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CHARLES MORGAN

In Church One Day

In church
one day
I saw a thousand
heads
bowed in prayer
or thought
or sleep.
The tender napes of a thousands necks
bare and vulnerable,
waiting.
Fragile enough
to strangle
or to
kiss.

TASSIE CAMERON



CYNTHIA FRASER

As Charles Saw It

Charles felt betrayed, not so much by Marjorie, as by life itself. Everything had gone according to plan because he had played by the rules; he had attained what he had, comfort, corporate success, sexual satisfaction (if not excitement), material gratification, as was his due, the reward for hard work, the quick removal of obstacles. He had never been more fulfilled than when the keys to the fashionable house in the prestigious district had passed into his hands and he had driven his new BMW up the suitably long driveway to park before the imposing oak doorways. He had only been slightly disturbed by Marjorie's languid indifference putting it down to a cold and fatigue.

'Tell me Charles, why did you feel so angry?'

The doctor was tilted back in his high-backed chair casually stuffing red jelly beans into his mouth, drowning out the bleeding hum of the tape recorder which had been annoying Charles for some time. He heard himself talking about frustration and inability to understand, all of which was true, but he doubted that he had ever been really angry. It had been more a state of shock that anything so disruptive, so threatening to his life plan should happen, and he had simply set about correcting it in a business-like fashion, with efficiency, certitude and at first patience. When the problem had not solved itself quickly he had, he admitted to himself, become rather fretful, a condition to be deplored exhibiting a puerile lack of control.

That Marjorie was not as happy as he was obvious and so, dispassionately, he had reexamined the reasons for this and decided his absences were certainly part of the problem as a woman alone a great deal naturally languishes. Marjorie, being intelligent, had certainly understood that their lifestyle depended upon his job which required long hours and company loyalty, but he had explained this would not be forever; they would vacation for two weeks in Mexico at Christmas consuming sun and Margueritas, but in the meantime she had only to look around her to see the rewards of this sacrifice, the fine china, lovely clothes, the security of their stock portfolio. He made a special point of dining her in an expensive restaurant, taking her to a concert or the theatre (both of which he loathed) at least twice a month. She seemed to enjoy this, though he felt his presence at these occasions was more or less secondary to the entertainment and wondered if perhaps she was commencing menopause.

'I really did try,' came his voice. 'She was simply not to be pleased.'

The tape hummed on and the doctor leaned forward trying to fix

him with a benevolent stare. Charles simply smiled and let the man feel professional.

'Why do you think that was so?'

He had thought about that and the answer, much to his consternation, had eluded him. Everything she had ever wanted he had given her. He kept himself in shape, so that while not youthful and possessing youth's attributes, he was well-favoured. From what he heard in the office, he judged himself a better than average lover. Marjorie never complained. At the appropriate times he paid compliments, was solicitous and made an effort to listen when she complained, which was usually about her job as executive secretary to Brice, McCullough and Stevens, one of his firm's largest clients. The fact that she was highly valued by her employers, next to indispensable, made little difference to her. Again and again she uttered rather immaturely,

'It's so boring. What I hate most is the endlessness. There's never a sense of finishing anything, just the same thing day after day, buried under a pile of paper. "I want, I want" all day long. I hate it!'

Correctly he had pointed out that ninety percent of working people found their jobs tedious, but accepted this fact and carried on. He would rather have been an engineer than a chartered accountant, but there you were. Things had worked out in the long run.

Then he came home one day and found she had quit, just like that.

'Do you think that was fair? A wife should discuss a step like that with her husband.'

'Are you sure she hadn't?' the doctor asked popping in a few more jelly beans.

Of course he was sure. He did not begrudge her leisure, but he should have been consulted. As it was the decision had left them financially very tight and the Mexican trip had to be cancelled, an embarrassment, as he had made much of it at the office. Brice, McCullough and Stevens were none too happy either, being given such short notice. But she had seemed happier and that pleased him, as did her new interest in continuing her education, a laudatory desire and one he knew would be an asset to one on his way up like himself, well educated and poised wives being a distinct advantage. It was a fallacy that men didn't appreciate intelligent women as long as they didn't try to act like men.

'How do you mean that?' the doctor asked over the top of his spectacles.

'Aggressive; you know, overbearing.'

Women like that annoyed him. Unfortunately they were the ones that generally got ahead.

He had thought she might take a commerce programme, statistics, economics, maybe even some computer science as he watched her thumb through the university calendar, and pictured himself advising and helping her on cold winter nights over a cup of coffee. It would give them something to talk about. When she decided on Victorian Poetry he was more than a little disappointed, not only because he found poetry boring and effeminate, but because his little dream of tutoring and coffee evaporated.

'What use will that be?' he had rather irritably asked.

'I just want to enjoy myself Charles.'

She had looked at him with what he had then thought was a request for understanding, but later, on reflection, seemed something else. He had let her go, hoping the poetry would wear thin.

'Why did you find her choice of course so annoying, Charles?'

'It had no practical purpose. All this talk about culture being essential to man's well being is nonsense. If human beings paid more attention to what was really going on, and less reading romantic fiction and looking at sick art, the world would be a better place.'

'You have no use for the arts then?' the doctor enquired.

'Not in the least.'

He had surreptitiously looked at the textbook after her first class, Rosetti, Browning, Wilde and Swinburne. Faggot stuff that disturbed him with its elegant emotionalism.

'The class is rather large,' Marjorie had said. 'We need two tutorials.'

There had been a covert glance up from her books then back down again.

'It means I'll have to be out Wednesday as well as Monday.'

It shouldn't have made a great deal of difference, as generally he worked both nights, but already he could feel things getting out of hand.

'Why couldn't you take the Monday night tutorial?'

'I suppose I could have, but the teaching assistant takes that. Professor Langdon takes Wednesday, and he's so much better than the TA.'

That had been the first time he'd heard what was to become a household word. Marjorie couldn't mention her course without bringing in her professor. What he said, how brilliantly he illustrated such and such a point, how well he read.

Charles made a point of taking a Wednesday off suggesting they dine at a fine little Italian restaurant he knew Marjorie particularly enjoyed and then go to a movie. When she declined due to the necessity of attending the pre-test tutorial he had been more than irritated.

It was shortly after this that Langdon took his group to an exhibition of late Victorian watercolours and beer afterwards at a very cozy pub. Marjorie had begun referring to him as David. At university Charles had never referred to any of his professors by their first names.

'You seem to be putting an awful lot of work into this course. Are you sure it's not too much for you?' he'd asked trying a different tack.

'Oh no, I enjoy it so much. It's the first time I've felt alive in years. I used to sit in that office and ask myself what the hell I was doing with my life. Now I'm doing what I want. You should come to a class Charles. David wouldn't mind.'

So Charles went, not because of a growing interest in Victorian poetry, but, he told himself, to see what all the fuss was about.

'Did you have hostile feelings about this Charles?'

The doctor spilt a red candy pool across the desk and began to meticulously diminish it drop by drop back into the glass jar.

'Why should I have hostile feelings?'

Indeed he had felt relieved on several counts for the class was large, some 30 students for a third-year poetry course being somewhat unusual, and Langdon was older than Charles had expected, perhaps mid-fifties, far too old for Marjorie to show an interest, or so he thought – and the TA, a typical artsy, pale and pimpled with long, greasy hair, bifocals and, most importantly, male. Somehow Charles had painted Langdon as much younger, smoother, the kind that would have a pretty female grad student as a TA. He was glad his assumptions were erroneous.

Langdon had one of those Masterpiece Theatre English voices that handle poetry well and indeed when he read was quite mesmerizing. He would walk to and fro across the front of the classroom as he read, gesticulating appropriately, his voice low enough to require attention.

And love, grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure.

As Charles looked about himself he saw the hold this man exercised upon his class, the rapt adoration reserved for movie stars and sports heroes. A girl to the left, two rows down was actually crying, sobbing quietly in her textbook behind pink kleenex. Once again Charles turned his attention to Langdon in his carefully casual tweed jacket and cords, desert boots, tieless, the studied professorial look,

even down to the rather old fashioned gold rimmed glasses. The more Charles looked at him, the more he realized that his man, despite his age, could be quite attractive to a certain type of woman who thrived on romanticism, emotionalism. His greatest trick, Charles noticed, was the apparent naivety with which he went about his work, as if he really were unaware of the effect he was having on his class.

'Isn't he something?' Marjorie had said tucking her book into the rather expensive briefcase Charles had bought her. 'I was so lucky getting someone like him for my first class.'

'You were jealous then Charles?' the doctor turned the tape over, then clasped rather ugly hands in front of him.

Charles thought a moment and being honest with himself said, 'Yes, but I was angry too, that guys like him could manipulate women so.'

'Was it only women that were impressed? Were there no men in the class? How did they react? Perhaps he was simply an exceptional teacher.'

He had not really noticed the men except for the oily TA, most of his attention being concentrated on Marjorie who glowed.

It was two weeks later when a friend informed him that Marjorie had been spotted with a man at a rather out of the way restaurant frequented by university types. When given a description of the escort, Charles had immediately recognized Langson. If it had been innocent why hadn't she mentioned it to him? Faithful wives don't hide luncheon dates from their husbands. He asked her and she had looked startled and flushed.

'Oh, we met at the bookstore and he asked me to lunch. I thought, why not.'

Why not indeed. Charles slept little from that night on. He had a weeks vacation due him and he took it, keeping it from Marjorie so that he might watch her. Nothing happened - until the Friday when she went to the library where she met Langdon in the stacks. They had spoken briefly, in low voices, then left together, casually strolling through the park where they sat on a bench and talked for over an hour, occasionally referring to a book he carried as a ploy just in case they were being observed. Langdon had taken off his jacket, an entirely unnecessary action as it wasn't hot, and she had folded it over the bench. Charles had left then, not wishing or needing to see more. His imagination did the rest. How often as he lay awake beside her at night did he picture Marjorie and her lover kissing, touching, in hot, sweaty embrace.

'Did you ever confront Marjorie or Langdon?' The red jelly beans flew into the doctor's mouth like little drops of blood.

'What was the use of that? I knew what had to be done.'

Charles was still overwhelmed by the coolness and efficiency with which he executed his plan, the way he discreetly ascertained where Langdon ate, the decision to act openly and quickly as a man ought to.

David Langdon frequented a small understated place that catered to vegetarians and other oddballs with foreign stuff like couscous and humus, eggplant and brown rice. It's main advantage as far as Charles was concerned was its location beneath a small concourse which afforded an unobstructed view perhaps twenty feet down into the restaurant. One could lean over and watch the patrons. Charles browsed as he walked along, struck by the rather beautiful crystals in a geology shop, taken by a dress he would buy Marjorie in celebration of his solution to the problem which had been so annoying and disruptive. He had booked a double passage on a cruise ship for Xmas despite the financial strain. He felt relieved already.

If nothing else Langdon was precise, arriving at 12:15 as usual, today accompanied by two male colleagues. Charles savoured his anticipation, leaning casually on the railing overlooking their table. He could even hear them discussing an 'abysmal paper' submitted by some poor graduate student. Langdon ordered some kind of vegetable stew on rice which Charles let him finish, being a fair and reasonable man. One of the colleagues left after tea and soup. He couldn't put it off any longer, indeed he was becoming excited, and did not wish to lose his concentration. At school he had won prizes for his marksmanship and he had kept his hand in at the club, a singular gratification coming from such expertise. No one even noticed him take the gun from his pocket, as he knew they wouldn't. No one noticed anything these days. His aim was infallible, one quick, sharp shot that jerked Langdon's head back, knocked him off the chair. Charles knew he was dead when he hit the floor and was satisfied his problem had been solved. He knew no jury would convict him with such just cause, and indeed they had not, but sent him to this hospital to recuperate, for the whole thing had been a terrible strain.

'Do you feel sorry Charles?'

'Sorry? Only that Marjorie never comes to see me. What kind of wife wouldn't visit her sick husband?'

The doctor sighed and popped a little red jelly bean in his mouth.

CAROL ASHTON

the fast

eyes are hungry
and hollow
sunken into
the skeleton head

body is famished
and fading
count the ribs
from the back

and you'll see

starving for
love

seems selfish
to starve
by choice

TASSIE CAMERON

A
JOURNAL
OF THE
Planet
BEING THE

Bizarre and Most Fright'ning History
of the
COLLAPSE of the BIOSPHERE of PLANET EARTH
as a
Result of the Heinous and Destructive Activities
of ITS
INHABITANTS,
WITH THE
Unintended Consequence of the Disruption of Civilization,
AND
GENERAL CATASTROPHE.

Told, in his own hand, by a
CITIZEN of the Unfortunate Planet
at the time of its Demise.

NEVER BEFORE IN PRINTOUT.

T O R O N T O :
M C M L X X X V I I I

MARGARET SHARROW

Media Breakfast

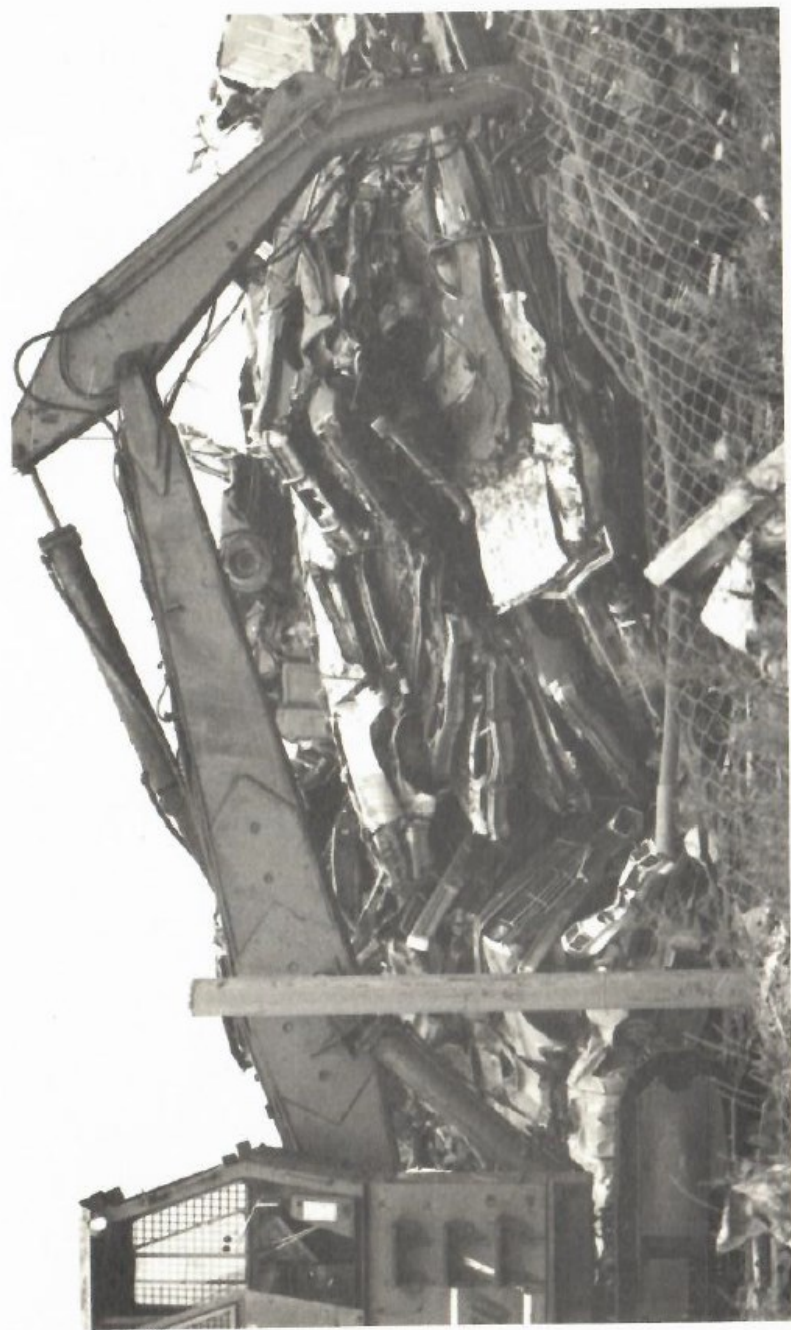
Good Morning Death!
Hallo Wrath of God!
(distant flames burn cold words cross the sky)
How strange to have you in my chamber
Bouncing off sunbeams and into my heart ...

Only cereal mush to eat anyway
so I need more to grow up big and strong,
more than foam walls and squeezey plastic people –
I live without steel.

(Blood, then,
an odd stuff to me,
wetness behind scabs and blackheads
red only because it has always been so –
I really can't imagine a good gush
with venous purple rhythmically gushing
with the contortions of the casual casualty)

I turn on my radio
Pour myself a big bowl of schrapnel
and imagine for a moment ... I am real –
before I open my eyes.

RICHARD ENGLAND



URS BILL

Epistle to an Insurance Man

'Did he incite the assassin? Must men stand by what they write as by their camp-beds or their weaponry or shell-shocked comrades while they sag and cry?' - Geoffrey Hill

In the first snow lay the child;
Adam's tousled hair reflected in the perfect fall.
And Bedlam berated April
While March howled for recognition,
Its ice sharp screams piercing
Nearly comatose ears.
May springs into maturity,
The rest: the recluse of lazy age:
Until pure birth
From pregnant air
In genome flasks.

Reverse the seasons.
Name them again, originally,
As they were, in the beginning,
Their house unrestrained.
Afraid, he was, that the civilizing
Structure would dictate a home.
Another unity between time
And community. Begin ephebe?
(A little bird told me)
The poet builds the stanza with whatever:
The blade, the coppice, the reed,
But use no columns,
No architecture,
No pencil lines,
Only the senses
Of the first words
Of winter-time.

And you're dead if you preach,
And you're cold if you teach,
And you're young if you reach
There, for some new fruit.
'Do I dare eat a peach?'
And the only possible answer's given:

The prudent indecision.
There's no thrill to an apple,
No sense of sin.

Begin by asking of what they have but are not
lacking?

Begin by writing of as it was in the beginning:
Things, but no words for ideas.
Beguile then by using borrowed echoes?
Beguile then by trying something new:
Being, exalted, in your procreant urge.

He had a mind so fine that no sense
Could violate it. A deconstruction
Of seeing, an evening
Of wrinkled points of view.
Chosen to be the editor
There are those that cut
Even you. Silent blades
Meant to knife public opinion.

How can the angel dive
Into the chalk cloudy waters, serene
In descent from a Dover
Crag, his naked bronzed body
Jettisoned from nature's machiulation
Into the adit of fiction
Without Milton?
But this won't fit the forum
With its desultory enfilade of stares,
The board birds begging
For consummate winter.
Cornelius Nepos sidles with me
Constantly bleeding in poecy.

It is time ephebe, it is time.
Sun and heir of god are weary,
Rotting in the stagnantest elements
Decaying with the unutterable word
Begging to be spoken. (Dare, You've said it!)
So much reamins to be said.
'Du calme, mon vieux, du calme.'

And the vultures devour these crumbs
 Beaking blood from the flesh.
 And even if string, like the one Theseus lay,
 They would have used it to soften their nest.
 So the feast ends. Talons remove
 Small bifocal lenses to reveal
 The hunter's eye, then, the rallying cry:
 'Let's break for lunch!
 And I'd thought they'd eaten!
 No, just my little manuscript
 To whet their appetite
 For something more subtle, or polite.
 Of course, they'll reply, 'It's in your best
 interest'
 And, 'Start from what you know,
 Don't be so ambitious!
 Weeks later you receive the remains
 Of two Aryan children. Hansel and Gretel
 Lost forever in a German wood.
 And the witches survive,
 With candy temptation –
 A dollar a line – if its good
 And short.... After all the rejection
 Say, 'We're always pleased to sharpen new talents,
 Don't be dejected, just more selective
 Of whose birds you feel are fit for zoos.'

It would have been different ephebe,
 If thus spake Ezra,
 They would have listened
 And it would be different.
 Damn their filial ingratitude.
 Poor Tom the poet, the thing itself
 (Unaccommodated: naked: taking
 No worm's silk, beast's hide, sheep's wool,
 Or feline's scent), is cold.
 Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
 His word was still, 'Soldier there is a war
 Between the mind and sky,'
 Between thought, and day, and night.

Every decade is low, dishonest,
 Ripe in the life of decay,

Decadent in the cadences
Danced to while mending the fences
Of bone, lying always in the path
Of the lie perpetuated
In defence to the change:
The necessary imago
Of someone's falling perfection,
The eternal abstraction of truth.

The time is at hand ephebe
To write a poem with an ending
Here where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the City,
And where the cunningest pattern of excelling nature
Can be found in your girlfriend's scarf,
Your jealousy over her old lovers,
And your ability to say
'I'm sorry' and mean just that.

In the beginning was the word
And in my ending was the word
And every day there is the word:
Never tired or archaic,
Never alive until you breathe it
With the same air of its beginning
And without the sense of divine pretending.
Everything returns upon itself:
The little gnome of belonging
That buzzes and stings and cries
Unto flowers after dormancy.
Sleep is the chrysalis of chrysolite,
The other imago of silent creation,
The ice that freezes crystal clear
Like Christ on Christmas eve
Opening his eyes to catch his snowflake
On his tongue. From the bare branches
Of the tree of birth swing and prick
Up your ears to the smell of leaves
And kindling catching the crack
Of birthing flame: hear the heat
Rising to meet your Mother's breast
And suckle, ephebe, your nourishment.

Soft you, a word or two before you go,
Pericles warned of hypocrisy,
An unkind self fulfilling prophecy
That infects the purest of page
And the basest of villain.
There can be no definitive fiction
Without the vision revision
Affords to hindsight and centuries
Of meditation, the adjusting eye
That retains the privileged posture
Of the first old man in baptismal
Flame. Every epithet must be as pure
As the most innocent name of the first snow,
Blindly serene until first seen, and thus,
Spoken.

MICHAEL W. HOLMES



MARTHA WEAVER



MARTHA WEAVER

Common-Place Poesis

'Those who are asleep I think Heraclitus calls labourers and co-producers of what happens in the universe.'

The sun was beating hard all afternoon on the ground, making
it hard, hard-packing
it, the land rain-soaked and sodden-wet for hours by the side
of the road,
the hardtop baked in the new heat. Corn and sun-flowers, their
heads
rain-bent, faded in the storm, this morning's tumult, stand
idly
by, leaning and weak. Not so long ago a car passed, went by
leaving dust and a breeze in its brief wake. Someone stood by
leaning
half-awake on the shed, trying hard to keep himself up against
the worn
boards, his hand on a wood stake that held up a fence.
The car stopped, kicked up a few stones. A man leaned out,
after
opening the widow, and asked the local in the dark jeans and
boots
for directions, the man against the shed and the fence-post.
There was a word-exchange, as the one's demands were met with
brief, vague descriptions, directions. The driver half-
satisfied pulled out, took off
and admired the corn's slow waver at the roadside. The local,
lazy
and half-asleep against the shed at the corner where a lane, a
couple of overgrown
tracks more like a path, leads into the road that rides along,
stood himself hard-up, stepped on a long plank, and walked off
backward into his sunny field. Not a sound, a voice or a word,
he vanished and left behind. Overhead where a tree writhes
toward the heart of light, almost in its own sinuous thought
more than a form, a stone's throw from tremendous overhead
heat,
a slight wind turns among crops simply moving over the plants
in a long-winded blow.
The breeze is in the wake of a fast car, the branches spin in
the warm wind, setting fast a hard creation.

JAMES KNOX

making preserves

these days fall on me
the rain
 the leaves
the raking up of promises
 written on pages and littering the desk

all the words and moments
hoarded and huddled –
 at best pieced together
 on postcards of no particular order
stare at me from the bottom of the drawer

an ashtray of intentions
for each finite day
complete the pagan cycle
and for an instant
like the grazing beast
 i fear no death
 i have no past

inward eyes are caught
self-considered in distraction
and then i feel the burden
of the weight of expectation –

note to estranged lover
buried in the cellar:

after all these autumns
there's something you should know –
in you i always wanted
the confidence of snow

MICHAEL DOLENKO

Towards Thought

We work around thought. Just as a professor may forget what s / he is saying half way through her / his sentence, the logic of language carries him / her / us forward, and abstracts him / her from thought. The unremitance of lecturing, carries him / her through the lecture. The process is what is evolving, and what is thought, is, and is about process.

One might well forget all that the lecturer has said, but be left with one thing. The 'isness' of process, that which inverts, and links, encloses, permeates and makes relations. The 'deep structure' of thought, which surfaces in logic and syntax, and words.

We work around thought to reach thought. Bo(u)rne into the periphery of perception, we follow the outline of chairs, desks, and softly rimmed human profiles. We are lead into the stream by skirting the banks. We dash in and out, kick and splash. Dry ourselves before leaping into a current of electrical impulses, in order to swim against stream.

The professor, too, circumscribes thought. Approaches hesitatingly a thought, radiating out like a dandelion gone to seed – if only to explode. Like fireworks, just before they touch the retina, disintegrate, are pushed under the darkness, sub-darkness.

And so, student-professor meet in lecture. In orans, in prayer, over the lectern. Meet the untouchable in thought. Towards becoming thought. We do not 'get the point', though we may follow the gist. We create boundaries, strange weeds, deadly night shade, which lead us, tendrils, tentacles, towards the centre of – what is to be contemplated.

JANE STUPART



LYNN MCDONALD

Nancy in search of a toilet plunger

— *in the style of Daniel DeFoe*

My preparations almost at a conclusion, I resolved to engage myself in a few moments of Relief; wanting to avoid a later mishap which might result in missing some Nice Young Prince, during Introductions, who might be making up a Guest List for his upcoming Wedding; and upon lifting the Seat Cover I discovered the root of Ronald's recent Confusion and general unhappiness; a condition I have quite become accustomed to of late. The first thing I did upon observing proof of Ronald's Diseased Bowels was to send for my maid Beatty, already having pulled up my Pants and firmly secured the Belt Buckle; but to my dismay Beatty appeared, not knowing where to find the Instrument; least I refer to it by its common name — the toilet plunger — which would relieve us of this Visitation. Undaunted I resolved to pursue the matter Myself and discover the whereabouts of the Instrument, or perish amongst the discarded Containers of hair-colouring.

SAM MANCINA

Selected Tomatoes

That's the title to our
First volume of first fruit.
It won't be Selected
Quince or Pears, but the real
Name, selected of soil.

Tomatoes selected
Carefully by some in
Spector, shadow of laws
From sunny Florida
In the good old U.S.
Of A. are not my mom's
Tomatoes: marl scented,
Cold Spanish explosives
Erupting on your tongue.
Our tomatoes of youth
Never came in cardboard
Boxes. My last red fruit
Won't either.

Selected

Poet. Fill in the name.
Mine on that day wrote Three
Poems. Prose pieces, life
In metre, sublime peace
On the subway, in bags,
Plastic tombs. The buzz stench
Of commuters snaps back,
Flush in my face, ferret
Like nosiness in white
Noise. Your poised head cracks glass
In recoil, recollect
Ancestral undergrounds.
But the box, with the book,
Stares you down: bold black type

Selectively chosen
Tomatoes. Really choice,
Naturally. Select
The word you want, the one

Selective memory
That's in-between the real
And perfect tomato,
The whole point, to the left
And the right, of the hole's
Still point, whole, forever.

Selected from the shelf
With newspaper lining,
Dark forms in cellar light,
Green leaved, ripened and red
For the first and last time.

This is the voice I think
With from purgatory
To paradise. Lost words
From personae to pen.
This is the voice, unread,
An intoxicating
And drowning fleshy taste:

Selected Tomatoes.

MICHAEL W. HOLMES



MARGARET SHARROW

On Becoming Human

A petal peeled white
Stuck, rippling to my lips red
Your tongue flitting
like a butterfly
over my teeth:

a translucent wing
caught in a half open oyster
the coloured powder
dusted off on my cheeks,
the wind over the water
blue

gives tongue
to language,
as T to T
we touch

the chrysalis

JANE STUPART



1/4

"LEAR"

David Donkin '85

DAVID DONKIN

Shades in Gray

This is how it goes: 5:30 rise. Up through the dark. Cold outside the tent. Scan the horizon. Look closer now, to where dust devils are madly whirling; like mad dancing. Desert jubilation – ‘Homage to Thee’ – awaiting in the east Ra’s return. Step out. Equipment check. Beck’s shitty coffee. Burn tongue yet again. A taste of heat to last the day. K1 by 7:00, K2 by 2:00, K3 by 5:00. Scrape stone thousands of years old into dust.

Not so easy: by noon there is no distinction between sky and sun. Beck a few feet away is a blur of heat waves. He is dissolving into shimmering motion, his body giving away to it languidly. Beck, your head’s melting again. Beck, does it hurt? So bloody hot and he’s swimming, under water, cool.

K2 is the best, Karnak site number 2, 12th dynasty. Lots of shade. I’ll do west side, Beck. Slip into cool dark. Bend over, back already aching, scrape a few grains of ancient rock into a plastic canister. A scrape here, a scrape there. Actually very exact. 15 cms up, 15 more cms. Where is it? Here? Where’s the salt? A temple wall almost four thousand years old and who’d think something so simple could do it in. The salt of the temples of Karnak. The Mystery. But it wasn’t really. No surprises here. Ground water salinity ten times too high. Nile salt leached up into the stone, crystallizing, eroding it. Quite simple.

Not thinking of Sally at all during the day – that was the surprise. Thinking about her a lot at night, dreaming about her occasionally. One dream in particular. Sweating in the cool sheets, in the cool closed black desert night. Sweating as with the lingering caress of sun, the remembrance of day.

Bend and scrape. After a while you wouldn’t be able to sense the sun behind and above you, nor feel its subtle descent upon the nape of your neck, the vampire kiss that steadily drains your body of moisture, beguiling away life. Never enough to finish the job. No, not quite. Just enough to leave you bleary-eyed, dizzy and aware, oddly, of violation.

The next day the same thing. And again the next.

Some things last forever.

That’s how it went for six months. And now he was here, as far as possible from Karnak as you could imagine, in a doughnut shop on the other side of the world, the dark side. Well, so far anyway. He had arrived a little after 6:00, a modest delay, and had phoned her

from the airport, from a phone with gum stuffed in the coin return slot, curling the cord around and around his finger. He was fine. No, he didn't need a place to stay; he was staying with Beck and didn't know how long he'd be in town. Just wanted to say hello, maybe see her, why else? And she said okay. So he picked the most innocuous place he could think of in which to meet. They planned for 10:00. He didn't have long to wait.

He had ordered a cup of coffee – 'Anything else?' – but not a doughnut, although he had been tempted. The thought of chocolate teeth dissuaded him.

'No thanks.'

He paid with a wrinkled bill, at least six months old anyway, older now than the ancient Egyptian tombs of his memory. He took the cup to a table in the far corner by the counter, a wall mirror and the Men's room, scanning the room's interior obliquely as he went. There was a young couple, no, on second look an aging couple; someone in one corner old and faded scribbling on a note pad. (They would soon leave.) And a bum who seemed to playing with a coffee cup.

He sat down with care. This all had to look right, casual, even his pose sitting, the near cup of coffee, half-drunk, not all gone nor all there: haven't been here too long or suddenly thirstless, nervous. So far so good. He was here, he had arrived. Ralph. It's me, Ralph, he thought with unexpected bitterness. Short fiction by Sally Weiss. So where is she, s.w., my creator?

Why am I here? Beck, will it hurt?

Who would have thought it of Sally? He didn't mean to be insulting, but who would have suspected her of going so far. Well, it wasn't so far really, he had to remind himself, and she could always blow it, knowing her. It was just so painfully implausible. Archeometric research wasn't exactly the good life but it did seem a little more – what? – realistic than mailing out your daydreams to magazines. But how much could she make at it? Without thinking he turned to the window and the parking lot outside. If she drives up in a jaguar I'll puke.

s.w. So what the hell were Shades In Gray anyway?

At least the wait wouldn't be boring. There was something interesting here. The bum wasn't playing with the cup; he was trying to catch a fly with it, cupping his hand over the mouth whenever the fly buzzed about the dregs inside. The fly escaped each time.

Besides, this wasn't exactly neutral turf. Doughnut shops were an

integral part of his past, a part of the memories that composed him. This one was a Doughnut Castle, variation on the theme. He'd been here with Beck a couple of times after work. A neon caption read 'Fresh and Delicious', others 'Delicious and Home-made', 'Tasty Fresh', 'Baked Daily'. How many permutations could they come up with? Didn't they know it wasn't the signs that brought people in, that nobody even read the signs, that people just knew the places, what they were, what only they were and would be. It wasn't signs. It was something else, vague, inscrutable, almost like race memory.

The cashier had moved to his end of the counter and was busy at the hot chocolate machine, a white rag in her hand doing a quick tour of the metal spillage grill, a quick wrap-around and downward pull of the nozzle. She was a young girl, probably in her early twenties, slightly overweight and unattractive in the extreme. It was almost amazing and almost, almost riveting. But it was common enough for an all-night shop, probably a prerequisite for that sort of job with its various undisclosed hazards, working alone through the night attended by skulking unidentifiable patrons. Had he missed a sign at the door: Cash collected daily, Cashiers ugly virgins? He wasn't being charitable and probably not very accurate either. Besides, with the amount of police popping in and out, these doughnut stops were probably the safest spots in the city. Safer than most others (out there now, behind the black glass), unaccountable hidden holes sunk somewhere between hard dark and soft light, someplace where multi-folded shadows kept secret rooms drearier than any tombs imaginable, places where stillness collapsed into a moment awaiting neon visitation and the accession of sound. Faint sound, muffled but unmistakable behind brass chained doors. He held images half-cast before him, half-withheld, formed more by the vaguery of intuition than any actual experience. And there were other rooms in his mind which he had never been in, other places, people, obscure and discreet as dreams. From TV probably – if anything approximated race memory it was the collectivity of our TV-watching experience – movie scenes scanned for an instant years, years ago and secured as evidence, as proof. The motif was real at last, the underlying message: Light. That was it. So natural. The well-lighted interiors, the cleanliness – relative cleanliness – these were always better. Wanderers in the night generally ended up in a doughnut shop, for a coffee they didn't want, to squeeze out a few gratuitous drops of urine.

Tonight he was waiting here for Sally. Some nights you could meet half of humanity in a doughnut shop. Young men courting easier pleasure having abandoned their young women for the evening;

Cabbies rinsing out their mouths with coffee between pick-ups; Truckers loading up on carbohydrates before a long haul ('Two glazed please.' 'Anything else?' 'No, that'll be all.'). And others, myriad: poets, junkies, lovers, psychotics, cops and robbers in coffee-break armistice, late-nighting business initiates, all-nighting hookers. Wanderers meeting on the cusp, before parting, perhaps never speaking, never so much as looking at each other before following their shadows out the glass doors, along paths that might take them away again forever.

From the light, the cleanliness.

And the doughnuts. What more innocuous child-friendly shape; marginally repugnant, perhaps, if over-doughed and chocolate glazed so that the hole was a tight pucker (he had to grimace picturing it); but these were rare cases in an otherwise flawless stream of doughnut rings, bracelets, hula-hoops, inertubes, haloes, wreaths. How many doughnuts could you stick on your finger with the finger through the holes? Two if they were fresh. And if they weren't fresh? Two. It was a universal norm. Any more was stuffing.

Tonight he was waiting here for Sally; but trying not to be waiting, trying to look casual, convince himself of his casualness, sipping his coffee (colder than he expected), taking in the surroundings. There was only the bum in here with him now and the cashier moving in and out of the kitchen. He had come but not only for Sally, not only for her. (Thinking 'Why am I here?'; trying hard to forget that day, that one particular day, trying to contain the bitterness rising in him.)

He hadn't thought about her the whole time he was away, not really, not as much as he thought he would have. He tried now to picture her face. He hadn't seen it for six months except for in the dream. In the dream it was perfectly reproduced, startling, each feature articulated. Like a photograph. The essence of Sally in an image clipped out of life. But that might have been simply dream logic, that strange certitude of the mind asleep. It was possible for instance in his other dreams for Beck to be a complete stranger, a floating face of someone quite other than Beck, or even on occasion an inanimate object. Whatever the case, the sense of Beckness was flawlessly appended to the image. In the dream, in his private dream of her, was the face true to life, was it really hers? He would be able to recognize her if he saw her, of course - when he did see her tonight. But during the day he could barely imagine what she looked like, during all those days, past, spent. Nothing to see; the very effort confused his recollection. And now was no different. There was no way to conjure her up among these drained coffee cups and shining counters, no way to place her here. He would just have to wait.

It begins like this, his dream: There is a breathless, confused moment and he finds himself wandering in sand made gray by fallen darkness, lifted listlessly about his feet by the stirring wind trapped between these layers of night. He can see only the sand moving before him, so much like water swelling, and now in the distance someone else, someone wrapped in robes walking before him. There are different versions of the dream. Sometimes he calls out. Sometimes he runs. But no matter what he does in the end there will be the same moment; he's seen it countless times. The robed figure will turn and look back at him and it will be Sally. There will be no more then.

The bum had given up on the cupped hand strategy. This was a resourceful bum. He had sprinkled a small pile of sugar onto the table and pushed it together with his finger. Over the pile he had placed the cup. Fly cage. He lifted the edge of the cup to allow the fly access to the sugar. Now he delicately placed a spoon on edge beneath the rim. And let go. It held, cup partially propped up, sugar pile shadowed but visible beneath, spoon balanced on edge, points of contact infinitesimal. There was something slightly disturbing about it, the exactitude perhaps, the delicate little assemblage suspended by some expansive and violent stasis. There were such set-ups in the pyramids, weren't there? Only larger scale. Tons of stone hair-triggered for sudden collapse. For whom? Robbers? Curiosity seekers? A careless step and you'd be on your way to wherever it was they went after lights out. The throne of Osiris or Anubis or something like that, begging for forgiveness before an alligator ate your heart. No, must have been a crocodile. Let's be accurate.

Sally had once read him parts of *The Book of The Dead* during the rest periods between their love-making. 'Homage to Thee, O Ra, when thou risest,' she would read out loud, her light girlish voice laboring with augustness. He could tell how much she loved the language, the feel of the words, the touch of sound upon her tongue.

Thou risest, thou risest, thou shinest, thou shinest, at dawn of day. Thou are crowned king of the gods, and the goddesses Maati perform an act of homage unto thee.

She would close the book, place it on the bedside table, reach for the light switch.

A wrong step in the darkness and tons of stone would come slamming down. What would your last thought be? Or would you have time? Of course you would; there'd always be time for one last thought. That's the way it worked. So what then? Perhaps a glimmer

of confusion, a curious sensation of rising to the ceiling when just the opposite was the case – something to puzzle over for the briefest moment. Probably something else, very petty, very incongruous. A pang of embarrassment, of disappointment, the mental correlative of 'oops'. A sickening realization of error.

The bum was having a difficult time trying to persuade the fly to crawl beneath the cup. It preferred his finger which appeared to be covered with chocolate. There was a piece of wax paper nearby. The bum had had a chocolate doughnut with his coffee. No mystery.

A disturbance at the door sent reflections around the room like echoes in a closed space, flashes of movement in the back mirror, the side windows, the metal casing of the machines, the vinyl of the counters. He brought them together with his eyes. Two figures were dragging a third through the door and out of the dark, dredging it up and out of a black pond whose surface glistened and slightly trembled with the closing of the glass behind them. What was it? a young woman, wet; a young woman had been saved from drowning, her copious black stringy hair obscuring a pale face tilted floorward. She was having difficulty negotiating the path of their motion, her own tripping footsteps. A maybe gloomy, maybe tired young man was holding her up by the waist and trying to walk her to the counter. Another young woman was offering verbal support (which reached his ears oddly from behind as he watched their progress in the mirror). He was wary of appearing too curious, pulling down quick cursory images from the wall, reassembling the frames in the instant of after-sight. The man looked fed-up, heaving her weight in a last effort. Similarly dressed, all three: dark clothes, expensive leathers, chains, a kind of collectivity there, an intimacy, almost tribal. And the girl was braced up against the counter's edge, precarious on a revolving stool seat; her friend (they were friends, by the voice, the verbal touching) was asking for coffee, ready with arms out to catch her sudden descent. The man was coming towards him out of the mirror, behind him now, close with the passage of air and sound, disappearing into the Men's room. A few gratuitous drops into a porcelain receptacle. Libations to Light and Cleanliness.

And his own? Maybe just a few days ago, a few days of a life unreclaimable. All right he admitted, remembering. Maybe there had been more than the dream. He had pissed her initials into the sand once, into the cool gray sand behind the squat outcropping of Nefertari's tomb. They were working in the Valley of the Queens cross-sampling. Beck was somewhere inside Titi's tomb. It must have been cooler that day, or he had worked more in the shade. His

bladder was full, uncomfortable, and there wasn't anyone around (Nefertari's tomb was closed to the public). But he hadn't planned on the initials; a muscle spasm produced a slight curve, the semicircle of a possible s and well, his mind directing the thin jet of urine just filled in the remainder: s.w. The first time. The second time he pissed her initials it was to see if he could do a better job of it. He had never really finished the w. That letter required considerable dexterity and ample piss. Within a few weeks he was a pro at it; he had perfected his artistry. He could piss an s.w. anytime, any place. He could inscribe it dribbleless and perfect in a space the size of a dinner plate. Of course he had often pissed it on the side of a Karnak temple. It had been inevitable, working over them every day, bending before them as if in obeisance. And now this perfect graffiti, letting you feel the thrill of desecration and criminality without lingering evidence. A quick zip, a few moments and who was the wiser. But what was it to Sally? Wasn't it tribute? Carving out her initials like a hieroglyph, private and indecipherable, on a temple wall: What else could it be? It was a temple after all, someone's sometime temple. Thousands of years old, ancient not with time only but also with lives, worshiping lives, with the thousands of conceivers, builders, laborers, involved in its making, convoluted with its having been made, indivisible unfree in its madness. How long it had stood, not waiting perhaps but still lasting, moveless amid shifting sand, only to have him come and piss on it.

Maybe he wasn't the first. Maybe that explained the salt.

'Hey!'

What? The stringy haired girl had staggered over to him. She was leaning so closely into him now that he had to bend backward to avoid wet contact. She was soaking. Had they doused her with it, the smell from here palpable.

'Forgive me please please please.'

Was it a joke? He looked at her incredulously.

'Meg!' The other girl was at the cash paying for the coffee, calling to her.

'Meg!'

'Do you? Please say you do.'

She had escaped from those ready arms. She had come over to him and her breath was wet, warm and heady-sweet.

'Meg!'

Don't just call. Come and get her.

'Forgive me. You will. I know you will.'

She placed a fingertip matter-of-factly on the end of his nose. Hair

was hanging over her face; the eyes behind the dark strands were without focus, aimless, ugly with their tiny clenched black pupils. She let the finger drop downward. Down to his lips. It stayed there, tracing their outline, parting them gently, collecting moisture.

She leaned back and removed the finger. With an appalling sensuality she put it in her mouth.

'Meg, you don't even know him.'

The other girl was here now, with the steaming coffee. She tried to pull her back but despite the effort there was a face puckered up into his own, the eyes tiny black squinted, peering closely. This is unbearable.

'You're not Happy,' she said.

'Sorry.'

'Where's Happy?'

'Meg, he's in the can. Look, drink this.' She put the cup to her lips.

A pocket of darkness, just one corner of the dark to slip into. That would be nice right about now. But all around him gleaming reflections made mockery of his discomfort. He saw himself in front of them, his face averted, trying not to watch as the girl dribbled coffee; as the man returned from the Men's room, grabbed her up just like luggage left waiting, as the three shuffled out. And he saw himself trying not to see himself. The cashier, had she noticed? Or the bum with the cup, had he also made a point of his embarrassment? He ventured a glance. Apparently not.

On the other side of the room the bum and the fly were in oblique confrontation, the latter treading a minute breath-gentle path around the rim of the inverted cup. The bum held the spoon. Patiently.

He and Beck had had rip-roaring nights in Luxor, swallowing uncountable mouthfuls of something like beer (it tasted like beer; well, after a while), swallowing without bringing his teeth together in order to avoid crunching sand (it was everywhere, dusty, fine and always dry). But no matter how many rounds they'd had he had never been that bad: staggering blindly, ugly-blind, interrogating strangers. Damn it. It was just the sort of thing to unnerve him entirely. A ridiculous mistake really. He hadn't even looked like this guy. Sometimes it made sense; on a bus in Luxor he had caught a glimpse of someone hovering about a wooden rack of colored material. He had been positive it was Martin Searles, the zoologist from the third floor in the research building, the one who brought bagged lunches to the cafeteria and talked incessantly about his doctorate in tissue regeneration. But it couldn't have been him, of course; Searles was far too busy electrocuting frogs ten thousand miles away to do a five second cameo in a Luxor market. Still, the similarity was impres-

sive. He had spent the rest of the day believing, at least unconsciously, that he had somehow made contact with Searles; the sense of Searles lingered about the day's events and about him too, closely, like the smell of cigarette smoke. Other times there'd be a series of familiar faces; a whole slew of almost-acquaintances would approach him walking in the street, come near, quickly turn into strangers, pass by; or celebrities one after another in Toyotas and Hondas zipping along his line of sight, pulling it taut, sending it elastically backward as they dashed around corners and back into oblivion.

He drained his coffee cup. The last quarter inch had gone cold. There was some rocky sediment at the bottom.

He looked at his watch; he was waiting, clearly. No pretence now. Watching the cup-bum and his fly, not yet his, that little drama, that little life and death. Thinking, I will not remember, but feeling himself even then falling into the images.

And that day, rising again around him.

It was their day off, unofficially (they'd done the Valley of the Kings sooner than they had expected and were saving their energy for the Valley of the Queens). Beck returned with supplies, coffee mostly, for their rude awakenings, but more: sun glasses, suntan lotion. 'No beach ball, Beck?' He had gone into Luxor, not to the general market but rather to the little store near the main hotel which catered to tourists, carrying international newspapers, now and then an American magazine or even a bestseller.

He was sitting in the tent with his eyes closed and his feet on their only table when Beck entered and slammed something down in the sounding darkness before him. A cloud of flies passed across his face. ('Nile Flies,' they called them. Tiny but just as loud.) He opened his eyes tentatively. He squinted at the table: a magazine. Beck reached down for it and held it up, displaying it so he could see the cover fully.

It was a magazine he'd heard of but never read. Beck was obviously excited, grinning. 'Well, well, well,' he kept saying.

'Well?'

Beck's hands moved and the magazine opened to a page somewhere near the middle: an inevitable opening. An unavoidable page.

He bolted up from his chair.

Shades In Gray. And below these words, not too far below, not too much smaller either: Sally Weiss.

S. W.

He was riffling through it quickly, ardently, scanning the lines. It was presumption, it was egotism, maybe, but he was afraid of finding himself recreated in her words. And there he was. My God, is that

supposed to be me? I did do something like that, yes, and say that, or something like it. But not this or this. Surely I don't look like this. Ralph. (Ralph?!) The character, the fuzzy half-image, the vague attenuation of words. He was sure it was modeled on himself. A sensation of confusion and resentment welled up within him as he read it through, read about this person, this fiction. He was bleary-eyed with concentration, following minutely the print, shooing away flies unconsciously with one hand. Beck unnoticed hovered close by.

'You don't seem too happy for her,' he said. 'Does it bother you?'

But there was no sound except the crisp sibilance of turning pages and the occasional fly buzzing in quick dopplar crescendo. Beck watched, waited, stepped out.

Later he would follow. Outside the tent the sun would already be indistinct, no longer a precise circle, but amorphous, expanding. Rising and rising above the shimmering liquid sand. Ra: Lover, despoiler, creator. He who rises and shines, casting down and down his burning shade, which is his self, his love, on all the world and all the sands.

It wasn't fair. 'Ralph.' It was a violation, but subtle, subtle. He tried not to feel bitterness. It was all past now. What did it matter? He just wanted to see her again, say hello, maybe be friends. What else was there? The dream of course. Yes it would be nice to settle that, to indulge that last curiosity and see if she looked in life in any way similar to the way he remembered her in sleep. But everything else, everything between them was over. That much was secure. All buried and forgotten, the good perhaps not so much as the bad. The bad had been really bad: those fights, mindless drudgeries of trying to out-talk, out-speak, out-not-listen; the death rattle of romance ending but not quite concluded, not quite into the stage of comfortable tolerance and commiseration. It's always the same: I Me Mine, the tropes and figures of lovers' rhetoric. But Sally was so particular.

'You only think you love me.' And he'd say something and she'd say something more, like 'That just proves you don't know me.'

Sure, sure, he would resign. It had a name too, didn't it? Must have, something like Projection Effect, something out of a sophomore psychology text. Yes, that'll do. She probably knew it herself; she was reading a lot then, studying everything, writing a bit, at first secretly in a blue binder she kept in her desk. And his research was going well, a good diversion, with hope for a grant - a godsend - to Egypt.

God, send me to Egypt.

'You only think you do.' But how did it feel to him? Like love.

Wasn't it that which he felt for her, foremost, finally; wasn't that real, more real perhaps? He felt it, despite what she said, that he loved the thing which arose only for him like a heat mirage in the intensity of his bedroom stare, that stare that made the brief nothing in between, a brief everything.

Sitting alone in the doughnut shop he didn't see the cashier come out of the kitchen with a tray of new doughnuts, nor the cup-bum patiently holding the spoon's handle. Not seeing, remembering: A steady accumulation of textbooks and paperbacks, paper bricks around her in bed, steadily rising on all sides like walls. But that was okay because he slept mostly at the research faculty now, on the old couch (there was still a salt mystery then) and there was always Beck to put him up for a night or two; and she can have her bed back, her apartment back, have it all back anyway, he found himself unexpectedly thinking the morning Beck told him about the Egypt grant, the long-overdue government authorization and Beck's own particular slant, 'Sun and Sand' that made it sound like a holiday. Only that, not a finality at all, a phase through which he would pass and from which he would return, a short period, almost not a real time, a short respite, a short fiction. So it had been and he had gone just like that, complying, and had stayed six months which were not six months but so many days, hours, moments; working and not thinking of Sally – waiting sunbeaten, sun-violated, laboring over the dissolving stone of temple walls, scraping away salty dry dust, crouched in ironical obeisance, traitorous obeisance, aiding if ever so minutely their slow end – no, not thinking of Sally; no, no, the truth of it, thinking of himself, of that last awakening that would bring him up through the darkness and return him to her. Then, then, then he would confront her and just prove it finally, by his own confrontation, by the very act, by his simply being there. He would prove to her that he was what and who he was.

There was a motion, a movement. Not there, here. Here, now.

Something was happening, coming, going, occurring quickly. Sally was suddenly spreading in swift colors across the black glass – Sally!? – behind it, passing, walking right past the doors and away across the dark parking lot. It was her! She had come. But she was walking right past him. Typical. Go to all the trouble and then blow it in the last moment. That was Sally. And now he had to check her mistake, intercept her, bring her back. Get up, get up. He left his seat. He was walking rapidly but not running across the doughnut shop, his eyes directed to the dwindling figure disappearing outside, fading: a colored jacket bleeding into darkness. He had to dip into

that darkness and pull it out; and Sally, how would she look, how would she smile, openly or reservedly, and what, what possibly could they say to each other as they stood frozen, leering like gargoyles in the half-dark?

He picked up speed, easing into a slow jog as he neared the doors. A chocolate tipped finger, chocolate smeared, chocolate dirty rose for an instant before his face. He looked down. The cup-bum was smiling excitedly. He looked ecstatic. Does he want my attention? No time. The doors broke apart. There was a breath of hot air within and without, breathed, exhaled. Moist hot darkness closed down thickly and shockingly around him. He paused to reorient himself.

Sally was nearing the edge of the parking lot where the dark asphalt slipped into light, the sheet of black tipping slightly. He started towards her, a faint forward careering of his head forcing his motion, top-heavy toppling into the light, falling forward toward Sally. After all this time. And it was too much, too thrilling. He was closing in on her. She was facing the light, her form wavy-edged and ghostlike. The silhouette was unmistakable though: the imperfectly brushed hair, the lazy droop of her shoulders. Nothing had changed. Sally hurrying off to nowhere, going the wrong way entirely. (Was there more than one doughnut shop around here? had she missed the neon sign?) He would have laughed out loud but he wanted to surprise her. This was even better than he had planned. Now he had the jump on her completely; but would he be able to keep it? Would surprise be enough?

He couldn't have prepared himself for his reaction: implacable, excessive, undermining. But delicious. Exhilaration was coursing through him, through unseen channels, faster than blood, the instant rush of months of waiting. In a dizzying second it had taken him entirely and reaching for her, so close, he felt, Oh God, Oh God, he was on the point of blacking out.

He grasped her, his hand taking her firmly by the shoulder. She froze; her face turned around quickly, neck twisted, features drawn.

There was a dark confused soundless moment.

'Oh. I'm sorry.'

Her face washed clean of darkness, of expression as it turned again to the light; and she moved away from him, moved forward with a deliberate curt motion, her shoulder unhooking itself from his grasp.

But he still clutched her shadow, intangible, indefinite, billowing out behind her as she left him, pulled relentlessly from his unmoving fingers like a long black veil.



PHILIP LEE-SHANOK

Sound for Joe

Dump truck goes
BOOM!
with a sticky wet pavement smack
like a cold cadaver's hand
dropped on clean white linoleum
from six inches high
in a well lit flourescent bulb room
but made heavy
with stuff in the back

RAYMOND ROBERTSON

Spring Fever (walk down Bloor Street)

The day is delicious!, she said
I turned to reply,
 heavy lidded, high and
startled
a white ring of ice cream
presenting her wet lips
like a topping
 that said
 yeah.

JOE HOLLAND

on a bus

neither consenting nor resisting
the thumb rests
inert in my palm
just a thumb.

'i'm only tired' she explained.

outside the window
aimless cattle
barbed wire
eighteen wheels
the anonymity of a cornfield.

i'm troubled by the clear sky
and the straightness of the road –
there are other words for this.

'i won't be known there' she flicked an ash.

tilting back her seat
she seemed relieved
and put on her sunglasses.

MICHAEL DOLENKO



Dead Wood

Wood rots the way bodies do. The old wood in the backyard stood
there
for years, and decayed. It was eaten alive, devoured by time,
and wind, and cold. We used to kick it around, uncover bugs,
smother them.
We did it all the time, in summer, counted our kills. We were
fast ourselves
on the way to being numbered. Every day it might have been, but
we were drawn back, again and again we drew ourselves a-back.
Every day things should have lost their beauty, even dead bugs.
Yet smothered bugs
became what was most beautiful, having acquired a number, a new
idea,
a renewed meaning. The wet wood that rotted, as we kicked it
around
also was renewed. Our boots and shoes restored beauty. And our
old bodies
battered all year, that we never even knew, never considered
alone,
we renewed its blood every day, we soaked or drowned
every day, like the wet wood that was suddenly dried out under
the heavy, round
sun, we lumbered in our bodies every day not even knowing
we felt the same decay we saw about us all the time.

JAMES KNOX

□

and now I'm gonna scribble
another Fascist Subway Poem
 about,
the glory of freedom in subjugation
the eroticism of eating a 75¢ Becker's blueberry square
the cowardice of the snide
the stupidity of subterranean silence and polity
the honour of the drunkard homeless heroes who
 swear and spit and smoke in the face of the watch
the beauty of the fat lady
 smiling and thinking secret and wonderful thoughts
the exotic of the exile
 reading and being unknown tongue
the misery of the executive
 caught up in dizzying columns of shares unshared
the folly of the lovers
 entwining in deadly embraces on orange vinyl seats
the futility of the people
 standing in empty cars
the idiocy of the poet
 whose lines only go westbound and are gone.

RICHARD ENGLAND

The 'Dead Skin' Dialogue

The characters have been sitting for a long time, they are restless and irritated. They speak as if what they say is being ignored.

AYN RAND: Without the pretense of sounding too dramatic, it is clear to see for everyone who is willing to look, that man is choking. 'Don't tackle a problem like that, a problem that is too big for anyone to solve,' that is what our world says today. And I have no doubt that they *do* say it, because *I* hear it every day. Dead skin: that is what man has become subject to. Dead skin is flaking off his dying soul, with the slightest movement, with the smallest thought. There is nothing proverbial about it, for all my accusations come from what is real – in other words, from (trite as it today sounds) the Providence of reality.

[With irony] I suppose it would be too logical for anybody to open their eyes. Hmph, to open their eyes and watch their homes and families crumble under the light of the dead stars. Think of it: we are choking to death on our *own* flesh.

ORSON WELLES: I have no doubt that all of your reasoning and accusations are infallible, logic flowing from page to page – no doubt. But I have come to think that all philosophers are judged only by their ability to *reason*, and to manipulate their premises by the 'providence of logic' – the overall result: beautifully reasoned garbage. To piece together the fragments of our confused world, one must have a foundation – a base and a constant – to reach plausible solutions. It is just like a film, for the projection of a film needs a screen, so as the audience can discern what they are watching. Logic makes boring and dysfunctional characterizations in any good film.

JACK KEROUAC: We are choking alright, but it is not on dead skin, it is on our *whole* souls. There is no more skin left to choke on, because it all died a long time ago with the first grave robbers in milk-loved Egypt and with the last world series in 1919 – man has become a half-lovable translucent monster with his soul open for all to see; but it has lodged itself in his incredulous gaping mouth (that is how man is choking), and all of the dead skin (which is flowing in the gutters) can only double as a poignant chaser.

□

haphazard chemicals
mix a drink of toxin
indebted to science for my daily bread
preserved in stone
i am a chemist's version of life
full to the brim with liquid waste
i am invincible in my state of petrification
pure as rain and snow and sleet
days of toxic bliss
breathe, eat and sleep
the mind dies
my glowing form lives on

ANN FORD

CHARLES MORGAN



□

Telephone poles: spokes on a metamorphosing hub
Of electric talk (broken lines, and intermittent resistance),
A wheel, rolling towards silence,
But remaining, always, half a revolution away.
Man perceives man: the voice heard between two quietudes.
God perceives man: the silence heard between timid amens.
Man perceives God: eternity and taciturnity.
The world 'help' in a dream
Always goes unvocalized
And one is awakened by its soundlessness.
Silence gives consent.
The dead, then, assent to death;
The unborn to birth.
Silence disagrees,
And the quiet one must be disquieted.

MIKE GIGLIO



Fertile

darkness of loam:
to cull the bleeding hour
and pull cupric measure
from the earth.
unease settling soil
cake it in the sun
draw to mill and grind
for bread and sour-salt dough
for earth-ovens and tide-beds

shall we cut them
 into slate?
wash them down
 with a dram of mule?
wince from the jaw, sweet-bone
 squeezing with hands

tread upon the alluvium
as in prayer.
it is the medium of growth
with lead-metal weight of
fertility. it is air's

to cull the loam at the
bled hour, awaiting
the glistening break:

 on the coming cold
autumnal wind of storm
 and fire smoke
at hands full
 directed to the ground
and its infinite piece

STEPHEN PENDER



