go to Texas! Do you see what you've done, James McKensie!? Do you see what you've done?"

The indians stirred their ponies and murmured to one another.

Katherine turned and faced them defiantly. "You'll have to wait until I've buried my baby."

For a moment there was no sound except the grasses rubbing together, passing their gossip, sharing their secrets, waiting, the canvas stretched over the wagon snapping and the frame creaking under the increasing pressure of the wind. A heedless, chill wind brought a darkening sky. Then the indians moved slowly away, and Katherine was seized with a desperate desire to call them back. "Oh, Katherine," she thought aloud, "you are demented, indeed, if you need the company of savages on your death bed." The wind sifted dirt back into the hole as she watched the indians sinking into the grass in the distance.

She returned to her labor, driving the shovel into the earth until the grave was handle deep. She looked around to see if the indians had returned, they had not. As quickly, and as silently as they had appeared, the indians had vanished. She was alone, standing next to the grave that would soon embrace the last of her family. A few yards away, a prairie dog stood beside her hole, still, as still as a hunters trophy. Katherine felt a sudden surge of envy at the life that must exist

in that small hole. For several minutes, Katherine and the prairie dog stood motionless, each of them a mute sentinel, poised beside a labor of love for what was, and what was no more. There was a sudden flash of lightning nearby, and the prairie dog disappeared into its hole breaking the spell that had rooted Katherine to the edge of the grave. She sighed, drove the blade of the shovel into the soft dirt at the edge of the grave and shuffled through the grass to the wagon. Joshua's body lay near the rear of the wagon, wrapped in a quilt that Katherine's mother had made. Katherine pulled the quilt away, gently, until she could see the small face. He was a beautiful child. The wind caught his hair and blew it away from his forehead. He seemed to be smiling as though he were dreaming of candy, or Christmas, or the circus that came to town just before they left Ohio. Katherine knelt beside him. "Oh, Joshua, Momma's sorry, so very sorry."

She carried the tiny bundle to the grave. It had taken so long to dig, and it took so little time to fill it in. When she had finished smoothing the mound, she looked across the waving grasses, bent sharply in the damp wind. They seemed to reach completely around the world. How long would it be, she wondered, before the grasses reclaimed her three mounds of earth? How long before all of the evidence that the McKensie family had ever existed would disappear?

Katherine McKensie sank to her knees and pitched forward, embracing the mound that covered her youngest child. Large drops of rain began to dent the freshly smoothed earth.

The Story of My Life

Once upon a time, there was a man named Dewey Kossuth. Dewey lived in a pretty pink house, on a broad black street, in a whole neighborhood of pretty houses. The roof of Dewey's house, like all of the other roofs on all of the other houses in Dewey's neighborhood, was painted happy, Kelly Green. Sometimes, especially in lovely weather, all of the roofs in the neighborhood hovered a few inches above the houses.

"Look," Dewey's wife, Bipsy, would say, "the roofs are up again."

"Isn't that the darndest thing?" Dewey would reply.

Dewey had a job at the Spongee Bread Bakery. His job was to make sure that each and every loaf of Spongee Bread, that was wrapped in a blue and white Spongee Bread wrapper, was suitably soft and pliant. Dewey sat on a stool beside a slowly moving train of Spongee bread cars. As they passed, Dewey would reach out and gently prod each loaf. If his little poke mark didn't disappear in two seconds, that loaf was eliminated because it just didn't have what it took to be a Spongee.

"Too bad," Dewey would say, tossing the loaf over his shoulder.

When Dewey came home after work, there was nothing he enjoyed more than having his dog Slicko gnaw on his toes. As soon as Slicko heard the door latch click, he would stop whatever he was doing and come lumbering over, eager to wrap his gums around the toes of Dewey's wedgies. Every day, after work, Dewey would stand just inside the front door while old Slicko gummed his toes.

"Hi, Honey!" he'd say, waving to Bipsy.

One night after a delicious dinner of avocados and lavender cakes, Bipsy put down her fork, a sparkle dancing in her eyes.

"Oh, pipsy-poo," she said coyly.

"Yes, mugglewumpums?" Dewey cooed back.

"I've got a surprise for you."

Dewey, his face the picture of wide-eyed wonder, said, "What's a 'surprise,' Bipsy?"

Bipsy gave a condescending look. "A surprise is something that you could never, ever imagine, no matter how hard you tried. Something that you couldn't even guess in a million, trillion years."

Dewey looked appropriately chastened and stupid. "Oh," he mumbled.

"You'll never, ever, guess," Bipsy teased.

"Probably not," Dewey murmured.

"It's a baby!" said Bipsy, jumping up from the table and skipping proudly over to the kitchen pantry. She reached in, and pulled out a burbling bundle of pink and blue blankets. Bipsy turned to the table and ailed the bundle so that Dewey could see the baby's face.

"Oh, a white one," said Dewey. He held out his arms. "Toss it to me," he said.

Bipsy frowned. "Now Dewey, you big idiot, this is a baby, not a frisbee. It just came today." She gazed lovingly at the baby. "You should see it change colors," she said. "Someday this baby will make us happy."

"Wonderful!" said Dewey. "When?"

"Someday!" Bipsy emphasized. "I just know it. Why, it will wear little red and white striped hats, and eat marshmallows and tall, sour-grass, and call to us sometimes."

"When?" asked Dewey.

"Sometimes!" Bipsy repeated. For instance, if it gets stuck in a tree, or if it is trying to tie its shoes and starts to choke. Who else do you think it would call to, if not to us?"

"Nobodys." Dewey asked timidly.

"That's right. Nobody. Just to us! And if this baby ever needs us, we will come running because that's what babies are for, and that's what we are for. We must live and breathe, and spend every moment of our lives trying to please and be of service to this little creature."

Dewey choked down a bite of avocado. "Can I still go to work?" he asked.

"Of course you will go to work, and so will I ... whenever I want to. But, for now, I don't want to. I just want to stay at home with this baby, and put clothes on it that are too tight, and help it chew its nails, and clean out its ears with a cold wet cloth. Oh, won't it be wonderful, Dewey? Won't we just be the most wonderfully happy family that ever assembled under one roof?"

Dewey smiled a wan smile and stared at his plate. Bipsy walked back to the table. As she bent to kiss Dewey on the cheek, she banged the baby's head on the back of his chair. It was only a little knock, but it left a slight dent in the baby's

head. Dewey watched the spot for a few seconds, expecting it to pop back out. It didn't.

"Too bad," said Dewey, tossing the baby over his shoulder.

E s s a y s

Orpheus •

Variations on Male Chauvinism

During the 1970's there was a great deal of discussion about feminism and male chauvinism. Issues of fairness and equal rights were widely debated. And, although the discussion has continued into this decade, many of the inequities of the past have apparently been redressed. However, male chauvinism has not disappeared, it has gone underground, making it more difficult to recognize and avoid.

The most apparent form of male chauvinism is, paradoxically, the least detrimental. This form is embodied in the man who is most comfortable with traditional roles for men and women. Contrary to the stereotypical characterization of this traditionalist, he is not a tyrant who insists that women remain barefoot, pregnant, and silent. He simply prefers to relate to women within a more customary context. Moreover, this form does not emanate from any malice toward women, but from an honest preference for conventional relationships. President Reagan's remark that, "Without the influence of women, civilization would not have advanced so far," demonstrates the traditional man's genuine esteem for the role of women in society.

A more insidious form of male chauvinism is personified by the man who only appears to be sympathetic to women's issues. This man professes to espouse the feminist cause, identifying with role models like Phil Donahue and Alan Alda. Yet he remains unable to relate to women as individuals. Instead he sees all women as part of a generic group. This man assumes that he knows what individual women think or feel about a particular subject because he thinks he knows what the general feminist view of that subject may be.

In the wake of the women's rights movement, there has been extensive pressure to remove prejudices against women. This pressure has led, in some cases, to the development of the most odious form of male chauvinism. In this

form, a man pretends to be fair-minded on behalf of equal treatment of women. An example of this form is the employer who maintains a facade of equal employment opportunities by hiring a percentage of women. He employs women at equivalent rates of pay, and grants similar job titles to both men and women who have similar credentials and experience. His fundamental prejudice surfaces when there is a difference of opinion between male and female employees. Invariably, this chauvinist will view another male's assertions concerning a conflict as legitimate and rational, while seeing a woman's views as somehow tainted by her "nature." Such a man believes that women, due to the effects of a varying hormonal cycle, can never be quite as rational as men. He, therefore, never gives equal credence to the views of women. This view of women is expressed in an unequal distribution of power among employees. This man may never give voice to a pejorative view of the nature of women, but he does consider that women are inherently less able, and he assigns the more important responsibilities to men.

This last example of male chauvinism underscores the importance of recognizing tacit prejudices. One is always more vulnerable to an unrecognized adversary. While trying to exorcise ingrained prejudice from our society may be laudable, for now it would seem prudent to acknowledge its continued existence, and encourage women to concentrate their efforts on finding the most effective ways to succeed within our culture despite the existence of specific prejudices.

On Higher Education, Further Education, and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*

In a work that covers ground so diverse as Aristotle and Acid Rock, *Fruit Ilium* to feminism one would think it hard to miss "a" point, let alone "the" point. But I believe Allan Bloom has done just that in his *The Closing of the American Mind*.

Perhaps "miss" is inaccurate, or at minimum insufficient, for Bloom -in his resolute zeal to punish all transgressors - obscures a central and telling issue, one that is far more figurative and historical than he evidently acknowledges. The fundamental debate in American colleges and universities is not, nor should it be, about Western Civilization, or commonality of values, or cultural (read minority ethnic and racial) diversity. Rather, it is of the distinction between "higher" and "further" education.

Higher education supposes a hierarchical and cumulative rationality, a certainty that truth can be meaningfully pursued, and that the pursuit itself is of high value and benefit. Further education, on the other hand, views rationality as dispersed and specific, and truth as a relativity wherein its pursuit is merely functional, not fundamental. The discourse and cacophony current in and about American colleges and universities is structured by this dialectic, and demarcations of patricians and plebs are merely manifestations of that structure. Classicists and feminists, "people of color," and "old, white men" are only the names of current players in an age-old game.

Western universities began when the Parisian sons of the powerful and wealthy sought to become more powerful and wealthier. Judging that law and economic order were essential ingredients to their successful attainment, these

sons-to-be-fathers hired Arabian professors to teach them these, and other, secrets. This, almost a thousand years ago. Soon, similar efforts were born in Cambridge and Oxford, and some 800 years later in new America. In this, the feminists and radicals of race are incontrovertibly correct: Universities were founded, funded, and furthered by white men intent on maintaining - yea, even improving - their advantageous station.

Wealth and power, however, do not a patrician make. The "citizens" of Athens, obliged by all that is noble, understood this and in their delineations of what really counted set forth a model of enlightened humanity. This model was clearly divorced from practical matters of status attainment, largely because their status was taken for granted, neither doubted nor foreseeably imperiled. Such also was the lot in life of these French, English, and ultimately American sons, who dutifully pursued an ethos of civility and a respect for truths, both certain and ethereal.

The creation of technical knowledge in the 15th century altered this course, first in Germany then everywhere else. Coupled with the effects of the most plebeian of all inventions - the printing press - there now was a knowledge of use to the most common of men (and still only men), and a means of transporting that knowledge over time and distance. Just as important, this knowledge - technical knowledge - was not viewed by those empowered as a great threat, since only efficiencies of servitude were promulgated, not the secrets of civility.

To communicate these practical matters more conveniently and efficiently, technical schools and "high" schools were created, and out of a sense of noblesse oblige smatterings of civility - in doses not too taxing - were gradually added, often in partnership with very elementary theology. Such was the case in 19th century America, where the "normal schools" sought to train small cohorts of imminently modest men (and now, women) the techniques of, and appropriate curriculum for, instruction in serviceable knowledge.

Universities, populated by peoples not needing "knowledge which served," continued much as they had, save one new responsibility. Expanding in numbers as they had, universities soon exhausted the ready supply of Arab intellectuals, and realized if other sons and sons-of-sons were to be passed the secrets and civilities, new professors would have to be fashioned. This they did out of their own fabric, and one has to say, much out of their own likeness, as well.

A near millennium, and a whole ocean, had passed since Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford, and save some minor alterations and the addition of another Cambridge, a new New Haven and assorted other addresses, little had changed. A higher education for those who were higher, a common (or serving) education for those who would serve.

The end of World War II foretold a truly fundamental change, as a small wave of returning servicemen — their tuitions now paid by a patriotized noblesse oblige through, horrors, a public government - entered universities. It was just a comparative trickle, however, and the communion of status and civility was not threatened. Such a real threat would have to wait another generation. For the present, the distinction between higher and further education would remain, unmixed and unchallenged.

In 1964 and 1965 with the first thrust of the baby boom, the impact was immediate, resounding, and ever consequential. Teacher colleges, which had been "normal schools" and would soon become universities at least in name, were inundated - not by masses, but rather by the masses. So, too, were public and land grant universities, at that time the higher elevation of technical towers. These students, soon fearful of a war and now resentful of their station, demanded the "secrets" stripped bare of the "civilities" they long ago had been wrapped in. Impatient, demanding, and in wholly unanticipated numbers, they created a force that could only be resisted, not shaped or repelled. Relevance became a code-word for "teach me what I want to know."

All in all, this was not much different a demand from that first voiced by those Parisian sons a thousand years before. American professors, however, unlike their far earlier Arabian counterparts, could not fashion these demands. Public money, public values, and - indeed - public professors were too great an ally, and the faculty concerned with higher education were forced to retreat.

They barricaded themselves in the fortress "General (nee Liberal) Education," and in departments of the humanities. Some set up perimeters of defense in the sciences and social sciences, but in their withdrawal (or strategic retreat) ceded territories soon encamped by business, engineering, social work and teacher education. A new synthesis had been formed in the dialectic. Most importantly, the battle had been joined, and it is the same battle being fought today, a quarter of a century later.

It is in this sense that Bloom misses the point. Voiceful African-American and female students are just the freshest troops in a long-standing confrontation, not entrants in a new war. Their cry is no different from that of nursing, business and education majors, and no different from that voiced 25 years before by their parents.

What they want to know are relative truths which are functional, that advance a course, balm an ego, secure a job. Curriculum, professors and courses ought, they believe, do these things, and those who do not are irrelevant, wasteful, and perhaps even evil. The value of pursuit can be measured only by its goal and the goal's subsequent attainment. The purpose of a university is to "further" their cause, regardless of whether that course is ideological or monetary.

Further education is easily grasped, as are all "furthers." One simply looks forward, along the same dimension one currently occupies. Higher education is not so easily grasped, in the same way all "highers" are more difficult. Another dimension is necessitated, and a profoundly different one, as well. Horizontality is a familiar perspective, verticality is not.

The issue and debate remain the same: Whether to pursue what students want to know, or what they should know. These considerations should be thoughtful, not gennuine. A "higher education," despite its somewhat sordid underpinnings, is meaningful and what is most worthy in our humanity and history gives ample evidence of this. There need be no retrenchment. However, and because it is "higher," there should be no expectation that students (or their parents) would understand this. After all, it is not a priori, but rather a studied deduction of logic, and induction of fact, which establishes this truth. As such, a "higher education" is something the student should graduate with; it should not be a condition for admittance, or even retention.

Aged aversions and ill-thought admonitions toward television and rock and roll are simply prejudices, as are selective testimonies to wrongdoing by African-Americans and women. Bloom should recognize these things for what they are, particularly since his perspective is so close. Shakespeare meant for his plays to be publicly performed, so too with Mozart and his opera. Only to read or listen is to miss the communion, a communion of people, be they of any color, background or gender. The same can be said of Dylan's words apart from his music, and the album apart from the concert. The truth to be sought lies in the communion of art and audience, not in the aperceptions *sui generis*, and the greater truth lies in a greater communion.

Which pleases God more, Gregorian chants or Negro spirituals? A higher education may be able to answer this, but unless we examine both with equal vigor, any judgment would simply be a preference. Similarly, in what literature is truth to be found, that written by white men, or that written by others? The claim that the former wrote more is irrelevant to this pursuit of truth. First, let us be clear about the truths that we seek. Clarity in that will inform our choices, and perhaps expand them as well.

It is certainly true that only a small fraction of students enter a university seeking a higher education. Most seek only a further education. It also is true that some administrators and faculty share in this perspective, perhaps even most. It may even be true that these disparate visions should be institutionally separated, creating once again distinct institutions of "further" and "higher" education, but this would be elitist and is impossible. What we are left with, perhaps for the next millennium, is a continuing struggle to thrust students "higher" even as they rush to be "further." Many we will fail, and some will fail us, in mission not in grades. But an honest effort by all and for all is certainly a

civility we can enthrall. Higher education is neither composed of, nor directed to, human pigmentation, gender or genetics, and prejudice is not informed perspective. Whether women wrote books of classic proportion is an empirical question deserving of examination, but the question is begged if "classic proportion" simply means the writings of men. The study of western civilization is incomplete if it focuses only on what was included, and not on what was missed. What do we learn of "western values," absent the inquiry into the values of others who preserved our earliest histories, while we ignored, abandoned, and fled without them? What can we know of power and exploitation, if we examine only the powerful and exploitative?

One should welcome the sparks of Bloom's (and Bennett's) fire, but recognize it is not the flame nor the coals. His expression, and very well his vision, is too narrow, too contemporary and too petty. No number of mentionments of Hobbes and Locke, Plato and Aristotle, can obscure this. His criticisms of specific disciplines are superficial and unscholarly, and tepid in comparison to the self-studies generated by these disciplines themselves. Too often his labels are divisive and demeaning, not disciplined and discussive. Still there is a call here, a genuine call for communion in the community of scholars. We do lose our way, and settle for the familiar dimensions served best by pre-read textbooks, op-scan exams, and pusillanimous pedagogy. Too easily we cede territory to technicians and control to constituencies. Our vision is much too often too vague. In all of this, Bloom is correct and further correct to challenge it and with it, us all.

But his shelter and his ire obscure this, as well as his willing disposition to be used by those who neither understand nor respect these fundamental issues. African-American students associate with others like them for many reasons, but chief among them is that few genuine and persistent efforts at inclusion are made by whites, whether students or faculty. Bloom doesn't understand this, but more importantly, his resolute insistence on blaming the victims of discrimination balm the bigots who always thought so. If Bloom did not intend this outcome, then he was thoughtless. If he does not intend this outcome, he will protest it and correct his statements in the next edition. And if he did intend them . . .

The volume is too often riddled with like apostasies. The reader is forced into a great patience and tested critically to exhume from the refuse the plausible petitions of genuine consideration and importance. Those uneager for this, or incapable of it, simply find in the pages a gild for their chauvinisms, and for this Bloom is, and must be held, responsible.

His confusions are palpable, and with sympathy, understandable. The manifestations of student cultures have befuddled most academicians, present, past and I daresay future. They are different from us even though we once were

they; children beget children who beget children. Generational discomfort and status dissimilarity are not evidences of evil, however, but merely unending articulations of functional resurrection. Youth is, as Robert Louis Stevenson noted, "wholly experimental," and no place so fosters and nurtures these experiments as does the university. This is as it should be. Feminism and rock and roll, affirmative action and political protestation post no threat to the towers of ivory. Nor did jitterbugs and engulfed goldfish, communism and open enrollment. Only the professoriate holds within it all the powers that are necessary for enduring civility and true conservatism. To blame others, to objurgate, to credit much to that which is small, is to squander the power and the responsibility that is the professoriate's alone.

The university is not a *Cordon sanitaire*, but neither is it a discount cathedral for the most current and common of gods. It is rightly a place of higher expectations, best measured first against its most enduring inhabitants, the faculty. In obscuring this most worthy of truths, in seeing unveracious threat among those most vulnerable, disservice—not service—is done. Aim distracted is an arrow amiss. "The Closing of the American Mind" is just such a well-drawn arrow, but with so many distractions, the target itself is amiss.

Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then, maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon? No. It frightened me. I read on and what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it.

— Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

